

Men of Speech: The ‘Ajam Dervishes and Their Role in the Transmission of Popular Persian Narratives

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A group of dervishes known as ‘Ajam belonged originally to the dervishes without an order (*bi-selsele*). They are closely related to the Khāksāriyya and are considered as one lineage of this order today.

The Khāksār order, as one of the three Shi‘i dervish orders of today’s Iran, used to have three main lineages, which were: Nurā’i, Ma‘ṣum ‘Alishāhi, and Gholām ‘Alishāhi (Raei 2014:237-38). Concerning the Nurā’i lineage, written sources, as well as Khāksār dervishes themselves, provide no further information except the name. The lineage of Ma‘ṣum ‘Alishāhi has also gradually declined, and most of its survivors have joined the lineage of Gholām ‘Alishāhi (Raei 2017:267). However, there are still remains of Ma‘ṣum ‘Alishāhi in some cities of Iran. Today, the Khāksār dervishes belong mainly to the Gholām-‘Alishāhi lineage. The ‘Ajam dervishes were later considered as the fourth lineage of the Khāksār order. It is not clear when this group of dervishes became known as part of the Khāksār.

It seems that some Khāksārs viewed the position of ‘Ajam dervishes as lower than themselves and declared the ‘Ajam dervishes as “footmen of poverty” (*farrāsh-e faqr*) and their own order as “king of poverty” (*solṭān-e faqr*) (Chahārdehi 1990:23; Zariri 1990:375).

On the other hand, many ‘Ajam dervishes were not happy to be subordinate to the Khāksārs and acknowledged their independence from them. For example, the author of *Wasīlat al-najāt*—the most important known treatise of the ‘Ajam—who is himself an ‘Ajam dervish, objects to the tradition of Khāksār and introduces it as a false mystical path (Afshari 2003:282).

The ‘Ajam dervishes, like the other lineages of Khāksāriyya, had most probably a historical connection with the Ḥaydaris of the Safavid era (Raei 2020:44; Ma‘ṣum‘alishāh 1959:68-69). Ḥaydariyya refers to two particular groups of members of the Qalandariyya, the followers of Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Zāwe’i (d. 618/1221), as well as the followers of Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Tuni (d. 830/1426-27) (Raei 2020:43).

This Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar-e Tuni was born in Bāku of Shervān and was a wanderer and traveler who built lodges (*tekye*) in some of the towns that he visited (Ibn Karbalā’i 1965:467).

The followers of this Mir Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar, with whom the ‘Ajam dervishes have a historical connection, included twelver Shi‘a (Shushtari 1972:82) and his sheikhs, like the sheikhs of ‘Ajam, who were called *bābā*. Qoṭb al-Din Ḥaydar himself was known as Bābā

Ḥaydar (Ibn Karbalā'ī 1965:467; Maḥdawi 2007:30). The Ḥaydaris played an essential social role during the Savafavid era; during this period, the Shāh himself appointed *bābās* of the Ḥaydari lodges (Naṣrābādī 1938:284; Maḥdawi 2007:34).

It is possible that the 'Ajam dervishes also had correlations with the Noḡṭawiyya. Their name is linked perhaps to the Noḡṭawis, surnamed 'Ajam (Papas 2020:299). There are reports which suggest that after the suppression and fall of the Noḡṭawis, those that remained dressed as 'Ajam and Khāksār dervishes and lived among them (Zakāwati 2014:44, 77).¹ It is also reported that there were Khāksār and 'Ajam Dervishes who interpreted the mystical books according to Noḡṭawi thoughts and beliefs and introduced many mystics and poets as Noḡṭawi (47).² In addition, in some Noḡṭawi texts, a few special terms were used, which belong to the main concepts of the Khāksār tradition (115, 239).³

Our primary knowledge of the 'Ajam dervishes is mainly due to an important treatise called *Wasīlat al-najāt (Tool of Salvation)*, written in 1266/1887-8 during the reign of Nāṣer al-Din Shāh (r. 1264-1341/1848-96). This treatise deals in detail with the customs, rituals and beliefs of the 'Ajam.⁴ There is also the manuscript MS 4362 of the Central Library of the University of Tehran, which is a rich collection of Persian poetry copied in 1336/1918. These simple but elegant verses were recited during public declamation (*sokhanwari*) by 'Ajam dervishes (Papas 2020:293).

The 'Ajam dervishes, like other branches of Khāksāriyya and also like the *foṭuwat* tradition, connect their mystical-spiritual lineage to 'Alī b. Abī Tālib through Salmān-e Fārsī (Afshari 2008:112). Moreover, in their oral tradition, in poems and narrations, they mention two brothers named Jalil and Khalil, who must have developed the 'Ajam and the public declamation (*sokhanwari*) in today's form (Maḥjub 1958a:535; Hāshemi 2020:15).⁵

Regarding the 'Ajam dervishes, it should also be mentioned that they were mainly craftsmen and had a strong connection with the trade and professional guilds (*aṣnāf*). They introduced themselves as “seventeen orders” (*hefdah selsele*) or, in other words, seventeen guilds or trades. The members of these seventeen particular trades received their spiritual training only from 'Ajam dervishes and were all obedient (*moti'*) to the order (Ridgeon 2010:152, 164). It seems that the linkage between the 'Ajam dervishes and these trades was so essential that an

¹ Including a report in *Mir'āt al-Ḥaq*, which implies that Majzub 'Alishāh (1173-1239) met some of them (Zakāwati 2014:78). Zayn al-'Abidin Shirwāni has also reported on this (Zakāwati 2014:44, 46).

² This report is related to the meeting of Nur al-din Modarresi Chahārdehi with a dervish in Behbahan in the southwest of Iran (Zakāwati 2014:47).

³ Some scholars have even assumed that “Maḥmud 'Ajam,” the leader of the 'Ajam dervishes, is the same as Maḥmud Pasikhāni, the founder of Noḡṭawiyyah (Zakāwati 2014:240).

⁴ This treatise was written by a dervish named Mashhadi Moḥammad Mehdi Tabrizi, and one of his devotees named 'Ali Moḥammad Kaffāsh Hamedāni helped him to edit some poems. It has been registered with the number 9200 at the Parliament Library in Tehran and has been edited and published by Mehran Afshari (Afshari 2003:231-94). Lloyd Ridgeon recently analyzed this treatise and translated parts of it into English (2020:311-20).

⁵ Among others in the long poem entitled *ṣobut-e sardam*. An example of these poems is given by Morshed Qāsem Hāshemi (2020:15).

‘Ajam dervish had to be a member of one. If he was not, it was not permissible for him to enter the order (Ridgeon 2010:152).

In the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt*, the seventeen guilds associated with the ‘Ajam dervishes were mentioned as follows: 1. dervish (*darwish*), 2. Koran reciter (*qāri-ye Qur’ān*), 3. lamentation narrator (*rowzēkhān*), 4. caller for prayer (*mo’azen*), 5. pilgrim caravan leader (*chāwush*), 6. master of the bath (*ḥammāmi*), 7. barber (*salmāni*), 8. cobbler (*kafshduz*), 9. saddler (*sarrāj*), 10. leader of traditional exercises (*kohnesawār*), 11. wrestler (*pahlawān*), 12. chef (*tabbākh*), 13. baker (*nānvā*), 14. grocer (*baqqāl*), 15. blacksmith (*na’iband*), 16. water-bearer (*saqqā*), and 17. butcher (*qaṣṣāb*) (Afshari 2003:231).

In all sources, the number seventeen has been given for the guilds associated with ‘Ajam. However, there are sometimes differences in the type of a small number of guilds, for example, one guild is replaced by another, or there are occasionally slight differences in the order of the guilds (Afshari 2008:112-13). Of course, these differences are trivial. For instance, guilds for the hookah-seller (*qalyān forush*), washer of corpses (*ghassāl*), winnower (*bowjār*), or coffee-house keeper (*qahwechi*) have been mentioned instead of other guilds in some sources. In the classification of different guilds, those mentioned above are mainly considered as a group that have lower status than the official guilds of the bazaar.

These professional groups also had to pay taxes, but they had no guild leader (*za’im* or *bāshi*) to collect their taxes to make payments to the government. Each of these guilds paid the usual tax to its deputy (*naqib*), who was historically considered to be the representative and liaison of the government (Keywāni 2013:63-64). The deputy of ‘Ajam dervishes, who often lived in Mashhad, collected taxes from the seventeen trades (Chahārdehi 1990:26).⁶

The Mystical Hierarchy of ‘Ajam

The Khāksār have a seven-level hierarchy in their initiatory mystical path. These seven levels, or stages (*haft marḥale*, *haft maqām*), show the spiritual level a dervish has reached. Here it is a question of attaining a certain level of spiritual accomplishment. The promotion from one stage to the next can only be realized with the consent of the sheikh, and through holding a specific ritual (Raei 2014:238-41; Gramlich 1981:80-82).

The ‘Ajam also have their own seven-stage mystical hierarchy, but these stages are fundamentally different from those of the other lineages of Khāksāriyya in terms of their names and customs. The names of these seven stages are recorded in scattered sources and with slight differences in the order and sometimes even in name. In some poems and narrations of ‘Ajam, these stages are stated as follows: 1. *abdāl* (“righteous person”), 2. *mofred* (“independent dervish”), 3. *qazzāb* or *ghazzāw* (“judge” or “warrior”), 4. *darwish ekhtiyār* (“authorized

⁶ There are reports that Mirzā Gholām Ḥosseini, the main deputy (*naqib al-mamālek*) and favorite narrator of Nāṣer al-Din Shāh, appointed a representative in each state and received taxes from these seventeen trades (Chahārdehi 1990:26, Chahārdehi n.d.:51).

dervish”), 5. *naqib* (“deputy”), 6. *‘alamdār* (“banner holder”), and 7. *chehel gisu* (“having forty ringlets”) (Maḥjub 1958c:780).⁷

The initiation ritual of the ‘Ajām dervishes, like other lineages of Khāksār, is called *lesān* (“tongue”) or *lesān dādan* (“giving word”).⁸ However, the first stage of the mystical path, which among the other lineages of Khāksār is also called *lesān*, after the initiation ritual, is called *abdāl* among the ‘Ajām dervishes, using a term of the tradition of Qalandariyya. A notable point, which again shows the relationship between ‘Ajām dervishes and the guilds, is the presence of representatives of specific guilds in the initiation ritual, those who would sit in the ritual place in a special order. (Afshari 2003:258-59; Ridgeon 2010:152). Initiation to the ‘Ajām, like initiation to the Khāksāriyya, had certain preconditions. For example, it has been reported that the novice had to provide services to the master for one thousand and one days, which was divided into twenty-five forty-day periods (*chelle*) (Chahārdehi n.d.:51). The promotion of a dervish from lower to higher stages also had its own conditions and was done through a ritual (Maḥjub 1958c:780). When the ‘Ajām dervishes reached any level of poverty (*faqr*), they received from their master a permission (*parwāne*) or license (*ejāzat-nāme*), which was called *mojallā*.⁹ They had to carry their licenses with them at all times. Furthermore, they received up to twelve special items and special garb from their elders, some of which they carried with them, indicating their status.¹⁰

In some cases, the deputy (*naqib*) would demand the itinerant dervishes provide their licenses to make sure they were bona fide dervishes. If one of these individuals did not have the license and could not answer the deputy's secret questions correctly, the deputy would dispossess him of the position of a dervish and confiscate his dervish garb (*keswat*) (Afshari 2003:256; Modarresi 1965:59).

A dervish who rose to the rank of an authorized dervish (*darvish ekhtiyār*) attained the position of a spiritual guide (*ershād*) (Maḥjub 1958c:780). The highest stage which could be reached through promotion on the mystical path was the stage of the banner holder (*‘alamdār*). The position of deputy (*naqib*) was to be taken from the *foṭuwat* tradition (Keywāni 2013:77), and it was an official bearing that was sometimes inherited. The deputy's assistant (*dast-naqib*) operated as the executive to the deputy and carried out his orders (Maḥjub 1958c:781). Of course, the position of deputy's assistant does not, however, belong to the seven stages of the mystical hierarchy of ‘Ajām. In the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt*, the rituals related to the promotion from each stage to another, as well as the paraphernalia which a dervish receives at each stage, are described in detail (Afshari 2003:258-78).

⁷ In some sources the order of these stages is recorded differently (See Maḥjub 1958c:780; Afshari and Mir‘ābedini 1995:317). The author of *Wasīlat al-najāt* only mentions four of these stages (see Afshari 2003:232).

⁸ The initiation ritual is explained in the treatise *Wasīlat al-najāt* in detail (see Afshari 2003:256-58).

⁹ The fourth part of *Wasīlat al-najāt* deals with different types of these permissions and licenses in detail (see Afshari 2003:262-76).

¹⁰ For more details on these items see Afshari 2012:42.

Traditional Street Performance (*Maʿrekegiri*) and Public Declamation (*Sokhanvari*)

The ʿAjam dervishes did traditional performances on the streets and open spaces in the towns and villages. According to the *Wasīlat al-najāt*, a dervish who reached the stage of authorized dervish (*darwish ekhtiyār*) was allowed to do street performances (Afshari 2012:41), which included the public declamation (*sokhanwari*) and the delivery of Shiʿi panegyric speeches (*maddāhi*).¹¹

The oldest known text that provides us information about the people who engaged in some form of public declamation is the book known as *Kitāb al-Naqd*, which was written in the twelfth century CE by ʿAbd al-Jalil Qazvini Rāzi (b. late-eleventh century CE) (Calmard 1993:132; Afshari 2012:34). This book tells of two religious groups who performed on streets, as well as in bazaars and open spaces, before and during the twelfth century. A group that was Shiʿi and recited poems about the heroism, valor, and virtues of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to the public was called *manāqebkhān* (panegyrist), and the second group, who did the same act but were Sunni, were known as *fazāʿelkhān* (virtue orator) (Calmard 1993:132-33; Afshari 2012:34). According to this Shiʿi author the poems that were recited by the Shiʿi *manāqeb-khāns* were by distinguished poets, while the stories and poems recited by the Sunni *fazāʿel-khāns* were popular poetry of much lower quality (Calmard 1993:132).

The most important source on the street performance and public declamation is *Fotuwat-nāme-ye solṭāni* (*Solṭāni's Chivalry and Guild Treatise*), which was written in the fifteenth century by Ḥoseyn Wāʿez Kāshefi Sabzewāri (839-910/1436-1504). This text deals in detail with different groups of traditional street performers (*maʿrekegir*) and divides them into three main categories: men of speech (*ahl-e sokhan*), men of power (*ahl-e zur*), and men of games (*ahl-e bāzi*) (Kāshefi 1971:279).

This text is mainly in the form of questions and answers and describes each of these groups in detail and, again, divides them into different categories. The men of speech are divided into three main groups: the first group is the panegyrists (or cantors) (*maddāhān*) and eloquent orators (*gharrākhānān*), the second is the special orators (*khawāšguyān*), and the third is the storytellers (*qeṣṣekhānān*) and legend tellers (*afsāneguyān*) (Kāshefi 1971:280).¹² In fact, this text considers the first group as superior to the second group, which is superior to the third (297).

Wāʿez Kāshefi himself belonged to the group of panegyrists (*maddāhān*), and his other work, *Rawḍat al-Shuhadāʿ* (*Martyrs' Garden*), which is more famous than *Fotuwat-nāme*, has caused a significant change in the history of the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāhi*) (Calmard 1993:133; Afshari 2012:39). The Persian term *rowḷe-khāni*, which means lamentation over the sufferings of the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), is also derived from the same work of Kāshefi.

In *Fotuwat-nāme-ye solṭāni*, the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāhi*) is divided into several categories based on the types and content of recitations. In this work, it is said (Kāshefi 1971:286):

¹¹ The word *morshed* (spiritual guide), which is used for a Sufi or dervish with the permission of guidance, has also been used in popular literature for a dervish who does street performance.

¹² Some sources and manuscripts introduce a few of these panegyrists (see Afshari 2012:34-35, 40).

If they ask how many types of the delivery of panegyric speeches (*maddāhi*) exist, say three types: first, those who recite only the poems, whether Arabic or Persian, and they are called the simple panegyrists (*maddāh-e sādekhān*). Second, those who narrate only prose and tell of miracles and virtues, and they are called the eloquent orators (*gharrākhān*). Third, those who speak in prose and poetry together. They explain the purposed meaning sometimes in prose and recite the poems afterwards and sometimes vice versa. This group is called the stilted orators (*moraṣṣa 'khān*), and they possess a higher virtue than the other two groups.

In *Fotuwat-nāmeḥ-ye solṭāni*, the special symbols and tools of the panegyrists are also illustrated as follows: spear (*neyze*), banner (*towq*), girdle of chivalry (*shadd*), tablecloth (*sofre*), lantern (*cherāgh*), and dervish axe (*tabarzin*) (Kāshefī 1971:286). According to this text, the specific banner (*towq*) was a long spear on which the panegyrist tied a piece of felt and installed it into the ground of the performance arena (*meydān-e ma'rekegiri*). The reach of the banner's shadow was recognized as the owner's performance space, and no other performer and panegyrist was allowed to recite or perform in this area (288).

For the classification of men of speech (*ahl-e sokhan*), provided by Kāshefī, the narrators (*naqqāls*) are actually in the third group, among the storytellers (*qeṣṣekhān*). The *naqqāls* are also among the 'Ajam dervishes, and in the early periods they narrated from books like *Romuz-e Ḥamze*, *Hoseyn Kord-e Shabestari*, and *Khāwarnāmeḥ*. These texts mostly included religious content and were specifically about praising and describing the heroism and virtues of 'Ali, the first Imam of Shi'a (Maḥjub 1958a:531).

In his work (*Fotuwat-nāme*), Kāshefī divides *naqqāli* into two categories, telling anecdotes (*hekāyat-gu'i*) and reciting poetry (*naẓm-khāni*), and he mentions the principles and mores of both of these (Kāshefī 1971:304-05). He also describes the chair (*ṣandali*) and the dervish axe (*tabarzin*) as special ritual tools of the *naqqāls*, and associates many rituals and mores especially with the chair of *naqqāl* (see Kāshefī 1971:303).¹³

The Education

There have always been enthusiasts who loved the art of public declamation and accompanied the declaimer as apprentices. These disciples received poems from the declaimer and learned them by heart, and they usually recited or sang them aloud before the start of the performance or whenever the master asked them to (Maḥjub 1958c:779). If an apprentice was successful in attracting the attention of the audience, and was also willing to join the group of declaimers, then after performing the ritual of *lesān* ("tongue") and giving word (*lesān dādan*), he could join the circle of public declaimers (*sokhanwar*) and at the same time the 'Ajam dervishes. From that point, the apprentice would accompany the declaimer as a disciple, following the ranks of promotion of the public declamation and, at the same time, advancing along the mystical path of 'Ajam (Maḥjub 1958c:780).

¹³ Alexandre Papas provides valuable information on the performances and social status of the *maddāh* in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan (2010:183-95 and 2019:283-97).

The poems sung by the declaimers are in the same style as the poems of the panegyrists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Afshari 2012:42-43). The panegyrists would sometimes compose these poems themselves, or they used the work of many other poets who are unknown to us today (Maḥjub 1958c:783). In their poems, the panegyrists competed in particular with Ferdowsi, comparing themselves to him and presenting themselves as superior (Afshari 2012:46).

According to *Tadkirat al-Shu‘arā’* written by Dawlatshāh Samarqandi (c. 834-900/1431-1495), the panegyrists were skilled in composing a unique genre of Persian literature called *Welāyat-nāme* (Afshari 2012:44, 64). A known volume of poems entitled *‘Ali-nāme* is written in this genre. This volume, which was composed by a person named Rabi‘ (b. 420/1029) and finished in 482/1089-90, is known as one of the first Twelver Shi‘i literary poems (Afshari 2012:54).

An Example of a Public Declamation (*Sokhanwari*) in Recent Decades

Moḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjub’s reports about public declamations (*sokhanwari*) that were held in some coffee houses in Tehran in 1337/1958-59 are among the few accurate reports of this kind (Maḥjub 1958a-c).¹⁴

According to these reports, initially an ‘Ajam dervish whose task it was to organize a public performance in a coffee house brought a number of dervish paraphernalia along with his equipment (*aṣās*), which included animal skins (for instance deer, leopard, and sometimes sheep). The skins were nailed to the wall to prepare the stage. The symbols and coats of arms of seventeen guilds and additional paraphernalia, such as the dervish string girdle (*reshteh*), begging bowl (*kashkul*), horn (*nafir*), dervish axe (*tabarzin*), dervish stick (*metrāq*), the “sword” of the swordfish (*arre nahang*), and a “stone of contentment” (*sang-e qanā‘at*), were nailed between the skins (Maḥjub 1958a:531). In fact, each skin belonged to a specific guild, and the symbol of that guild, which consisted of one or two of its tools symbolically made on a smaller scale, was hung or nailed next to the skin (Maḥjub 1958a:535 and 1958b:631).

The coffee houses were busier on the nights of Ramaḍān, and the sessions of public declamation had more visitors during that month. The preparation of the stage and nailing of the skins (*pustkubi*) was usually done on the last night of Sha‘bān, and thus, the coffee house was prepared for the public declamation during Ramaḍān. The skins and symbols of the seventeen guilds were hung in a particular order. The declaimer had to know the specific order of the skins, and whenever someone asked him about it, he had to answer as proof of his competence and ability (Maḥjub 1958b:631).¹⁵

The Khāksār dervishes have specific pieces of poetry assigned to their paraphernalia, and to some of their rituals, which are called *sobut* (“proof”), for example, *sobut-e kashkul* (“the proof of the begging bowl”). These poems express the history, reason, and manner of using that

¹⁴ These reports are based on the participation of Maḥjub in several public declamation sessions accompanied by a declaimer named ‘Amūḥājī (Afshari 2008:124).

¹⁵ For the order of the skins of the seventeen guilds see Maḥjub 1958b:631.

implement or performing that ritual, and explain its mystical importance, and also the spiritual connection of that implement with the elders of the order. 'Ajam dervishes and declaimers also had such poems called *sobut-e hefdah selsele* ("proof of the seventeen orders"), which were used to describe the guilds and the order of their symbols and their skins. The declaimer recited them from memory while preparing the stage (Mahjub 1958b:631). It has been said that the declaimers usually did not do the public declamation—at least ostensibly—as a job or to earn money (Mahjub 1958a:533).

Today, some high-ranking 'Ajam dervishes still enjoy a special reputation and popularity among Iranians. For example, the poet Shāṭer 'Abbās Şabuḥi (655-715/1257-1315) and the famous wrestler Seyyed Ḥasan Shojā'at (655-725/1257-1325), known as Ḥasan Razzāz, were 'Ajam dervishes with the rank of *darwish ekhtiyār* (Mahjub 1958c:780-81).

From the end of the Qajar era onwards, with the modernization of Iranian society, the number and role of 'Ajam dervishes have been significantly reduced. According to Mahjub, already in 1337/1958-59 only a group of 'Ajam dervishes in the first stage of their mystical path (*abdāl*) and a small number of dervishes in the second stage (*mofred*)¹⁶ were left (1958c:781).

However, there are still remnants of the 'Ajam tradition in present-day Iran, such as a few authentic *naqqāls* who still tell stories in circles and coffee houses. Of the customs and traditions of the 'Ajam dervishes, at least some paraphernalia and clothes, and some aspects of their past traditions and customs survive.

Summary

Ahl-e-sokhan (men of speech) is a general title used in Kāshefi's fifteenth-century treatise which refers to several groups engaged in different forms of public declamation. These groups had a close and strong connection with the tradition of *fotuwat*. Men of speech were, in fact, remnants of the traditions of the Qalandars and itinerant Ḥaydari dervishes of the Safavid era, who until recently gave street performances and public declamation in dervish apparel. The groups of men of speech mostly belonged to the community of 'Ajam dervishes. One of the main occupations and social roles of the 'Ajams was public declamation.

The fusion of *fotuwat* and Sufism, which probably dates back to the thirteenth century CE, can be explicitly seen in the case of the 'Ajam dervishes. The 'Ajam dervishes and other lineages of Khāksāriyya are committed to the principles and traditions of *fotuwat* and observe these as the basis of their doctrinal principles.

The 'Ajam dervishes had an explicit connection with some professional guilds, which dates back to the relationship of both groups with *fotuwat*. The association of these groups is also reflected in their literature and treatises.

The detailed classification of men of speech, as presented in the Kāshefi's treatise, refers to their large number, the nature of their activities, and the importance of their social status at the time. During the Safavid period, the work of various groups of men of speech, including reciters

¹⁶ The word *mofred* has been interpreted as someone who can do his duties alone and no longer has to follow the master's orders (Mahjub 1958c:780).

of eulogies and panegyrist, flourished. They dressed as dervishes and played a very decisive role in propagating the Shi'a.

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