

## **Assessment of the Role of Lullaby in Religious Culture Transfer to Children Based on Written Persian Lullabies**

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### **Abstract**

Folklore is an important indicator in determining the culture of each nation so that we can without doubt say that the most lasting and purest literary and artistic creations of mankind have been inspired by the folklore and literature of the masses. Lullabies are also part of the oral folk literature of the society which originated from the minds of the masses; hence, indirectly transferring different concepts to the minds of the listeners. Therefore, based on a descriptive-analytic approach in this article, we decided to answer questions like what issues do the written Persian lullabies cover in relation to the religious culture? And else what role do these Persian lullabies play in transferring it to children? The results of this study show that among mothers' lullabies, religious culture has been expressed in different ways, such as "religious beliefs, moral beliefs, and public opinions", while the hypnotic melodies can play an important role in the religious identity of children. Therefore, mothers' shares should not be underestimated in creation and development of such feelings and beliefs.

**Keywords:** Folk literature; lullaby; religious culture; children.

### **1. Introduction**

Folklore is an important indicator in determining the culture of each nation, and the past and present cultures of different nations of the world can be recognized through

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investigation and contemplation. Delving into the folk cultures of nations requires a comprehensive review of their folklore, since various branches of culture are rooted in it. We can certainly say that the most lasting and purest literary and artistic creations of mankind have been inspired by the folklore and literature of the masses. To understand the different cultural aspects of nations, it is important to first examine their fundamental thinking as reflected in folklore and oral literature, of which lullabies are a part. Lullabies, as a component of a society's oral literature, originate from the mindsets of the masses while indirectly transferring various concepts to listeners. Rooted in themes such as nature, religion, and traditions, lullabies have been passed down from generation to generation and have remained constant among the people of a society.

In fact, childhood is a critical and decision-making period from an educational point of view. Childhood teachings are like patterns carved in stone, leaving a relatively lasting effect on the child's mind and influencing his or her fate. Therefore,

among the different human generations, the period of childhood is undoubtedly considered the most important and influential time of human life. This time is full of innocence and purity, mystery, and the dominance of the human's immaculate nature. During this period, a child's mental capacity opens to searching, discovering, and learning. Hence, core beliefs are formed and institutionalized during this period, while the child's tender and impressionable nature has a greater capacity for acceptance and modeling. Moreover, during these years, humans are yet to face the adversities of social life, spiritual wear, and mental concerns of adulthood, which can prevent them from understanding the delicate equations of humanity. Human growth and development are products of knowledge and thought, acquired over time. On the other hand, children are the bearers of the future of any society and the heirs and guardians of the efforts of past generations. Therefore, children's understanding of their societies, together with their cultures, customs, traditions, and prevailing norms, as well as the overall conditions governing the world, is essential (Salehi Amiri & Habibi, 2009).

In modern societies, social relations and people's customs and beliefs are changing daily with the development of cultural interactions. Folklore is a great heritage of the past that can be kept alive and dynamic in its current context. Folk literature is also an important and broad component of people's culture, while lullabies represent one of the richest aspects of the spiritual cultures of communities.

They reflect social changes, people's lifestyles, and the aspirations of mothers within a territory, as they are deeply connected with people's lives (Taheri, 2009). Furthermore, our cultural identity is the Iranian identity, a combination of Iranian and Islamic elements. Given that Iran has been a passageway for different ethnic groups over a long period, it has both influenced and been influenced by other cultures through interaction and sometimes conflict. Thus, preserving and continuing cultural identity is a necessary and important task. Iranian national culture is specific to our people, inspired by the characteristics of geography, ideology, attitudes, desires, collective experiences, feelings, and beliefs, and is flavored with Iranian-Islamic perspectives. Possessing such a culture gives our people a distinct dignity and identity, setting them apart from others. This factor can elevate our nation among other nations, enabling us to stand on our own and be recognized (Salehi Amiri & Habibi, 2009).

Therefore, based on the discussion above, this study aims to answer questions such as: What issues do written Persian lullabies address in relation to religious culture? And what role do they play in transmitting it to children?

## 2. Research Literature

The transfer of religious culture to children is an important issue that has never been thoroughly addressed in detail in previous research. Although much work has been done in the field of lullabies, unfortunately, none have focused on religious identity. A few of these studies are mentioned below:

- Assessment of the Educational and Lyrical Aspects of Lullabies in Bushehr Province" by Manizheh Poorne'mat Roodsari (2012).

In the above study, the author aimed to introduce the cultural, economic, and religious perspectives of the people of Bushehr Province, particularly mothers and women, through the analysis of the content of lullabies as forms of folk, lyrical, and educational literature. The study also highlighted the social and economic concerns of the people, as well as family structures, including emotional connections and polygamy. Furthermore, it attempted to present lullabies that reflect mothers' aspirations and the religious identities of the people.

This study differs from ours in that it evaluated all aspects of the lullabies of Bushehr Province—religious, cultural, and economic—whereas our research focuses specifically on examining written Persian lullabies in terms of religious culture, including religion, belief, ethics, and popular culture.

- Lullabies in the Culture of the South Khorasan People: A Case Study of the Old Texture of Birjand" by Asghar Askari Khanqah and Atosa Afsari (2013).

The authors of this research examined the themes and structures of lullabies in Birjand and highlighted specific cultural examples by reviewing their various themes and motifs. At the end of their analysis, they concluded that lullabies, like other songs and stories for children, play an important role in the socialization of individuals within a society by embedding cultural potentials. Furthermore, the study showed that mothers are the transmitters of traditions, rituals, and ethnic-cultural identities, and they preserve their native cultures by singing lullabies and passing them on to future generations.

- Lullaby as the Music of the Female Role in the Transmission of Oral Culture" by Behrouz Vojdani (2008)

In this study, the need to record children's lullabies and folk songs was emphasized, and mothers' roles in the transmission of oral culture to their children were highlighted. At the end, the themes of Iranian lullabies were also introduced.

- Lullaby in Kallhor's Culture" by Nahid Hemmati and Sa'eed Nazari (2013)

The authors of this study introduced lullabies as a form of ethnic literature that plays a significant social role in shaping a child's character. They also noted that although many Kurdish lullabies reflect the suffering of Kurdish women, they occasionally contain traces of admiration, praise, and worship, as well as wishes and honors for children, a mother's sweet imaginations of her child's future, and poems expressing children's happiness, success, and health. The authors emphasized that lullabies are rooted in the culture of each ethnic group, through which their lifestyle and moral characteristics can be understood.

### **3. Analysis of Lullabies with a Religious Culture Approach**

#### **3.1 Religious Beliefs**

In Iranian culture and families, there exists, and has long existed, a deep belief in God's companionship with His people in all areas. This has been seen abundantly in the lullabies that mothers sing to their children. By singing lullabies that refer to God's companionship, mothers familiarize their children with God's grace and kindness, thereby teaching them that they can rely on this companionship at all stages of their lives. Given the role of religious beliefs in the development of

identity, attention to religious and spiritual communities and communications to create a sense of belonging, nurture and preserve values and meanings, and unite ideological abstractions or self-concepts to foster and promote different aspects of identity, seems especially important. In our culture, attention to religion and emphasis on the importance of both religion and ethnicity have led the collective identity—rooted in self-collective elements such as religion, nation, and race—to be divided into two components: ethnic identity and religious identity. Since the relationship between religion and aspects of identity depends on the cultural context (Hashemi & Jowkar, 2001), religious beliefs can be regarded as a part of cultural identity.

In the following lullaby, the mother likens her baby to a poppy flower, telling him or her that the father has gone to a gathering and praying for God's companionship with him. She then gives the child the good news that the father will bring sacrificial meat. In fact, beyond familiarizing her baby with the notion of God's accompaniment, the mother also introduces the child to the customs of pilgrims returning from the House of God, since the father is expected to bring sacrificial meat as a blessing:

*Lully, lully, poppy flower  
Daddy has gone, with God protecting;  
Daddy has gone to a gathering,  
To bring you meat from the offering.*

(Khazayi, 2005)

One of the important issues that has always existed in Iranian culture is the practice of expressing gratitude to God for His blessings. Through such lullabies, mothers teach their children the custom of being thankful to God. In the following lullaby, the mother considers herself rich for having her child and thanks the Lord a thousand times for this blessing:

*Nothing lacks to have you  
Thousand thanks to Him too!*

(Javid & Jorjani, 2004)

Also, the mother familiarizes her child with the Lord by singing the following lullaby, thus teaching him or her that God is always awake and always protecting. On this basis, the child comes to understand God's kindness and greatness from early childhood, thereby learning to trust Him at all stages of life in the future:

*O God, a true concealer You are  
When all are asleep, awake You are, sure!  
Ever awake, I swear not to sleep;  
My child forever in safety keep!*

(Poorne'mat Roodsari, 2012)

In addition, in the following lullaby, the mother prays that her baby never gets sick, whether asleep or awake, and that God watches over him or her. This is another example of a lullaby in which the mother teaches her child while praying to the Lord to protect the child's health and keep illness away:

*If awake or if asleep, my flower!  
No disease I wish you'll ever get;  
If you get it someday, then I'll pray to  
God to keep you safe and watch over you.*

(Homāyooni, 2010)

Monotheism and appealing to God have been central cultural and religious beliefs of Iranians since ancient times. In the following lullaby, the mother tells her baby that she has prayed to God with tears every night for her child, who is like a dahlia. Here, the mother teaches her child how to pray to the Lord:

*Lully, lully, Dahlia!  
Every night to Allah  
Prayed I purely for you,  
Drowned in tears and virtue*

(Eslami, 2013)

In Iranian Islamic culture, families have deep respect for the Holy Qur'an and profound belief in it, so that they begin any work not only in the name of God but also by reciting a short chapter from it. In the following lullaby, the value and respect that families have for the Qur'an is clearly evident. From the time a child is born, they either tie a small Qur'an to one of the child's arms or place the holy book above the child's head, as they believe the Qur'an protects their baby:

*Your mother tied the holy Koran round your arm;  
Your mother's life devoted well to nice your tress.  
Koran may be your true protector thus from harm;  
Your mother's faith in wholly thirty chapters, yes!*

(Shams Ansari, 1999)

The Holy Word of God (Qur'an) has always been revered by Iranian families. Children's recitation of the Qur'an has long held great value for parents and is considered an honor for the child. In the following lullaby, besides wishing that her child becomes a reader of the Qur'an, the mother teaches him or her that pilgrimage is highly valuable and can be attained only through reading the Qur'an:

*Lully, lully, pretty tulip!  
Once I'll take you sure on a trip.  
Thus I read you God's word to kip.  
Koran! Make him old enough then!  
Destine meeting shrines his high ken!*

(Javid & Jorjani, 2004)

In some lullabies, mothers ask God to grant their children a long life so that they may have them as companions in old age. In these lullabies, mothers acknowledge God as the protector of their children, while also drawing the child's attention to the greatness of God in another form of lullaby:

*May you let him old, my God!  
Qur'an's lines, his share of heart!  
Lully, lully, flower bud!  
Grow my partner, full of art!  
Let him old, o' Word of God!*

(Enāyat et al., 2011)

In the following lullaby, the mother recognizes the cradle as useful, as her child is sleeping in it. She also seeks help from God to protect her baby, which reflects that Iranian families regard the power of God as supreme over all other powers:

*Lully, lully! Sleep in cradle now!  
Precious babe the cradle's holding, wow!  
O' God may keep my babe to dow!*

(Jamali Soosfi: 2007)

In another form of lullaby, such as the following, the mother compares her child to a tulip, noting that her son is sleeping in the cradle and praying to God to keep him healthy. In fact, this type of lullaby reflects the mother's sincere faith in God to protect her baby:

*Lully, lully, tulip!  
Easy sleep in the crib!*

*My hope in God to keep*

*My baby safe in sleep.*

(Moghaddasi, 2004)

God's accompaniment with travelers is part of Iranian religious beliefs, and they are always considered to be under His protection. In the following lullaby, the mother teaches her child that God is with His servants everywhere:

*Lully, lully, carpet flower!*

*Daddy's gone; we're missing his vim.*

*Lully, lully, poppy flower!*

*Daddy's gone and God will speed him.*

(Khazayi, 2005)

### 3.2 Religious Beliefs

Iranians believe in and hold great respect for their Imams, including Imam Reza (AS). Due to the location of the holy shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the city is considered highly sacred, and traveling there to visit the shrine holds great value for them. By singing the following lullaby, the mother familiarizes her baby with the Imams and their religious teachings from the very beginning of childhood, thereby helping the child understand their great reverence. For example, in the lullaby below, the mother prays that her baby may one day travel to Mashhad to kiss the shrine and become a servant of Imam Reza, if he grants entry:

*Lully, lully, thou to Mashhad may!*

*Close to Imam Reza's tomb to stay!*

*May he let you be his servant fine!*

*Just a sweeper right inside his shrine!*

(Mohajeri, 2004)

In addition, Imam Ali (AS) holds great dignity among Iranians. In fact, he is often regarded as a problem-solver whose name has always been associated with guidance and support. In many lullabies, mothers consider the holiness of Imam Ali (AS) as a mediator to fulfill their needs. Through these religious lullabies, mothers introduce this religious figure to their children, fostering a sense of devotion. The following lullaby begins with the name of Imam Ali (AS), and the mother continues by introducing him to her child. She refers to Imam Ali (AS) as Heydar, noting that he is the Prophet's son-in-law as well as the chief. She further recounts to her child the story of Imam Ali's bravery and heroism during the capture of the Khyber fort:

*Lully, lully, jonquil's Ali!  
Lion's Ali, master's Ali!  
Prophet's groom was Ali, Ali!  
Captured Khyber Castle, Ali!*

(Homāyooni, 2001)

In the following two lullabies, due to Imam Ali's esteemed status before God, the mother asks him to heal her child's pain and illness and to grant pilgrimage to Karbala as part of the child's life. In these lullabies, where the location of Karbala is mentioned, the mother's intention may be not only to acquaint her child with Imam Ali's character but also to arouse curiosity about this particular place, thereby providing more information about religious figures:

*Lully, lully, you are lulling!  
Ali comes above your head to  
Heal your pain and all your suffering;  
Destine Karbala for you to woo.*

(Ghiyāsvand, 2006)

*Lully, lully, for the day!  
Heal my pain, thou Ali may!  
Destine Karbala on my way!  
Lully, lully, for the day!  
For Muhammad's dome today,  
Grant the needy what they may!*

(Enāyat et al., 2011)

Also, in the following lullaby, besides asking for God's help, the mother regards Imam Ali (AS) as a support for her baby and prays for him to resolve the child's problems. In fact, the mother's intention is to teach the child to appeal to Imam Ali (AS) as a revered religious figure to have all difficulties addressed:

*Lully, lully, may God be with you!  
Ali may protect you well too!  
God will keep you safe in virtue;  
Ali would solve your problems, true!*

(Homāyooni, 2001)

In Iranian-Islamic culture, belief in and respect for the Imams have very deep roots. In most lullabies, the mother wishes for her child to become their servant,

which is considered a great honor. By singing such lullabies, mothers familiarize their children with the Imams and help cultivate the holy seed of love for them in their hearts. For example, in the following lullaby, the mother wishes her baby to be a slave and servant of her holiness Ma'soumeh (Imam Reza's sister), buried in Qom, thereby ensuring the child's well-being and protection forever:

*I lull you slowly thus to stay alive;  
To serve M'asumah well in Qom and thrive;  
Her faithful servant then the whole of your life;  
Alive until Doomsday beside your wife!*

(Poorne'mat Roodsari, 2012)

In addition to fostering their children's familiarity with the Imams, mothers help them learn about the Imams' interrelations and strengthen the formation of their religious roots. For example, in the following lullaby, the mother encourages her child to go on a pilgrimage to honor her holiness Zahra (the Prophet's daughter). Since the Shrine of Fatima is not specified, the mother mentions no particular location. She then wishes for her child to become Shah Reza's (i.e., Imam Reza's) servant, if Zahra grants her consent. Here, the mother's intention is to teach her child that Fatima is Imam Reza's mother and that obtaining her approval is necessary for the child to serve him:

*Lully, lully, towards the desert thou may be!  
Over Zahra's hidden tomb you'll one day knee;  
If you're given her permission, then you'll see  
Shah-e Reza's servant thou are merrily!*

(Omranji, 2002)

Religious beliefs are very strong in the Iranian-Islamic culture in a way that mothers have always sung a variety of lullabies to their children in this field. In addition to acquainting their children with Imams, the mothers have introduced religious sites in the form of lullabies. In some religious lullabies, the mother intends to familiarize her child with holy shrines, such as the following two lullabies and some others, in which Mashhad, Qom, and Karbala have been mentioned:

*I lull you thus to stay alive;  
To serve M'asumah well and thrive;  
To meet her shrine at night and morn  
And serve her woe and deeply mourn.*

(Panahi Semnani, 1992)

*Lully, lully, thou to Mashhad may!  
Close to Imam Reza's tomb to stay!  
If you're given his permission, fine!  
Be a sweeper right in Zeinab's shrine!*

(ibid)

In some other lullabies, the mother familiarizes her child with the Imams through storytelling. For example, in the following lullaby, the mother narrates that she went to the sea one night and caught three fish: Akbar, Asghar, and the Prophet's groom. In fact, the mother has assimilated the three sons of the Imams to these fish. This approach is intended to provoke the child's curiosity about religious figures, helping them later understand these stories as part of their religious and cultural identity:

*Lully, lully, lullaby!  
One night to sea headed I;  
Three fish caught I then in gloom:  
Akbar, Asghar, Prophet's groom.  
Prophet did I see to pray;  
Praise of God did Ali say.  
Ali pulled down Khyber door,  
Powered then by the Great Lord.*

(Vojdani, 2008)

### 3.3 Moral Beliefs

#### 3.3.1 Bonds of Relationship with Relatives

Visiting family and friends strengthens relationships and is an important part of Iranian moral beliefs. By showing regard for one another, people seek to develop closer relationships and assist each other during difficult times. Through such lullabies, mothers help their children become accustomed to these good manners from early childhood and teach them to form emotional connections with relatives. For example, in the following lullaby, the mother first likens her child to a tea rose and then informs him or her that the father has gone to an uncle's house. It is likely that the mother intends to establish a connection between tea and her husband's visit. Similarly, in the subsequent stanzas, she likens her baby to a vine flower. Grapes and tea can serve as means of entertaining guests, while the mother engages her child's mind in his or her father's visit through these references:

*Lully, lully, tea flower!  
Daddy's gone to uncle's home.  
Lully, Lully, vine flower!  
Daddy's gone away alone.  
Lully, lully, wallflower!  
Daddy's gone to uncle's home.  
Lully, lully, cotton flower!  
Daddy's gone to your aunt's home.  
Lully, lully, fair tulip!  
Daddy's gone to aunt on trip.*

(Khazayi, 2005)

*Lully, lully, lull in tears!  
Daddy comes at night's prayers.  
Lully, lully, you're my flower!  
Uncle's home and stays an hour.*

(Javid & Jorjani, 2004)

### 3.3.2 Bonds of Relationship with Relatives

Being an early riser has long been important in both Iranian and Islamic culture. Iranians believe that rising early is associated with an increase in sustenance. In fact, daily work typically begins with early rising. For example, in the following lullaby, by announcing the coming of dawn, the mother reminds her child that it is time to start the day and that staying in bed is inappropriate, as it would cause them to miss daily activities:

*Dawn has come and day to work...  
Lully, lully, lullaby!  
No more sleep, your shame to lurk!  
Lully, lully, lullaby!*

(Rahmandoust, 1986)

### 3.4 Public Belief (Superstitions)

In his explanation of the public beliefs and superstitions, Shāhnoushi maintains, “Beliefs are a component of any cultures and part of them are realistic and based on proven expressions. However, some parts are unfounded and unreasonable though historically accepted by people. These are called superstitious (2009).” Also in Dehkhoda’s Dictionary, superstition is defined as this: It is a confusing and incoherent speech called pleasantly confusing words (Dehkhoda, 1955).

One of the Iranian beliefs proven by medical sciences is that rose water and its perfume cause peace and serenity and perhaps it is because of this that people spray it over the remaining members of the family and relatives of a dead person when burring him or her so as to relieve them. In the following lullaby, by mentioning rose and rose water, the mother wants to tell her baby that the time of his or her sleep and relaxation has come:

*Lully, lully, pretty rose!  
Dear my baby! Time to doze!  
Fair a flower's right in cradle;  
Time to extract rosewater!*

(Omrani, 2002)

Among Iranians, ring gems such as agate and turquoise hold special significance and are highly valued. This belief has deepened over time. Mentioning a turquoise gem at the end of the month of Ramadan and recalling the celebration in the following lullaby unconsciously reminds listeners of the holy days of Ramadan:

*Lully, lully, nice a flower!  
Turquoise gem of green! It's over!  
Final fasting to break tonight!  
New month's tomorrow, full of light!*

(Mohajeri, 2004)

In Iranian culture, giving alms to ward off the evil eye is, and has long been, a strong belief. The mother explains this to her child in the lullaby below:

*Lully, lully, lully, lully!  
Fifty hundred dollars I'll pay;  
For your lip spot I'll pay money.  
Fifty hundred dollars I'll pay;  
For your drunken eyes, my sonny!*

(Sarayi & Sarayi, 2012)

In Iranian culture, the arrival of travelers is always accompanied by joy and happiness. In the following lullaby, the mother transfers this sense of delight to her child while teaching him or her that sharing good news brings happiness. For example, she first likens her baby to a rice flower and a fresh plant, then answers her own question about why her child is so happy and why his or her lips are smiling today. She explains that the father's return from a journey is the reason for the

child's joy, while the child is no longer weepy and looks forward with bright, wide-open eyes:

*Rice flower! Lully, lully!  
Tender seedling this year, thou are!  
Lips smiling, heart is happy!  
Why so joyful shining a star?  
Nice a tulip, Lully, lullay!  
Dear my flower's cheerful today!  
Dad has come, congratulations!  
No more crying, no more actions!*

(Eslami, 2013)

*Lully, lully, o' my lily!  
Daddy has come; cheer up, buddy!*

(Zargar, 2003)

In another lullaby, the mother gives her baby the good news of his or her father's return after a journey in the month ahead:

*Lully, lully, worried why, son!?  
Dad's on trip but next month he'll come.*

(Khazayi, 2005)

Some characters in lullabies, such as the bogey, are not real and are mostly part of superstitions in public culture. In all the following lullabies where the word bogey appears, the mother does not intend to frighten her child. Instead, by mentioning that the father has a dagger tied to his side and the Qur'an under his arm, the mother instills in the child the idea that it is he or she who, with the father's support and the help of the Qur'an, can scare away the bogey. In fact, such lullabies teach children to confront superstition:

*Lully, lully, tea flower!  
Bogey, bogey, get away!  
Brave a father has my babe!  
Dagger's tied on belt, you're prey!*

(Javid & Jorjani, 2004)

*Bogey, bogey, go to hell!  
Come to die before my babe!  
Father saves his baby well;*

*Dagger's round his belt to scrape.*

(Poorne'mat Roodsari, 2012)

*Go, you desert bogie, go!  
To my babe you'll bring no woe;  
Brave a father has my babe!  
Dagger's tied on belt to save.*

(Homāyooni, 2010)

*Lully, lully! Worry no!  
Go, you nightly bogie, go!  
Dark and black you're like a foe!  
Go you dog! You're shameless so!  
Brave a father has my babe!  
Daggers tied on belt enslave;  
Two Korans in hand, to save!*

(Hassan Lee, 2003)

In the following lullaby, by announcing that her baby is sleeping peacefully, the mother commands the bogie to leave him or her alone:

*Lully, lully, lully!  
Lying here's my flower.  
No pranks he's done, bogie!  
Go out right now, dour!*

(Eslami, 2013)

Lully, lully! Get out, bogie!  
Out of this house, out of abbey!  
Pretty petal like my baby,  
Surely no one I'll give, nay, nay!

(ibid)

#### 4. Conclusion

Since the primary responsibility for raising children rests on the mother's shoulders, and the most important years of a child's character development occur within the warm and intimate atmosphere that the mother creates, a committed mother takes full advantage of this unique opportunity to lay the foundation of faith in her child's religious culture. In this way, the first lessons are often delivered through the

humming of a lullaby. Due to the appeal of words in lullabies, they can play an important role in the ideological education of children. Through the indirect education provided by singing lullabies, aspects of religious, ethical, and public culture are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Our analysis of lullabies demonstrated that Persian written lullabies, in terms of religious culture, encompass religious and ethnic beliefs as well as folklore (superstitions). By singing hymns that emanate from the heart and soul, mothers indirectly pass on the beliefs they themselves have learned from their parents to their children. They do so by referring to the existence of God, appealing to Him and the Imams (AS), offering good wishes, recounting stories of gatherings and hospitality, and more, all delivered through a sweet and melodic tune.

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