

Wanvun: The leading folk style of Kashmiri music

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Abstract

Kashmiri music has evolved through many historic phases. Lying in middle of South East Asia; it absorbed a permissible cultural impact in its language and culture. A good influence of Persian, Arabic and Sino-Indian languages induce rich cultural synthesis in Kashmiri music. Persian and Sanskrit are mainly overlapped in a modified form in Kashmiri language. Thus Kashmiri music is embedded with Persian Sanskrit and Indian music strands.

Keywords: Wanvun, folk style, Kashmiri music

Introduction

Wanvun is the chorus folk song sung by a group of women singers without the accompaniment of musical instruments. Wanvun is of the oldest folk forms of Kashmir. Wanvun is a simple but attractive folk song of Kashmir. The word Wanvun means to speak up or to say something on the eve of special occasion. It plays a leading role in all the folk forms of Kashmir e.g. Rouf, Chakri, Nend Gevun etc. Wanvun is not possible for every woman to sing this type of folk song. Wanvun is actually a blessing in the form of folk song. Its verses are directly connected to God. Knowledgeable and old learned ladies were specially invited for such an occasion. There is a vast treasure of Wanvun poetry in Kashmir and Kashmiri women use this poetry in the form of singing Wanvun, mostly sung in marriages.

Background

Kashmiri Wanvun is distinguished in two main categories. One is the Wanvun of Kashmiri Pandits or Hindus and the other is the Wanvun of Kashmiri Muslims. According to Walter R. Lawrence, in his book, "The Valley of Kashmir", it is generally accepted fact that upto about the beginning of the 14th century the population of the valley was Hindu and about the middle and of this century the mass of the people was converted to Islam through the efforts of Shah-i-Hamdan and his followers^[1]. After conversion many things changed in the traditional Wanvun of Kashmiri Muslims. They don't follow the practice of Wanvun in the same fashion as the Hindu in Kashmir do. Their style of singing is different from Hindus. Muslims changed the style and subject of Wanvun from the original. The Muslim songs are weighed with Persian words, where as those of the Hindus have Sanskrit vocabulary and the tunes recall Vedic chants. The quantity of Kashmiri Hindu Wanvun is much more than that of Muslims Kashmiri Muslims.

Style of Singing:-

i) Mussalmanan Heund Wanvun

As already described above, the Wanvun (Chorus folk songs)

sung by Kashmiri muslim women, or Wanvun concerned to Kashmiri muslims is referred as Mussalmanan heund Wanvun. It can be further divided into three shapes or parts.

1. Khandar Wanvun (Marriage songs)
2. Khatanhal Wanvun (Circumcision songs)
3. Zarkasay Wanvun (Initial Child Hair shaving songs)



Fig 1: Kashmiri Muslim ladies during Wanvun in their traditional dresses

1. Khandar Wanvun (Marriage Songs)

Wanvun displayed or sung by Kashmiri Muslim women during marriage process of Kashmiri Boy or Girl is referred as Khandar Wanvun. Kashmiri Muslim marriages are full of Wanvun from beginning to the end.

The singing style of Muslim wanvun almost remains same in all types of wanvun whether it is Khandar Wanvun, Khatanhal Wanvun or Zarkasay Wanvun irrespective of varied poetry. Muslim ladies sung wanvun in Madhya laya. The swaras in this particular type of singing remains uniform in all the styles. In this type of singing Ga is komal. Ga and Re swaras are mostly used in this style in ascending as well as in descending order. Only three swaras are used in muslims wanvun i.e. Sa, Re (Shudh) and Ga (Komal). In every occasion they start their Wanvun in the name of Allah e.g. in the following lines:-

*"Bismillah Karith Hemai Wanvune
 Sahibo Azwalo Sonuyai
 Roshi Roshi Karsai Poshi Wathronui
 Sahibo Azwalo Soniyeh"*

¹ The Valley of Kashmir by Walter R. Lawrence p. 302

*Nabi Saeban hyota sakhronui
Sakhrith aawa ghare sonuyai
(In Kashmiri language)*

Meaning

With the name of God, we begin chorus song,

Composition

Table 1

Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	Sa	-	-
Bis	me	la	ka	-	rith	He	mai	wan	wo	-	nui
Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	-	-	-
Sa	hi	boa	az	wa	lo	so	oa	nu	ye	-	-

2. Khatanhal Wanvun

In Muslims the most important ceremony related to the circumcision of male child is known as Khatanhal or Khutna. The Khutna is generally performed during the early years of age among Muslims. It is an obligatory practice according to Islamic Sharia and it is binding upon rich and poor parents to undertake the Khatanhal of their male child [2]. Muslim ladies sing Wanvun with great rejoice in this ceremony and is conveyed in this folk song.

*“wastai karo kar khabar deri
Sani gari che wamed wari” [3]*

(In kashmiri Language)

Meaning: Oh Surgeon you are cautioned to be serious to your job,
Gifts awaited in abundance for you.

Composition

Table 2

Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	-	-	-
was	tai	ka	ro	-	kar	kha	bar	da	-	-	ri
Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	-	-	-
Sa	ni	ga	ri	-	chei	wom	med	wa	-	-	ri

3. Zarkasay Wanvun

Zarkasay (First hair removal) is an important cheerful occasion related to the child. Zarkasay is performed both in Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. Kashmiri Muslims of the valley prefer to hold this function outdoors in some Sufi shrines like the shrine of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani at Chrar or in Srinagar city at Dargah Hazratbal shrine or else. Likewise practiced by other Muslims of the world, Kashmiri Muslims also remove the hair of both boy and girl child after a year and a half. This function is performed with great enthusiasm and great rejoice. However the same function is also performed by many families at their own homes demonstrating similar formalities. On this occasion they arrange feasts, offer charity in cash amounts /donating

*O’ Prophet^(PBUH) come to ours today,
For you laying serene credence of floral welcome,
O’ Prophet^(PBUH) come to ours today,
The noble prophet ^(PBUH) is about to leave,
dignified came to our home with a gay.*

livestock particularly home reared sheep and cocks. After the religious ceremony sing Wanvun e.g. in the following lines:

*“Bismillah Karith Zarkasayo
Ismi Azam Parayo...”*

(In Kashmiri language)

Meaning

With the Most Beneficent name of Allah we have sought auspicious day for your hair removal.

Composition

Table 3

Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	-	-	-
Bis	la	ka	-	rith	zar	kasa	yo	da	-	-	-
Sa	Re	GaRe	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	GaRe	GaRe	Sa	-	-	-
Is	me	aa	za	-	m	pa	ra	yo	-	-	o

ii. Batte Wanvun

It can be defined as the Wanvun (Chorus folk songs) sung by Kashmiri Pandits or Hindus women, or Wanvun concerned to Kashmiri Hindus is referred as Batte Wanvun.

There is an abundant reserved storage of Batte Wanvun than Kashmiri Muslim Wanvun. The most important thing in Kashmiri Pandit community is that they reserved, followed and practiced their age old customs till date irrespective of odd cultural transformations. The heritage of Wanvun maintains the continuity of Kashmiri culture from Vedic period through Mahabhart and Ramayana etc [4]. Being the speakers of same language, Muslims and Hindus vary to a greater extent in Wanvun. The use of Sanskrit and Persian involves difference in musical compositions, ideological themes, symbols and metaphors also. Muslims use Persian words while as Kashmiri Pandits use Sanskrit words. Kashmiri Pandits sing Wanvun in Vilambhit (slow) Lay and Kashmiri Muslims sing Wanvun in Madhya Lay (medium speed). After conversion, Muslims changed their style of singing Wanvun. But Hindus follow their ancient traditional Wanvun. However the paradigm, theme and spirit is always similar between Hindus and Muslim Wanvun. On every occasion Kashmiri Pandits welcome Lord

² Farooq Fayaz (A Study in Historical Perspective) Folklore Kashmir p. 205.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Traditional music of Kashmir by Dr. Sunita Dhar p.10

Ganesha to participate at the outset of every ceremony e.g. in the following lines.

"OM Shree Ganeshai Namha"

Meaning

These lines have been commenced to Lord Ganesha and the results are obviously auspicious.



Fig 2: Kashmiri Pandit ladies during Wanvun in their traditional dresses

The laya of Batte wanvun is vilambhit, (very much slower) than muslims, the laya and swaras remains uniform in all types of wanvun which are sung during different ceremonies of Batte Wanvun like marriage ceremony, Yegnopavit, Zarkasay etc.

Swaras which are used in Batte Wanvun i.e., Sa, Re Re Ga Ga, Ma and Ni.. In this style of singing many pauses are taken which is really soothing the ears. Batte Wanvun is further divided into the following three parts.

1. Khandar Wanvun or Lagen Wanvun (Marriage songs)
2. Yegnopavit Wanvun (Songs sung on thread ceremony)
3. Zarkasay wanvun (Initial Child Hair shaving songs)

Khander Wanvun (Marriage songs)

Wanvun exhibited or sung during marriage process of Pandit Boy or Girl is referred as Batte Wanvun. Wedding or Khander Wanvun can be sub-divided into the following Wanvun components meant for the particular instance of the marriage process e.g, Gandun wanvun, Dapnas wanvun Shranas wanvun, Devgun wanvun etc.

Yegnopavit Wanvun

Yegnopavit is an important ceremony of Kashmiri Pandits and is related to the boy child. Yegnopavit was called the "Wapnayam" in ancient times and was derived from Sanskrit [5] means (to go forward). In Kashmiri language, it is also called Mekhal or "Yoni" (which is made of cotton thread) when Pandit boy has attained the age of eight years as per the ancient belief and before he attains the age of twelve years; he must become a true Brahman. On this day, important function derives its name from the sacred thread Yegnopavit. Without this ceremony, the Brahman is not looked upon as perfect Brahmin in the caste system

"Tan kemi laji petren te mamin
Jaman chei poat zebani
Pate bronth wuchyo wasudev razan
Maman khorkho kochai peth..."

(In kashmiri Language)

Meaning

From your childhood who has taken care of you,
Your costume is adding beauty to your personality,
Lord Vasudeva is staring at you from every angle,
Your uncle has offered his lap to you.

Composition

Table 4

Sa	Sa	Re	MaGa	Re	Sa	-
Ta	N	E	K	E	m	-
Sa	Sa	Re	MaGa	Re	Sa	-
La	E	J	I	-	-	e
Ni	Ni	Ni	Sa	Re	GaMaRe	Sa
Pet	Ren	Te	M	A	-	mn

Zarkasay Wanvun

For Kashmiri Pandits, this ceremony is related to the male child only. The ceremony of shaving the child's head is called "Zarkasay" and they prefer to hold this ceremony outside in some famous temples of Kashmir, like Tulmul, Shankeracharya or else. During this ceremony Kashmiri Pandit ladies sing Wanvun and the lines of Wanvun which goes as:-

"Zar Kasith Drakh Obiri Tali Siriyo
Gobur Chukh Wasudev Razunye
Long Heth Dimyo Khor bo Darmas
Brahman Zanmas Namaskar I [6]

(In kashmiri language)

Composition

Table 5

Sa	Sa	Re	MaGa	Re	Sa	-
Za	r	E	kae	si	Th	-
Sa	Sa	Re	MaGa	Re	Sa	-
Dr	a	A	kh	-	-	e
Ni	Ni	Ni	Sa	Re	GaMaRe	Sa
Obre	tal	Si	r	yo	-	e

Meaning

O' Sun, thou appeared from the clouds,
You are the son of King Vasudeva.
Cloths and blade I Pay to Dharma
Saying Namaskar (Greeting) to Brahman Birth

Hence Wanvun is an indispensable part particularly of kashmiri marriages and generally of other ceremonies like Yegnopavit, zarkasay, circumcision etc. It tremendously help towards understanding, the different facets of Kashmir social life. The songs illuminate the institution of marriage. No study

⁵ Kashren Batan Hind Rasam-Te-Rewah by Somnath Dhar p-31.

⁶ Kashiren Batan hind RasamTi Rewaj by Somnath Pandit P-29.

of kashmiri society can be complete, unless there is reference to this rich genre of kashmiri folk literature wanvun.

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