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## Gharana Tradition in Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqui

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### ABSTRACT

Kashmir has been called ‘paradise on earth’ by poets and rulers. Through the ages it has been praised equally by many scholars and visitors for its beauty, history and culture. The present day Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is rich with distinct elements of culture in its two distinct regions Jammu and Kashmir. Based on the review of primary as well as secondary historical texts and discussions with leading Sufiana artists, the paper attempts to explore the Sufiana Mausiqui and its Gharanas.

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### KEYWORDS

Kashmir, Sufiana Mausiqui, Sufiana Gharanas, Ramzan Joo Gharana

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### INTRODUCTION

Before the beginning of human settlement in what is now the Valley of Kashmir, it is believed that there used to be a huge lake, an inland sea, called the Kashyap Sar<sup>1</sup>. Since ancient times in Kashmir lived Buddhists and Hindus with their marvelous cultures that evolved over hundreds of years. But later a substantial change was brought in the society with the coming of Muslim educationalists and thinkers during medieval times, particularly from central Asia and Persia. These people brought with them new cultures and new styles of life that fascinated the locals<sup>2</sup>. Kashmir has a historical tradition which is unique in South Asia with few parallels in the world. The present day culture of Kashmir is a syncretic one containing both Indic and Islamic traditions. The pre-medieval period was dominated by the Hindustani culture rooted in India, and the medieval period by the Islamic culture of Central Asian countries.

The Valley of Kashmir is culturally rich in terms of oral histories, native crafts, music, written words, science and philosophy. Thus Kashmir has been able to make great contributions to the world of culture. In everyday life the subtle traditions and culture of Kashmir can be discerned. One of the most important cultural aspects of Kashmir is the Kashmiri language. It is spoken only in the Valley of Kashmir by the Kashmir irrespective of religious faith and creed. The language is an Indo-Aryan (Dardic subgroup) language, of

the Indo-European language family. The script of the Kashmiri language was Sharada which was the writing system of Brahminical family script and was used till 8<sup>th</sup> century. After that some changes took place in the script with changing times and streams of cultures. Presently, Kashmiri language is written in Perso-Arabic script by Kashmiri Muslims and in Devanagari script by Kashmiri Pandits.

Now to come to music, the culture of Kashmir is defined by Kashmiri Music to a large extent and the following paragraphs will attempt to historicize the development and the current state of Kashmiri music.

The earliest references to the art of the music in Kashmir are found in *Nilamatpurana*, a historical chronicle of Kashmir written by Pandit Kalhan. The book is one of the sources of ancient history of Kashmir which dates back to 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. There are a number of verses in *Nilamatpurana* mentioning the state of music in Ancient Kashmir. According to *Nilamatpurana*, the religious music was attached with the temples and it played an important role in the cultural life of Kashmir. The *Nilamatapurana* lays down that singing, dancing, and recitals of instrumental music used to take place in some of the religious festivals. It is held that, similar to the rest of the Indian sub-continent, classical dance in Kashmir had a religious background<sup>3</sup>. There were temple dancers known as *Nartakis*<sup>4</sup>. They were associated with the temples from the very early times, visibly represented in the tiles and sculptures found in archeological sites like Harwan in the district of Srinagar. The tiles and sculptures show dancers, singers and ladies playing various musical instruments. Thus the historical facts reveal enough evidences that music and dance has been part of Kashmiri culture since time immemorial.

A lot of information on music and dance from ancient Kashmir available till this day, comes from Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. Especially the first Taranga of *Rajatarangini* mentions about music that in *Viharas* during the reign of King Jaluka, the son of Ashoka, some kind of wind instruments were played. In *Rajatarangini* a dance concert has been mentioned in which a hundred female performers had danced in the presence of King Jaluka in Jyestha Rudra, a Buddhist temple. Dancers who were professional and associated with temples were allowed to dance<sup>5</sup>.

Later in the medieval times, Islam and Sufism came into existence in Kashmir as a result of which almost every aspect of life and culture in Kashmir underwent changes. Islam flowed in Kashmir from Turkestan and Persia through the activities of Islamic missionaries and *sufi* mystics<sup>6</sup>. It was at that time that Persian began to replace Sanskrit and gradually became the official language. Music and fine arts were influenced by this foreign culture. Due to the synthesis of folk music of Kashmir and the music of India, Persia, Central Asia, and Arabia (Turkey) a new musical form appeared and came to be called as *Sufiana Mausiqui*, the high-culture or classical music of Kashmir.

Noted scholar Avatar Krishna Raazdan mentions that Shamsuddin Shahmiri was the first Sultan who patronized the music in Kashmir. He encouraged the artists to perform their art and in his time many books were written on music. The names of the books were *Sammy Matrika* and *Cutnih Mahatma*. They contained information about the Kashmiri music and drama prevalent at that time and were written in Sanskrit. Both these books are now unavailable.

On Kashmiri culture, especially on poetry and music, Sufism has had a great impact. Elements of Sufi philosophy were included in mostly all Kashmiri poetry written by the Islamic poets either in Kashmiri or in Persian language. This poetry was also associated with music and dance. Kashmiri poets contributed to Persian literature by following Persian literary models in their poetry. The introduction of Islam did not negatively affect the development of music, rather it helped music and dance as essential elements in ritualistic ceremonies through Sufi orders. The information available on music during the Islamic period comes from various sources. Till the reign of the Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin cultural life was covered by the chronicles of Abul Fazal, Jonaraja and particularly of Srivara. Abul Fazal mentioned in his 16th century document *Ain-i-Akbari* that during the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin a school of music was found in Kashmir with the musicians from Iran and Turan. "These musicians were responsible for introducing many elements of Persian and Central Asiatic music to Kashmir and that many features of today's Sufiana Mausiqui could have been the result of the influence". Srivara wrote in his text *Zaina-Rag Tarangini* (c. 1486) that musical festivals used to be held in Kashmir during the period of Zain-ul-Abidin, and during this time Raja of Gwalior had sent him all standard books on Indian music which, as it is believed, influenced Kashmiri music. The king Hasan Shah, a son of Zain-ul-Abidin introduced Rabab, an Afghani musical instrument to Kashmiri music. During this Islamic era, there were eminent and talented musicians like Sooni Bhat, Shridhar Bhat, Ajodhya Bhat and Kshakara who hugely contributed in developing Kashmiri music<sup>7</sup>.

In the beginning of the Afghan rule and before the end of the Mughal period in the 18<sup>th</sup> century concrete written sources, concerned specifically with music, were available. These sources include treatises on music theory, such as the anonymously written *Karamat-e-Majra* (The marvel of the courses), and Daya Ram Khushdil's *Tarana-e-Suroor* (The song of the joy) and anthologies of the poetry associated with music. There is sufficient reason to believe that the treatises, and particularly the anthologies, refer specifically to Sufiana Mausiqui. Thus it is possible, with a certain degree of certainty, to state that Sufiana Mausiqui existed in Kashmir at least as early as the decline of the Mughal period.

### **Sufiana Mausiqui-the classical music of Kashmir:**

Sufiana Mausiqui was formed during the medieval period when Islam and Sufism arrived at Kashmir, and this musical form is influenced by Iranian & Central Asian music. It

is known as the classical music of Kashmir. This musical genre has an important part of Kashmiri society and culture. Sufiana Mausiqui is referred to as Sufiana Kalaam by some people and it is incorrect. Sufiana Kalaam means texts of Sufi poetry where as Sufiana Mausiqui is a type of spiritual music. It is practiced by professional musicians of four Sufiana Gharanas of Kashmir. Sufiana Mausiqui is also known as Saazandar Gyawun. It is vocal ensemble music-five to twelve musicians sing together to the accompaniment of Santoor, Sehtar, Saz-e-Kashmir and Wasul. Sufiana Mausiqui is similar to the Classical music of India as both follow the time theory system for performing. But instead of Raga, Persian Maqams are sung in Sufiana Mausiqui. The text of the songs are Sufi poems which are generally in Persian and Kashmiri by poets such as Maulana Rumi, Hafiz Shirazi, Omar Khayyam, Allamma Iqbal and Memood Ghami. Earlier there was a dance form called Hafiza Nagma which was part of Sufiana Mausiqui. In this a female dancer expresses the meaning of a poem through elaborate hand gestures, which is in style similar to the Mudras of Indian classical dance Kathak.

Sufiana Mausiqui starts with Shakal which is similar to Raga Alaap or Chalan (prelude) in Hindustani Classical music. It shows the identity of a Maqam. It is played on instruments, generally on Santoor by the leader of the ensemble. And then we start Maqam which is having two parts. The first line of the first part is called Zamin, and the second line is Nimwoj. These two lines are repeated again and again as refrain which is called Baazghasht. Second part of the Maqam is called Bathe (Antara). Sufiana Mausiqui is also sung in slow tempo called Nimdor (Vilambit). Nimdor is sung in various talas like Mukhamas similar to 32 matra tala. After this the composition is sung in fast tempo in various talas like chapandas, doyeka, etc. In this musical form Tarana is also sung, it is called as Tilana in Sufiana mausiqui. Earlier it was popular in local public spheres and later it was popularized throughout Kashmir by the media- Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

### **History of Sufiana Gharanas of Kashmir:**

In Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqui there is Gharana system as in the Hindustani Classical Music tradition. As per the accounts of Cultural Historians, this musical form has been in practice in Kashmir since the medieval period. Since its inception, Sufiana Mausiqui blossomed in the courts of kings and sultans belonging to different dynasties. During the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70) there were many Sufiana musicians belonging to Iran and performing in his court. It is believed that gradually this art form came to be practiced by many Kashmiri families specializing in Sufiana Mausiqui. After that Haider Shah, Son of Zain-ul-Abidin came into power. Scholars believe that he was generous and cultured, and a patron of art and learning. He was a poet himself and wrote a book of songs in Persian. He was fond of the society of Mulla Daud, a great musician whose pupil Khwaja Abdul Qadir taught the Sultan how to play the flute. He acquired such proficiency in it that, according to

Srivara, he also learned to play well on other instruments from persons who were attached to his court. After the death his son, Hassan Shah the great lover of art, ruled Kashmir. He was not only a great patron of music, but was himself well versed in it. He possessed a sweet voice and sang Persian, Kashmiri, and Sanskrit songs. His court was adorned with skilful musicians some of whom had come from far off places, attracted by the Sultan's love for music. In total, there were about 1,200 musicians in his court. Hassan Shah was succeeded by the Chak dynasty and they were not only music lovers but also contributors towards the promotion of this art. In Chak dynasty there was a prominent king named Yousuf Shah Chak who was known to be an accomplished musician himself. There are many historians who mentioned that Yousuf Shah Chak was the inventor of Maqam Raast-e-Kashmir. During his reign, as historians note, Sufiana music flourished in every corner of Kashmir and the musicians were earning money and respect alike<sup>8</sup>.

It has been unanimously noted by some Sufiana musicians that during the Mughal period in Kashmir the concept of Gharana system was introduced in Sufiana Mausiqui. However there is not any written proof to bear testimony to this fact. Meanwhile, during Afghan rule in and around 1753 A. D. Sufiana Mausiqui reached its nadir as it lost state patronage due to the more conservative outlook of the then rulers and began on the verge of decline. However, it was protected by Sufi saints and some culturally inclined elite families. In 1846 Kashmir valley came under the Dogra ruler. It was the time when Sufiana Mausiqui was able to carve a distinct niche in the court of Maharaja Pratap Singh. During this time many gharanas of Sufiana Mausiqui came into existence.

Apart from this, there were the Sufi preachers namely Qadiri Parampara who were promoting Sufiana Mausiqui and led to the emergence of many Sufiana musicians. If we talk about the gharanas in Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqui before 18<sup>th</sup> century there was not any systematic development of the gharanas. Musicians were associated with various princely courts and Sufi shrines as a precursor to the gharana system that, historically speaking, came into existence around late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

According to some Sufiana musicians and musicologists, it was the Ustad Ramzan Joo who initiated the gharana for the first time in Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqui. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century he began his own gharana after his name Ramzan Joo Gharana which is called Gwalior gharana of Kashmir. Many prominent musicians from other gharanas trace their ancestry to this gharana. Interview with Ustad Shabir Ahmad Saaznawaz the present Khalifa of Ramzan Joo Gharana says that there were some gharanas with their ancestors migrating from Iran as well accomplished Sufiana musicians. Presently, they are not in touch with this music system because they are not interested and have given business an edge over the passion for music. He also says that the lesser popularity of Sufiana Mausiqui account for the decline of the gharanas. However, the history of the gharanas in Kashmiri Sufiana

Gharana is quite intriguing and must be engaged with to understand the nature of Kashmiri music in general.

Earlier there were a number of Sufiana Gharanas throughout the Kashmir valley. Nowadays this tradition is alive only in three districts of Kashmir region which include Srinagar, Budgam and Anantnag. Even some 50 years ago, there were many peculiar Sufiana musicians belonging to other districts of Kashmir, Baramulla, Kupwara, Shopian, and Pulwama etc. But unfortunately in these districts this tradition is extinct at present.

Although Sufiana music of Kashmir was mainly practiced by Muslim musicians, in the past, when Sufiana music was on its peak, there were some Kashmiri Pandit families who were pioneers in this art form. For example, one of the familiar gharanas of Sufiana Mausiqui was in North Kashmir Sopore which was represented by Pandit Shankar Pandit. Pandit Shankar Pandit was an exponent of Sufiana Mausiqui as well as Santoor and Sehtar maestro. His son Pandit Samsar Chand Sopori was also great master of Santoor and Wasul-a percussion instrument. Along with them, their descendant, renowned Santoor maestro Pt. Bhajan Sopori also has a vast knowledge of Sufiana Mausiqui. He is the grandson of Pandit Samsar Chand Sopori. The other eminent Sufiana artist among the Kashmiri Pandits was Pandit Khera Kak Munshi. He was one of the leading Sufiana musicians of Kashmir. Pandit Khera Kak Munshi was well known for organizing Sufiana Mehfiles at his home regularly.

At present, there are only four Gharanas of Sufiana Mausiqui existing in Kashmir. Among these four, Ramzan Joo Gharana, like the Gwalior Gharana of Hindustani Music, is one of the oldest and main Sufiana gharana as a progenitor. Many musicians from other gharanas trace their ancestry to this gharana. The other three existing gharanas of Kashmir are Qaleenbaft Gharana, Kamal Bhat Gharana and Setari Gharana.

### **Contemporary Gharanas of Sufiana Mausiqui:**

In Sufiana Mausiqui of Kashmir there is also Gharana system. The Gharanas are Ramzan Joo, Kamal Bhat, Qaleenbaft, and Sitari. Earlier, in every district there was one Gharana or the other<sup>9</sup>. Currently it is surviving only in three districts of Kashmir region. They are Srinagar, Budgam and Anantnag-Bijbhera. Every Gharana has its own specialty and has contributed a lot to the music of Kashmir. Because of the Gharanas, Sufiana Mausiqui is still alive. Ramzan Joo Gharana is called Gwalior Gharana of Kashmir; being one of the oldest surviving Gharanas of Sufiana Mausiqui. There are prominent musicians related to this Gharana. Ustad Shabir Ahmad Saznawaz, the son of Padma Shri awardee Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saznawaz, says that his ancestors had come from Iran. The founder of Ramzan Joo Gharana is Ustad Mohammad Ramzan Joo. From this Gharana came into being Qaleenbaft Gharana by Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Qaleenbaft.

**Ramzan Joo Gharana:**

This is widely accepted that it is one of the oldest and main Sufiana Gharana of Kashmir. It originated from reputed artists Ustad Sultan Joo and his son Ustad Hadi Joo. Their descendents got patronage from Shah Mir Dynasty of Iran. The gharana is known by the name of its leading musician, Ustad Ramzan Joo who was born in 1881 and died in 1971. The last famous music practitioner of this *gharana* was Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saaznawaz who passed away recently in February 2014. At present, Shabir Ahmad Saaznawaz, son of the late Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saaznawaz acts as the Khalifa of this *gharana*

**Kamal Bhat Gharana:**

The Kamal Bhat *Gharana* is one of the most prominent *gharanas* of the Budgam district of Kashmir. Ustad Kamal Bhat was the founder of Kamal Bhat Gharana. This gharana demonstrates a synthesis of two differing performance styles - the Sufiana and the Bhand Pather style which is a folk theatre form from Kashmir. Theatre activity was primarily associated with social-religious ceremonies before the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir which is evident from the archaeological and literary theatre performances seen in festivals and during the birth celebrations of Lord Buddha, Lord Krishna and other deities.

**Qaleebafat Gharana:**

Qaleenbaft is one of the most prominent *gharanas* of the Budgam district and is named after the most renowned musician of the *gharana*, Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Bhat Qaleenbaft. It is an offshoot *gharana* of the Ramzan Joo *Gharana* as the founder of this *Gharana*, Ustad Qaleenbaft, had initially learnt the basics of Sufiana Mausiqi from Ustad Sultan Joo and Ustad Siddiq Joo, the brother of Ustad Ramzan Joo. Besides this, he had also learnt the Tabla from Ustad Ramzan Joo. However he had learnt most of the art of Sufiana Mausiqi mainly from Mohammad Khaleel, who was also known as Khalla Sahib Anderwari, who in turn had learnt the Sufiana Mausiqi from Ustad Abdullah Shah who also belonged to Ramzan Joo *Gharana*.

**Setari Gharana:**

Setari *Gharana* is the only surviving *gharana* of South Kashmir and this *gharana* is well known for Sehtar players. The most distinguished musician of this *gharana* was Ustad Abdul Khaliq Shah Setari. It is generally believed that Ustad Abdul Khaliq Shah was so skilled in playing the Sehtar that he earned the name Setari, the name by which his family is still recognized. This *Gharana* is presently represented by Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Shah Setari. While interviewing him at his home, I found that not only his family but the entire community in his locality uses the surname 'Setari' and the entire Mohalla is known as Setari Mohalla.

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**Decline of Sufiana Mausiqui and Its Gharanas:**

The musical tradition in Kashmir is declining day by day. According to the present scholar, there are many reasons responsible for this. In the last 30 years, the Kashmir conflict remained very counter-productive affecting culture and choking musicality-as long months of lockdowns shut avenues for the growth of culture and the arts. Music is not taught in universities, colleges and schools due to which Kashmir music is suffering. Also the people of Kashmir do not seem to take interest in learning this art because they cannot foresee any promising future with it. Kashmiri musicians are economically poor and facing problems. Again some musicians themselves are responsible for the decline of music: there were some Ustads earlier who hid this art from common people in the fear of losing this to them. Another major reason for the decline of appreciation for Kashmir music is globalization and, as a result, the influence of popular music especially rock and pop music.

Pt. Sopori, eminent Santoor maestro and music composer, states that the musical concerts are not organized by government or any private organization, which is one of the reasons of declining the music tradition in Kashmir. According to him, the decline of music is due to the loss of patronage and low economic incentive. Another reason is people do not want to take the risk by letting their children learn an art form that doesn't provide economic security. Pt. Sopori also claims that the Kashmir conflict is the biggest example for declining Kashmiris cultural identity, let alone music.

Dr. Usha Bhagati, a retired music professor, says that the Sufiana music is declining due to globalization. She says further that there was a time when Sufiana music was played in all the functions and festivals, but now unfortunately pop and rock music is played in celebrations, which is a biggest loss to Kashmir music. Kashmiri musical instruments are suffering the domination of western musical instruments. Bhagati suggests that the government of Jammu & Kashmir has to take initiative in including music as a subject in educational institutions.

Dr. Shabir Ahmad Mir, an assistant professor in music at Sumbal College mentions that the music of Kashmir is declining badly day by day due to the impact of western culture. He opines that there are very talented students who are interested to learn this art form but there is shortage of Gurus (Ustad), due to which music of Kashmir is near extinction. One more major reason is that people are criticizing the musicians without any rhyme or reason.

Thus, once a huge cultural capital, the music of Kashmir is at its dusk with the dark night approaching slowly and surely.

**CONCLUSION**

In the state of conclusion Sufiana Mausiqui was formed during the medieval period



when Islam and Sufism arrived at Kashmir, and this musical form is influenced by Iranian & Central Asian music. It is known as the classical music of Kashmir. The gharana system in Sufiana Mausiqui was formed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. From the concluded study it is clear that due to the decline of Sufiana Mausiqui and its gharanas over the last fifty years, many gharanas are lost and at present only about three gharanas are there. The Setari gharana of south Kashmir is almost over. Precisely we can say that the Sufiana Mausiqui of Kashmir without gharanas is a body without soul and spirit.

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