



## A study of Kashmiri folk singing form “Vanvun” and “Laddishah”

Bilal Ahmed Dar

Research Scholar, Faculty of Music, Panjab University Chandigarh, India

### Abstract

India is land of cultural diversities, every region in India has its own form of folk music. This rich tradition of folk music is very much alive in not just rural India but also in some metros. Like other parts of the country, Kashmir has also a rich and pure socio cultural back ground, which is quite visible in its folk forms and folk lores.

Kashmir has been a grand arena of folk music, since time immemorial there have been poets, writers, Musicians, Dramatists, dancers etc, who have attained glory in the literacy and art world of Kashmir. From the very beginning Kashmiri people love singing and dancing and have always been a part of their literary culture. Festivals, fairs, marriages, receptions each have a particular folk style to suit the occasion. The folk songs of Kashmir has always played a vital role to communicate to the masses and acts as a medium of communication. It has always been a source to create social instincts, i.e. feelings of love and sympathy towards human beings. In essence folk songs of Kashmir is an expression of spontaneous and inspiring ideas that flow without any pre thought besides that there is a directness and simplicity in the narration, the ideas are concrete and specific the music is simple and therefore easy to learn and sing. The common man sings under the impact of grief or joy in most easy flowering and easy words. The beats being determined by the intensity of emotions.

The characteristic feature of Kashmiri folk songs like “Vanvun and Laddishah” is its direct mass appeal. It prompts participation of the listeners even if they are not trained in the lilting expression of a song or tune unconsciously they partake of the mood. These folk songs of Kashmir carries the message of nature and the mind and soul of the simple and pure Kashmiri people. It is serene and sustained. The rhythms are slow and controlled but not galloping. The distinguishing quality of Kashmiri folk songs is its bewitching charm and aesthetic merit, which makes it intimate and interesting. There is a balance in the combination and arrangement of notes. Spontaneity comes from influence of nature and way of life. These folk songs has a natural feel and depth in them, which becomes a source of spreading happiness and also filling the air with joy and mirth, through its wordings connected with its sweet melodies, these folk songs always keeps the audience spell bound and also gives them inspiration and motivation through the spontaneous creation of its enchanting and everlasting melodies. The folk songs of Kashmir not only depicts the melodic tradition of Kashmir but also carry the message of nature as well as the simple and pure life of Kashmiri people.

**Keywords:** vanvun, laddishah, isabandh, mantras, kangri, udat, anudat, swarit, Kashmiri language

### Introduction

“VANVUN” is a part of Kashmiri cultural legacy and it has played a vital role in maintaining the continuity of our culture from the Vedic period. It is a shared heritage of Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. Vanvun is a prayer in the form of folk music. It commences with a prayer to God. In simple way vanvun is form of folk music especially meant for marriages. Vanvun only belongs to the women folk. In this type of folk song no musical instrument is played with it. Vanvun is an oral literature accumulated over centuries in Kashmir and comprises of songs that have mass appeal. Both Hindus and Muslims have added distinct religious colour and aesthetic essence to this style of singing. It is believed that ‘VANVUN’ ha its origin from the Vedic period. In Vedic period the Ved mantras were recited in the epic form and the ascent and descent of those mantras were done on the directions of special signs, These signs were (UDAT, ANUDAT and SWARIT).

The wonderful thing is that the technique with which, the ascent & descent of Udat and Anudat are used for modulation in chanting of vedic mantras, the same procedure is applied by

the Hindu women while singing vanvun. There are different sets of vanvun songs for Muslims and Hindus. Songs of muslims wedding cover first few years of married life, while as songs sung at Hindu marriages are chants steeped in Classical Hinduism.

In this way there is no element of tribal music in it. But purely in a classical mode. The way Kashmiri Pandit women sings vanvun it seem as if they are chanting the Vedic mantras in a slow and steady way. It is believed that this style originated four thousand years ago.

In this way ‘vanvun’ has been a tool to preserve and carry forward our rich old traditions and customs. The subject matter of vanvun is a mixture of prayers, good wishes, happy, healthy and peaceful marital life and over all for the welfare of the bride groom and bride.

Kashmiri pandits used to go for extensive ‘VANVUN’ in marriage which started from Livvun function (house cleaning function) followed by ‘Krool Kharun’ (Decorating the main entrance colour fully). Vanvun is sung in chorus form, Its soulful and pleasing melody envelops the whole surrounding with continuous peace, prosperity and religious fervor.

Besides marriage there are many other rituals and merriments in Kashmiri, Hindu families where the practice of vanvun singing is done in the same way. They are as:- “DAPUN VANVUN, GARNAVAYA VANVUN, MANZI VANVUN, KROOR VANVUN, SHRAN VANVUN, DEVGUN VANVUN, AGNIKUND VANVUN, YAGROPAWIT VANVUN” ETC.

### Muslim Vanvun



Fig 1

The practice of singing ‘vanvun’ in Muslims is different from that of Hindus. They have a different pattern and fashion to sing vanvun songs. With the arrival of Islam in Kashmir vanvun also underwent some changes in order to suit the socio-religious aspirations of the Muslim section of Kashmiri society. The new thing that Muslims discovered and adopted in vanvun was “BISMILLAH” (i.e. I start with the name Allah) as an auspicious and suitable term, comparable for used Shoklan or Suklam of the Hindu language.

In all Muslims marriages vanvun songs always begins with the pious and soulful verses, like

“BISMILLAH KARITH HAMOVE VANVUNAYE”  
 “SABIBO AAZWALO SOONUYAI”

(In Kashmiri Language)

### Meaning

I start with the name of ALLAH let us begin the vanvun to invite the Almighty in order to shower grace and bless to this auspicious occasion.

In marriages ‘vanvun’ songs are sung during “Mehandiraat”, “Dastarbandhi” of the bride groom, “Nikahkhani” arrival of “Baraat” and departure of Bride. Some times this ‘vanvun’ is accompanied by burning of “ISABANDH” (sesame seeds) in a special type of “KANGRI” (kangri is an earthen jar of about 5-6 inches in diameter covered with a basket of wicker work). Actually this kind of tradition is considered as an auspicious practice in Muslims.

Muslim women sings Vanvun during marriage ceremonies which is really encouraging and praise worthy. Their style and

technique of arranging the couplets, modulation of voice and their expressions, hence everything is matchless and very presentable.

This kind of folk song is sung in such a way that the women first divide themselves into two groups, according to their age. One group sings the punch line of the vanvun song in a slow and pleasing way, and the other opposite group repeats the same line in the same manner, this practice is usually done in a standing mode, facing each other and holding each other’s back. While singing vanvun they also shows a slight foot movement by taking a step forward and then back word in order to maintain the alleviation of tone and laya.

At the reception of ‘BARAAT’ ladies sings vanvun with full zeal and enthusiasm in order to give honor and reverence to the bride groom & bride. The songs (Vanvun) which are sung during this moment pertains to describe the prince and fairy qualities of the bride groom and bride respectively. Such kind of vanvun songs lends grace and a holy aura to this auspicious ceremony.

There are hundreds of vanvun songs which are attributed by the women folk in a sweet and artistic way during the different phases of a marriage, they are;

1. TOMUL-CHHATUN (clearing of rice).
2. MASMU-CCHRAVAN (opening of the hair of girl before marriage)
3. MEHANDI RAAT
4. YENIVOL (arrival of groom and guests).
5. NIKAH KHAWANI. ETC

Apart from the melody of its verses, Vanvun has also all the flavor of satire and comical wit to impart it the important and highest status. Vanvun is considered to be the actual reflection of the social kaleidoscope, in the contemporary times. A Muslim marriage without vanvun is just like a flower without fragrance. This type of folk song in Kashmir has survived as a part of folk literature essentially preserved and protected by the women folk, through a simple easy and pure oral tradition. In addition to all this vanvun songs are also sung during an auspicious function of “ZARKASY” (i.e. removing hair of child) and also in an important celebration of circumcision. During this time the family arrange feasts, and a special dishes in the form of “WAZWAN” is also prepared.

Vanvun which is sung during these functions contains the verses of blessings prayers and good wishes for the child.

### Examples of Mulsim Vanvun Songs are as

“GUTCHH HAVAAL KOERMAKH PEER–E-PEERANUS”  
 “SUYEE KARIE RAATCHH AATH SHURE PAANUS”

(In Kashmiri Language)

### Meaning

Go I entrust you to the custody of our greet peer. He alone shall protect your child like being.

“KADALUE TOAR MAHARAAZ”  
 “AABUS GUV GOOR GOOR”  
 “AASE DOAP RANG BILBUL MA AAV”

(In Kashmiri Language)

**Meaning**

The bride groom crossed the bridge and set water underneath in wave motion it occurred to us that the colorful bulbul had arrived.

**“VANVUN” Song with text, meaning and Notation**

Text : Jeep chaye Soansuenz  
 Handle Sung Latuk  
 Aawaye Junglatuk Tehsildaar-  
 Bootas Peth Chuy Patloon Naleyai  
 Schu Kassu Pareyai Ashiq Goakh  
 (In Kashmiri Language)

This marriage chorus is sung by Muslim women at the time of girl's marriage. The lines are addressed to the bride groom who is arriving. These lines imply that the jeep in which the bride groom is coming is made of gold and its handle is made of iron. The groom seems to be looking like a 'Tehsildaar' (The Tehsildaar held the position of the king of the area). He is coming from the jungle. Next line gives the description of his shoes and pants. He is looking gorgeous and has been enchanted by the beauty of the fairy i.e. the bride.

**Notation**

**Table 1**

X			0		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Sa	Re	Re <sup>Ga</sup>	GaRe	Ga	Sa
Je	-P	Chay	son	-u	Sunz
Re	Ga	Sa <sup>Re</sup>	Sa	Sa	Sa
Han	dle	Sung	La	-	tuk
Re	Ga	MaRe	GaRe	Ga	Sa
Aa	V	Jung	La	-	tuk
Re	Ga	Sa	Sa	Sa	Sa
Te	ha	Sil	da	-	r
Sa	Re	Re <sup>Ga</sup>	GaRe	Ga	Sa
Bo	o	Tas	Pet	hu	chuy
Re	Ga	Sa <sup>Re</sup>	Sa	Sa	Sa
Pa	tu	Loan	Na	-	li
Re	Ga	MaRe	GaRe	Ga	Sa
Chu	ka	Su	Pa	re	yai
Re	Ga	Sa	Sa	Sa	Sa
Aa	-	Shiq	Go	-	kh

**“Laddishah”**



**Fig 2**

Ladishah is a literary term which has multiple meaning. Ladi means a row or line; shah has been added after wards with the advent of Muslim rulers.

Initially the term inclines us towards the folk artist who opts for comical, critical and tragically verse. The presentation given by the very artist is itself known as “LADISHAH”. The verses used in ‘ladishah’ basically belong to some known or unknown poets and sometimes the artist himself created a new thing out of the already present verses by interpolating it. So the term has three assets, viz- The artist, the presentation and the genre.

In this way ‘ladishah’ becomes a hotchpotch. The presentation accompanies with a dim sort of music on interval basis.

“Ladishah” is a satirical song, which reflects the society’s condition, from every aspect. This type of folk song makes people to laugh. It entertains them, but at the same time it is a satire on the existing government.

“Ladishah” has a very significant historical back ground. The said genre especially flourished during the region of imperialism and colonialism, when our state was under the control of Non- Residents or out siders. In those grim days “ladishah” used to provide some sort of entertainment and pleasure to the native Kashmiri’s even though the pleasure was temporary. Ladishah used to wear some typical things such as, turban on his head, a hanging piece of cotton cloth, white in colour, on his right shoulder a long white robe traditional sort of Kashmiri sleeper made of dry paddy and long moustaches, all these typical things were the identity of a "Ladishah".

As soon as ‘Ladishah’ entered into the streets of a village, or some ones courtyard or in the paddy fields, it firstly hit the musical note on the musical instrument known in the past as “Trum-Trum” and now a days known as “DEHRA”. In a very short span of time almost the whole village folk assembled there to entertain themselves with the lively performance of the ladishah. At the accomplishment of the ladishah performance, the singer (LADISHAH) was rewarded with handful of rice grains etc. Various scholars have given different perceptions about this humorous and entertaining ladishah. It is said that in the history of Kashmir there was a king whose name was MUKUNDA, unfortunately his ears were very big as ears of a buffallow. In order to hide his ears he used to hide them with a huge turban. This secret was only known to his barber. But unfortunately the barber died as a result the king engaged a new barber and directed him not to disclose the secret of his big ears to anyone. He never knew that the new barber was “LADISHAH” the barber completely disobeyed his majesty and the secret was exposed to the public like this;

“Maankan Rajas Mooshe Hinde kan”  
 “Kan Chee Yeateyah Youtah won”  
 “Maankan Rajas Mooshe Hinde Kan”

(In Kashmiri Language)

**Meaning**

King Mukund’s ears are of the size of ears of a buffallow. Ears are as big as huge forest.

Ladishah a unique kind of ballad brings out wit and worldly wisdom of Kashmiri people. Ladishah ballads are sung by the

Ministrels in one single tune accompanied by the music created by stirring the iron rings as an iron rod.

Most of the researches suggests, that ladishash might have been a village “Faqir” (mendicant) who hailed from “Ler” a village in district ‘Pulwama’. The surname shah is still used in rural Kashmir for the folk minstrel bhand or dooms. In all probability since the village “ler” falls in flood prone zone area, and due to the heavy devastation made by floods some elderly members of the Shah family (Professional folk singers) of “Ler” village might have composed a poem describing the destruction caused by the flood waters. A legendary figure Nishat Ansari considers that ladishash is not at all the contribution of folk literature while as famous scholar Dr. Farooq Fayaz keeps ladishash with in the domain of folk literature. Due to containment of satire, sarcasm and humour it is a popular form of folk music, especially in rural areas.

In the encyclopedia of Indian Literature it has been mentioned that ‘ladishash’ is basically an exemplary type of folk literature. These types of compositions are presented by the romantic type of artists who love roaming and adventures. Some authors are of the opinion that ‘ladishash’ stands for both the artist as well as the genre. The presentation of the ‘ladishash’ is called “Larinama”.

“Ladishah” is a song brief in nature which comments on various economical, culture and constitutional issues. It is basically verses meant for singing and presentation. Some time also carries political themes such as political instability, political crisis and political inequality. It was mostly based on the entertainment purposes but at the same time it was used as a tool for social reformation and social consciousness. Actually ‘Ladishah’ in Kashmir is named to a male person who wanders from place to place, playing his musical instrument ‘Dehra’ entertains the people in the farm fields, play grounds, streets and finally into ones courtyard where he used to sit on the “verenda” and makes people aware on the issues pertaining to the happening or tragedies in the society by interpolating the verses and presents them in a very humorous charming and entertaining way. The prior thing for “ladishah” is that it should possess humour as well as criticism. It is very obligatory Ladishah to apply continuity of thought. Ladishah must possess a theme carried throughout the whole “larinama” some of the ‘larinamas’ used to be comic in nature.

There was a time indeed when majority of the Kashmiri’s were illiterate and same was the case of the folk artists. Those artists presented their performances without the support of piece of paper. Memorization is also important in the sense that it provides opportunity for the artists to use good body gestures and facial expressions. The language of “Ladishah” should be simple and lucid which would become easy for viewers and listeners to comprehend. So simplicity of the language is the hall mark of ladishah.

If ‘ladishah’ is the genre of folk-poetry then it should be passed to the next generations. It needs patronage from the government and other private institutions of the state. In Kashmir encyclopedia it has been mentioned that ladishah is that composed verse which a folk artist sings in front of a huge audience while playing the musical instrument DEHRA. It is poetic in theme but in treatment it focuses on comic,

critical and tragically elements.

### Ladishah song with text, meaning and Notation

#### Text

Hawayi Jahaz Aav Mulke Kashmir

Yemov Vuchh Temov Koar Toab Taqseer.

(In Kashmiri Language)

#### Meaning

The song depicts the reaction of the public in Kashmir, on seeing the aeroplane for the first time.

#### Notation

Table 2

X			O		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Sa	Pa	Pa	Sa	Pa	Pa
Ha	Wa	Yi	Ja	haz	Aav
Sa	Pa	Pa	Pa	Pa	Sapa
Mul	Ke	kash	mi	-	r
Sa	Pa	Pa	Sa	Pa	Pa
Ye	Mo	vuch	Te	mov	kor
Sa	Pa	Pa	Pa	Pa	Sapa
Toa	Bu	Taq	se	-	r

#### References

1. Deva BC. Musical Instruments, Published By The Director National Book Trust Indi A- 5 Green Park New Delhi, 16.
2. Dhar Suneeta. The Traditional Music of Kashmir, Kanishka Publishers Distributors, New Delhi, 2003.
3. Pandit Mohd Amin, Festivals of Kashmir, Srinagar, 1997.
4. Bamzai PNK. Cultural and Political History of Kashmir New Delhi, 1994.
5. Qalandar Qaisar, Hamari Moosiqui, Gulrez, Publication, Jawahar Nagar, 198, Srinagar, 1995.
6. Saqi Moti Lal Koshur Loka Barth, Cultural Academy Srinagar, 1998.
7. Surjit S singh. The great people of Jammu and Kashmir.
8. Vir Ram Avatar, Theory of Indian Music New Delhi, 1980.
9. Najar G Nabi. Kashmiri folk literature Anhaar University research journal, Kashmiri department, University of Kashmir.
10. Dr. Fayaz Farooq, A study in Historical perspective.
11. Dutta Amresh, Encyclopedia of Indian literature.
12. Aatash G Nabi. Sheeraza Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art Culture & Languages Srinagar.