

Santoor and Sehtar – Traditional Instruments of Kashmir

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Abstract

The musical instruments of Kashmir, comprises a variety of strings and percussion instruments. The better know, and in general use, are the Santoor, an instrument of hundred strings, the Saz-i-Kashmir a bowed instrument, the Sehtar, a stringed instrument, the Sarang a miniature bowed instrument, and percussion instruments like the Tabla (Dukra), noet and tumbakhnari. Majority of traditional music of Kashmir is in complete without the support of the musical instruments. In Sufiyana mosique (classical music of Kashmir), instruments are much more important, accompanied with traditional folk musical instrument like saz-e-Kashmir, Santoor, Dukra, Sehtar, the singers sing with full devotion and enthusiasm which is reflected in their flawless performance.

Keywords: santoor, sehtar, traditional instrument, Kashmir

Introduction: Santoor

Santoor is a very ancient musical instrument. The original name of this instrument was Shanta-tantri Veena which in Sanskrit language means Veena of 100 strings. Today, when we say Veena, it means specific instrument but in ancient times Veena was a common word for different kinds of string instruments. The first string instruments was called Pinaki-Veena [1]. The idea to create this instrument came from the bow and arrow, when arrow was released, it created a sound out of that idea was created a musical instrument and named it Pinaki Veena. Pinak in Sanskrit languages means the bow and the idea to create this instrument came from the bow and arrow, that is why it was named Pinaki Veena. In the western countries this instrument is called the Harp' and in india we have got a miniature form of the same instrument known as "swar mandal, which many vocalists these days use while singing. After Pinaki veena, in ancient india, we heard different kinds of veenas like Baan Veena, Tumbra veena, katyajini veena, rudra veena, saraswati veena and Shata-tantri veena.

In ancient scriptures of India there is a mention of shata tantric veena which is known today as "Santoor". This instrument got its present name "Santoor" with the influence of persian language in our country. References of Shat-tantri Veena is available at several places [2]. It might have been the original form of Santoor and in due course, might have changed to the present form. The techniques of performance linguistically analyzing "Shat" word must have travelled to 'Sat' and then to "Sant" and "tantri" to trir to and finally to "toor" both together must have become "Santoor" [3]. "Santoor" is made of mulberry wood. Some scholars believe it to be related to Shakt Sect. Accordingly to Shakts, triangular is a symbol of desire, knowledge and action. The base on which Santoor is placed is

also of triangular shape. The shape of Santoor is trapezoid. Its right side is called "burn" and sleft as 'jil'.



Fig 1

(Santoor)

There are 96 strings in santoor. It is a hollow box on top of which there are 24 bridges. Each bridge used to have four strings resting on it. To play this instrument, two wooden mallets are used. There are 12 knobs on the left side and 12 knobs on the right side, four wires are fixed on each knob. Twelve wires on right side are of brass and those on the left are of iron. The production of tune depends on the knobs. Twelve brass wires remind us of soft and sweet shakt emotion and the throbbing tune of iron wires reminds us of hard appearance of shiva himself. As already mentioned the number of wires is 96.

This instrument has been in use in the valley of Kashmir, in a typical type of music known as 'Sufiyana Mousique' which means a music connected to sufi philosophy. In this style mostly "Santoor" is used as an accompaniment instrument.

¹ The Nilamata Purana Vol. 1 by Ved Kumari P. 106

² Musical Instruments of India by B. Chatanya Deva P. 126-127

³ Traditional Music of Kashmir by Sunita Dar P. 60

The instrument Santoor occupied a prominent place in Sufiana music. Without this instrument Sufiana singing is not accomplished. It has possessed an important place even outside Kashmir. It creates a beautiful atmosphere and gives tranquility to soul. This instrument exhale enchanting sound and sound is like playing strings of heart. There is controversy whether this instrument is a native or abroad from but most of the scholars have their opinion that it has adopted from Iran during 15th century [4].

These days, it is gaining popularity even outside Kashmir. Its sweet tapping creates a feeling of romantic mood where as its soft tune remind of the tranquility of the other world, which suits the mystical temperament of sufiyana mosique. This instrument emits loud and enchanting sounds. It requires subtle sense of tuning on the part of the musicians who play it with both hands using two sticks of 24 centimeters called 'Kalam'. It is debatable whether Santoor is a native instrument of Kashmir or has been brought from abroad, opinions differ, some scholar view that it belongs to Iran.

During 1940's and 50's the best known sufiyana musicians in Kashmir valley were Mohammad Abdullah, Tibel Baqal and Mohammad Qaleen Baaf, who are known to be masters of santoor playing, of the time. Till then Santoor was not being used in Indian classical music.

The journey of Santoor changed in early 1950's when P.t Umadutt Sharma father of Shiv Kumar Sharma, who was a very versatile musicians, a performing vocalist and Dilruba player but equally well versed in playing Tabla and harmonium, saw this instrument in Kashmir and thought of introducing indian classical music on Santoor. He had an intensive training of music under pt. Bade Ramdasji the legendary vocalist of Banaras Gharana. In early 50's Pt. Umadutt Sharma was music incharge of Radio Station Srinagar for few years. During that period he did an intensive research on Santoor and started teaching his son Shiv Kumar Sharma the intricacies of Santoor.

Twenth century leading player of Santoor has been Ustad Tibet Bakal. At present Saz Nawaz, Kaleem, Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Mushtaq Ahmad are known for their style of playing. Pandit Bhajan Sopoori is making it popular on classical stage and popularizing it all over the world.

The Kashmiri Santoor music displays the rich musical heritage and traditional culture of the state. The classical music of Jammu and Kashmir, the melodious Kashmiri Santoor compositions, enchants and enralls the audience with its captivating music. Accompanied with the traditional musical instruments santoor, the talented classical music displays their exemplary artistic caliber.

The Kashmiri Santoor music, bears relics to enrich heritage of classical music of state. The enchanting melody of the traditional instrument of Santoor, fills the audience with the instant sense of pleasure and satisfaction, usually played on special festive occasions of the Kashmir. Santoor music displays the artistic inclination of the indigenous local inhabitants of the state.



Inherited from the glorious ancient era, the professional classical musicians and singers of Kashmir have earned a name for themselves in the international arena as well. The composers and singers of Kashmiri Santoor music performs with full dedication which is reflected in their exemplary and flawless performance.

The enchanting melodious notes of Santoor provides the audience a relief from the stress and strains of daily mundane life. The beautiful compositions of Santoor potrays the potentialities of the musicians of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sehtar

Many musical instruments originated in ancient Iran and were introduced to other countries some maintained their name other were renamed but still traceable. While some like "Tar" which means "String" in Persian has carried its name as a suffix to most string instruments that have developed since, like that Guitar, Sitar etc⁵.



Fig 2

(Sehtar)

The Sitar is a musical instrument which was invented by the Amir Khusru, a courtier of Alludin Khilji in the 13th century. The name sitar was derived from Persian "Sehtar" which means "Three strings" which the instrument originally had [6].

⁴ The Traditional music of Kashmir by Dr. Sunita Dhar P-51-65.

⁵ Persian music by Fari bovz Rahnamoon P.6

⁶ Traditional music of Kashmir Sunita Dhar P.50.

The Kashmiri Sehtar or Sitar is said to be original model of Indian Sitar. This instrument is now however, comparable to Indian sitar of these days and retain its originality. The Kashmiri Sehtar is the original instrument accompanying Sufiyana Kalaam or Mosique which came to Kashmir from central Asia: Sitar or Sehtar is widely used in Kashmir, in villages (especially in Wathora where jesters called Bhands live). Sufiyana musicians would use Kashmiri Sitar for accompaniment for this mosiqui and is meant for accompaniment for this purpose only.



Fig 3

Shabir Saznawaz playing Sehtar

Sehtar or Satonyeh is a three-cord instrument, which was converted into a four-cord instrument. It is, in general, an ancient and Gnostic instrument usually played at the gathering of dervishes most oftenly held at Khaneqahs (monasteries a house of Darveshes), which make the listener feel high. In view of its special vocal features, Sehtar is known as the instrument appealing to the listeners heart. It is simpler than other instruments both in appearance and the method of playing. Its low tune, compactness and tenderness are the main reason for its great appeal in the course of past centuries. It is made in various types and sizes including large, small, flat and Zir-abar Tars, and made in scrupled kasdami (in one piece). Sehtar is generally made from berry wood, while as some occasions made of pear or walnut wood. Its bowel is a pear-shaped semi-sphere, while its thin and delicate handle is tenderer than that of other instruments. The Sehtar is strummed by the nail of the right index finger.

It is well suited either for the amateur or the professional. It is not difficult for the amateur to learn to play simple melodies upon it, and at the same time it lends itself to all the subtle arts of the professional, whereby he can show his skill or the charm of the music.

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