

## **SUFYANA MOUSIQUI IN KASHMIR: CONTRIBUTION OF SHEIKH ABDUL AZIZ**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Kashmir's Sufyana Mousiqui the traditional music of the valley is breathing its last. Unfortunately, the 500 year old tradition of mystic music is dying very fast. Renowned Kashmiri musicologists warn that these haunting melodies and sensual dances brought down to this idyllic Himalayan valley from central Asia in the 15<sup>th</sup> century might vanish out of our sight soon. Sufyana Mousiqui or the music of the Sufis/mystics is on the verge of extinction due to the lack of patronage and recognition, Kashmiri mystical music has suffered an irreparable loss. Not just a few but 138 of the 180 aagas or melodies referred to in early medieval scripts, as well as some dance of antiquity have been lost forever.

**Keywords:** Sufyana Mousiqui, Traditional Music, Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Kashmir

### **INTRODUCTION**

The classical music of Kashmir is known as Sufiana Mousiqi. It is an important component of the Kashmiri society and culture. It is a type of mystical music practiced traditionally by professional musicians belonging to different gharanas of Kashmir. This musical form has been fashioned over the centuries of its development by a synthesis of foreign as well as indigenous elements. It is a type of composed choral 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. This classical music genre took shape in the 15<sup>th</sup> that the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470). It is the amalgam of the music of Central Asia, Persia, Turkey and India. It is generally believed that during the time of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, artists from Central Asia and Persia brought with them their art, music, musical instruments and culture and that resulted in the wonderful interaction with the local culture and in the course of time gave birth to what is known as Sufyana Mousiqui.

The word Sufyana has been derived from "Sufism", meaning "mystical" and Mousiqui is the Urdu word for music. Therefore the phrase Sufyana Mousiqui means 'mystical music'. Sufyana

Mousiqui is so called because of the association of this musical form with the Sufis and the text used in it is mostly that of Sufi poets.

### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

There is no written source available that may trace the origin and history of the Kashmiri Sufyana Mousiqui. However the origin of Sufyana Mousiqui in Kashmir 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 (Rinchana) 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, there was a huge turning point in the history of Islam in Kashmir when 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 Kabravi Saint played an important role in Islamizing Kashmir.

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, Turkistan and India, which is known as Sufyana Mousiqui and is regarded as the classical music of Kashmir. Sufyana Mousiqui is thus the amalgam of the music of Central Asia, Persia, Turkey and India.

The late Sheikh Abdul Aziz (d.2005), a renowned musician and musicologist from the valley, was well aware of this loss and tried to help the situation. He succeeded in reviving and preserving 42 of these precious melodies. After almost fifteen year of research and unrelenting hard work Sheikh was able to notate them in his four-volume monumental book, 'Kashur Seagram (translated Kashmiri sofiya).

'Kashur Sargam, for its significant contribution in the field, bagged the prestigious sangeet natak academy award. Three of its volumes were published by Jammu and Kashmir Academy of art, Culture and Languages. When the fourth volume did not receive any support. The author musician's dedication and devotion was such that he got it published at his own expense.

Aziz also worked as a guest lecturer in Ethnomusicology Department of Baltimore University of Maryland, the USA has included his work in the syllabus of its post-graduation course in music. His work was later also included in the syllabus of Kashmir university. In the Sheikh also represented India once in the world music festival in Europe.

His research has also been recorded in western notation by Josphe Pacholezyk in his book, 'Classical music of Kashmir', Pacholezyk has dedicated his book to Sheikh Abdul Aziz and in his praise for Aziz says that, "Unfortunately, the unsung legend and the santoor maestro, despite of so many a contribution died an anonymous death in December 2005.

The crisis faced by the music in Kashmir has only intensified during the past twenty years of conflict and instability.

The unrest has forced some very important musicians to leave Kashmir, especially those of the Pandit community, and schools too have stopped teaching performing arts as a subject.

Not only ragas and dances, but many of the musical instruments played in the performance of Sufyana Mousiqui face extinction. A conventional performance would include a chorus of four or five musicians, singing and playing various unique instruments. Both, the number of players and makers of these instruments are falling steeply.

Saz-e Kashmir, that looks like an adapted violin has only one important player in the whole of Kashmiri musician community, Ghulam Modammad Saznawaz other surviving instruments are the stringed santoor and Kashmiri sitar as well as the dhokra, a percussive instrument.

When the malaise touched the mystic dance, Kashmir's cultural platform was erased of another beautiful presence. Hafizas or female dancers almost disappeared in the late 1940s because of some baseless rumors. Many local musicians blame the present predicament of the art on the passing of a tradition of royal patronage passed down orally from generation to generation also contributed to the disappearance of many Kashmiri performing art forms.

The musicians feel the spread of the western music and that from Indian mainland through television and media also threaten the survival of this art form. The presence of inimical forces and influences which have not wanted this culture to thrive has hastened the degeneration.

Because of all these reasons, Kashmir has lost a precious and rich part of its culture.

Just before days of his passing away, Aziz expressed his regret and grief for the plight of the art he belonged to in an interview Aziz is reported to have said "I felt guilty of not having done much, and I can see it dying out".

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