

A Panoramic View of Kashmiri Music

Shabir Ahmad Mir
Research Scholar,
School of Performing & Visual Arts
IGNOU, New Delhi-110068

Abstract

The region of Kashmir is renowned worldwide for its rich and distinct cultural heritage. Music forms an important component of Kashmir's cultural heritage. Music is associated with almost all the functions and celebrations of Kashmiri society and culture like birth, marriage, death, harvesting etc. Kashmir is one of the few regions of India which has its distinct and rich classical music tradition along with a rich repertoire of folk and modern light music. Many musical instruments like Santoor, Sehtar and Saaz-e-Kashmir trace their origin to Kashmir. There are three distinct musical forms prevalent in Kashmir at present namely classical music, folk music and modern light music. This paper provides a brief overview of the current musical forms of Kashmir.

[Keywords: Kashmiri music, Sufiana Mausiqi, Saaz-e-Kashmir, Maqam, Sehtar]

Introduction

The region of Kashmir is renowned for its rich and distinct cultural heritage throughout the world. Fine arts in general and music in particular forms an important part of Kashmir's glorious cultural heritage. The music of Kashmir is very rich and diverse. Since the Valley of Kashmir was subjugated in the past by many rulers belonging to different regions, religions and Cultures, therefore the music which is prevalent today in Kashmir contains the fragrance of many cultures in it. The history of music in Kashmir dates back to ancient times. What type and form of music was prevalent in ancient Kashmir is not certainly known. However we get an idea about the ancient Kashmiri music with the help of ancient texts and also through the means of tiles and sculptures found during the excavations at Harwan Srinagar. The two important texts that contain a good deal of information on the music in Ancient Kashmir are Nilmatapurana and Rajatarangini.

The earliest references to the art of music in Kashmir are found in “Nilmatapurana”. Nilmatapurana is regarded as the Kashmiri Purana referred to by Kalhana as one of the sources of ancient history of Kashmir. It dates at least to 6th or 7th century A.D. There are a number of verses in Nilmatapurana mentioning the state of music in Ancient Kashmir.

Rajatarangini (Chronicle of Kings) written by Kalhana in 1148-50 A.D, also, contains many references to music in ancient Kashmir. Starting with the King Jalauka, it shows the place of music in the life of different kings up to the reign of King Harsha.

The history of Kashmir saw a new development in the 14th century when Islam was adopted in Kashmir due to the efforts of Sufi missionaries from Iran and Central Asia. The emergence of Islam and Sufism in Kashmir brought major changes in almost every aspect of life in Kashmir such as diet, dress, moral standards, customs and arts including music. The sultans established strong cultural links with Persia and Central Asia. Persian replaced Sanskrit as language of government, learning and literature. Artists were invited from Persia and Bukhara, who introduced carpet weaving, paper machine, wood carving and other arts so characteristic of Persia and Central Asia. These flourished in Kashmir and constitute an integral part of Kashmiri culture.

With the inception of Islam in Kashmir, the older musical traditions appeared in the new form due to the intercultural synthesis that took place between the indigenous music of Kashmir and the music of Persia, Central Asia and India. During the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70 A.D), a new musical genre was born due to the intercultural synthesis of the music of Kashmir, Persia, Central Asia and Turkistan, which is known as Sufiana Mausiqi and is regarded as the classical music of Kashmir. The music of Kashmir at present consists of Sufiana Mousiqi (classical music), Chakri, Ruf, Naindai bathe, Vanvun, Chalant, Laddishah (folk music) and Geet and Ghazal (modern light music).

I. Classical Music

The classical music of Kashmir is known as *Sufiana Mausiqi*. It has its deep roots in the north Indian classical music tradition but influenced by Iranian & central Asian music. The origin of Sufiana Mausiqi can be directly attributed to the advent of Islam and the establishment of

Sultanate period in Kashmir in the 14th Century when Lhachen Rgyalbu Ritichina (Rinchina) adopted Islam in 1320 and assumed the title of Sultan Sadruddin. Rinchin'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. The emergence of Islam and Sufism in Kashmir brought a revolutionary change in almost every aspect of life and culture in Kashmir. A firm cultural link was established with Central Asia and Persia. Sanskrit as an official language was replaced by Persian. Fine arts including music were also influenced by the foreign culture. It is generally believed that during the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70 A.D) artists and musicians were invited from Central Asia, Persia and different parts of India who brought with them their music and musical instruments. As a result of which intercultural musical exchange took place and a new musical genre took shape which is known as the Sufiana Mausiqi, the classical music of Kashmir.

Sufiana Mausiqi is a composed choral music. Five to twelve musicians sing together and also play on various instruments. Instead of raga, the Persian Maqams are used. The Hindustani time theory is followed for the Persian Maqams in the Sufiana Mausiqi. The principal scale is the diatonic major (Bilawal that of Hindustani music). The Sufiana song texts are basically mystical Sufi poems in Persian, Kashmiri and Urdu by poets such as Hafiz Sheerazi, Sadi, Omar Khayyam, Jalalluddin Rumi, Rasul Mir, Mehmood Gami, Sarfi, and Iqbal. Four instruments are used in the performance of Sufiana Mausiqi: the Santoor or trapezoidal zither, the Sehtar or long-necked lute, the now nearly extinct Saaz-e-Kashmir or spike fiddle, and the Tabla (percussion instrument).

The basis of the melody of Sufiana Mausiqi 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, Basant Bahar, Bihag etc, have been drawn from Hindustani music. Araq, Hussaini, Navruz-e Saba, Ushaaq, Navruz-e Ajam, Navruz-e Arab, Bayat, Rahawi, Isfahan, Rast-e Farsi and so forth have been taken from Arabic and Persian musical systems.

The Tala system resembles the Tala system of Hindustani music as well as Persio-Arabic music. The names of Talas have been taken from both the Indian and Persio-Arabic Music systems such as yaktala (Ek-Tala), Sehtal, Duroya, Chapandaz, Hejaz and Doyeka etc. It is important to mention here that presently Sufiana artists uses the bols of Hindustani Talas and not the original bols which were used earlier when Wasul was the accompanying instrument.

One of the most important features of Sufiana Mausiqi 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.

“There is no verbalized concept of microtones in Sufiana Mausiqi. However after careful enquiry, Sheikh Abdul Aziz admitted that there are komals that are slightly smaller than the normal ones” (Pachoclyk)

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, for some are morning Maqams, some evening ones 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 Sufiana Mausiqi was accompanied by *Hafiz Nagma*, a dance form in which the meaning of the song was expressed by physical movements by a female dancer Known as Hafiza. This 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 Sufiana Mausiqi which is considered as the spiritual music of Kashmir.

II. Folk Music

Folk music is the music of common masses. It is not bound by a set of typical rules and regulations as is found in classical music. It is not the property of elite class but it is every body’s music. In India there are more than three hundred forms of folk musical forms in vogue. So far as Kashmir is concerned there are folk songs associated with every activity of life. There are songs associated with the birth of a child, marriage, harvest, songs of minstrels, etc.

Here I am briefly discussing some of the major forms of folk music genres which are presently prevalent in Kashmir.

Chakri

One of the major folk musical forms of Kashmir is Chakri. In Chakri a group of five to six musicians sing together. The group leader sings the first verse which is repeated by the group members in unison. The same procedure is followed till the end. In between the lines is provided a gap which is filled with playing the instruments especially Nout (earthen pot, which provides the rhythm). The speed of Chakri goes on increasing and when it becomes very fast, a male dancer in the attire of a dancing girl, dances to the tunes of the song. The theme of the song is generally romantic. In the past Chakri was also used to tell stories and tales like Yousf-Zulaikha, Laila-Majnun etc.

The instruments used with Chakri include Harmonium, Nout, Sarangi, and Rabab. Earlier only Sarangi (Kashmiri Saran), Nout and Tumbaknari were used. But with the globalisation in music new instruments were included which include Rabab, Harmonium, Tabla, flute and Clarinet.

Ruf/Row

Ruf or 'Row' is a popular traditional dance form of Kashmir which graces all the festive occasions such as Ramzan, Eid and marriages. The dance is performed by a group of women facing each other. Usually two or four groups are formed, each group consisting of three to four girls. These groups face each other and each girl puts her arms on the shoulders of other girl. These girls bring their feet to and fro in a proper laya. The footwork of Ruf is both a visual as well as an artistic treat. The Ruf songs are generally in question answer form. "One group questions and the other answers, musically while dancing Ruf". (Dhar, Traditional Music of Kashmir, 2003)

The thematic content of Ruf among Muslims and Hindus is different. Hindus generally sing the Vakhs of Lal Ded (Laleshwari) while the thematic content of Muslim Ruf generally is associated with Eid and Ramzan. Here is one of the famous Ruff of Muslims.

Eid Aayi Ras Ras

Eidgah Vasvoy, Eidgah Vasvoy.

(Oh friend; Eid has approached, let us go to the Eidgah)

"Chakri and Ruf have evolved from oral tradition. Later people started writing Chakri, and with the passage of time, a galaxy of the poets emerged, which include Rasool Mir, Samad Mir,

Mehmood Gami, Mehjoor, Dina Nath Nadim, Ahad Zargar, Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Fazil Kashmiri, Amin Kamil, Rehman Rahi, and the like.” (Hyderi, Radio in Kashmir, 2001)

Vanvun

One of the popular female folk song forms of our state is Vanvun. It is actually a prayer in the form of folk song. The song is sung in unison by a group of women and generally starts with the word Bismillah.

Bismillah kaareth hueta Vanvoonuy

Saahibo Az wala soonuyay

(We begin Vanvun with the name of Allah. Oh Sahib (prophet), come to our place/home today)

The Muslim Vanvun is a little different from that of its Hindu counterpart". “Muslims change words here and there to separate it from Hindu Vanvun. They sing fast and sometimes very fast.” (Dhar, Radio in Kashmir, 2003)

The Muslim Vanvun is generally limited to the marriage ceremonies but Hindu Vanvun is very vast and includes the following sub categories as mentioned by Sunita Dhar in his book, “Traditional music of Kashmir”.

- 1) Garnavaya Vanvun (house cleaning and washing)
- 2) Dapun (invitation of guests for the marriage)
- 3) Manzirath (Mehendi Rath or Henna night)
- 4) Kroor (after a whitewash flowery decoration at the main door)
- 5) Devgun (welcome to Vedic gods)
- 6) Shran (sitting on stool and dripping milk, curd and bathing)
- 7) Varidan (gifts to the relatives)
- 8) Yonya (holy fire)
- 9) Tekya Narivan (holy mark on the forehead and sacred thread tied around the wrist)
- 10) Kalash Lava (after the worship of Kalash, sprinkling of water)

The Muslim Vanvun comprises of the following categories which are a part of marriage ceremony:

- 1) Tomul-cchatun (winnowing)
- 2) Mehandirath (Henna Dye night)

- 3) Masmucchravun (opening of the hair of the girl before marriage)
- 4) Yenivol (arrival of the groom and guests)

Naindai Bathe

Naindai Bathe is a farmer folk song. After the Paddy is sown in Kashmir, the weeding is done to remove the weeds from the paddy field. This removal of weeds in Kashmir is known as Naindai or Nainduh. While busy in removing the weeds, the farmers or labourers sing folk songs to lessen the burden of labour. These songs are known as Naindai Bathe.

Laddishah

Laddishah is type of Satirical ballad in which a man stirs the iron rings strung on an iron rod known as Chimta or Dhukar, and make witty comments on the social issues. This song which criticises the existing government or any other higher authority makes the people laugh but at the same time reflects the society's condition. The approach of Laddishah is humours and entertaining but bitter at the same time. In the beginning of the song, the Laddishah starts with a line in which he makes fun of himself.

“Laddishah, Laddishah Draar’ kin pyow,

Pyawaane Pyawaane Hapatan khyow

(Laddishah, Laddishah! Fell off the window! And a Grizzly bit him just as he fell!)”: (Raazdan)

Chalant

A recent genre of folk music, which is the contribution of Late Ghulam Nabi Dolwal, is chalant. It is the something in between a Chakri and Sufiana Mausiqi, a sort of semi classical music.

“In Chalant, a group of five to seven persons perform together. It is milder than chakri in tone but sharper than Sufiana music. Harmonium, Tabla, Dholak, Chimta, Glass beaten with a spoon and thali are the instruments used during the performance of Chalant.” (Niyaz, Music and Melody)

III. Modern Light Music

Kashmiri modern light music comprises of Ghazal and geet and Qawwali. Kashmiri light music is at the peak at present times. Unlike Sufiana Mausiqi which has very little audience, Kashmiri light music, particularly Kashmiri ghazals have a very huge audience. The era of light music on

Radio began in 1943 as a reaction to the popular film music. “Radio Kashmir Srinagar has popularized a galaxy of Kashmiri singers in this genre of music. The prominent among them include, Ghulam Hassan Sofi, Raj Bagum, Haseena Bagum, Naseema Akhter, Shamima Dev, Jahan Ara Janbaz, Kailash Mehra, Ghulam Muhammad Rah, Nirmala Devi, Asha Koul, Jalal Gilani, Vijay Malla, Omkarnath Koul, and Ghulam Nabi Sheikh. Besides, top playback singers like Asha Bhonsle and Runa Laila, too, have recorded songs in Kashmiri light music.” (Hyderi, Radio in Kashmir, 2001)

At present Muneer Ahmad Mir, Qazi Rafi, Kafayat Faheem, Waheed Jilani, Aijaz Rah, Jamila Khan, Kailash Mehra, shameema Dev, Shazia Manzoor etc., are the popular names in the field of Modern light music. The contribution of Kashmiri music composer and Santoor Maestro, Pandit Bhajan Sopori, towards the popularization of Kashmiri light music is praiseworthy. The legendary musician has a unique record of composing thousands of classic songs which are very popular among the local populace and are regularly broadcasted through the Radio Kashmir and Doordarshan. Bhajan Sopori has produced the top most singers of Kashmir including the melody Queens, Shameema Azad and Kailash Mehra and Vijay Kumar Malla.

Conclusion

The music of Kashmir is very rich and diverse. In fact Kashmiri is one amongst the very few regions of India having its own rich and distinct classical musical genre, Sufiana Mausiqi. This study reveals that till the 14th century the music that was popular in the Valley was simply Indian music practiced according to the Indian tradition. However after the 14th century when Islam became the dominant faith of the people, Kashmiri music was strongly influenced by the foreign music particularly Persian music. It was during the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70 A.D) that the local Kashmiri music absorbed certain new elements from the alien music and as result gave birth to a new musical genre which is known as Sufiana Mausiqi and regarded as the classical music of Kashmir. Initially Sufiana Mausiqi was structured on the lines of Persian music but during the time of Mughal's, it incorporated many elements from Indian classical music and thus it became partly Persian and partly Indian. Not only classical music but folk music too was influenced by foreign music. It is because of this influence that we today find many foreign instruments like Rabab, Tumbaknari etc. used in Kashmiri folk music.

References:

Dhar, S. (2003). *Traditional Music of Kashmir*. New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers & Distributors.

Hyderi, Z. (2001). *Radio in Kashmir*. Srinagar.

Niyaz, A. *Music and Melody*.

Pacholczyk, J. (1996) *Sufiyana Kalam: The Classical Music of Kashmir*. Berlin: Verlag

Raazdan, V. Retrieved from www.searchkashmir.org