

Musical Instruments used with Bhand Pather of Kashmir

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Abstract

The state of Jammu & Kashmir is a cultural mosaic which includes culturally distinct three regions Kashmir, Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh. Of the three regions, Kashmir has remained the focus of scholars and visitors alike for its enchanting beauty, cultural continuity and high tradition of scholarship. All this helped natives to develop a holistic view of social and cultural life. Ever since the dawn of history, there has been no dearth of rulers who patronized and promoted all genres of art in Kashmir. Gifted with creative imagination and innovation, Kashmiris developed rich folk traditions and music. Nilamat Purana, a century Mahatmya, fully records this. Based on the review of primary as well as secondary historical texts and discussions with leading Bhand Pather artists, the article attempts to explore the history, theory and playing technique of musical instruments that are used with Bhand Pather-the folk theatre of Kashmir

[**Keywords:** Bhand Pather, Musical instruments, Swarnai, Dhol, Nagara]

Introduction

Bhand Pather is the regional folk theater of Kashmir. Like other regional folk theatre of India, its emergence was a consequence of the decline of classical Sanskrit theater and development of regional languages. The word Bhand, it has its origin in the Sanskrit “Bhanda” which means to jest or to mimic. A character in Sanskrit plays is called ‘Patra’. The word Pather also means play. The Kashmiri word Pathur too carries the same meaning. Jashan, which has evolved from Avestic word ‘Yasna’ means festival. Bhand Jashan is very popular among Kashmiris and attracted large audiences. It is staged in the precincts of shrines and public places. At shrines there would be somber display of religious devotionals, while elsewhere there would be joyful singing, music and theatrical performances by Bhand artists. It provides good entertainment to people through mimicry and clowning Bhand artists would make people laugh. Bhand play integrated dance, music and dialogue. Besides being comedians and mimic artists the Bhand used to be good dancers and musicians. Bhand Jashan witnessed regular participation of Bacha Nagma dancers, Hafiz Nagma performers and Bhand Jashan actors. Bhand Pather has an

elaborate musical orchestra comprising Swarnai, Dhol, and Nagara. On occasions Bhand groups played an instrument called Saaz-e-Kashmir. At times Tabla or 'Tassa Joure' is also played

Historical Overview of Bhand Pather

The traditional theater of Kashmir has a thousand years of history and this is already proven by recording the history in the forms of music, dance and drama which are performing arts in every house of Kashmir. Young girls and boys were trained in these performing arts by their mothers in the valley of Kashmir. During the rule of Kshemendra Kashmir had its own theater. In the royal court the famous actors, dancers, and musicians used to perform theater which was widely applauded by the king and people of Kashmir. According to Nilamat Purana, there were most important occasions – like religious festivals, agricultural festivals, social occasions and first snow fall occasions in winter – where the Bhand Pather was performed and has taken shape and form. The golden era for the performing arts in Kashmir is 4th to 7th century AD. In this period the music, dance, and drama of Kashmir have acclaimed their glory. Every village set up a stage to perform the music, dance, and drama. (Yasir, 2009)

During the Muslim rule in the 14th -century, the Kashmir Theater has received a tremendous acclamation by the support of the people, especially in urban community. In the rural areas, the folk theater form continued to receive a great applause because of its entertainment form when they were performed in Bhand-Jashan, a folk-theatre-festival. These Bhands played a vital role in representing the people before the royal court as the Bhands were enacted through satire and mimicry, the apathy and aggression of the rulers over the masses. With the establishment of Muslim Sultanat in Kashmir, the theater in tune with earliest Hindu traditions, continued to attain legitimacy from the saintly centers. The only difference was that the place of Math's, Monasteries and Temples was taken by Shrines, Khanqahas and Rishi abodes. So deep was peoples attachment to these actors of Bhand Pather that during the days of acute crises, prompted by natural calamities like floods, famines, epidemics, fires and recurring earthquake, common masses sought their help by arranging special prayer performances at the Shrines of Sufi and Rishi saints. During prayer performances, Bhands are seen engrossed, with utmost degree of surrender and self denial. Bhand Doikhar as it is said in the vernacular forms the crux of every Bhand Pather. It is generally carried out by the Maghun (head Bhand) at the shrine where all the Bhands in traditional costumes used to play for aid and mercy. (Fayaz, 2008)

Music is the soul of the folk theater of Kashmir. The Kashmiri folk theater has evolved its own musical instruments based on native genius and the situational requirements. Bhand Pather performers and artists use music to add color and vibrancy to their acts mesmerize the audience and send them into ecstasy. It is worth mentioning that Bhands are well aware of the importance of the instruments like Swarnai in their performance and make it sure that this art of playing the instrument is carried forward to coming generations. In Indian terminology, a musical instrument

is called Vadya, derived from the word Vad, which means to speak. The term Vad as used by Bhands has several meanings. Bharat has classified all musical instruments into four classes: - Tata or stringed instrument e.g., Vina, Sushir or Instruments with holes i.e., wind instruments, e.g., Flute, Avanaddha, i.e., instruments covered with skin e.g., Mridanga, Ghana or instruments made of brass or wood to mark time, e.g. Cymbals.

Besides vocal music and dance, instrumental music also finds an important place in theater. It would take the life out of a theatre if it is not accompanied by instrumental music. According to Maharishi Bharat, instrumental music forms an integral part of theater and should be judiciously used after considering the Rasa and Bhava aspects present in the theater.

According to Pandit Kalhana, the folk musical instruments like earthen pots, brass vessels etc. were used by Kashmiri people from very early times. In Kashmir 4th century A.D. tile, found during excavation from Harwan, is showing the impression of a female musician playing on drum. The other person is shown playing the Veena in an artistic pastime (blog, 2013). Rajatarangini mentions an instrument called “Hadukka” which can be compared to a big pipe. Music is an essential part element of Bhand Pather. In fact, every Pather begins with drum beating (beating of Nagara). The Nagara players are known as Karidaar who make rounds of the arena selected for performance. The Nagara is followed by Surnai Vadan and Dhol music. Surnai, Dhol and Nagara are important musical instruments, best suited for open air performances. Besides these primary musical instruments, Bhands also use whip and a short bamboo stick. The main musical instruments that are used in the Bhand Pather are Swarnai (Tulle-Saaz), Dhol and Nagara. Apart from these main instruments used in Bhand Pather the other instruments which are or were occasionally used are: Peshrav, Talehor (Khanjiri), Ghaer, Vasul, Chang, and Saaze Kashmir. Vasul and Saaze Kashmir both the instruments are used in Kashmiri Classical music which is known as Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqi. Vasul is used for rhythm. It is similar with Tabla of Hindustani Classical music. Saaze-Kashmir is a string instrument. In Bhand Pather many songs are based on Kashmiri Sufiana due to this effect of Sufiana instruments are vogue in it.

SWARNAI

Swarnai is a wind instrument. Wind instrument or Sushir Vadya literally meaning hollow/perforated/full of holes is called Mukh Veena in our ancient musical text, meaning the melody instrument played upon the mouth (Mukh). These instruments use air to produce sound. Swarnai is the mixture of two words Swar and Nai, Swar means musical note and Nai is flute. By joining the two words it becomes Swarnai. This instrument is crafted by drilling holes in a piece of hollowed wood. In Kashmir it is fashioned by craftsmen of the Kulgam area. The Swarnai is held between the teeth with a blade of wheat-grass; musical notes are produced by blowing into it and putting fingers on the stops. It is a very old instrument of Kashmir as well as an important

musical instrument of the Bhand Theatre. In Ladakh it is called Surna, which indicates that it travelled there from Kashmir. Swarnai is the prominent instrument of Bhand Pather. Some music lovers and others call it as 'Sirnai'. Common people recognize it with the name of Swarnai but spiritual saints says that its real name is Sirnai or simply a Nai. Over the passage of time the word Sirnai has changed into Swarnai. Apparently it seems that Swarnai and Sirnai has no difference. This instrument has been mentioned in Nilamata Purana and in Kalhana's Raj Tarangini. Swarnai holds the same place in Kashmiri folk music as the Shehnai in the Indian music. This is the reason, why Swarnai is also called Shehnai in Kashmiri music (Dhar, 2003). The Swarnai is larger in size than the Shehnai and has a strong and metallic sound that has arresting impact in the open air arena. This instrument attracts audiences from the vicinity. A special wind instrument, it is made of three parts, the Nai or wooden pipe made by special carpenters, the barg, a reed of a particular grass found locally and a cooper disc the diameter of the pipe into which the barg is fitted. Before the Swarnai player adopts his newly made instrument a ritual offering is made in dargah. All the tunes that have been composed in Bhand Pather are played on Swarnai. The use of Dhol and Nagara is essential along with Swarnai because they help in making it prominent. Every Maqqam composition is played on Swarnai, without any interruption. In modern times many Swarnai player are accompanied with Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqi the classical music of Kashmir. Besides playing a vital role in sustaining folk drama movement in Kashmir, Swarnai players form themselves into groups of two's and three's and move into villages. They play Swarnai wherever they find an occasion to join the merriment and entertain the listeners. Swarnai is also known as Tul-e-Saz in the Bhand Fraternity. Tul-e-Saz (the nozzle used in Swarnai) is usually by experts. Some of these experts live in village Shangus in Anantnag district of South Kashmir and it is fashioned by craftsmen of the Kulgam area.

According to musicologists Swarnai has travelled from the Iran through Central Asia and reached Kashmir and people of Kashmir accepted and loved it as a musical instrument. Originally Swarnai was used in the places of Kings, especially in Iran. They used to organize programmers to listen to Swarnai which produce a melodious tune. Later on these kings used it in their armies (Field Forces). The Swarnai players were made to march, in advance, in front of soldiers. Its music thrilled the soldiers and a spirit of bravery aroused in them. All these information's have been provided by Shah Naama and epic written by the famous Iranian poet Firdausi.

DHOL

Dhol has its own history in the musical instruments of India. The first form can be traced in the Mohenjo-Daro culture. One of the oldest instruments of India, Dhol is mainly traced in the villages and every state of India. In Kashmiri villages, is mostly played in the folk dance of the Bhands. In India folk tradition and music Dhol has its own relevance. It is a Sanskrit word which

has got corrupted with time. Dhol has been used in Indian musical tradition and folk since 3000 BC. The proof of the usage of Dhol as a musical instrument has been established in Mohenjo-Daro. In Sanchi excavations, it has been proved that Dhol has been in the use since 200 BC. In Harwan excavations of Kashmir, the remains of the Kushan era depict the use of this instrument. The image of a dancing girl beating the Dhol has been found in Kashmir during the first century BC. The use of Dhol was well defined. Dhol is the most common instrument used in the rural and urban area of India. The Dhol used in Kashmir is not different from the Dhol used in other regions. It is used in Bhand Pather (The folk theater of Kashmir) and Bhand Jashan (Festivals of Folk Plays) to add a musical touch to the acts. Being the instrument of common people it adds value to the performance (Bhagati, 2002). Dhol is present in the theatre and folk art of Kashmir since the Vedic era. Its physical character appears in rock murals, stone carvings of ancient times and stone plates excavated from ancient historical sites of archaeological importance. Its rhythmic beating inspires a graceful movement amongst the listeners and the beater too. Its fast beating is indicative of the arrival of the king in the folk drama and its flash beating conveys to the peasantry to arrive and witness the performance of the Bhands. Since the earlier times, it was used in Darbar admission to proclaim the official announcement to the people. Dhol beater involved in this process was called the Hazoori Dhol beater and he was paid by the Darbar. Dhol beaters were engaged by the courts and the panchayats too in past. This practice is still visible in some areas of Kashmir valley. Dhol is made from the wood acquired from a tree locally known as Arae Kul and is generally known as tahal tree. Dhol is usually played with a thick wooden stick on Bum side which we call as “Chob”. The Zill side is beaten with a thin strong twig called as “Chheed”. Every kind of Taal of Sufiana is produced from the dhol e.g., Hajiz, Neem Dore, Duroy, She Taal, Dueka (Bhagat, 1984).

NAGARA

Nagada is an instrument in the form of dhol. It is used for musical performance in Bhand Pather. In various Indian languages, it has names like Nakkara and Dugdugi. Nagara is used in rural Kashmir on marriages. It is also used during the harvesting season by the farmers to celebrate the activity. It infuses a sense of enthusiasm and energy in the people. Nagara is an important musical instrument in Bhand Pather. Before the commencement of the play the nagara player comes in and goes around the performance arena in a circular movement, beating his drum. The audience then takes the seat around him. He is called Karydar and his action is termed Kor dyun. The drummer, who follows him, provides accompaniment to the Swarnai players. By now the space outside the Karydars circle gets packed with the people. The Vad or musical mode changes after the beat of the Kor and the players make their entry (Kemmu, 2011).

The Nagara is a quite familiar drum throughout North India. B.C. Deva opines that name nagara may have the west Asian origin (Deva, 1977). Excavation of the Kushan period indicates that nagara was used by the kings for the spread of information and royal announcement. It is used in

folk dramas, during festivals, in religious processions and on marriages. Usually, there are two conical bowl drums struck with sticks, the pair is known as nagara or naqara. The smaller of the two is higher in pitch and is the male or female, the larger with a deeper tone is called Nar or the male. A Bhand party that comprises of many Swarnai players must have as many nagara players. Some musicians associated with Bhand Theatre use two nagaras instead of one to generate the frenzy in the beginning of a folk performance in the village or in a Jashan in the compound of a shrine. The nagara is beaten with a thick wooden rod that makes the sound of the dhol much prominent. As per Ain-i-Akbari it has twenty forms, which are incorporated as per the performances. Excavations of the Kushan period indicate that Nagara was used by the kings for the spread of information and royal announcement. It is used in folk dramas, during festivals, in religious processions and on marriages. Nagara used in Bhand Pather is an asymmetrical instrument, circular or spherical at the front and assumes the shape of a cone at the bottom. Nagara in Kashmir is made by the potter. He uses clay. The clay is baked in a kiln along with other vessels. It is in the shape of a round vessel having no bottom. A leather sheet, usually of bull's skin (in Himachal Pradesh skin of goat is used), is applied in raw form. Being raw it begins to shrink and becomes stony hard. This procedure demands goods expertise and energy.



Figure 1 Bhands displaying their musical instruments

Source:<http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/25114/bhand-e-pather-a-fading-art-in-kashmir/>

Conclusion:

These instruments are vogue in Bhand Pather nowadays. It is clear that music and the musical instruments play an important role in Bhand Pather and make it more effective and presentable to the audience. The relevance of the musical instruments in the Bhand Pather can be summed up

by saying that the performers in Bhand Pather do not follow a written script and notation. The use of musical instruments of indigenous character has added to its originality and upheld the rural flavor in totality. The description of the musical instruments used by the Bhands in their various performances brings to the fore the importance of these instruments. It has been clearly established by studying and describing the construction of these instruments that aesthetic coherence has not been overruled by the masters as the materials used in their manufacture is purely indigenous and bears the mark of the local artisanship.

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