

# Film: *Moloud Khān* (The Panegyrist)

Filmed and Directed by Iradj Esmailpour Ghucahnai

Filmed in spring of 2007 (1386 SH)

URLs:

Moloud Khān #1; part1; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQNqmjxLo5s>

Moloud Khān #1; part2; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFuYQ4nRAj8>

Moloud Khān #2; part1; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XS-oKJoDc4>

Moloud Khān #2; part2; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4PZE9u0on8>

Moloud Khān #2; part3; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPBmoi15b-E>

**Note:** All of the songs being sung by the panegyrist in the films or interviews are chosen by themselves and mostly accidentally. I understand the relation between these poems and the dream culture of the region, initially after undertaking a much deeper study on this theme. Then these poems should be considered as a set of data whose content is more important for the people who sing it than the filmmaker who at the time of filmmaking was totally unaware of the hidden relation between these issues.

## Descriptions on the Scenes:

### Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 1:

Min: 00:00”-01:00”

Description: *Seyed Zāhid Ibrāhimi* the panegyrist is singing the opening verses of Mouloud-nāme:

*“This is a majlis (session) [prepared] for describing of [the features of] his holy presence (ḥadrat حضرت)*

*Which is the sign of mercy and blessing*

*beautify the atmosphere of this session with commemorating ṣalawāt (salute) [which should be] free from impurity and contaminations.*

*This session is prepared for the auspicious Prophet*

*God and the angels are pleased of him*

*It is said in Islam’s canonical law (shar‘ شرع)*

*That the Mouloudi session is repellent to disasters [and takes disasters away from the house].”*

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 2:**

Min: 01:00”-01:45”

Location: The convent of one of the khalife’s of *Sheikh Mohammad Kasnazānī* in Sanandaj. *Sheikh Mohammad* is the most prominent living sheikh of *Kasnazāni* branch in Bagdad with many khalifes all around the Kurdistan including Sanandaj.

Description: The pupils and other khalifes are gradually gathering before the ritual of *madjlis-i zikr* مجلس ذکر ([lit.] commemoration session) which usually held twice a week (the nights of every Monday and Thursday). They usually come one or half an hour sooner. This short interval helps them to adapt themselves with the convent’s atmosphere and to come out from the rush and hecticness of everyday life and routines.

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 3:**

Min: 01:46”-03:07”



Two panegyrists (*maddah* مداح), one of whom a khalife, signaling each other for starting the ritual and the ritual begins by a light opening song in praise of the prophet of Islam:

موسم غم آمد و ایام شادی دور شد  
صد هزاران دل شکست و دیده ها بی نور شد

" یا رسول الله دوچشمم رانتظار ت کور شد

...

"It is now the time of sorrow and the days of happiness are all gone  
One hundred thousand hearts are now broken and the eyes are blind  
Oh, messenger of Allah! My eyes became blind in your separation

..."

This song is followed by another song in praise of Ali. There is no dance during these *warm-up* songs. Everybody is sitting in their place listening. There is no place for women in this convent however, in some special occasions they may come to listen to the ritual and in a few ceremonies such as *shab-i mi'rāj* (the night of ascension) or *moloudī* (birthday party [of Mohammad]) they can even see the ritual. Women cannot watch the menly ritual (as their gaze will affect the *ḥāl* ([lit.] presence usually used for ascribing the state of trance) of the group) except the two feasts of *mi'rāj* (ascension) and prophet's birthday (*moloudī*) or open space performances of a convent that they usually prepare for *tabligh* تبلیغ ([lit.] advertisement or propaganda). During the days considered for *tabligh*, the followers of a sheikh dance or perform 'khawāreq' in a group on the streets and in front of the eyes of ordinary people: men and women. *Tabligh* تبلیغ is aimed to recruit new disciples for an absent sheikh whose presence is signified by his flag or *beyraq*.

#### **Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 4:**

Min: 03:08"- 04:08"

The dervishes come together, sitting in a circle to recite collectively their *zīkr* (commemoration). This is the heart of this ritual and sometimes one session could be summarized into these few minutes in which the group *pound* their *zīkr* upon their heart (*zīkr rā bar qalbishān mikouband* ذکر را بر قلبشان می کوبند). All other parts even *samā'* or dance of dervishes are some add-ons to this central part of the ritual.



As described in sound track Mirec135, the khalife of this convent who is the most important person in this group of dervishes (in absence of their Sheikh who lives in *Soleymanie*), is sitting before the door of entrance which in this culture is the most (in)significant place of a room. He is sitting there to imitate the prophet of Islam who used to sit at door-gates as the most inferior place in the room.

### **Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 5:**

Min: 04:09”-06:10”

After the sitting commemoration (*zīkr-i neshaste* ذکر نشسته) the dervishes stand up to say one of the most important *zīkr*s of dervishes: *ḥay Allah* حی الله [lit.] “Allah is [the only] alive” which means that everything other than Allah is mortal. Every Sufi is aimed to *die* first from his mortal aspect of being usually conflated with bodily desires or *nafs* (≈ego) and experience *fanā* فنا, annihilation or death, to be able to live in his sheikh, prophet and finally Allah and become immortal [lit.] (*baqā* بقا). They articulate this *zīkr* by bowing down and up in several intervals. This is also a breathing technique with a special stress on the ending sound of the word *ḥay* حی. At the end of the first dancing round, one of the dervishes went into trance (*ḥāl* حال). Trance usually happens every time with a completely different effect on its concerning person. This time the dervish starts to take

off his cloth by opening his long Kurdish shawl that the men use as their belt. In moments of experiencing a really deep trance, the khalifes are there to calm the individual down.



These moments are allegorically compared with the moments of being drunken by wine. In the same way one should know his limits. Hafiz writes:

صوفی ار باده به اندازه خورد نوشش باد  
ورنه اندیشه این کار فراموشش باد

*If Sufi knows his limits, may his drink prove wholesome to him  
Otherwise he should [even] forget about it altogether!*

### **Moloud Khān #1; Part1; Scene 6:**

Min: 06:11”09:12”

A madjlis can consist of several repeating cycles of *zīkr*, *semā*‘ سماع (dance of dervishes), *do‘ā* (prayer), rest, tea-drinking and so on...

*Madadkhāhī* is also an important part of every session in which the group ask for help from the forefathers of their sheikh to bless their ritual. During the resting time, it is always possible that one of the participators be touched by the trance. In the moments in which one dervish is authentically dived into trance, the other members of the group cannot remain neutral to it and usually it puts its effect on the others in a very infective

way and after a few moments a new round of *semā'* is started or fired(= *semā' dar migirad* (سماع در می گیرد)).



The trance is very infectious; it develops itself inside the group like a fire as it does in this scene.

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 7:**

Min: 09:12”- 12:05”



*Ṣalawāt* is a standard sentence by which the Muslims praise their messenger. In contrast to its standard format there are numerous verses by which one person can invite other people to recite *ṣalawāt* to Mohammad. In this scene, we see a retired military officer that invites energetically the dervishes for saying *ṣalawat* by the medium of seven different verses.

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 8:**

Min: 12:06” - 15:14”

2. April 2007



This scene is all about a *mouloudī* ceremony: A collective feast thrown because of the birth of Mohammad the prophet. In one or two days and nights, the dervishes visit mutually the convent of other sheikhs or khalifes through a preannounced time schedule. It is as if a family goes to visit another family and relatives in their home and invite them back into their own home in return. At this night they are gathered in the convent of *Sheikh Şan‘ān Salāmī*. *Sheikh Şan‘ān* as the host of this ceremony has taken a rather controlling role. He usually wears a white *dashdāshe* (Arabic cloth) which makes him distinguishable from most of other sheikhs and khalifes who wear ordinary Kurdish cloths. He wears Arabic clothes perhaps because of his grandfather, the founder of the branch of *Salāmī* who has lived in Medinna for most of his life.

Most of the dervishes were ready in this night to do *khāwareq* armed with different kinds of nails, knives and so on... but *Sheikh Salāmī* did not allow that. Actually doing *khāwareq* is increasingly a rare occasion because its success proves doubtful as the dervishes are not disciplined as before.



In order to know more about the relation between ‘khawāreq’ and bodily disciplines and practices watch the following video in which I interviewed Friad, A Kurd immigrant in Germany who was a derwish in his youth. He also explained in this interview—which is recorded in German language—why he stopped being a derwish.

(URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwFXllT5Rws&feature=youtu.be>)

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 9:**

Min: 15:20” - 18:37”

A visit of a village of *Sorkhe Desaj* سرخه دزج which is a small village in *Arandan* Rural District, in the Central District of Sanandaj County. At the time of filmmaking and according to the official results of 2006 census, the population of this village was 525, in 131 families<sup>1</sup>.

The singing style of panegyrists in villages are slightly different from those in Sanadaj. In this scene, we can hear a very short sample of the voice of two of panygerists of this village.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Official webpage of Iranian National Center of Census; URL: <https://www.amar.org.ir/>; last accessed on 7.1.2017.



**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 10:**

Min: 18:47" - 22:15"



This is when I met *Seyed Zahid Ibrāhimī* for the first time in my life. He is the well known panegyrist and dream interpreter in Sanandaj with a very respectful character among the people of *shari'at* and *tariqat*, Mullahs and sheikhs. Actually the most important body of my descriptive data regarding the culture of dreams among the ordinary people and the dervishes in Sanandaj is based on what Seyed Zāhid and Khalife Mousā communicated to me during my fieldwork. In this scene, Seyed Zāhid describes the general form of a feast of moloudī in Sanandaj which is held in homes or mosques. This ceremony that he explains is structurally different from those thrown by dervishes in their convents. In the following table, I point out some of the major differences between these two ceremonies although they both are held for the same occasion (birthday of Mohammad) and they both carry the same name (*Jashn-i Moloudī* جشن مولودی which literally means the feast of birthday):

<b><i>Jashn-i Moloudī</i> among the dervishes</b>	<b><i>Jashn-i Moloudī</i> among the ordinary people</b>
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Held in convents	Held in mosques or homes
Chief organizer: the Sheikh or his khalifes	Chief organizer: <i>Mamousta</i> (Mullah)
Spacial order: circular having the sheikh or khalife or the one in trance at the center	Spacial order: array of rows facing Kaaba or <i>qiblah</i> قبله (Mecca) having <i>mamoustā</i> in front
Time-oriented: Their pivotal point is the sheikh as prophet's residue	Place-oriented: Their pivotal point is Kaaba known by Muslims as the house of Allah
Ritual	Feast

**Table5.** Feast vs. Ritual (To know more about the general differences between a *feast* and a *ritual*, read the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the following book: Heidemann, Frank: *Akka Bakka, Religion, Politik und Duale Souveränität der Badaga in den Nilgiri Südindiens*; Berlin: Lit, 2006.)

Until now the film was concerned with recording the moloudī inside the convents. In the rest of the film, the camera changes its direction toward the mosques and the people of shari‘ah. Seyed Zāhid describes the feast of Moloudī inside the mosques and homes of Sanandaj: “... *In the old times the people used to just recite qaside قصیده (ode, a kind of lyrical stanza) and there was less daf<sup>2</sup> [playing]. They would also cook a large variety of food. In some ceremonies, they served the food at the beginning and in others, they served it at the end, following this wisdom which says:*

درون از طعام خالی دار  
تا درو نور معرفت بینی

*Make your inside [= stomach] empty from the food  
To see the light of wisdom inside it*

...

Comment: this is a verse from *Sa‘dī*, (Golestan, Chapter II, Anecdote Nr. 22, *in the Morals of the Dervishes*).

URL: <http://ganjoor.net/saadi/golestan/gbab2/sh22/> last accessed on 12.1.2016)

<sup>2</sup> Daf is an Iranian musical instrument bigger than *dayere*: A large framed drum with jingles.

And once someone joined the feast was greeted by everybody. In return, they would then greet the host by wishing them: “*qaboul bāsha; Mobārak bāsha inshāallah* قبول باشه، مبارک” (Hope to be accepted [by God], hope to be blessed by God’s will...) *قبول باشه ان شاءالله*

Comment: Many people in Sanandaj host a *Moloudī* because of a *nazr* نذر (religious plight or pledge) or because of a dream.

... There are many different kinds of *qasides*: *qaside bordiyeh, kordiyeh, Mohammadiyah or Seyed ‘Abdol-Aziz...* reading of *qaside* and *moloud-nāme* is usually intertwined with several pauses to let the people rest or eat something to change their taste (*taghir-i zāiqe* تغییر ذائقه) and find their peace of mind again in order to be able to continue with the hearing of the *qaside*. [Qaside and *moloudi.nāme* of a] *Moloudī* has many chapters, it is not just one or two, three or ten. It provides you with the text so long that you would prefer to read:

ته ئریف پی قمبه ر تا به ژی فره است  
مخته صه ر خا صه شه مسه ای تر به س

*The description of the prophet is as much as you want  
But “less is more”, hence, Shams it is better to stop [your ode]!*

Comment: Here *Seyed Zāhid* brings the ending verse of the *Moloudnāme* written by *Shams-i Qosheyrī*.

*At the end of Moloudī, all the participators stand up and raise their hands up in do‘ā (praying):*

“Oh God, for the sake of this prophet and for sake of the strength of Islam, have mercy upon us and accept this ceremony from this fellow [the name of the patron or the organizer of the *Moloudi*] and this people! Make our destiny accompanied with goodness and our life with esteem! Keep our children safe and guide us into the right way!..”

*It is really much more than this but I have tried to summarize it!*

Comment: As described inside the text, it is strongly believed that part of the *qaside-yi Bordiyeh* was induced to *Imām Bouşīrī* by the medium of a dream and the people also believe that if they recite it again with innocence and purity (*kholous* خلوص) the spirit of the prophet will be present in the session to solve their

problems. It is a very special kind of séance that should be understood through its context based on a true dream.

**Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 11:**

Min: 22:15”- 23:30”



A short interview with a Sufi whose name nobody knows, people believe that he is one hundred and ten years old at the time of this filming (2006) and used to sleep in empty graves. [I personally do not like the way that the camera objectifies this interesting old man and for sure I would make the video completely differently if it was today.]

Sleeping in a grave was a very strong technique for ego-denunciation or killing the nafs (*nafs-koshī* نفس کشی) among the Sufis that as far as I am aware of, is still practiced by some pupils among *ahl-i ḥaq* brotherhood in *Kermānshāh*. I know a young man who was punished by his Sheikh to sleep in an empty grave because he had shaved his mustache<sup>3</sup>. He had experienced a deep hallucination and fear on that night and as he explained he saw the one or two meters walls of his grave an infinite way into stars until the sheikh

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<sup>3</sup> Mustache for dervishes of *ahl-i ḥaq* is a symbol for a curtain that hides their mouth as a treasure that holds a treasure inside: *Kalām* or the Word. Shaving the mustache means to be ready to reveal the secret راز to others and deceiving the group of dervishes.

came and put him out by offering his hand that again looked in his feared eyes like an infinite long white ribbon.

In this interview, the old man has such a strong Kurdish accent that I had to use an interpreter. He explained from memory that long time ago the madjlis of *moloudī* was much simpler and not so detailed as it is in nowadays: “*They just read the qaside of Bordiyeh and qaside of Amin tazakorī امین تذکری and that was it!*”

Comment: It seems that he is talking about another qaside by saying *qasid-i amin Tazakorī قصیده امین تذکری* but here is a different version of the second verse of *qaside-yi Bordiye*:

أمن تذكر جيرانِ بذي سلم  
مزجت دمعا جَرَى من مقلّةِ بدم

(see the full ode in URL: <http://poem.afdhl.com/text-13236.html> last accessed on 13.1.2016).

### **Moloud Khān #1; part1; Scene 12:**

Min: 23:30”- 28:58”

In this scene, Seyed Zāhid starts by singing the Arabic [and original] version of *Bordieh* and afterward he sang it in other variations of this ode and the ending chant of *marḥabā* ([lit.] welcome).



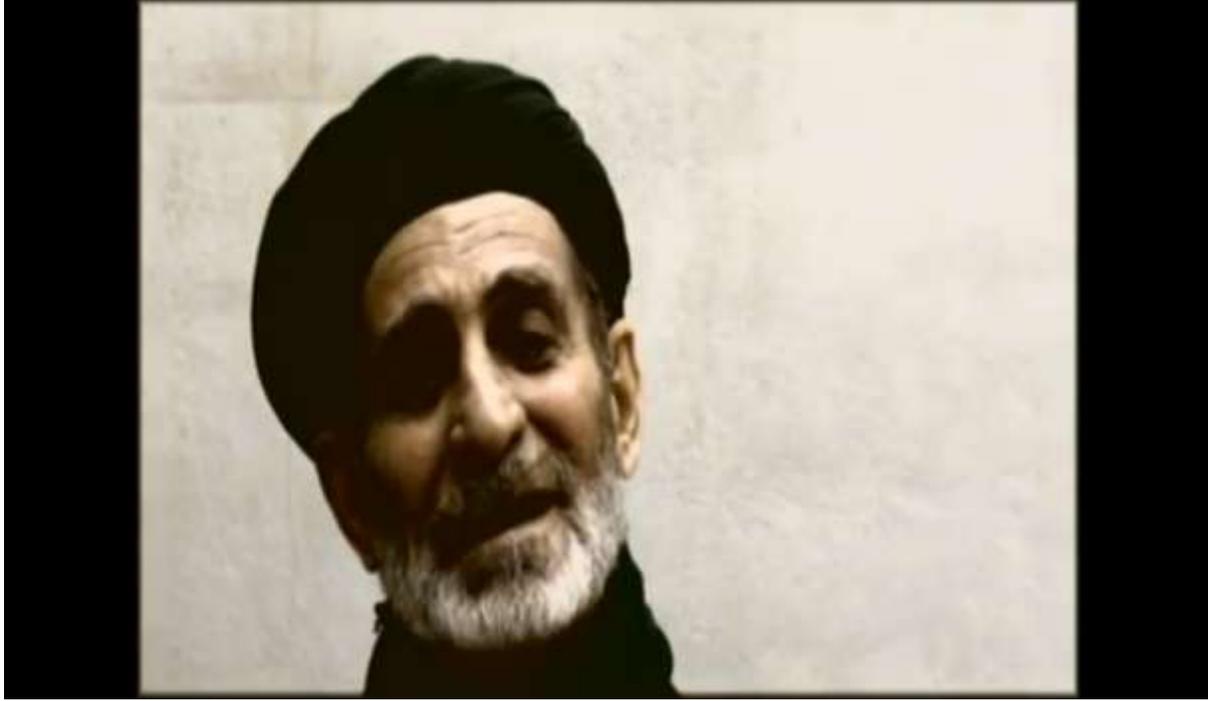
## Moloud khān #1 مولود خوان (Panegerist) Part2

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFuYQ4nRAj8>

Filmed in spring of 2007 (1386 SH)

### Moloud Khān #1; part2; Scene 1:

Min: 00:00”-03:12”



Continuation of the songs and chants from the first part of the video. In between he explained the motivation that forced him to sing in this age:

*“My children are not happy with my singing. “Why are you still singing?!” they always ask me; “if it is for status or for making a name (nām o nishān نام و نشان) you have it already! And if it is for money, there is enough either...” but I have become accustomed to this art of singing firstly and secondly I fear that the Prophet would question me on the day of resurrection: “Why did you stop being my panegyrist?””*

### Moloud Khān #1; part2; Scene 2:

Min: 03:13”- 06:00”



Some footages from *sisdah-be-dar* سیزده به در festival as a part of the *Nowruz* new year celebration rituals, held on the 13th of Farvardin (the 1st month of the Iranian calendar), during which people spend time picnicking outdoors. In 2007, when this video was filming, the *moloudī* of the prophet coincides with *sisdah-be-dar*. The next scenes were filmed on the very night of this day of picnicking festival.

**Moloud Khān #1; part2; Scene 3:**

Min: 06:00”- 13:00”



This scene is a summarized report of a *moloudikhānī* session in a mosque. At the beginning of this scene I asked the people of the place if they have picnicked on that day? *Seyed Zāhid* answered: “*I was in Ṣaḥrā* صحرا” [*Ṣaḥrā* literally means sahara but here it means a pleasant open and infinite space]. After a while, he corrected his answer: “*I was in the mosque...my saḥrā is the mosque!*” insisting that he was talking allegorically at first. This is an ever happening discourse by which the true intention of the speaker remains unclear and unknown. *Ṣaḥrā* here is a double-signified signifier. As a general rule, the discourse of Sufis and those who are acquainted with their poetry and literature is very figurative and citational; every word refers to many or a very special verse of Quran, hadith or a poem from a well-known author, Sufi etc. Here he is referring to this verse of Hafiz:

خلوت گزیده را به تماشا چه حاجت است؟

چون کوی دوست هست به صحرا چه حاجت است؟

What is the need of excursion for the one who has selected solitude?

What is the need of Sahara when there is the alley of ally? [ally or friend here is a metaphor for Allah, prophet, a friend, a beloved, a woman ...potentially everyone]

By saying “*my saḥrā is the mosque*”, *Seyed Zāhid* attributes himself with those ascetic people and hermits while at the same time, he distances himself from the mass majority who go out picnicking on days like that.

At the end of this scene, we see how women are descending down from behind the curtain. All the participants say their good wishes to the man who has organized this ceremony before leaving for home.