

THE GHARANAS AND PROMINENT MUSICIANS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC OF KASHMIR

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Abstract

Classical music of Kashmir is the amalgamation of the Music of central Asia, Persia, Turkey and India. It is generally believed that during the time of *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin*, Artists from central Asia and Persia brought with them their art, music, musical instruments and culture and that resulted in the wonderful interaction with the local culture of Kashmir and in the course of time gave birth to beautiful “*Sufiana Mousique*” presently known as Classical music of Kashmir.

Key words:- Sufiana Mousique, Gharana, Musicians

Introduction

The Classical music of Kashmir is also known as “*Sufiana Mousiqui*”. The word “*Sufiana*” has been derived from the word “Sufism” and intimates mystical and philosophical poetry, the poetry used in *Sufiana Mousiqui* or Classical music of Kashmir is usually in Kashmiri but sometimes in Persian as it is blended with Persian music which is “sung in praise of Supreme being”. The enchanting melody of Classical music of Kashmir fills the devotees with an intense sense of devotion and dedication. It is said about this form of music that it has been associated with mystics and has been food for souls for those persons who indulged in spiritualism. The Traditional Classical music of Kashmir is an interesting blend of many an influences under different rules. It possesses some unique elements. It has its own principles. It contains a treasure of verses with deep thought of Kashmiri and Persian poetry. It borrowed its style from Persian music. It has about fifty four *Maqams* (Modes or a type of scales) or ragas and has incorporated a number of Indian ragas, having Indian names like *Bhairvi*, *Lalit*, *jhinjoti* and *Kalyan*, etc. while other *Maqams* bear Persian names as *Far*, *Dugah*, *Chargah*, *Panjgah*, *Rast farsi*, *Rast Iraq*, *Ishfahani* and *Sehgah*, etc. The *Maqams* are played with respect to time significance (Similar to Indian ragas) some of them are morning *Maqams* and some evening.

The singers of Classical music of Kashmir sing with full devotion and enthusiasm which is reflected in their flawless performances composed of poetic expression that shows the divine love between the passionate devotees and the Supreme Being. It is the amalgamation of poetry rich with sonorous voices of the singer and the beautiful pieces of music that keep listeners captivated until the performance ends.

Gharana

“*Gharana*” is linked to the ancient concept of ‘*Guru-shishya Parampara*’. The word *Gharana* has been derived from Hindi/Urdu word “*Ghar*” which means house or family. A *Gharana* may take the name of a person, family or a place or region.¹

¹ Pandit Nikhil Ghosh, Sangit Mahabharati, *The Oxford Encyclopedia Of The Music Of India*, Vol. 1, P. 355

The characteristic feature of a *Gharana* is its peculiar style of presentation, which is the result of the special and extra ordinary creativity and innovation of a highly talented musician. Each *Gharana* has its own peculiar style of presentation. The different presentation style of the same *Maqam (raag)* by different *Gharanas* distinguishes them from each other.

In the *Gharana* System there were a number of *Gharanas* of Classical music of Kashmir. These *Gharanas* were spread across the length and breadth of Kashmir valley but nowadays there are only three districts in Kashmir where Classical music of Kashmir is practiced. These include district Budgam, Anantnag and Srinagar. There are only four *Gharanas* of Classical music of Kashmir (*Sufiana Mosique*) existing in Kashmir at present.

a. Ramzan Joo Gharana

b. Qaleenbaft Gharana

c. Kamal Bhat Gharana

d. Setari Gharana

a. Ramzan Joo Gharana

The most prominent *Gharana* of Classical music of Kashmir is '*Ramzan Joo Gharana*' located in the heart of Srinagar district of Kashmir. This *Gharana* is known by the name of its leading musician *Ramzan Joo* (1881-1971). The last leading musician of this *Gharana* was Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saaznawaz who died recently in February 2014. This is the oldest and the main *Gharana* of Classical music of Kashmir. The present '*Khalifa*' of this *Gharana* is Shabir Ahmad Saaznawaz, son of late Ghulam Mohammad Saaznawaz.

The main characteristic feature of *Ramzan Joo Gharana* is that, its musicians present a *Maqam* in uniform tempo from beginning till end. They mostly present a *Maqam* in *Vilambit Laya*.

b. Qaleenbaft Gharana

One of the most prominent *Gharanas* of District Budgam is "*Qaleenbaft Gharana*". The *Gharana* is named after the most renowned musician of the *Gharana*, Ustad Ghulam Muhammad Qaleenbaft. It is an offshoot *Gharana* by *Ramzan Joo Gharana*. Ustad Qaleenbaft had initially learnt the Classical music of Kashmir from Ustad Sultan joo, *Ramzan Joo* and Mohammad Khaleel (*Khalla Sahib*) but Ustad Qaleenbaft later developed his own style of singing and founded a separate *Gharana*. Ustad Qaleenbaft was able to establish himself as one of the leading Kashmiri Classical musician.

The characteristic feature of *Qaleenbaft Gharana* is change of tempo of the *Maqam* from *Vilambit* (slow) to *Madhya* (Medium) and *Drut* (fast) tempo, while presenting the "*jawab*" of the *Maqam* (*Jawab* is instrumentally repeated after a *waqf/rest* during the presentation of a *Maqam*).

c. Kamal Bhat Gharana

Kamal Bhat Gharana is one of the prominent *Gharana* of District Budgam. This *Gharana* is the *Gharana* of *Bhands* and is named after top most musician of the *Gharana*, Ustad Kamal Bhat. He inherited the art of Classical music of Kashmir from his father, Muhammad Jamal Bhat and his cousin Qadir Bhat.

Ustad Kamal Bhat and his family were professional musicians. He was very proficient in playing the following *Talas*, *Neemdor*, *NeemSakeel*, *Mukhammas*, *Hijaz*, *Dor-e-Khafif*, *Duroya*, *Yeka*, *Doyeka*, *Sehtal*, *Chapandaz*, *Ravani* and so on.

One of the main differences between the *Bhands* and other mainstream *Gharanas* is that traditionally the musician of this *Gharana* used to present a *Maqam* without the accompaniment of *Santoor*. Only *Sehtar*, *Saaz-e-kashmir* and *wasul* were used but now a days the present musicians of this *Gharana* use *Santoor* as the leading instrument. The *Gharana* is presently represented by Ustad Mohammad Ismail Bhat of *Wathora*.

The characteristic feature of '*Kamal Bhat Gharana*' is that the musicians of this *Gharana* present a *Maqam* in a comparatively faster tempo as compared to the other *Gharanas*.

d. Setari Gharana

The only surviving *Gharana* of south Kashmir is the "*Setari Gharana*". This *Gharana* is known for its *Sehtar* players. The most well known musician of this *Gharana* was "Ustad Abdul Khaliq Setari". It is generally believed that the latter *Ustad* was so adept in playing '*Sehtar*' that he earned the name and fame *Setari*, the name with which his family is still recognized. I found that not only the family is known by the name *Setari* but the entire local community uses the surname *Setari* and the entire *Mohalla* (clan) are therefore known as '*Setari Mohalla*'.

Ustad Abdul Khaliq Setari is regarded as the founder of *Setari Gharana*. He was born at *Bijbehara* District Anantnag in 1904. He belonged to a 'Kashmiri classical musical family'. He received his initial training from his father 'Khwaja Abdul Gaffar' and also learnt from his brother. Ustad Abdul Khaliq maintained his good voice and entertained people with his magical voice till he breathed his last in 1985.

Present practitioner of '*Setari Gharana*' is Ustad Muhammad Abdullah Shah Setari son of late Ustad Abdul Khaliq Setari. The *Ustad* is presently running a home based school "*Al-Khaliq Sufiana Bazum Bijbehara*" where he is imparting training to his disciples.

Prominent Musicians of Classical Music of Kashmir

Ustad Ghulam Mohmmad Qaleenbafat: Ustad Ghulam Mohmmad Qaleenbaft, son of Mohammad Sadique was born in 1909 at *Khankah-i-Moula*, Srinagar. He belonged to the elite group of singers and musicians. Right from his childhood he used to participate in *Sufiana Mousique Mehfiles* and thus gathered interest in the Art. He received his initial training in the art of *Sufiana Mousique* from Ustad Sultan Joo (brother of Ustad Ramzan Joo) and then from Ustad Khalla Joo (Khaliq Joo) who in turn was the disciple of Abdullah Shah. He also learnt *Tabla* from Ustad Ramzan Joo. He had a unique style of singing. He served All India Radio, Kashmir Srinagar from 1949 to 1971. He also imparted music lessons to girl students at women's collage Srinagar. Later on he was employed by Cultural Akademy Srinagar to impart *Sufiana Mousique* lessons to the students.

Ustad Qaleenbaft has performed throughout the length and breadth of the country and also abroad and received many Awards including the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for his life time contribution to *Sufiana Mousique*. He died in 1996 at the age of 90 years and his disciples include Ustad Mohammad Yaqoob Shaikh (grandson), Shaikh Abdul Aziz, Mushtaq Ahmad and Shakeel Ahmad Lala.

Shaikh Abdul Aziz: *Sheikh Abdul Aziz* (1928-2005) received initial training in Classical music of Kashmir from Ustad Ghulam Muhammad Qaleenbaft and then learned under the guidance of Ustad Muhammad Siddique. Although he didn't belong to the family of musicians but with his dedication and hard work, he

attained perfection in the art of singing and playing *Santoor* and *Sehtar*. His great contribution in Classical music of Kashmir is his book “*Kashur Sargam*”. The importance of “*Kashur Sargam*” is that in this work the notation of every *Maqam* (*Raag*) is written in the same way as the *Maqam* is actually sung. The “*Baazgasht*”² which forms an integral part of classical music performance of Kashmir has been given a due place in the notation. Before this, Classical music of Kashmir had no exact notation and had been handed from father to son, teacher to pupil. This, in fact had hampered its proper growth. Under these circumstances condition it was bound to lose some of the subtle characteristics in the process. Another important publication of “*Sheikh Abdul Aziz*” is his “*Ramooz-e-Mousiqui*” (secrets of music) which is small textbook on Classical music of Kashmir.

Sheikh Abdul Aziz served the “Institute of Music and Fine Arts, Srinagar” for over a decade. Afterwards he joined All India Radio, Kashmir and served there till his retirement. *Sheikh* was the first classical singer or musician of Kashmir who was invited by University of Maryland, USA to deliver extension lectures on Classical music of Kashmir.

Ustad Mohammad Yaqoob sheikh: Ustad Yaqoob sheikh (Born 1960) received his initial training at the age of seven from his maternal grandfather the legendary Ustad Qaleenbaft. Ustad Yaqoob achieved top grade in the year 2012 from the Kashmiri Classical music audition board, All India Radio, New Delhi and at present is employed at All India Radio, Kashmir, Srinagar as staff artist. *Yaqoob* is having the great honor to perform in seventeen European & African countries such as Paris, England, Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Italy, Algeria and Libya, etc.

One of the important contributions of Yaqoob Sheikh towards promoting and preserving Classical music of Kashmir is the establishment of “*Qaleenbaft Memorial Sufiana Music Institute*” at *Bonishah Kralpora*. The institute is running since 1996 and is dedicated to the ‘*Guru*’ and the maternal grandfather of Yaqoob Ustad Qaleenbaft. Here he imparts free training in the traditional style (*Guru-Shishya Parampara*) to his disciples. The Institute has produced many students including two groups of girl musicians and singers who have performed in both public and on radio. (Otherwise Kashmiri classical music has been traditionally performed by men only). This unique achievement of *Yaqoob* has been appreciated by one and all. One of the unique features of Ustad Yaqoob’s training is to teach students with the notation of the *Maqams*. He is striving hard for the promotion, propagation and preservation of the dying art of Classical music of Kashmir.

Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal: In addition to these famous singers, there was a legendary Kashmiri classical singer “Ustad Muhammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal (1914-1982)”. Ustad Tibetbaqal cannot be put under any of the *Gharanas*. It is a well known fact that Ustad Tibetbaqal had not taken any formal lesson in Classical music of Kashmir but had himself learnt this art by participating in the “*Mehfils*” of great *Ustads* and by his imagination, dedication and hard work. He has become one of the most successful vocalists and composers that Kashmir has produced so far.

According to his son, (Mohd Ashraf) he was a self-taught genius who composed a large number of famous *Sufiana kalaams* (*Maqams*) *Leelas*, *Manqabats* and *Naats* with his extraordinary creative faculty.

In earlier days *Santoor* was predominantly used as an accompanying instrument in Kashmiri classical music but it was the contribution of Ustad Tibetbaqal who introduced it first time as a lead instrument in solo-

² Baazgasht is repeating a line or a phrase in Classical music of Kashmir. It is for creating variation

performance.³ The archived tapes in possession of All India Radio, Sangeet Natak Akademi, *Doordarshan* and private library of Ustad Tibatbaqal are a testimony to this.

According to “Mohd Ashraf Tak” Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Pandit Bhajan Sopori “*Santoor* maestros” took their initial lessons in *Santoor* from Ustad Tibatbaqal. Besides these, many renowned people like ‘*Jawarhar Lal Nehru, Indra Gandhi and Dilip Kumar* were his fans’.⁴

It is said that, when the renowned singer ‘*Mohammad Rafi*’ came to Kashmir for *Tibatbaqal*’s magical Kashmiri classical performances at polo-ground and then at Tagore-hall Srinagar, he took his skilled and art-crafted hands in his own hands and kissed them.⁵ Ustad Tibetbaqal has been honoured by many appreciation and awards like,

* Sangeet Nalak Akademi Award, 1972

* Kala Kendra and Golden jubilee Award (All India Radio) by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Ustad Ghullam Mohammad Saaznawaz: Ustad Ghullam Mohammad Saaznawaz (1940-2013) is the leading musician of *Ramzan Joo Gharana*. Saaznawaz is among the few artistes, who could play many musical instruments such as *Santoor, Saaz-e-Kashmir, Kashmiri Sehtar, Madham* (Hindustani sitar) and *Tabla*. *Saazsnawaz* knew most of the *Maqamas* and could sing in difficult *Talas*. As told by Ustad Muhammad Yaqoob Sheik (famous Kashmiri classical singer) *Saaznawaz* had a great control over *Layakary*.

During the researcher’s interaction with *Saaznawaz*’s family members, they claimed that *Saaznawaz* was the only musician and singer of his time, who could play the difficult *Talas* such as *Neemdor, Neemskale* and *Mukhamas* with ease. He has performed all over India and abroad. One of the important contributions of Ustad Saaznawaz towards promoting and preserving Classical music of Kashmir is the establishment of a Musical institute. The institute has produced many Artists including his three sons, Mushtaq Saaznawaz, Sahabir Saaznawaz and Rafiq Saaznawaz.

Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saaznawaz has been honoured by many appreciations and awards by State and Central govt. The prominent of these are:

* Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1999)

* Tulsi Award by Madhya Pradesh Govt. (2004)

* Sa Ma Pa, Sher-i-Kashmir Sheik Muhammad Abdullah Award (2009)

* *Saaznawaz* was also awarded as “Man of the year 2001” by American Biographical Institute (ABI).

* In 2013 Ustad Saaznawaz was honoured by prestigious “*Padama Shree*” Award by the Govt. of India for his contribution towards classical music of Kashmir.

³ Telephonic Interview, *Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma* (Santoor Maestro), time, 11:30 Am, 27 Nov 2018

⁴ Mohd Ashraf tak (*Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbakal Shakhs va Fan*) Urdu Sheeraza, p. 362

⁵ Interview, Adil Tibetbakal (Santoor Maestro, Grandson of Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbakal), 28 Nov 2018

Conclusion

At present Classical music of Kashmir is battling for a survival. It is declining day by day. There are only a few *Ustads* still striving hard to protect this glorious musical tradition. Among the Ustads, Ustad Mohammad Yaqoob Shaikh, Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Setari and Ustad Mohammad Ismail Bhat are actively involved in the continuation of this art form but these masters are not able to attract many disciples because people do not want their children waste precious time in learning an art which does not provide economic security and earning opportunity. Besides these master musicians, the sons and disciples of Padma Shree Ustad, Late Gullam Mohammad Saznawaz are also struggling to keep the tradition alive.

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