THE EVOLUTION OF MUSIC SEMIOLOGY IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Semiology addresses function of different languages, the quiddity of concepts in production and exchange process, and linguistic signs interpretation. Although using it to study the function of music as a language or a communication medium dates back to a few decades ago, the existence of signs in sonic rituals of various cultures could be attributed to the date of appearance of this art. Also, conscience usage of signs in the framework of certain musical material to transfer special concepts dates back to musical figure in Baroque period. Identifying such elements through describing and analyzing music is not quite old in Iranian musicology literature and only in recent years some issues have been published in this area. Music semiology in Iran, having classified fundamental signs of Iranian (Persian) traditional music, can culminate in innovation and development of it. Therefore, in the present study the most recently existing works in this area, will be criticized.

Key words: Music Semiology, Iran, Iranian (Persian) Traditional Music, Semiology, Music

1. INTRODUCTION

Semiology\(^1\) in the prevailing wisdom of Iranian semiologist deals with production and reception process of signs in a language or communication medium and was formed following the ideas of renowned Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussur\(^2\). He deemed linguistics as sub-part of semiology, thereby considering semiology as a part of social psychology (Rashidi, 2014, 19). He by defining sign to two aspects of signifier and signified, believed in no contrast between them, while Charles Sanders Peirce\(^3\), believing in semiology to be a sub-branch of logics, defined sign as an entity replacing another one and addressing another person (Rashidi, 2013, 33-34).

Semiology in the area of music is around half a century old, and while the main tenet of semiology is the quiddity of meaning or sense\(^4\), music semiology should be considered beyond semantics. Accordingly, if the meaning of a piece is not accessible, that music could be considered in terms of semiology. Indeed, even if there are no symbolic forms of environment elements in music, the listener can infer some symbolic meanings; As far as a thing that carries a specific meaning for composer, may not bear the same meaning both for the player who is interpreting it and the listener. From a post-structuralism perspective, it could be claimed that the responses pivoting around the imagination of the listener make the music a meaningful entity.

The entrance to consider a special music in terms of semiology can be taken to go through its genre features. For instance, Iranian traditional music is not faced with semiology challenges Western classic music has since complicated polyphony is absent in this music and it is heavily dependent on literature, so sometimes symbolic and semantic processes of which depend on other system or text (Rashidi, 2014, 3). However, semiology of this music, as true of all other types, is formed in the framework of constituting elements related to one other, so that the interrelation of the Dastgah-s and Gusheh-s together, build the semiotic text. Each of the Dastgah-s, Gusheh-s, and even phrases or notes of this music according to associate relationship and the adjacent with one other can lead to the absolute text, and in the performance some sub-Gusheh-s can be ignored according to successive relationship. This is a somiological interpretation of Iranian traditional music in theory and practice.

2. THE HISTORY OF MUSIC SEMIOLOGY IN IRAN

Music semiology in Iran is not quite rich, and only a few books in Farsi (Persian) have been penned with this title and content, to be named as follows: Semiology and Terminology in Music Theory by Azizollah Ahmadian, Film Music Semiology by Touraj Zahedi, Music Semiology of Ta’zieh\(^5\), and An Introduction to Music Semiology both by Sadegh Rashidi.

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\(^1\) Also Semiotics
\(^2\) 26 November 1857 - 22 February 1913
\(^3\) 10 September 1839 - 19 April 1914
\(^4\) In the rest of the article it will be shown that Farhad Sasani believes there is distinction between the functioning of the word "meaning" and "sense" in semiology.
\(^5\) A Condolence Theater inspired by Battle of Karbala
The book by Ahmadian, *Semiology and Terminology in Music Theory*, is more or less of a book to recapitulate other books as an overlapping in basics of music theory yet to be clad in semiology and throughout the book, musical alphabet and expressions are named as musical signs (Ahmadian, 2003); Such as written forms of Farsi are viewed as signs of ascertaining the concept and function of this language, while the main axis of any language is best pictured as its structure. The author has seemingly failed to propound a serious issue about music semiology.

The book by Zahedi, *Film Music Semiology*, is again an overlapping case of many books in emotional descriptive approach towards music. He also, in the 4th chapter, included an introduction to original Iranian instruments as far as the position of film music semiology (Zahedi, 2009). In fact, he paid an exorbitant attention to the generator of sounds as signs rather than sonic structure of music.

The first book by Rashidi, *Music Semiology of Ta'zieh*, does not deal with music directly, also a great part of which is quotations from different semiologist, unfortunately futile and unable to comes across any new conclusions; For example, in the 4th chapter apart from generalities and dealing with similarities of some events in this genre of music to semiotic concepts, no special point is mentioned. On the other hands a rather complex concept like de-contextualization (Rashidi, 2013, 109) is superficially referred to an irregular move in Gusheh-s of Ta'zieh music and finally music work 4,33 by John Cage, a pioneering music experientalist in the US is mentioned without referring to the main subject! Moreover, it is probable the author tried to justify the simplistic superficiality adopted by contending that naturally the vocal music has no complexity of the instrumental music (Rashidi, 2013, 116), that naturally cannot be acceptable.

The second book by Rashidi, *An Introduction to Music Semiology*, according to its name paved the way for the further specific research later to follow, albeit the emphasis placed on Iranian traditional music is of utmost significance so that the author also published a paper as “Semiology of Iranian Dastgah-I Music (An Analysis of Sign-Bearing Concepts and Musical Signification)”. Unfortunately, what noticeable in both books by Rashidi is that some pages are completely identical. Considering the time of publishing, 2014 one year after the first book publishing, a sort of non-professional quotations from the former have been included, being indicative of armature copying. However, the issues mentioned in *An Introduction to Music Semiology* are completely remarkable and somehow innovative; To exemplify, it should be said that Rashidi at the beginning of the book talks about the history of music semiology in Iran and vents his comprehensive familiarity with the issue. The justifiabley organized chapters that are in order, enable the author to initially make her idea appropriately transferred and then give the reader a possibility to more coherently comprehension.

One of remarkable points included in the book *An Introduction to Music Semiology* by Rashidi, is referring to the concept of tension for producing the meaning of music. The author takes into account the quantitative interaction of Iranian traditional music (generally Iranian music) such as rhythm, interval, and tempo as decrease and increase and links them to the function of tension (Rashidi, 2014, 116). Also following the introduction of intertextuality, he explains its expand by Gérard Genette to transtextuality (Rashidi, 2014, 119), yet unfortunately, this complex concept is employed to restate the relation between Dastgah-s and Avazes that the musically relations thereof are inevitably vivid. In fact, Rashidi is so involved with semiology that sometimes is driven away from music semiology, and delves to prove the facts which using musicology of Radif, there is not requirement to be proved and of course these clear-cut facts have no relationship with musical signs.

The present author in the book “The Concepts of Music”, clearly defines the signs in music and their functions, then offers a way-out to reach the meaning of music, a highly noteworthy point that is mainly pivoting around musical view. In the author’s idea, musical sign comprises a sound signifier in music that signifies an ultra sound signified or the meaning outside music. Music semiology can be applied regardless of time and place to receive meaning and concept in a piece, and for this calls for considering the concept of climax in music. Climax or climaxes present in a piece commensurate to the ideas of the addressee, classify various sonic combinations in different semantic levels which ordinarily are derived from the world outside the music, and cause to extraction of the ultimate concept of the structure. Therefore, the understanding of the addressee to interpret, is an undeniably important part of the way to come across the concept in music that is in general proportionate to knowing the structure of other music pieces. This is an obvious manifestations of the intertextuality in semiology (2014, 101).

On the other hands, some Farsi articles and papers on music semiology can be mentioned, to be named as follows: Farhad Sasani in an article named “Signification or Reminding? The Evolution Process of Meaning in Music” differentiates meaning and sense; He asserts that the former refers to initial language systems and the latter denotes secondary pattern-forming systems such as myth, culture, religion, art, and science. Therefore, music semiology intends to look for the sense. Meaning in music is observed as a continuum of reminding toward signifying, from reminding the personal experiences to social memories or to cultural significations (Sasani, 2007, 245-246). The interpretations denoting a previously known entity, no matter variable, are called significations (Sasani, 2007, 247); Nonetheless, reminding is based on preconception on a part of the people not a consensus or social shared agreement. Based on this, the meaning in music is oriented toward reminding although signification to meaning has no clear-cut reference in music. Likewise, frequently reoccurring reminding of an experience while listening to a music can give it a state of signification to that experience, thereby developing reminding into signification (Sasani, 2007, 251-252).

Another article “Semiology as a theory in art” written by Mieke Bal and translated to Farsi by Farzan Sojoudi goes toward music semiology to some extent. The author believes in the access to cyphered coding of
artistic works and the ability to use them so as to get the meaning are quite learnable (Bal, 2002, 24) and the addressee brings his or her cultural backgrounds to the artwork, leading to intertextuality (Bal, 2002, 26). Also, it was concluded that based on ethnological and historical information, music without having replaced language could express meanings by diving in the deep textures such as religion (Bal, 2002, 33).

The History Related to Music Semiology in Iran

1. The Relationship between Music and Verbal Language

Such a relationship is important in studying music with a semiotic discipline; For instance, Claude-Achille Debussy's music is ambiguous in tonal atmosphere and this property gives it an impromptu and floating nature, deemed to be equivalent to musical concept of space in impressionist paintings. Such a flowing stream in music supported by Debussy's avoiding of regular accent in measure is a reflective of easily flowing quality of French language that is his mother tongue (Parnian, 2006, 86). There is a close-knit connection between Farsi language and Iranian traditional music so that length of the syllables and time value (rhythm) of notes, also pitch of speech and melodic curvature are consistently congruent. Accordingly, in Masnavi-ye Dashti of Dastgah Mahour for instance, the music depicts the poem. However, in a general view Iranian traditional music does not definitely describe the content of the poem along with (Masoudieh, 2011, 185).

On the other hands, the relationship between music and verbal language is analyzable from two main bearings: One, reminding the beliefs and memories aligned with the cultural perceptions and second, the deduction meaning aesthetically. Music is best crystalized through these two elements as verbal language with the two functions of literary value and daily uses. In reminiscence of beliefs and memories, musical signifier is not related to any special significed. For example, a series of memories coincides with thinking of social memories of a special place and time, and as a result the final significed is postponed (Rashidi, 2014, 25).

In considering the relationship between music and verbal language, it is highly important to pay attention to fundamental differences in using of fundamental concepts of form; As an instance, repetition in speech can be boring and tiring since it is repetition of a specific meaning (signification), yet repetition in music can every time remind of a different thing (Sasani, 2007, 258), notwithstanding the fact that in some styles such as minimalism it can cause boredom.

2. Studying the Emotional Aspects of Music

Such a study can prepare an analysis of the musical elements and their inherent relationships to different emotions, thus helping music semiology. Using such an approach as a perceived default can prevent the researcher from viewing music as untouched phenomenon though. Connection with music while listening to it, perpetually makes the listeners face a phenomenological condition that is based on direct emotion (Merleau-Ponty quoted from Rashidi, 2014, 42). In fact, each music is a phenomenon and for having a phenomenological study of it, perceived defaults should be prevented or controlled.

In this regard, Alizadeh Mmohammadi and Kheirodin, having done a statistical research on Iranian music experts and laymen, in a study named “Studying Emotional Features of Iranian Traditional Music”, showed that all emotional aspects exist in Iranian traditional music (Alizadeh Mmohammadi and Kheirodin, 1998, 149). According to their research the relationship between human’s two fundamental emotions and Dastghah-s are as in the following: Merriment and mental exhilaration can be attributed to Mahour, Rast Panigah, and Chahargah and sorrow and depression, conversely to Dashti, Homayoun, Segah, and Shour. Also, the other results have been gain about the effect of different Dastghah-s on creating the emotions of love, serenity, and charm (Alizadeh Mmohammadi and Kheirodin, 1998, 149-150) that can be justified according to the two fundamental emotions. Moreover, what to add is that there is no agreement or consensus on the ways of arousing an emotion as exposed to different Dastghah-s between Iranian music experts and laymen, although there is agreement about sorrow in Dastghah-s of Mahour, Segah, Homayoun, and Chahargah, also about disappointment in Dastghah of Isfahan (Alizadeh Mmohammadi and Kheirodin, 1998, 151).

3. OPPOSITE DUALITIES

This concept is taken from linguistics and can play a hugely key role in deducing meaning from musical signs. Listening to music can result in the same psychological responses that are produced upon emotion-spurring moments and an important parameter of music aesthetics is detection of such responses in listener (Rashidi, 2014, 34-35) that can show the existence or deduction of meaning in music. On the other hands, the pieces of experimental and avant-garde music use analogue and fairly widespread structural grounds so that their different sonic properties do not easily set in opposite dualities to make possible deduction of meaning, while pieces of tonal music or ones with any sonic centrality use digital and fairly limited structural grounds and their properties clearly set in opposite dualities such as tonics-dominants in Western classical music or Ist-Shahed in some Dastghah-s of Iranian traditional music. This trait of digital-based music facilitates deduction of meaning (Habibdoost, 2014, 25). Therefore, the psychological responses from listening music, due to the existence or deduction of meaning, are worthy of being analyzed based on classifying musical signs in opposite dualities.
4. THE FUNCTION OF MUSIC IN FILM

Semiology can also be studied in this regard. Of course, to better transfer the meanings through dialogue and picture of film, music is included as well. The mutual impact of music and film is so important that at the very beginning of sound film period even in the silent film time, some classical music composers assumed a special character and were developed into signs of some special concepts; For example, Bach with religion, Vivaldi with nature, Mozart with adventure, Beethoven with philanthropy, and Wagner with Nazism were inseparably coalesced (Jalili, 2011, 83-84). However, the most film music composers believe in this profession is not something other than using previous compositions to produce new works (Radbeh and Rahnamaie, 2010, 86), so that this usage is indicator of special musical signs accompanying scenes and events of film and it can be expected that every element in film music gradually reminds the addressee a special meaning.

5. MULTI-SENSATIONAL SIGN SYSTEM

In music semiology, it should be noticed this art is not merely auditory and visual aspects (such as notes), physical, and tactile bearings (such as playing instrument) are also involved. These aspects in the form of procedures making music consist of cognitive interaction in the mind of composer resulting visual signs (notes), the interaction of player in the tactile system to transfer visual signs to audio ones, auditory interaction in transformation audio signs into internal ones, and the interaction of the critic that according to external familiarity and inner experience together physical aspects criticizes and interprets music (Shaieri quoted from Rashidi, 2014, 7-8).

On the other hands, to convey absolute concepts in the form of music language, sometimes non-musical elements such as dialogue and picture are simultaneously used with music. So that in Baroque period by specifying conventions it was possible to consciously deduct cognition from an instrumental music (or a music without verbal text). Nevertheless, music fundamentally is not symbolic and for this reason shaping and manifesting social-political changes by it is more problematic (Mir Ali Naghi, 1991, 126). However, this art with along with verbal and visual texts can receive meaning, even or even not these texts accompany music or music recalls them for many accompaniments in the past. It is important that some issues in this medium can remain an ideal no more; For example, the idea that time proportions of sounds in music have the same function of human scale in architecture and space (Farahani, 2013, 25) does not present a semiotic justification to cognition the development from one to other and is just a numerical relationship.

6. CONCLUSION

Identifying definite musical elements as sings and using them in a piece to transfer special concepts that is possible through describing and analyzing music, is quite new in Iranian musicology literature and only in recent years some issues have been published in this area; Including consideration of the concept of tension to introduce music meaning by Rashidi and the concept of climax in relation to classifying various sonic combinations in different semantic levels by Habibdoost. Also, the relationship between music and verbal language, studying emotional aspects of music, the role of opposite dualities in classifying musical signs, the function of music in films, and multi-sensational sign system have been introduced by some authors and somehow studied. Music semiology in Iran can develop and expand innovation through classifying fundamental signs of Iranian music. It is hoped to see more comprehensive research in this medium.

REFERENCES