

# Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

ISSN 0975-2935

[www.rupkatha.com](http://www.rupkatha.com)

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Volume VII, Number 3, 2015

General Issue

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## Indexing and abstracting

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1	21100201709	Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	0.313	0.034	0.1	0.271	0.038	0.116	0.061	0.007	0.101

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# Sufiana Mausiqi-Kashmir's Forgotten Classical Music

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## Abstract

Kashmir has a distinct regional classical music tradition along with a rich repertoire of folk and modern light music. The classical music of Kashmir is known as *Sufiana Mausiqi*. It is a type of choral ensemble music based on the principal melodic concept of Maqam. It is an amalgam of the music of Persia, Central Asia India and was born due to the intercultural synthesis of the music of the mentioned regions during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Regrettably this glorious tradition of the past is currently on the brink of extinction. Based on in-depth interviews and discussions with master musicians and other persons associated directly or indirectly with this art form and the review of some original texts related to the subject, this paper examines the current state of Sufiana Mausiqi in Kashmir and its future prospectus.

**Keywords:** Sufiana Mausiqi, Maqamat, Sufism, Kashmir, Saaz-e-Kashmir

## 1. Introduction

*Sufiana Mausiqi* is the classical choral ensemble music of the Kashmir region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is based on the principal concept of Maqam<sup>1</sup> and is close to the Central Asian Maqam traditions but also influenced by Indian classical music. The word Sufiana has been derived from "Sufism", meaning "mystical" and Mausiqi is the Urdu word for music. Therefore the phrase Sufiana Mausiqi means 'mystical music'. Sufiana Mausiqi is so called because of the association of this musical form with the Sufis and the text used in it is mostly that of the Sufi poets. "It functions primarily as a religious music being connected with the rituals of Sufis (Muslim mystics) and as elite entertainment music performed in secular context"<sup>2</sup>. Although Sufiana has the fragrance of Indo-Central Asian Music traditions, it has its own distinct style, structure and mode of presentation that gives Sufiana its own identity and distinguishes it from Indo-Central Asian music as well as Indian Classical music. It, according to Josef Pacholczyk<sup>3</sup>, is a

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<sup>1</sup> The term Maqam (from Arabic: Place, staying) means a musical mode (a type of Scale), or a musical composition. "Maqam is the exact counterpart of Indian Raga: a pattern of melody, based (though with certain freedom ) on one of the modal scales, and characterized by stereotype turns, by its mood, and even by its pitch-middle, high, low-which is reminiscent of the Greek classification of 'melodies'" (Curt Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, P.285).

<sup>2</sup> Jozef Pacholczyk. (1996). *Sufyana Musiqi, the classical music of Kashmir*, International Institute of Traditional Music Berlin

<sup>3</sup> Jozef Pacholczyk, Professor Emeritus at the school of Music, University of Maryland, had done a research on Sufiana Mausiqi and published his research findings in a book in 1996 titled, "Sufyana Musiqi-the classical music of Kashmir. This book is not available for consultation in India but can be ordered online. It

genre characteristically Kashmiri. This music is taught orally and passed on from one generation to another. At present this musical form is practiced by traditional musicians belonging to the three districts of Kashmir-Srinagar, Budgam and Anantnag. “Sufiana is traditionally performed in the context of a *Mehfil* which is of two kinds, a religious Sufi meeting in which Sufiana is an integral part of the event and a secular meeting, in which the Sufiana lovers gather expressly to listen to the music”<sup>4</sup>. At present the tradition of performing in Mehfiles is a rare case. Nowadays whatever Sufiana Mausiqi we listen, it is through the medium of Radio and sometimes through stage performances. In fact this glorious tradition of the past is presently facing threat of extinction. A very few families are practicing this profession now. Earlier there were many gharanas<sup>5</sup> (schools) of Sufiana Mausiqi spread across the length and breadth of Kashmir valley. But at present only four gharanas exist. The only surviving Ustads (Master musicians), Mohammad Abdullah Setari, Mohammad Yaqoob Sheikh, and Mohammad Ismail Bhat are finding it difficult to carry forward the tradition. Many Maqams and Talas<sup>6</sup> have been forgotten. Saaz-e-Kashmir, the only bow instrument is on the path of extinction. In the past, a dance form namely Hafiz Nagma was associated with Sufiana Mausiqi in which a female dancer, “Hafiza” would represent the meaning of the song through various hand gestures and movements of the body. This dance form is now out of practice.

## 2. The Study

The subject of Sufiana Mausiqi has been neglected by the researchers and musicologists of the India as well as the west. There is a dearth of literature available on the subject. Keeping in view the seriousness of the issue under discussion, this study aims at examining the current state and future prospectus of Sufiana Mausiqi in Kashmir and exploring the ways for propagating and safeguarding this declining art form. The study is based on the two years of fieldwork (2011-2013) carried out in three districts of Kashmir where Sufiana Mausiqi is presently practiced. These include District Srinagar (Central Kashmir), District Budgam and District Anantnag (South Kashmir). The field work was a part of the junior fellowship project funded by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Methods included participant-observation, interviews, and analysis of some recordings of master musicians. Besides, material was drawn from the review and analysis of some historical texts such as Rajatarangini, Zaina Rajatarangini, Tabaqat i-Akbari, Ain-i-Akbari, Baharistan-i-Shahi, Tarikh-i-Kashmir Makammal etc. Two important works dealing with the theory and principles of Sufiana Mausiqi, “Rumuz-e- Mausiqi” and “Koshur Sargam”, were also investigated.

## 3. Historical background

There is no written source available that may trace the origin and history of the Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqi. However the origin of Sufiana Mausiqi in Kashmir can be directly attributed to the advent of Islam and the establishment of Sultanate period in Kashmir in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century when

<sup>4</sup> Jozef pacholczyk, Sufiana Kalam, the Classical Music of Kashmir, [www.jstor.com](http://www.jstor.com), accessed on 13/03/15

<sup>5</sup> The word Gharana has been derived from the Urdu word “ghar” which means house or a family. “Gharana, as used in music, is a lineage which is biological (father-son etc.) to begin with and grows into a disciple-chain, that is of disciples and their disciples spread over generations. This is called a guru-shishya parampara” (Sangeet Mahabharati, the oxford encyclopedia of music in India, 2011, Oxford University Press, Vol.1, and P.355.)

<sup>6</sup> Rhythmic pattern in Indian music is called Tala.

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. In the year 1384, a well-organized Islamic mission arrived in Kashmir under the leadership of Syed Ali Hamdani, a great Sufi master and a widely travelled missionary. He was accompanied by about seven hundred followers, a majority of whom were great religious divines.

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 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 (1420-1470), a new musical genre was born due to the intercultural synthesis of the music of Kashmir, Persia, Central Asia and India, which is known as *Sufiana Mausiqi* and is regarded as the classical music of Kashmir. Sufiana Mausiqi is thus the amalgam of the music of Central Asia, Persia, and India.

#### 4. Characteristic features of Sufiana Mausiqi

*Sufiana Mausiqi* is a composed choral vocal music in which five to twelve musicians, led by a leader; sing together to the accompaniment of Santoor, Saaz-e-Kashmir, Kashmiri Sehtar and Tabla. Instead of Raga, Persian Maqams are used. The texts of the songs are mystical Sufi poems in Persian and Kashmiri.

The basis of the melody of Sufiana Mausiqi is *Maqam*. The musician is free to invent and compose all variations and inner shades 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. There are basically twelve Principal Maqams such as Rast, Isfahan, Araq, Kuchak, Buzurg, Hijaz, Busilk, Ushaaq, Hussaini, Zangula, Nava, and Rahawi. These principal Maqams are broadly grouped into six families called Ahang which include Salmak, Dur Gardaniya, Navruz-e Asal, Kawisht, Mawisht and Shahnaz. From each individual Maqam two further Maqams are derived Known as *Shobeh*. From each shobeh two *Gushe* and from each Gushe are derived two *Parde* making the total number of modes or Maqams one hundred eighty. Earlier there were a total of 54 Maqams used in Sufiana Mausiqi of Kashmir however at present only around thirty five to forty maqams are known to the existing master musicians. The rest have been forgotten over the years. Maqams like Ramkali, Bibhas, Bharavi, Jaijawanti, Iachari, Sarang, Navruz-e Arab, lalit, Devgiri, Adana, Bihagada, Kanahara, Soorath, and Paraj are not commonly used by the current musicians.

The *Tala* system resembles the Tala system of Hindustani music as well as Persio-Arabic music. The popular talas include, yaktala (Ek-Tala ), Sehtal, Duroya, Chapandaz, Hejaz, Nimdor, Mukhammas, Nim Saqeel, Doyeka etc. The current practice of Sufiana Mausiqi features only a few talas and they include Chapandaz, Duroya, Yaktala, Doyeka, Ravani and Sehtal. It is important to mention here that presently Sufiana artists use the bols of Hindustani Talas and not

the original bols which were used earlier when Wasul (Dholak in its rudimentary form) was the accompanying instrument.

A Sufiana Mausiqi 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 artists may join him. The shakal is followed usually by a short poem, *Nasr* in which the couplets of Lalleshwari called Lalle-Vaakh are usually sung. The Nasr is sung without the rhythm and then after Nasr, begins the first poem (*Bathe*). 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 Hejaz (14 Matras/beats) is played first then the next Tala will be Yektala or Sehtala consisting of twelve matras and then Duyeka of eight matras and so on.



Figure1: Sufiana Mausiqi Performance

A piece 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 cycle), leading to the final

Sa (Tara 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 bathe 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 a half and contain one to several poems but in the same Maqam.



Figure 2: A Sufiana musician tuning his Sehtar

## 5. Current state of Sufiana Mausiqi

Sufiana formed an integral part of the Kashmiri society and culture till 1947. However after this period it started to decline owing to various socio-economic and political reasons. In fact this glorious tradition of the past is presently facing the threat of extinction. A very few families are practicing this profession now. Earlier there were many gharanas<sup>7</sup> (schools) of Sufiana Mausiqi spread across the length and breadth of Kashmir valley. But at present only four gharanas exist.

<sup>7</sup> The word Gharana has been derived from the Urdu word “ghar” which means house or a family. “Gharana, as used in music, is a lineage which is biological (father-son etc.) to begin with and grows into a disciple-chain, that is of disciples and their disciples spread over generations. This is called a guru-shishya parampara” (Sangeet Mahabharati, the oxford encyclopedia of music in India, 2011, Oxford University Press, Vol.1, and P.355.)

The only surviving Ustads (Master musicians), Mohammad Abdullah Setari, Mohammad Yaqoob Sheikh, and Mohammad Ismail Bhat are finding it difficult to carry forward the tradition. Many Maqams and Talas<sup>8</sup> have been forgotten. Saaz-e-Kashmir, the only bow instrument is on the path of extinction. In the past, a dance form namely Hafiz Nagma was associated with Sufiana Mausiqi in which a female dancer, “Hafiza” would represent the meaning of the song through various hand gestures and movements of the body. This dance form is now out of practice. It is said that Hafiz Nagma was an integral part of Sufiana ensemble as late as 1920 but after this period this dance form started declining rapidly and finally became extinct. There are many reasons given for its extinction. Ishaq Khan (History of Srinagar) says, “With the growth of vulgar tastes owing to the advent of the Cinema and Theatre in Srinagar women ceased to get into this profession. Morality is also said to have become lax among the nautch girls. This deprived the Hafizas of the patronage of the better class people of Srinagar, who used to engage them on occasions of festivals and marriages”.

## 6. Causes for the decline of Sufiana Mausiqi

There are various factors responsible for the decline of Sufiana Mausiqi. According to Jozef Pacholczyk, it is very difficult to single out causes of the decline of a particular culture or genre. He points out that it is a result of some dramatic changes in the system of values of a particular society corresponding to the changes of the socio-economic situation as well as outside cultural influences. To him, the causes are due to the political and economic instability of Kashmir in the past two centuries<sup>1</sup>.

Pandit Bhajan Sopori, Santoor Maestro and Music composer states:

The decline of Sufiana Mausiqi is actually due to the loss of patronage and low economic incentive. People did not want to take risk to let their children learn an art form that doesn't provide economic security. As a result of this very few people learnt Sufiana and it remained limited to a few people.

Mr. Mehrajuddin, former Additional Secretary, Jammu & Kashmir State Cultural Academy gives the following reason for the current situation of Sufiana Mausiqi:

Sufiana Mausiqi developed in the royal courts at the time of Sultanate period and also under Maharajas. As soon as the rule of Kings and Maharajas was over in India after the 1947, Sufiana took refuge in the Mehfiles of music lovers and shrines and thus continued its journey. The lovers of this music would organize frequent Mehfiles at their homes on Thursday, Friday and Saturday as a result of which the artists would get compensation. Sufiana artists were even booked for marriages during this period. Moreover Kashmiri Pundits were also great patrons of this art form and it formed an integral part of their functions like marriage. Shraad (religious ceremony performed for the dead) and death etc. Then with the coming of modernization and globalization, everything changed. Peoples taste for music also changed and they started liking light musical genres such as Chakri, Ghazal and Pop music. As a result of this, Sufiana was marginalized. The musicians themselves are also responsible for its decline. There were some Ustads in the past that would hide this art from others. There were some Ustads who avoided teaching this art even to the sons of their daughters, fearing that the art will be transferred to other family.

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<sup>8</sup> Rhythmic pattern in Indian music is called Tala.

Some other important factors responsible for the decline of Sufiana Mausiqi include the decreasing contacts with Central Asia and near East resulting in the decrease of the knowledge of Persian language, globalization, economic insecurity, lack of knowledge, interest and appreciation on part of the Indian musicologists who consider it a folk music, lack of patronage, insensitivity of the government towards the promotion and propagation of traditional art.

## 7. Conclusion

From the study it is evident that Sufiana Mausiqi is on the brink of extinction and the future prospectus of this glorious art form looks very gloomy. It is therefore obligatory and mandatory to take sincere and serious efforts to save this glorious tradition from further decline and extinction. The first and foremost responsibility on part of the State Government is to formulate a proper cultural Policy for the promotion and Propagation of the Performing and Visual Arts of the State. Moreover training in Sufiana Mausiqi should be imparted in all the schools and colleges of Kashmir. Sufiana Mausiqi should be made a part of the curriculum in the educational institutions. There should be a provision of some financial assistance and maintenance grants to artists so that they can earn their livelihood and be able to pay full attention to the art form. A contributory pension scheme could be introduced for the master performing artists of the state. Frequent Sufiana Mausiqi programs and Mehfls and also Seminars and Workshops should be organized by the J & K Academy of Art Culture and Languages and the University of Kashmir, in various schools and colleges to create awareness regarding the art and thus encouraging younger generation to value and appreciate the rich heritage of their composite culture, thereby encouraging them to learn this art.

## Acknowledgement

I am indebted to the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for proving me opportunity through their prestigious junior fellowship, to carry out research on the endangered Sufiana Mausiqi. I am very thankful to all the Sufiana musicians who fully cooperated with me during the collection of field data.

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