

Traditional musical instruments of Kashmir

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Abstract

Singing and dancing by bands has contributed a lot to the traditional music of Kashmir from the ancient period. Not only in Kashmir, but also in other places, bhand pather (custom) has remained prevalent from the very ancient period. The performance of bhand is called Joshin, various parts of which are called the pathers. Bhand Pather or Joshin is the extemporary drama without any formal script.

Keywords: Traditional, Musical, Instruments, Kashmir

Introduction

The history of the *instruments*, the technique of playing the material they are made of and more will be discussed here.

“Rajtrangini” mentions specially about the art of music and musical instruments in the region in distant past. The ancient musical instruments used in Kashmir had been more or less a reflection of the Indian musical instruments in usage during that time [1].

According to pandith kalhana, “the folk musical instruments like earthen pots, brass vessels etc. were used by Kashmiri people from very early times. In Kashmiri 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 a veena in an artistic pastime. The kind Bhiksacara (1120-21) A.D., who himself played these instruments was found of “Chhakri” (folk choral singing) which continues to be popular in Kashmir valley since kalhana’s time and even earlier to that.

According to B.C. Deva, “the string instruments, Rabab and Sarangi, come to Kashmir with the influence of Muslims. The whole sub-continent was affected by the culture of the new rulers. In music, new styles and new instruments like Rabab and Sarangi. Rabab traveled with the bards and minstrels of Afghanistan and joined the folk group instruments in Kashmir.”

Some scholars say that “it must have been introduced into Kashmir at the time of Zain-ul-Abidin. The most popular instrument used in folk music is the Rabab, which was borrowed from Persia [2].”

According to V.N. Bhatkhande, “the Muslim rulers had brought with them their own system of music with new melodies, new interpretations, new types of songs and new Tals, which in course of time got fused with Hindu music and gave rise to modern Hindustani music. In a similar way, artists from central Asia, during Sultanate period, brought with them their art, music, musical instruments. It was in this period that the Kashmiri music reached the heights of perfection under the patronage of rulers and saints. Many improvements were brought out in the conventional instruments to render them more useful to the art.”

The musical instruments have played a key role in the evolution of Kashmiri traditional music.

There are four types of musical instruments which are used in Kashmiri traditional music that is:

A. Kashmiri Folk Music instruments

- Tumbaknari
- Sarang
- Kashmiri Sarang
- Gagar
- Khasya
- Rabab
- Noet
- Nai (Flute)
- Harmonium

B. Bhand Instruments

- Swarnai
- Dhola
- Nagada

C. Ladishah Instruments

- Dhukar

D. Sofiyana Instruments

- Santoor
- Saaz-I-Kashmir
- Madham
- Kashmiri Sitar
- Tabla

1. Tumbaknari (Folk instruments)

Tumbak has been a musical instrument in the good olden days in Iran and central Asia, which was being played mostly by the women folk of these places. Many authors believe that such instrument is being used in Iran and Arabia too. May be it has come to Kashmir from these places, for the simple reason that visitors and rulers were coming to Kashmir in the olden days from Iran and middle east, which besides other things made cultural invasion on the art of Kashmir. Co-incidentally, this instrument is also being played by the women folk in Kashmir, the only difference is that in Iran or Central Asia. It is now being made of wood, while in Kashmiri, it is still being made of baked clay maintaining its

originality. This type of instrument is used for keeping rhythm and also time that covers in a performance of music.

Dr. Rahullah-khaliqui has written in page no.403 of his book "Serguzashti". Moosiqi-Iran about the style of playing this instrument in Iran. In Iran, the style of playing this instrument is called "Timbakh" or *Tumbak*. In west, it is *Tumbal* or *Tumbari* and in Kashmir, it is *Tumbaknari*. The 'neer' is added because the tail end of the instrument is like a pipe, which in Kashmiri is called a 'Nore', which has in course of time, changed to near, making the instrumental *Tumbaknari*. It is generally used by women folk at various occasions of merriment like marriages; it is struck by the fingertips to produce the desired harmonious rhythm^[3].

2. Sarang (Sarangi) (Folk Instrument)

It is a stringed musical instrument played with a bow and it has three types;

- a) The first type is smaller in size and is used in Kashmir under the name of *Sarang*, which as per a belief (local) is the invention of Maharaja Sarang Dev's time (Sarang Dev was a king of Kashmir).
- b) The second type is slightly bigger in size than the *Kashmiri Sarang* and is mostly used in Bengal for Bengali music.
- c) The third type is a full size and standard *Sarangi* used in Indian Classical music. Its size is roughly three feet long and about eight inches wide. It has four main strings and about thirty five sympathetic side strings known as *Taraba* in musical language and most of them are made of steel and brass.

3. Kashmiri Sarang (Folk instrument)

Kashmiri Sarang is very simply in structure. It is made of a block of wood. Preferably of mulberry or teakwood. The entire body is hollow from inside with two combined parts. Both the sides of the lower part are punched and the whole is covered with hide. The upper part serves the purpose of a fingerboard. Commonly its length is one and a half feet. It has two strings of gut, one of steel and another of coiled brass (making four main strings). Beside it has eight or ten sympathetic wires/strings of steel known as 'terben'.

It is played with a bow, made of a hard round stick of wood, to which hair of the tail of horse are fixed at both the ends, and a small wooden triangular but curved bridge is placed at one end to keep the hair light. The bow is held in the right hand and moved from one end to the other, vertically on the main strings to produce sound. The fingers are mainly four, middle, ring and sometime the little finger is used to produce notes of different pitch at different length of different strings. The fingers however do not press down the strings on the fingerboard, but are simply touched at the starting place with nails of each finger of the left hand, thus the musical notes are produced.

4. Gagar (Folk Instrument)

Gager is a well-known word in the Indian language. Gagar is made of brass. In Kashmiri Hindu society, Gagar has a cultural importance.

In Kashmir also, at the time of "Herath Festival", *Gagar* has an important role to play. *Gagar* is placed on the bangle shaped circle made of dry paddy straw which is placed on the floor, washed with clay. The *Gagar* is half filled with dry nuts. Than Lord Shiva and Shakti are worshipped. Thus, it can

clearly be understood that *Gagar* holds valuable place in the religious festivals in Kashmir.

The *Gagar* is used with the music of Kashmir. The artist put iron rings in his fingers on the left hand and places his hand on *Gagar* while striking *Gagar* with the right hand. The second produced is very high and thus *Gagar* plays an important role in creating the musical environment in the gatherings. During festivals and temple kirtan, playing of *Gagar* is of great importance. *Gagar* might have its origin in vedic time^[4].

5. Khasya (Folk instrument)

In Kashmir folk music, round cup made of bronze is called "Khos." Usually khos is used for drinking khava (a type of Kashmiri tea) in Kashmiri Hindu families. Beneath the round form of Khos is smaller round portion on which it stands. *Khasya* is the plural form *khos*. Whenever there is a religious gathering, massing or yagnopavit, *Tumbaknar*, *Ghat*, two *Khasya* are played with both the hands. The Hindu women are more proficient in playing it. It is a 'Ghan Vadya'. The sound is produced by striking both the *Khasya* with each other.

6. Rabab (Folk instrument)

The word *Rabab* is pronounced as *Rabab* in Persian and *Rabab* in Arabic, which in Arabic is Rab-Raba; literary meaning to collect, to make available, to arrange or to manage. It has been controversial to assert about the origin of *Rabab*, which was however initially played with a bow but now it is played with a mizrab precisely with a mizrab precisely with a plectrum.

One school of thought suggests that this instrument has been brought to India from the Middle East by the foreign intruders perhaps by Sikandar Zulqurmein in the past. Others suggest that Tansen. The celebrated musician invented it, as is mentioned Ain-i-Akbari. Abu Naserfarabi is of the opinion that this instrument, originally played with a mizrab later on, in Middle East, one more thinker of music Aullya-chalbi of Arabia is of the opinion that *Rabab* was made in Arabia by one Abdullah before the birth of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.) of Islam. Nothing can be said authentically about its origin but it is one of the oldest stringed musical instruments known in the field of music, though it has undergone many changes in the form, structure and manner of playing^[5].

The presently *Rabab* is made of second mulberry wood. It is about to three and a half feet in length. One end of the body is round and the diameter is about a foot. The 'Band Natya'. It is used during paddy harvesting. The round part is converted with Parchment. This round part gradually joins the neck by becoming curved and narrow.

A pice of very thin wood is fixed at the top of the open part to cover it that serve the purpose of the fingerboard of the instrument. Four guts of different thickness are used in it as string, in place of metal strings. The entire body of instrument is hollow from inside. It is played with a plectrum made of coconut shell, bone or of any hard metal.

7. Noet (Folk Instrument)

It is a simple earthenware pot, usually for collection of water in rural India. Now-a-days it is usually made of brass or copper, but for musical purpose only the earthenware pot is traditionally used in Kashmiri music. It has a big round belly having a small open round mouth at the upper portion. It is the oldest type of drum variety known to the mankind.

In shape, the *Noet* of Kashmir is not different from the Ghatam of the South or the matki of Rajasthan. They are used as the instrument in the music in those states which proves the fact that they might have begun their journey from the same cultural background. Their skill and style of playing might have differed in accordance with the traditions prevalent in respective regions [6].

In Kashmiri language, the original words 'kalash' or 'Ghat' might have lost their existence and *Noet* might have gained popularity due to the fact that it was associated with 'UV' (nat). In due course of time the word 'nat kalash' might have lost the word 'kalash' and become popular as '*Noet*'. Such reference has been made in Nilamat purana (i.e. reasted clay pot players – Bhands), Kalhan in Rajtrangani frequently refers to this instrument. (They played on their balded heads exactly as the earthen pot instruments were played).

The tradition is maintained by the natives living in the distant rural areas of Kashmir, who spend their evenings in practicing this ancient art. The name of Mohan Lal Aima is worth mentioning here, who did deep and through study of *Noet* playing and thus revived the art and its importance for us.

8. Nai (Flut) (Folk instrument)

In Kashmiri language, the normal meaning of '*Nai*' is related to flute. In Kashmiri folk music, the prevalence of *Nai* is older than two thousand years as we get its description in "Nilmat Purana".

"Nilmat Purana" described banshi as well as venu and in the modern era even the Kashmiri artists, especially of Anantnag, are proficient in playing two types of flute:

1. The first type of flute is empty from inside and there are seven holes for seven swaras. While playing it, fingers of the both the hands are used. This type of flute is more prevalent in the folk music.
2. The second type of flute is also called pi- pi in Kashmiri language. This type of flute is made of Walnut's wood. Even this flute is seven holes but the hole from where the air is blown is absent, but its adjacent hole is put into the mouth and blown. The player sees the seven holes clearly. This instrument is used more conveniently and the player does not get tired soon. This type of flute is more famous in Kashmir [7].

9. Harmonium (Folk instrument)

Earlier the use of Harmonium was banned on AIR, with effect from March 1, 1940. It was generally believed that *Harmonium* was not a musical instrument and the personalities like Tagore, Sir Raza Ali, Pandith Ratanjankar, T. Lakshman Pillai and Dr. Zakir Hussain, seconded it. But in view of the tremendous pressures from the pro- *Harmonium* artist, the restrictions were earlier relaxed in 1971, and then in 1980. Now the harmonium is back in full form, for all kinds of programmes, including Chhakri [8].

Bhand Musical Instruments

1. Nagada

Nagada is an instrument resembling 'Dhol'. It has many names, like *nakkara*, *Nagada*, *Dugdugi* etc. in Indian language. According to B.Chaitanyadev, "*Nagada* is a changed form of the ancient Dhundubhi. In Himachal Pradesh also, its similar form and structure can be found, its upper side is covered with leather of goat. *Nagada* is slightly smaller than

the 'Nabat' instruments. The instrument '*Nagadi*' is also played with it. This instrument is struck with a piece of wood and the sound is produced, it is in demand in the temples."

In Kashmir, it is used during festivals and marriage ceremonies. Mainly it is used with the 'Bhand Jashan' and 'Band-Natya'. It is used during paddy harvesting. The formers consider it as an energy booster during their tiring task of farming.

2. Dhola (Bhand instrument)

Dhola has its own history in the musical instruments of India. The first form can be traced in the mohan jadaro culture. One of the oldest instruments of India, *Dhola* is mainly traced in the villages and every state of India.

In Kashmir, it is mainly used in villages and it is mostly played with the folk dance of the Bhands.

3. Swarnai (Bhand instrument)

Swarnai, a 'Sushir Vadya', holds an important place in the folk music of Kashmir. This instrument has been mentioned in Nilamata-purana and in kalhana's Rajtarangani. Swarnai holds the same place in Kashmiri folk music as the *Swarnai* in the Indian music. This is the reason, why *Swarnai* is also called Shahnai in Kashmiri music.

Swarnai is made of two words – swar and *Nai*. The structure of *swarnai* is slightly bigger in size as compared to Shahnai. This instrument is made of wood and its makers are the traditional makers of *Swarnai*. It has nine holes, near the round mouth of *Swarnai*, there is a little type square, through which the player blows the air. This is called Tulbarabir Tulkarav, in Kashmiri language.

The playing of *Swarnai* is considered very auspicious in Kashmiri culture. This musical instrument is deeply related to marriages, festivals, Shivratri, Novratri, Eidd and other auspicious occasion of Hindus as well as Musilims. It is also used by Bhands while performing in folk drama – 'Lok Natya'. Besides this, it is also widely used in 'Bachhi Nagma' folk dance. During the harvest, the players of *Swarnai* go to farms and perform entertaining music to entertain the farmers and collect the crop for themselves.

This way, melodious Swarnai is widely used in the folk music culture of Kashmir [9].

Ladisha Instrument

1. Dhukar

A community of Singers of Kashmir valley are known as the Laddi Shah who play a kind of Jingle Johny known as the *Dhukar* or even Laddi Shah which is an iron rod of about 75 cm length, bent like a walking stick at the top with a small cross handle at the other end. A number of metal rings are put on to this bar which are shaken to the rhythm of song [10].

Sofiyana Instruments

1. Santoor

Among the musical instruments, *Santoor* occupies an important place in Kashmiri music. Soofiyana singing is not possible without its accompaniments. These days, it is joining popularity even outside Kashmir. Its sweet tappings create a feeling of romantic mood whereas its soft tunes remind of the transquility of the other world, which suits the mystical temperament of sofiyana music. This instrument emits loud and enchanting sounds. It requires subtle sense of turning on

the part of the musicians who play it, with both hand using two sticks of twenty four centimeters called 'Kalam'. It is debatable whether *Santoor* is a native instrument of Kashmir or has been brought from abroad. Opinions differ. Some scholars view that it belongs to Iran. Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma claims that he was the first even *Santoor* maestro who brought it to classical stage. *Santoor* is being used for moosiqi in Kashmir since thirteenth century. But, that does not prove the fact that it came from abroad and its origin could not be Kashmir thirteen centuries before Christ. Reference to Shat-tantri veena is available at several places. It might have been the original form of *Santoor* and in due course, might have changed to the present form. The technique of performance, linguistically analyzing 'Shat' word must have traveled to 'Sat' and then to 'Sant; and 'tantri' to 'tantar' to 'trir' and finally to 'toor'. Both together must have become '*Santoor*'. Had it been from foreign origin, it would have brought the name along.

Santoor is made of mulberry wood. Some scholars believe it to be related to Shakt sect. According to Shakts, triangular is a symbol of desire, knowledge and action.

They have referred to the Shakt instruments, several times, and believed that goddess Mahashakti should be worshipped accompanying these instruments. The base on which *Santoor* is placed is also the same shape.

Mulberry tree in Kashmir has a religious value. It is related to 'Bhairav'. In every 'Bhairav' temple, mulberry tree is parted with vermilion and people worship it devotedly. In Khirbhavani, the famous Shakt Pilgrimage, the goddess is sitting on the mulberry tree. The very pilgrimage is called 'tulnuri' meaning 'root of mulberry'.

The shape of *Santoor* is trapezoid. Its right side is called 'burn' and the left 'Jil'. Twelve wires on right side are of brass and those on the left are of iron. There are also twelve nobs on the right and twelve on the left side. Four wires are fixed to each nob. The production of the tune depends on the nobs. Twelve brass wires remind us of soft and sweet Shakt emotion and the throbbing tune of iron wires remind us of hard appearance of Shiva himself. The number of wires in total is ninety six. At the tune of Yagnopavit, the priest wraps the holy thread ninety six times around his palm. The number is significant in itself. The tops of the nobs are inlaid in the horns of stag. This animal is found in Kashmir alone.

Twentieth century leading player of *Santoor* has been Tibat Bakal. At present Saz Naivaz, Kaleen bahap Shekh Abdul azis are known for their style of playing. Pandit Bhajan Sopori is making it popular on classical stage and popularizing it all over the world.

2. Saaz-i-Kashmir

Saaz had not originated from Kashmir. Since it has remained in vogue in Kashmir for centuries without any major modification, people preferred to call it *Saaz-i-Kashmir* or the musical instrument devised in Kashmir. It is played with bow, as such it is easier for the player to get microtones out of it.

According to Rouhulla Khalighi, Saaz in Persia is called *Kamancha*. It is the same instrument called Saaz in Kashmir and is played by a bow. He again states that the instrument has now been replaced by the violin as it is more complete. There are very few people who can play the *Kamancha* now-a-days.

Saaz is found all over the Islamic world and it originated from the north Iranian district, Kudristan. This type of instrument

(Three stringed fiddle) is mentioned as early the tenth century AD, by the great theorist Al Farabi. The instrument is found elsewhere in the Middle East also. Since the Kashmir Saaz is more developed and complicated, that is why people have named it as *Saaz-i-Kashmir*. The Iranian use this instrument for vocal accompaniment.

Saaz-i-Kashmir has three prominent strings, two made of silk. The silk string is made worthy of producing musical sound by mixing it with the skin of fish. It is tuned to Sa, while the 2nd one is tuned to SA (middle octave). The third one is not made use of, as it is not touched by the bow. On either side of the dand, there are seven strings (right side) made of steel and seven strings (left side) made of brass. Right side resonance strings are tuned respectively from Pa to Ma, whereas that of the left side from Sa to Ni (middle octave).

3. Madham

This instrument is played with Kashmiri Sufiana Moosiqi. It is also known as Indian Sitar because its shape and wires are equally related to Indian Sitar. The historians are in different opinions about the origin of this instrument in Kashmir and why is it called the Madham.

According to Gh. Mohd Saznawaz, "it is said that this instrument is originated by Amir Khusroo but there are no clear evidences when it had been included in Kashmiri Sufiyana Moosiqi. The first wire of this instrument is fixed on the Madhyam (Ma) Swar that is why it is known as *Madham* [11]."

Whatever the reason of its origin is. However, the eloquence of Swaras is very high than other instruments in Sufiyana Moosiqi.

Meendh, Gamaq, Kan, Jhalla, etc. are the particular varieties of Indian Sitar. But on the *Madham*, only the flate Swaras including "dha" instead of "Ra" are particularly played on *Madham*. If the Tarb Wires will be included, it will help to increase its more eloquence.

4. Kashmiri Sitar

This instrument is comparably smaller than an Indian Sitar. Its thickness is two or two and a half inch. Its width and length is one and a half times shorter than an Indian Sitar. Its curtains (walls) in front as well on back side of its stick are tied with yarn (Nylon Yarn). This leaves no capacity to produce a Meendh from Swaras. In an Indian Sitar the curtain in front of a stick is made of a pike of staff (steel) or brass, while as the back part has a Nylon yarn. The width of wires of a stick and the thickness of wire in an Indian Sitar prove a source of help in producing a Meendh. Sitar plays both these wires. These are close to each other. The rest of the wires are at a distance of about half an inch between them. All these wires are seven in number. Some *Kashmiri Sitar* have two wheeled wires, but these are not uses to play Jhalla. There is no conception of Jhalla in Kashmiri music. The two wires of *Kashmiri Sitar* are combined with "Sa" of Madhiya Saptaq. The other four are also combined with "Sa" of Madhya Saptaq. The fifth wire is adjoined with Pancham of Madhya Saptaq. This wire is made of brass or copper. The rest of the wire are made of steel or a pike staff. The two wires of Chhakir are combined with 'Pa' of Madhya Saptaq and "Sa" of Tar Saptaq [12].

This Sitar is played with mystical music. Thus this music keeps its harmony with a song. The identity of this music is not separate from a song. Although a *Kashmiri Sitar* is not

capable to produce Meendh in its present form, yet it has its own significance which is a necessity to know. So far *Kashmiri Sitar* is not used over in light and simple songs. Such an act discards its new aspects. Wadan music is not disjoined separately from mystical music. If it were so, *Kashmiri Sitar* would have been in use for Vadan Sangeet. It would have helped to know its merits and demerits. Before the onset of *Kashmiri Santoor*, *Kashmiri Sitar* and *Sazi Kashmir* was used in Kashmiri mystical (Sufiyana) music. If it is imagined that mystic music came here from Iran or Middle East that it is agreed upon that its musical instruments also accompanied to it. This music is sung and played in Kashmir from some past centuries.

At present a Sufiyana mystical musicians like to play Santoor. But in small sittings they often play Sitar because there is no difficulty in its mobility and no complexity in determining a tune. A few years before ustad Kamal Baht, a master and expert of Sufiyana Moosiqi from Wathora, used to play *Kashmiri Sitar*. Abdul Khaliq of Bijbehara also played *Kashmir Sitar*. There is a famous Quoth related to the Gharana of ustad Ramzan Joo. When a Ghuru from his Gharana went to the king of Afghanistan namely Abdul-Rehman to play Sitar. The king was greatly pleased and awarded him with honour and prize.

5. Tabla

Tabla maintains the laye and Tal in Sufiyana Kalam. Right and left. In Sufiyana Moosiqi (mystical music), a musician declares the right in his own convention as “ZILA KUND” and the “left” as “BUM KUND”. Perhaps it is based on “ZERU BUM”. Before this, a Dholaq was played for rhythm in Sufiyana Moosiqi. For keeping a laye on Kashmiri Lok music, a picture was used, which called “Neot” in Kashmiri. Once a famous singer of Kashmir namely Gh. Ahmad Sofi, said that a Kashmiri does not like a Chhakri without a Neot. A Chhakri is the most popular in lok music. The main singer (first singer) plays a Harmonium, a Neot or a fiddle. These instruments are essential in Chhakri. In Kashmiri Lok music, women use mostly “Tumbakhnari” for rhthym. One side of a Tumbakhnari is open and the other side is covered with the leather of a sheep or goat which played.

A mystical musician plays a *Tabla* in his own way i.e. in a Sadharun pattern (simple) the names of a few Tals are fixed while as a few are not named. The Tals are detailed as under: Neem Door Tal, Hijaz Tal, Du Roya Tal, Yaka Tal, Se Tal, Chap Tal, Zarb Turki Tal, and Rawani Tal.

There were a few other Tal patterns that prevailed in some period which are now out of use. These are namely: Makhmas, Sakeel, Neem Sakeel, and Samadi etc.

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