

Classical Music of Kashmir as a Cultural Heritage of Kashmir: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The Classical music of Kashmir (*Sufiana Mousiqui*) is an important component of the Kashmiri society and culture. It is a type of mystical music practiced traditionally by professional musicians belonging to different *Gharanas* of Kashmir. This musical form has been fashioned over the centuries of its development by a synthesis of foreign as well as indigenous elements. It is a type of composed choral music in which five to twelve musicians led by a leader, sing together to the accompaniment of *Santoor*, *Saaz-i-Kashmir*, *Kashmiri Sehtar* and *Dokara/Tabla*. Instead of *raga*, Persian *Maqams* are used. The text of the songs is mystical Sufi poems in Persian and Kashmiri. This musical genre took shape in the 15th century at the time of *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin* (1420-1470).

Key words:- Sufiana Mousiqui, Origin, Structure, Singing style, performance.

Introduction

The region of Kashmir is renowned worldwide for its rich and distinct cultural heritage. Fine arts in general and music in particular form an important component of Kashmir's glorious cultural heritage. The music of the valley is rich and diverse and consists of three major genres: Folk music of Kashmir, Modern light music of Kashmir and Classical music of Kashmir.

Historical background of Classical Music of Kashmir

However the origin of Classical music of Kashmir (*Sufiana Mousiqui*) can be directly attributed to the advent of Islam and the establishment of 'Saltanat' period in Kashmir in the fourteenth century, when "Lhachan Gualbu Rinchana" (*Rinchan*) adopted Islam in 1320 and assumed the title of "Sultan Sadr-Ud-Din". *Rinchan's* conversion to Islam was followed by the conversion of a large number of people into the new faith. After Islam was adopted in Kashmir, many well known Sufi missionaries visited Kashmir to spread the Islamic faith through their peaceful and lovable activities. Simultaneously with the establishment of Islamic rule, Sufism was introduced in Kashmir.

The emergence of Islam and Sufism in Kashmir brought a revolutionary change in almost every aspect of life and culture in Kashmir. Sanskrit as an official language was replaced by Persian. Fine arts including music were also influenced by the foreign culture. As a result of the inception of Islam in Kashmir, the old musical tradition appeared in the new form due to the intercultural synthesis that took place between the indigenous folk music of Kashmir and the music of India, Persia, Central Asia and Arabia.

The first *Sultan* from the Muslim dynasty who patronized the music in Kashmir was "Shams-ud-Din *Shahmir*"(1339-1342). The *Sultan* encouraged the artists to perform their art.¹

¹ Avtar Krishan Razdan, (*Kashmir Main Fan-i-Mousiqui:Tareekhi Pasimanzar*) Urdu Sheraza, Vol. 36, P.50

Mohib-ul-Hassan author of “*Kashmir under the Sultans*” gave a vivid description of the state of affairs in the sphere of music during the medieval period. He wrote “the medieval period as a great development of music in Kashmir”². The *Sultans* were great patrons of music and their courts thronged with musicians from various parts of India, central Asia and Persia. Of all the *Sultans* who sat on the throne of Kashmir, *Zain-ul-Abidin* (1420-1470) was undoubtedly the greatest. He ushered in a period of nearly half a century of peace, prosperity and benevolent rule for his people.

It is said that *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin* used to hold every year, the festival of music to which were invited musicians and singers from Yaraqand, Samarqand, Tashkant, Kabul, Punjab and Delhi. He himself was an expert in the art of music and used to spend some of his evenings in the company of singers and dancers.³ During the regime of *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin* in Kashmir, the older musical traditions appeared in the new form due to the intercultural synthesis of the indigenous folk music of Kashmir and the music of Persia, Central Asia, Turkey and India. The resulted new form of music was Kashmiri ‘*Sufiana Mousiqui*’ regarded as the Classical music of Kashmir.

Mohammad Ishaq Khan notes, “During the Muslim rule in Kashmir, Kashmiri music absorbed certain influences from Iran, Arabia, Samarqand and it was during this period that *Maqams* and *Talas* like *Neemdor* and *Turk-i-Zarab* were introduced into Classical music of Kashmir”.⁴

In “*Ain-i-Akbari*” it is written that under the patronage of *Sultan Zain-Ul-Abidin*, a School of music was founded in Kashmir by Irani and Turani musicians.⁵ As a direct result of the influence of Persian and Turanian music, a good many *Ragni*’s were thus imported into Classical music of Kashmir.⁶ The *Ragni*’s of Persian origin which are well known to the musicians are; *Rast*, *Rast Kashmiri*, *Chargah*, *Iraq*, *Nawa*, *Rihai*, *Shah Nawaz*, *Nairez* and *Zangola*, etc.⁷

After the death of *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin* in 1470 AD. he was succeeded by his son *Sultan Haider Shah* (1470-1472 AD). *Haider* could play excellently one musical instrument of “*Lute*” and used to give lesson to other “*Lute*” players, while his grandson, *Hassan Shah* (1472-1484) was a good musician and a proficient singer. During his time an exclusive department of music was introduced to promote music and ‘*Srivara*’ was made the head of this department.⁸

Thus it can be concluded that since the time of *Sultan Zain-Ul-Abidin* the music that has been patronized in Kashmir by the *Sultans* and *Sufis* is known as Classical music of Kashmir.

Classical Music of Kashmir

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

² Muhibbul, Hassan, *Kashmir under the Sultan*, Elmpress, Calcutta, 1998

³ Pandit K.N, *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, P. 66

⁴ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *History Of Srinagar(1846-1947)*, P. 96

⁵ H, Balochman, *Ain-i-Akbari* (English translation), P. 680

⁶ G.M.D.Sufi, *Islamic Culture In Kashmir*, P. 225

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Pandit Srivara, *Zaina Rajatarangini*, Eng Tr. By Kashi Nath Dhar, 3.242

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.

Structure and Style of Singing

Classical music of Kashmir is a choral, spiritual style of music in which a group of musicians sing and play various instruments simultaneously. A *Sufiana* ensemble comprises five to twelve people. A group leader sings the main lines of the *Maqam* (Raag) and usually plays either a *Santoor* or a *Saz-i-kashmir*. These *Maqams* are generally in Persian and Kashmiri by poets such as *Hafiz Sherazi*, *Shaikh Saadi*, *Omar Khayyam*, *Jallaludin Rumi*, *Moullana Jami*, *Rasul Mir*, *Mahmood Gami*, *Sarafi* and *Allama Iqbal*, etc. Instead of raga, the Persian *Maqams* are sung. The principal scale is the diatonic major (*Bilawal Thaata* of Hindustani music). The Four instruments are used in the performance of Classical music of Kashmir, the *Santoor* or trapezoidal zither, the *Sehtar* or long-necked lute, the now nearly extinct *Saaz-i-Kashmir* or Spike Fiddle, and the *Dukra/Tabla*.

The basis of the melody of Classical music of Kashmir is *Maqam*. The musician is free to show different variations and mastery within the framework of the *Maqam*, just as the Indian Musician does within the framework of a raga. Names of *Maqams* have been drawn from indigenous as well as foreign music, particularly Arabic and Persian music. *Lalit*, *Asawari*, *Bilawal*, *Sarang*, *Malkauns*, *Bihag* etc, have been drawn from Hindustani music. *Araq*, *Hussaini*, *Navruz-i-Saba*, *Ushaaq*, *Navruz-i-Ajam*, *Navruz-i-Arab*, *Bayat*, *Rahawi*, *Isfahan*, *Rast-Farsi* and so forth have been taken from Arabic and Persian musical systems.⁹

One of the most important features of Classical music of Kashmir is that all the *Maqams* are sung in two *Saptaks* only, *Madhya Saptak* and *Tar Saptak*. *Mandra Saptak* is not employed at all except the occasional use of *Mandra Nishad* in some *Maqams*.¹⁰

Like the Indian Raga, the *Maqams* too have their *Rasa's* and accordingly have to be sung in particular seasons and also during particular hours of the day and night, some are morning *Maqams*, some evening and some are associated with particular seasons and months. The musician always presents a *Maqam* according to the time theory while performing in a *Mehfil* or on radio and Television.

In the past, Classical music of Kashmir was accompanied by *Hafiz Nagma* (A female dancer, used to sing and dance with Classical music of Kashmir) a dance form in which the meaning of the song was expressed gesture and the movements of hands, feet and eyes by a female dancer. The dance form was then banned during the Dogra rule, because of its sensual appeal and the other reason was that some *Hafiza's* had indulged in prostitution which was against the nature of Classical music which is considered as the spiritual music of Kashmir.¹¹

⁹ Interview, Shabir Ahmad Saaznawaz (Disciple of Ustad Ghullam Mohammad Saaznawaz), 19 Nov 2018

¹⁰ Interview, Ustad Ghullam Mohammad Saaznawaz (Recorded by All India Radio, Kashmir, Srinagar) 2009

¹¹ G.M.D.Sufi, *Islamic Culture In Kashmir*, P. 16

The most important concept in Classical music of Kashmir is the *Tala*. It is similar to the *tala* of Hindustani music system. Earlier percussion instrument, *Wasul* was used to keep the rhythm by the Kashmiri classical musicians but at present Hindustani Tabla has replaced *Wasul* which has become obsolete. ‘Kashmiri classical musicians use the word *Dukra* for Tabla. The *bols* (words) of *Talas* are different from the *bols* of Hindustani *Talas*. Instead of *Dha Dhin Tin Tirkrit, Dish, Taka, Tun, Takadish* etc. are used in Classical music of Kashmir. The *bols* of both the systems are different and also the playing technique.¹² However, the number of *Vibhags* (bars), number of *Matras* and division of *Matras* are similar in most of the *Talas*.¹³

Kashmiri Classical Musical performance

A Kashmiri Classical Music performance always begins with an instrumental prelude known as *Shakal*. It is like the *Chalan* or beginning *Alaap* of Hindustani music which is in slow movement and introduces the theme of the song. However unlike Hindustani *Alaap*, the *Shakal* is an instrumental rendition of the base or Structure of the *Maqam*. It usually lasts from half a minute to about two minutes. It is played by the leader of the ensemble usually on *Santoor*. Occasionally the artist may join him. The *Shakal* is followed usually by a short poem, in which the couplets of *Lalleshwari* (poetess of Kashmir) called *Lalla-Vaakh*¹⁴ are usually sung. The *Nasr* (Prose) is sung without the rhythm and then after *Nasr*, begins the first *Beath* (poem). In the piece little improvisation is involved. The form strictly follows the form of the poem. Each verse is set to a particular *Maqam* and is locked to the particular *Tala* cycle. It is important to mention here that, the longest *talas* are played first followed by shorter *talas*. For instance if *Tala Hijaz* (14 *Matras*) is played first then the next *tala* will be *Yektala* or *Sehtala* consisting of twelve *Matras* and then *Duyeka taal* of eight *Matras* and so on.¹⁵

A *Beath* (poem) is composed of two sections. The first, *Zamin* (*Sthayi*) corresponds to the first section of the text. It ends with the *Sepurda* (Sam or the first beat of the *tala* cycle), leading to the final *Sa* (*Taar Shadaj*). After a *Waqf* (rest), it is instrumentally repeated as *Jawab* (reply). Then again after *Sepurda* and *Waqf* follows the second part *Nimwoj* (*Antara*) corresponding to the second part of the text. The structure of the second part is similar to the first. After the first *Beath* or poem is finished, the leader initiates the next one that is usually in a different *Tala*. The performance of a single *Maqam* may last from ten minutes to an hour and half and contain one to several poems in the same *Maqam*.¹⁶

Conclusion

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.

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¹² Jozef, *Sufiana Kalam- “The Classical Music of Kashmir*, P. 9

¹³ Interview, Ustad Ghullam Mohammad Saaznawaz (Recorded by All India Radio, Kashmir, Srinagar) 2009

¹⁴ *Nasr* (Prose) of *Lalleshwari* (*Lalla Ded*),

¹⁵ Interview, Ustad Mohammad yaqoob Shaikh (Top Grade Kashmiri Classical Singer), 8 Oct 2018

¹⁶ Interview, Manzoor-ul-Haq, (Sangeet Natak Akademi Awadi), 18 Dec 2018

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