

Ana Mani Fiyach's Poem: An In-Depth Study Of A Moroccan Malhun Masterpiece

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Abstract:

Morocco is a country with a vibrant musical heritage, where many traditional genres, such as Rai, Berber, Gnawa, and Sufi, continue to be performed today. One particularly distinctive and unconventional style of music is Malhun. Included in the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO, Malhun poetry is a key part of Moroccan oral tradition, serving as a popular form of memory that is expressed in melodic dialectal Arabic. Among the known poems in the Moroccan register, we find the well-known "Fiyachiya". Originating in the 17th century, Ana Mani Fiyach a Qsida/ poem by Sidi Bahloul Cherki stands as a pillar of the Malhun poetic tradition, continuing to resonate deeply with audiences across Morocco. Known for its profound emotional and spiritual themes, the poem is often performed at religious and social gatherings, capturing feelings of love, longing, and existential reflection. Over the centuries, Ana Mani Fiyach has evolved into much more than a poetic work—it has become a defining element of Moroccan cultural identity, through shaping the nation's artistic and spiritual heritage.

This article examines the religious, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of Ana Mani Fiyach, focusing on the famous line "Ana Mani Fiyach" ("I haven't got the force"), which encapsulates themes of longing, spiritual devotion, and existential questioning of the human soul. Through a close analysis of the poem's structure and language and translating it into English, the article reveals how Ana Mani Fiyach intertwines personal desire with spiritual devotion. By situating the poem within its historical and cultural context. This study aims to uncover the layers of meaning in Ana Mani Fiyach, shedding light on its role as both a spiritual and cultural touchstone in Moroccan society.

Key Words: Ana Mani Fiyach, Poem, Poetry, Translation, Malhun, Analysis, Morocco.

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I. Introduction

Malhun poetry, a significant cultural and literary heritage of Morocco, is a form of oral poetry that intertwines eloquent language with profound cultural expressions. The beginnings of Malhun poetry can be traced to the early 17th century. Malhun poetry is traditionally composed in the Moroccan Arabic dialect and often performed with musical accompaniment (El Fasi, 1989). It serves not only as a literary form but also as a medium of social commentary, historical record, and cultural preservation. Malhun began as a local art form in Tafilalet. Over time, it spread to urban artists, craftspeople, and Sufi communities, setting itself apart from other regional Moroccan traditions. (Jirari, 1970). As mentioned before, they are typically sung in colloquial Moroccan Arabic and are often accompanied by simple instrumentation such as drums, flutes, Darbouka, Kamenja, and stringed instruments like the oud and guembri. (Hoffman, 2007).

It refers also to a traditional form of Moroccan music and poetry that it is characterized by its simple melodies, repetitive rhythms, and lyrical content that often focuses on themes such as love, nature, gastronomy, daily life, social and religious issues. Topics in poetry have broadened over the centuries, so that contemporary Malhun includes several sub-genres: love, nature; praise, political appeals, and narratives. There are also many Malhun poems, rooted in Moroccan culture, resonate with Sufi mysticism and Islamic beliefs, blending with spiritual devotion (Ennahid, 2007).

The most written and performed poems are those of the religious ones, because of their spiritual value. Mystic poetry occupies a privileged place in the poetry of Malhun. The best known nowadays is “*Ana Mani Fiyach*” commonly called the Fiyachia or Hilaliya for some. This poem has become famous thanks to its performance by some singers such as El Haj Mohammed Bouzoubaa. This poem is today a must for traditional celebrations and religious holidays.

The poem *Ana Mani Fiyach* is a renowned qasida widely recognized across Morocco. Written by Sidi Bahloul Cherki in the 17th century, it has become a cherished piece of Moroccan heritage, frequently performed at religious gatherings, weddings, and other cultural ceremonies. Numerous Moroccan artists within the Malhun and Chaabi traditions, such as Abderrahmane Souiri and Mohamed Bajedoub, whose performances help to preserve its themes and its emotional appeal, have interpreted this timeless poem. It holds a significant place in the Malhun poetic tradition, a genre known for its deep emotional expression and connection to Moroccan culture. This analysis will focus on examining the central themes, and cultural elements within the poem, with a particular emphasis on how these aspects contribute to its overall meaning and impact through using translated stanzas. Cherki's *Ana Mani Fiyach* offers a rich tapestry of metaphor and imagery, utilizing the traditional structure of Malhun poetry to communicate feelings of personal turmoil and longing. By focusing on the poet's use of language, this study will uncover how these elements work together to convey the emotional and spiritual intensity of the poem. Furthermore, it will explore how the poem engages with themes of identity, love, and existential questioning, which are often central to the Malhun genre.

II. Context Of The Poem

The poet, who was also a jeweler, faced an unexpected challenge when the king ordered him to craft a piece of jewelry containing a diamond for the upcoming birth of the prince. While working on the piece, he accidentally cut the diamond in two. Fearing the consequences, he spent the entire night worrying about how he would explain the mishap to the king. As he worried about the consequences, a knock came at the door in the middle of the night. To his surprise, it was the king's messenger. The jeweler feared the worst, but the messenger brought unexpected news: the princess had given birth to twins, and the king wanted the diamond to be split into two pieces. Astonished by the turn of events, the jeweler was deeply inspired and wrote *Ana Mali Fiyach*, drawing on his feelings of fate and destiny. (BenMansour, 1998).

III. Analysis Of The Qsida

Malhun poetry's origins in Moroccan artisanal and working-class guilds gave rise to a unique tradition where spirituality is woven into the social and cultural fabric. In *Ana Mani fiyach*, this unity of faith and cultural pride underlines the poem's role in expressing a collective, almost communal fearlessness. This connection suggests that religious devotion is not solely individual but part of a shared Moroccan identity that blends faith, cultural expression, and communal solidarity. (Ennahid, 2007).

In this section, the focus will be on analyzing the following refrain of *Ana Mani Fiyach*:

انا ما ني فياش
اش عليا مني
نقلق من رزقي لاش
و الخالق يرزقني

I haven't got the force
No strength between my sides
Why feeling such remorse?
When my maker provides?

1. Rhythmic Performance and Repetition of the Refrain

In a performance of *Ana Mani Fiyach* with the orchestra, the experience is transformed into a rich fusion of sound and tradition. The orchestra's diverse instruments bring a full, layered sound that amplifies the emotional weight of the poem, while the performers' traditional clothing “white djellaba” connects the audience to the poem's cultural roots. The visual of the musicians in traditional dress reflects the heritage and authenticity of Malhun, grounding the performance in a sense of identity and continuity with the past.

As the refrain “*Ana Mani Fiyach*”/ *I haven't got the force* is repeated, the audience is invited to join in, creating a powerful moment of shared experience. The act of repeating the words together with the performers turns the refrain into a communal expression of the poem's themes—pain, longing, and unresolved struggle. The audience does not just listen; they become part of the emotional journey. This interactive call-and-response not only amplifies the message of the poem but also strengthens the bond between the performers and the listeners, making the performance a collective celebration of tradition and emotion. By merging song, performance,

metaphor, and symbolism in simple language and a joyful setting, Malhun unites all Moroccans, regardless of their religious background. In the Malhun tradition, refrains are fundamental to the art form, serving both artistic and functional purposes. Each refrain, often a repeated line or phrase, reinforces the poem's themes and sentiments, allowing listeners to grasp the message more fully. This repetition weaves a sense of rhythm and familiarity throughout the performance, transforming the poem from a static piece of text into a dynamic, musical experience. (Sahoum, 1993).

The refrain acts as an anchor, drawing listeners back to the core ideas and emotions expressed in the verse. This cyclical structure echoes the oral tradition of Malhun, where poetry was designed to be accessible and memorable. (Miller, 2017).

By revisiting key lines, the poet ensures that listeners of all backgrounds can follow the narrative and connect to its essence, making the performance a shared experience. Beyond reinforcing meaning, refrains also contribute to the song-like quality that defines Malhun. This musicality allows the poem to resonate emotionally, especially when performed with the support of traditional instruments. The refrain, sung or chanted rhythmically, creates a bridge between words and melody, giving malhun its unique character as both poetic and musical art. Through refrains, Malhun reaches audiences on a deeper level, blending language, music, and memory into a unified expression of Moroccan culture and heritage. (Chekron, 1987). We need to take into consideration that in Malhun tradition, refrains are a crucial stylistic feature, allowing the poem's message to be more impactful when performed. Here, the repetition not only strengthens the meaning but also makes the poem memorable, giving it a song-like quality that resonates during recitation. Therefore, to get inside, the refrain "*Ana Mani Fiyach*"—"I haven't got the force"—keeps coming back in the poem, almost like a heartbeat, underscoring the poet's deep unrest. Each time it's repeated, the words seem to take on more weight, more urgency, as if the poet is trying to get the listener to feel the same inner feeling and longing that they do. (Baskari, 2020). That is to say, this repetition is not just for emphasis; it creates a rhythm that mirrors the relentless cycle of the poet's emotions. In the tradition of Malhun poetry, this kind of refrain invites the audience to share in that feeling, to become part of the poem's emotional journey. In other words, this qaida amplifies the depth of the speaker's emotions and establishes an intimate connection with the audience. That is why; we can see the listeners involved in the process of singing.

2. Examining the Religious Theme

The religious dimension of *Ana Mani fiyach* is significant, as Malhun poetry often incorporates themes of spirituality, divine protection, and moral integrity.

From the refrain of this qaida, we can depict a deep trust in "Allah", *tawakkul*—the Islamic belief in putting full faith in God. This trust is not just about feeling brave; it is about believing that everything, even the hard times, is part of a divine plan, or *qadar*/destiny. For the poet, this trust means they (muslims) do not have to fear what is ahead, because they are confident that God is guiding them through life's difficulties, as can be observed in the following:

He says to whatever it be, and it is
Exalted is He,
he undertakes everything and remakes

يقول لما شاء كن فيكون و يبديء سبحانه و يعيد
يحكم في خلقه ما يشا
و يفعل في ملكه ما يريد

The poet is not only affirming their own faith but also motivating others to embrace and deepen theirs. They are leading by example, encouraging a shared connection through belief. In Sufi tradition, repeating a line like this can become almost like a prayer or a meditation, helping the listener feel calm and connected. It is a way of saying, "I trust that what happens is meant to happen," and it invites others to find that same peace. This idea is central to Islamic teachings, which say that trusting in God's wisdom brings a kind of inner strength that cannot be shaken by worldly fears. This becomes clear while saying:

I got nothing else to do;
I am his obedient servant
Things are already determined;
of this there is no absolute doubt over the fulfillment

مني اش عليا انا عبد مملوك
و الاشيا مقضيا
ما في التحقيق شكوك

In the second stanza, the poem highlights that humans are servants of God, existing within the framework of His will. It reflects the belief that everything in life is preordained by Him and will happen no matter what. We have no control over what has already been determined. The idea that humans are servants of God and that everything is predestined is a fundamental belief in many spiritual traditions. It emphasizes that all events in life are determined by a higher power, and no matter what we do, the course of life is set according to divine will. This concept suggests that everything that happens, whether good or bad, is part of a larger, divine plan that we are unable to alter. It teaches that we must trust in this plan, surrendering to the understanding that our lives unfold as they are meant to, beyond our control.

The refrain also reflects a personal bond with God. In our Islam religion, God is seen not only as a creator but also as a protector, someone who is close and caring. So, when the poet says, "I haven't got the force," it is not just about courage; it's about feeling safe because they trust that God is with them. This relationship with God gives the speaker a unique kind of resilience, making them feel ready to face whatever destiny has in store. This is also well illustrated when Cherki says:

In the darkness of the wombs, he created me from a drop
He gratified me with substance of every kinds
He created for me water, food and
various kinds of blessings
I came undressed to this world, so he
covered me and clothed me

في ظلمة الأرحام صورني من نطفة
و بدأني بالأنعام نعمة من كل صنفا
و خلق لي ما و طعام
و نعائم مختلفا
و نزلت من غير قماش
غطاني و سترني

Cherki not only shares his own feelings of longing and uncertainty but also conveys a profound trust in God's wisdom and care. At its heart, *Ana Mali Fiyach* is a reflection on letting go and trusting in what is already destined. It carries a message of peace, reminding us that there is no need to stress about the future, as life unfolds exactly as it is meant to. Using vivid imagery and deeply emotional language, Cherki invites us to release our fears and have faith that God's plan is greater than we can understand—and always for our ultimate good, as in the following:

I have no power or strength save in Allah,
the most high and supreme
Be satisfied with his decisions, you will come back to him
Your command is not equal to his

و لا لي حول و لا قوة الا بالله
العلي العظيم
و ارض باحكام الله لك اليه راجع
تدبيرك ما يسواش من تدبيرك دعني

When analyzing this stanza, it becomes clear that it highlights Allah's role as both our protector and provider, reassuring believers that there is no need to worry about their sustenance. Instead, it encourages a mindset of trust and reliance on Allah, reminding us that our needs will be met in His perfect timing and wisdom, freeing us from unnecessary concerns, as shown below:

Why feeling such remorse about my sustenance
While God is my provider
He created for me water, food
and various kinds of blessings

نقلق من رزقي لاش
و الخالق يرزقني
و خلق لي ما و طعام
و نعائم مختلفا

In *Ana Mali Fiyach*, Sidi Bahloul Cherki highlights the idea that Allah is the true source of our sustenance. The poem conveys the belief that everything we need in life, whether it's material wealth or spiritual blessings, comes from God. Cherki suggests that we, as human beings, do not have control over the provisions we receive. Instead, everything is given to us by God's will and in His perfect timing.

This theme is rooted in the Islamic concept of *rizq*, which refers to the sustenance and blessings God provides to each person. The poem reminds us that rather than worrying about what we lack or striving endlessly, we should place our trust in God. What is meant for us will come, and we can find peace in the knowledge that Allah knows what we truly need. Cherki's words encourage us to have faith and humility, understanding that God's wisdom and plan for us are far greater than anything we could ever understand or control. The following stanzas are a good example for what has been said:

Provisions are up to God,
I eat from his sustenance
No cause to worry about
My destiny will catch me

و الأرزاق على الله
اكل من رزق الله
ما نتخير من اش
نصيبني يلحقني

In the end, *Ana Mani fiyach* is a powerful reminder that true courage comes from letting go of control and trusting in something greater. This faith in *tawakkul* and divine destiny offers a deep sense of peace and strength, not just for the poet but also for anyone who hears the refrain. It is a message that real fearlessness is not about fighting destiny; it is about embracing it, knowing that every step of the journey is part of God's plan.

The predestined is leading you
Just give up and have be known that God is here

المقدر محتم
سلم تسلم و اعلم أن المقضي كاين

3.Exploring Resilience in Ana Mani Fiyach

At its core, *Ana Mani fiyach* ("I haven't got the force") is a powerful statement of defiance and resilience. The refrain, repeated like a heartbeat, captures a deep refusal to let fear or despair take control. When the speaker declares, "I haven't got the force," it's more than just words; it's an act of courage, a promise to themselves and to others that they will face whatever comes their way without backing down.

On a personal level, this refrain feels like a mantra, a vow the speaker makes to confront life's challenges head-on. Each repetition builds up a sense of inner strength. This is the kind of courage that comes from within;

the knowledge that, no matter how difficult things get, they will not allow fear to break them. It is a personal stand, an affirmation of their own resilience.

Glory to whom is providing us with his grace
All the praise and gratitude are a must
He lavishes us with his beneficence
And sustains us from the sky and from the Earth

فسبحان من عمنا فضله علينا
له الحمد والشكر فرض
يجود علينا باحسانه
و يرزقنا من سماء و أرض

Nevertheless, the refrain also speaks to something universal. “*Ana Mani fiyach*” is a declaration that anyone who has faced hard times can relate to it. It is a reminder that we all have the power to stand up and face adversity. The words tap into a shared human experience: the instinct to keep going, to resist giving in to despair, and to find strength we may not even know we have. The poet’s defiance reflects a universal truth about resilience; that even when we are shaken, we can still choose to hold on, to push through, and to keep moving forward. This can be seen in those stanzas:

Be satisfied with the disposal of your Sir,
And don't ever be disturbed by any trouble
Oh heart; trust Allah,
he is the donor and the preventative

بتدبير مولاك كن راضيا
و لا تنزعج أبدا من حرج
ثوق يا قلبي بالله
فهو المعطي المانع

4. Cultural Significance and Symbolism

Malhun poetry holds a special place in Moroccan life, often tied to personal and communal celebrations like weddings and religious gatherings. While full poems are performed at concerts, it is usually the refrains and first stanzas that people remember best, as these parts resonate widely across generations (Magidoe, 2013). These memorable lines have become favorites, cherished not only for their beauty but also for the emotions they evoke. Malhun’s well-loved verses allow people to feel a connection to both the art and each other, bridging individual memories with shared cultural heritage. In Moroccan culture, *Ana Mani Fiyach* is much more than a simple declaration of courage. It is a personal statement that also carries deep cultural meaning, reflecting a heritage that values resilience and pride. When someone says *Ana Mani fiyach*, they’re not only standing up to their own fears but also connecting to the spirit of Moroccan identity, where strength and determination are held as core values.

Historically, Morocco has faced its share of challenges, from natural hardships to periods of foreign control, and through it all, resilience and courage have become defining qualities. *Ana Mani Fiyach* taps into that legacy, reminding people of their cultural heritage of standing strong, even when times are tough. It is considered more than a personal motto; it is a reflection of the collective Moroccan spirit that refuses to give up. This phrase is often heard in Moroccan Malhun, a traditional poetic and musical form that uses rich, local language, imagery, and symbolism to reach audiences on a personal level. (Pasler, 2022).

Malhun is known for its expressive way of capturing everyday life and shared struggles, weaving in phrases that Moroccans can instantly relate to. When a poet or singer repeats *Ana Mani Fiyach* in a Malhun performance, it is not just about individual bravery; it is a phrase that speaks to everyone in the room, uniting people in a shared feeling of resilience. (Elinson, 2017).

In this way, *Ana Mani Fiyach* becomes a powerful symbol in Malhun, a genre where poets express both personal and shared experiences. Saying “I haven’t got the force” is like a reminder to every listener of the strength they carry within themselves and the strength they share with their community. It is a phrase that celebrates Moroccan resilience, honoring the history, pride, and courage that have been passed down through generations. (Magidoe, 2016).

IV. Conclusion

The influence of *Ana Mani Fiyach* extends beyond the traditional context. Modern Moroccan artists, musicians, and poets frequently reference Malhun themes and phrases in their work, using them to express contemporary social issues. This shows how *Ana Mani Fiyach* and similar poems continue to inspire new generations, reinforcing a resilient cultural identity. In summary, this article has examined the deep cultural and emotional significance of Malhun poetry, a treasured part of Moroccan heritage. Malhun is more than a poetic tradition; it is a powerful medium for expressing personal emotions, spiritual beliefs, and cultural identity. With its rich imagery, rhythmic beauty, and profound themes, it resonates across generations, capturing both individual and collective experiences.

Using Sidi Bahloul Cherki’s *Mali Fiyach* as a focal point, this article has highlighted how Malhun addresses universal themes of love, faith, and destiny, while remaining deeply rooted in its cultural context. The poem illustrates the genre’s ability to convey heartfelt emotions and philosophical reflections, making it a timeless expression of Moroccan soul and spirituality.

Ultimately, this article emphasizes that Malhun is not just a form of art but also a bridge between past and present. It preserves the stories, values, and emotions that define Moroccan identity, while continuing to inspire and connect people through its timeless wisdom and beauty.

To sum, *Ana Mani Fiyach* is a reminder of the strength we all have to face life's hardest moments. The simple, steady refrain, "I haven't got the force," tells us that resilience is not about avoiding challenges but meeting them with courage and hope. It is a timeless reminder that even in dark times, we have the power to say, "I am not afraid," and to keep going.

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