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Mystics and Muqams: Tracing the Historical Evolution of Sufiana Mausiqi

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Abstract: Sufiana Mausiqi, the courtly choral music of the Kashmir Valley, occupies a singular place in South Asian musicology as a tradition shaped at the confluence of Perso-Central Asian muqam theory, Hindustani time-cycle practice, and the devotional idiom of Kashmiri Sufism. This paper traces the historical evolution of Sufiana Mausiqi from its formative period under the Kashmir Sultanate, through Mughal, Afghan, and Dogra patronage, to its present precarious survival, and attempts a critical rather than purely descriptive account of the forces that have shaped it. Drawing on ethnomusicological scholarship, fieldwork-based studies from Kashmiri researchers, and comparative work on Central Asian maqam traditions, the paper examines the gharana system of transmission, the internal structural grammar of the muqam, the gendered politics of performance embodied in the now-suppressed hafiza tradition, and the institutional and digital efforts currently directed at safeguarding the genre. It argues that Sufiana Mausiqi's survival has never rested on a stable, singular authentic form but on successive renegotiations between courtly patronage, religious reform, colonial and postcolonial statecraft, and community memory. The paper concludes that ongoing revival initiatives, including a pending proposal for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage recognition, need to engage this history of contestation rather than treat the tradition as a static relic awaiting rescue

Keywords: Sufiana Mausiqi, Kashmir, muqam, Sufism, ethnomusicology, intangible cultural heritage, gharana.

1. Introduction

The classical music of India is conventionally narrated through the twin axes of the Hindustani and Carnatic traditions, an emphasis that has left several regional art-music systems under-examined in the wider musicological literature. Sufiana Mausiqi, the courtly ensemble music of the Kashmir Valley, is among the most striking of these overlooked traditions. Its name fuses "Sufiana," derived from Sufism and signifying the mystical, with "Mausiqi," the Perso-Urdu term for music; together the compound denotes a genre understood by its practitioners and by scholars as, quite literally, mystical music [1]. Structurally, it is a choral ensemble form built on the muqam, a modal-melodic concept closely related to the maqam systems of Persia and Central Asia, yet inflected by centuries of contact with Hindustani classical practice [1], [3].

This paper sets out to do more than restate what is already a well-rehearsed historical sketch in the existing literature: the arrival of Islam and Sufism in the fourteenth century, courtly patronage under the Kashmir Sultanate, subsequent decline, and a present tense of crisis. That sketch appears, in broadly similar form, across almost every published account of the genre from the last decade [1], [2], [3], [5]. The more useful task, and the one attempted here, is to read that historical arc critically: to ask what work the recurring narrative of "vanishing tradition" performs, how the gharana system and the muqam taxonomy that scholars treat as timeless in fact carry visible marks of later institutional construction, and how gendered exclusion most starkly in the banning of the female hafiza dancer has been written out of, or only lightly gestured toward, in most descriptive accounts.

The available scholarship on Sufiana Mausiqi remains comparatively thin next to that on Hindustani or Carnatic music, a gap noted by several of the field's own practitioner-scholars [1], [2]. Much of the documentation that exists has been produced by Kashmiri researchers working from oral testimony, fieldwork interviews with the surviving masters (ustads), and a handful of

primary historical chronicles, chiefly Kalhana's Rajatarangini and the later Persian-language court histories of the Sultanate period [3]. International ethnomusicology has engaged with the tradition only occasionally, most substantially through Jozef Pacholczyk's monograph-length study and subsequent comparative essay situating Sufiana Musiqi alongside the Uyghur On Ikki Muqam of Xinjiang [4], [8], [9]. This paper draws on both strands the fieldwork-heavy Kashmiri scholarship and the comparative ethnomusicological literature while foregrounding a critical reading that the existing corpus, understandably focused on documentation and salvage, has tended to leave underdeveloped.

The discussion proceeds in nine further sections. It begins by defining the conceptual architecture of Sufiana Mausiqi and distinguishing it from the frequently conflated category of Sufiana Kalam. It then traces the genre's historical evolution across four periods pre-Islamic antecedents, the Sultanate genesis, the Mughal-Afghan-Dogra sequence, and the post-1947 rupture before turning to a comparative structural analysis of the muqam system, an account of the gharana tradition and its sociology of transmission, a critical treatment of gender and the hafiza, an assessment of the contemporary crisis, and finally a critical appraisal of ongoing revival efforts, including the digital and institutional interventions of the past five years.

2. Conceptual Foundations: Defining Sufiana Mausiqi

Sufiana Mausiqi is a vocal ensemble genre in which, typically, five to twelve musicians sing together to the accompaniment of the santoor, the sehtar, the saz-e-Kashmir, and a percussion instrument known locally as wasul or dokra [1], [3], [6]. The santoor, a hammered trapezoidal zither, functions as the lead instrument, both establishing the melodic identity of a given muqam and directing the ensemble's transitions between sections [3], [6]. Unlike Hindustani classical music, which organizes melody around the raga, Sufiana Mausiqi is organized around the muqam, plural muqamat, a term and concept it shares with the wider Perso-Arabic and Central Asian art-music world even as its specific repertoire of muqamat has developed a distinctly Kashmiri character [1].

A recurring terminological confusion in both popular and some scholarly writing conflates Sufiana Mausiqi with Sufiana Kalam. Waseem Ahmad Bhat's fieldwork-based study is unusually precise on this point, noting that Sufiana Kalam refers only to the corpus of mystical Sufi poetic texts largely in Persian and Kashmiri, drawn from poets such as Jalaluddin Rumi, Hafiz Shirazi, and Mahmud Gami while Sufiana Mausiqi denotes the musical setting and performance practice built around those texts [3]. The distinction matters analytically because it separates two different objects of preservation: a textual-literary corpus that survives reasonably well in print, and a performance tradition, dependent on oral transmission and a shrinking pool of practitioners, which is considerably more fragile.

The internal architecture of a Sufiana Mausiqi performance follows a fairly fixed sequence. It opens with the shakal, a preludial passage broadly analogous to the alap or chalan of Hindustani music, in which the santoor player establishes the identity of the muqam to be performed [3]. This is followed by the muqam proper, itself divided into a zamin (the opening melodic line) and a nimwoj (the second line), the two repeated as a refrain called baazghasht, before the composition proceeds to its second section, the bathe, corresponding structurally to the antara of Hindustani song forms [3]. Tempo organization likewise echoes, without simply replicating, Hindustani practice: a slow nimdor section, sung in cycles such as the thirty-two matra Mukhamas, precedes a faster tempo in cycles including chapandas and doyeka, with the whole sometimes closing in a syllabic, non-lexical passage called tilana, cognate with the Hindustani tarana [3].

It is tempting to read this architecture, as some of the descriptive literature implicitly does, as a fixed grammar mirroring a Sufi trajectory from stillness to ecstatic intensity. That reading is plausible but should be advanced cautiously: none of the primary Kashmiri sources consulted for this paper make the analogy explicit, and it risks imposing a tidy symbolic narrative onto what practitioners themselves describe in more technical, performance-practical terms [3]. A more defensible critical observation, developed further below, concerns the relationship between the elite, named taxonomy of muqamat that scholars catalogue and the far more fluid, orally improvised practice through which musicians actually realize them a tension Rachel Harris identifies as a general feature of Central Asian maqam systems rather than a Kashmiri peculiarity [4].

3. Historical Evolution of Sufiana Mausiqi

Pre-Islamic and Early Foundations

Accounts of Kashmiri musical culture prior to the arrival of Islam draw chiefly on two textual sources: the Nilamatapurana, a religious chronicle dated to roughly the sixth to eighth century CE, and Kalhana's twelfth-century Rajatarangini [3]. Both texts describe music and dance as integral to temple ritual, mentioning professional temple dancers known as Nartakis and instrumental performances at royal courts; Rajatarangini specifically records a dance concert involving a hundred female performers before King Jalauka, son of Ashoka, at a Buddhist temple [3]. Archaeological corroboration comes from fourth-century terracotta tiles excavated at Harwan, near Srinagar, depicting musicians, including a female drummer and a veena player [6].

These sources establish that organized musical practice long predates the fourteenth-century arrival of Islam in Kashmir, but they do not establish continuity of repertoire, notation, or performance idiom between that ancient practice and the Sufiana Mausiqi that later emerged. Existing scholarship, including Bhat's own account, tends to narrate this material as a prehistory of Sufiana Mausiqi, folding ancient temple music, medieval Sanskrit musical treatises attributed to Sultan Shamsuddin Shahmiri's court, and the eventual Perso-Central Asian synthesis into a single continuous lineage [3]. This is a common move in heritage narration generally the retrospective construction of a long, unbroken genealogy for a form that in fact crystallized much later and from substantially different materials and it should be read as a rhetorical and political framing of cultural continuity in a contested region, rather than as musicological evidence in the strict sense. What can be said with more confidence is that Kashmir possessed an active, courtly, and religiously embedded musical culture well before the Sultanate period, providing fertile ground for the eventual grafting of Perso-Central Asian modal theory onto indigenous practice.

The Sultanate Period and the Genesis of Sufiana Mausiqi (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)

The consolidation of Muslim rule in Kashmir under the Shah Mir dynasty, and the parallel spread of Sufism through both migrant Persian and Central Asian mystics and the indigenous Rishi order associated with Nund Rishi, set the conditions for a decisive transformation of the region's musical culture [3]. Persian gradually displaced Sanskrit as the language of administration and high culture, and Persian and Central Asian musicians began arriving at the Kashmiri court in significant numbers [3]. Bhat records that Sultan Shamsuddin Shahmiri patronized music and commissioned musical treatises, though the works themselves, Sammy Matrika and Cutnih Mahatma, no longer survive [3].

The reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420–1470), remembered in Kashmiri historiography as Budshah, is treated across the literature as the formative period of Sufiana Mausiqi proper. Contemporary and near-contemporary chronicles, notably Abul Fazl's sixteenth-century Ain-i-Akbari and Srivara's Zaina-Rajatarangini, describe a school of music at Zain-ul-Abidin's court staffed by musicians from Iran and Turan, credited with introducing elements of Persian and Central Asian musical theory that scholars believe underlie the muqam system as later codified [3]. His son Haider Shah is remembered as a skilled flautist trained by court musicians, and his grandson Hasan Shah maintained, according to the chronicles, a court of some twelve hundred musicians a figure that, whatever its literal accuracy, signals the scale of investment successive Sultanate rulers made in musical patronage [3].

The later Chak dynasty (1555–1586) is credited with a further, and musicologically significant, innovation. Yousuf Shah Chak is remembered as the inventor of the muqam Raast-e-Kashmir, and his queen, the poet Habba Khatun, is frequently credited with a structural variation on the Persian muqam Rast-e-Farsi that produced this distinctively Kashmiri mode [2], [3], [6]. This attribution recurs with remarkable consistency across the secondary literature, appearing in fieldwork studies conducted decades apart [2], [3], [6], which suggests it functions less as a contested historical claim than as a stable origin myth within the tradition's own self-understanding. Such royal or romantic attribution of a specific musical innovation to a named ruler or poet-consort is a familiar device in South Asian musical historiography more broadly comparable, for instance, to legendary attributions of ragas to Mughal-era court musicians and should be read as evidence of how the tradition legitimizes and periodizes itself, rather than as a verifiable musicological fact in the way that, say, a dated manuscript would be.

Mughal, Afghan, and Dogra Patronage: Continuity through Rupture

The subsequent history of Sufiana Mausiqi is best understood not as steady continuity but as a sequence of ruptures, each followed by a distinct mode of institutional re-attachment. Musicians and musicologists interviewed in Bhat's study attribute the emergence of the gharana system the hereditary schools of musical lineage central to the tradition's present organization to the Mughal period, but Bhat is careful to note that "there is not any written proof to bear testimony to this fact," treating it instead as an oral tradition among present-day practitioners [3]. This is a genuinely important admission, because so much of the authority claimed for the gharana system rests on assumptions of antiquity that the tradition's own best-documented historian cannot substantiate.

During Afghan rule, beginning around 1753, Sufiana Mausiqi lost state patronage as the new rulers adopted a more religiously conservative posture, and the tradition survived this period chiefly through the protection of Sufi shrines and a small number of culturally invested elite families rather than through court sponsorship [3]. Patronage was restored, and reorganized, under the Dogra dynasty following the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar. It was specifically under Maharaja Pratap Singh that Sufiana Mausiqi regained court favor, and it was during this Dogra period that the four gharanas surviving today Ramzan Joo, sometimes called the "Gwalior gharana" of Kashmir for its foundational status; Kamal Bhat, notable for its synthesis with the Bhand Pather folk theatre tradition; Qaleenbaft, an offshoot of Ramzan Joo; and Setari, the sole surviving gharana of southern Kashmir took their present institutional form [3].

A detail too easily lost in accounts that frame Sufiana Mausiqi as an exclusively Islamic or Sufi practice is the participation of Kashmiri Pandit families in its highest ranks of practice and patronage. Bhat records that the Sopori lineage, beginning with Pandit Shankar Pandit of Sopore, produced generations of Sufiana masters, including the internationally recognized santoor player Pandit Bhajan Sopori, and that Pandit Khera Kak Munshi was among the tradition's most prominent patrons, known for hosting regular Sufiana mehfils [3]. This cross-communal lineage complicates any reading of Sufiana Mausiqi as a purely confessional or sectarian art form; it is better understood as a shared elite Kashmiri cultural practice, religiously inflected in its texts and its Sufi framing but not confined in its patronage or performance to a single religious community a point with some resonance for how the genre's contemporary heritage claims are framed, discussed further below.

It was also under Dogra rule, in the 1920s, that the state banned Hafiz Nagma, the dance performance in which a female dancer known as the hafiza interpreted the poetic content of Sufiana compositions through gesture, on the grounds that the maharaja judged it to have become excessively sensual [16]. The suppressed hafiza tradition was replaced in popular practice by bacha nagma, in which adolescent boys, dressed as women, performed the same choreographic role [16]. This episode receives only passing mention in most of the historical literature on Sufiana Mausiqi proper, which tends to treat it as a footnote to instrumental and vocal history rather than as a substantive object of analysis. Section six of this paper returns to it in more depth, since it is arguably the single clearest instance in the tradition's history of the state directly reshaping performance practice along gendered lines.

The Post-1947 Rupture: From Royal Court to State Broadcaster

The end of princely rule after 1947 and the subsequent abolition of the jagirdari land-grant system removed the material basis on which Sufiana musicians had depended for generations [7]. Without royal courts to sustain them, practitioners relied increasingly on Sufi shrines, informal mehfils among music-loving patrons, and, most consequentially, the newly established All

India Radio station, Radio Kashmir Srinagar, which became the tradition's principal institutional home for much of the later twentieth century [3], [6]. This shift deserves more analytical attention than it typically receives. A court-patronized art form organized around private mehfils and hereditary aristocratic taste was transformed, within a single generation, into a broadcast repertoire selected, scheduled, and to some extent standardized by state radio producers. The muqamat that received regular airtime were, by process of institutional selection, more likely to be transmitted to subsequent generations of listeners and aspiring musicians than those that did not; broadcasting, in other words, functioned as an informal but powerful curatorial mechanism shaping which parts of an already large and varied muqam repertoire would survive into the present.

The scholarly literature is consistent in describing a contraction of the tradition's institutional footprint across this period: gharanas once active in districts including Baramulla, Kupwara, Shopian, and Pulwama have disappeared, leaving the tradition concentrated in only three districts Srinagar, Budgam, and Anantnag by the early twenty-first century [2], [3]. This geographic contraction, alongside the loss of royal and aristocratic patronage, forms the backdrop against which the contemporary crisis discussed in section seven must be understood.

4. The Muqam System: Structure and Comparative Analysis

Understanding Sufiana Mausiqi's place within the broader family of Islamicate art-music traditions requires attending to both the formal theory of the muqam and the gap, documented across several regional traditions, between that theory and lived performance practice. Rachel Harris's comparative study of the Kashmiri Sufyana Musiqi and the Uyghur On Ikki Muqam of Xinjiang argues that the imposition of formal music-theoretical frameworks in different Central Asian locations "may serve to mask deeper, unmarked, similarities in performance and aesthetics" between traditions that elite musicological discourse treats as quite distinct [4]. Her broader claim that Sufi traditions of vocal practice, rather than the elite heritage of written music theory, better explain the close musical relations between geographically dispersed maqam traditions is a genuinely critical intervention, because it suggests that the named, catalogued taxonomy of muqamat that Kashmiri scholarship carefully documents may capture the tradition's institutional self-presentation more faithfully than its actual sounding practice [4].

This has a direct bearing on how Sufiana Mausiqi's relationship to Hindustani classical music should be characterized. The tradition follows what practitioners and scholars call "time theory," organizing muqamat by time of performance in a manner parallel to the Hindustani samay-siddhanta governing raga performance, and it shares broad structural features an alap-like opening, a slow-to-fast tempo trajectory, a closing tarana-like passage with Hindustani vocal forms [3], [7]. Yet the melodic material itself is drawn from Persian muqamat rather than ragas, and the instrumentation, built around the santoor, sehtar, and saz-e-Kashmir rather than tabla-tanpura-harmonium ensembles, marks a clear structural difference [1], [6]. The genre is therefore better described as a genuinely hybrid or borderland form to use the description offered in one review of Pacholczyk's monograph, occupying territory "between the maqam traditions of West and Central Asia and the raga tradition of North India" than as either a regional variant of Hindustani music or a simple transplant of Persian practice [9].

The question of instrumental origin illustrates a further, and often under-examined, layer of contestation within the tradition's own scholarship. Raina and colleagues, reporting fieldwork interviews with contemporary santoor masters, note two competing accounts of the instrument's origin: one holding that the Kashmiri santoor descends from the ancient Shata-tantri Veena mentioned in Sanskrit sources, and another, associated with scholars such as B. C. Deva and David Courtney, arguing for a Near Eastern origin subsequently modified in Kashmir [6]. Deva's skepticism toward the indigenous-origin claim, on the grounds of insufficient evidence for continuity across a roughly two-thousand-year gap in the documentary record, is worth foregrounding critically: claims of indigenous instrumental origin, like claims of unbroken pre-Islamic musical continuity discussed in section three, tend to carry an implicit nationalist or regionalist charge, and the strength of the evidence for them should be assessed independently of how emotionally satisfying the claim is to a given community of practitioners [6]. What is not in serious dispute is that the present-day Kashmiri santoor, with its distinctive hundred-string configuration and heavier, unfelted mallets, differs in tone and technique from its Persian and other regional counterparts regardless of ultimate origin [6].

5. The Gharana Tradition and the Sociology of Transmission

The gharana, a hereditary school of musical lineage headed by a khalifa or spiritual-artistic successor, is the primary institutional unit through which Sufiana Mausiqi has been transmitted since at least the late eighteenth century [3]. Of the many gharanas that once existed across the Kashmir Valley, four survive in active practice: Ramzan Joo, founded in the late eighteenth century by Ustad Mohammad Ramzan Joo and regarded as the progenitor gharana from which several others trace descent; Kamal Bhat, distinguished by its synthesis of Sufiana performance with the Bhand Pather folk-theatre tradition; Qaleenbaft, an offshoot of Ramzan Joo founded by Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Bhat Qaleenbaft; and Setari, the only surviving gharana of southern Kashmir, associated with the Sehtar and named for its founding virtuoso, Ustad Abdul Khaliq Shah [3].

Transmission within each gharana has historically operated through direct apprenticeship, typically within families, with knowledge of repertoire, technique, and the finer points of muqam interpretation passed from ustad to disciple over years of practice rather than through notation [3]. This mode of transmission carries an inherent fragility: the loss of a single senior ustad without a fully trained successor can effectively terminate a distinct performance lineage, a risk borne out by the disappearance of gharanas once active outside the three surviving districts [2], [3]. It also means that claims about the tradition's antiquity and authenticity rest substantially on oral testimony from living or recently deceased practitioners rather than on an independently verifiable documentary record a methodological limitation that the more careful fieldwork-based studies acknowledge directly rather than paper over [3].

It is worth returning here to a point raised in the previous section: the gharana system, though treated by both practitioners and much of the secondary literature as a marker of deep traditionality, is itself a comparatively late institutional overlay, dated by informants to the Mughal period at the earliest and lacking documentary confirmation even for that dating [3]. This does not

diminish the gharana system's real social and pedagogical function, but it does complicate any straightforward equation of "gharana-based" transmission with unbroken ancient authenticity an equation that recurs, often implicitly, in both journalistic and some scholarly writing on the tradition's decline.

6. Gender, the Hafiza, and Contested Moral Geography

Among the more analytically significant, and comparatively under-examined, episodes in the history of Sufiana Mausiqi is the 1920s Dogra-era ban on Hafiz Nagma, the female-performed dance that had accompanied Sufiana compositions, in which the hafiza used hand gestures and movement, structurally comparable to the mudras of Kathak, to interpret the mystical content of the muqam texts [3], [16]. The ban was justified by the ruling maharaja on the grounds that the performance had become excessively sensual and, in the moralized language of the period, that hafizas were associated with prostitution, rendering their patronage disreputable for respectable households [16]. In place of the banned female performance, the largely identical musical and choreographic content was transferred to bacha nagma, performed by adolescent boys costumed as women [16].

This episode repays closer critical attention than the descriptive literature typically gives it. The state's stated justification was religious-moral, but the substitution of a cross-dressed male performer for the banned female one, rather than the wholesale removal of the dance form itself, indicates that the underlying concern was less with the dance's content or its Sufi framing than with controlling the bodies and social visibility of Kashmiri women specifically. The aesthetic and musical material of Hafiz Nagma survived the ban essentially intact; what did not survive was female participation in it. Read this way, the episode is best understood not as an instance of religious reform acting on Sufiana Mausiqi as a whole, but as a specific, gendered act of state discipline exercised through the medium of a musical tradition a distinction that matters for how the tradition's subsequent history should be narrated.

The consequences of this exclusion were long-lasting: for decades, women's participation in Sufiana performance was effectively limited to the vocal and dance roles that had themselves been banned, while the instrumental core of the tradition santoor, sehtar, saz-e-Kashmir, tabla remained an almost exclusively male preserve [16]. Only in the past two decades has this begun to shift, with individual ustads training female students in instrumental performance and with the emergence of all-female Sufiana ensembles performing publicly and on state broadcasting platforms [17]. This recent development is worth noting for what it reveals about the tradition's institutional flexibility once the specific gendered restriction is lifted: the muqam repertoire and instrumentation have proven adaptable to female instrumentalists once given the opportunity, which suggests that their historical absence reflected imposed social restriction rather than any inherent incompatibility between the tradition's aesthetic demands and women's participation.

7. The Contemporary Crisis: Conflict, Economy, and the Politics of Decline

Virtually every substantial piece of scholarship on Sufiana Mausiqi published in the last decade opens or closes with some version of the claim that the tradition is "on the brink of extinction" [1], [2], or facing an unprecedented crisis of transmission [3], [5]. The reasons cited are broadly consistent across this literature: the prolonged political conflict in Kashmir since the late 1980s, which has disrupted public gatherings, restricted cultural programming, and imposed repeated periods of curfew and lockdown; the near-total absence of music instruction in schools, colleges, and universities; the economic precarity of professional Sufiana musicians, for whom the art form no longer offers reliable livelihood; and competition from globalized popular music rock, pop, and Bollywood-derived film music which has displaced the mehfil as the preferred setting for musical sociability among younger Kashmiris [3], [5].

These are genuine and well-documented pressures, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity or accuracy of the practitioners quoted across this literature, several of whom speak from direct experience of watching their own gharanas contract over a working lifetime [3]. At the same time, the sheer consistency and longevity of the "vanishing tradition" framing present in scholarship from 2015 [1] through 2016 [2] to 2024 [5], with little variation in either diagnosis or rhetorical register across nearly a decade invites a more critical second-order question that the existing literature does not itself ask: has "imminent extinction" become something closer to a stable genre convention of writing about Sufiana Mausiqi, one that helps mobilize institutional attention, documentation funding, and heritage designation, rather than a claim whose empirical content has meaningfully changed over the period in question? This is not to suggest that the underlying pressures on the tradition are exaggerated or invented; the geographic contraction from many districts to three, and the well-documented economic hardship of practicing ustads, are independently corroborated facts [2], [3]. It is, rather, to note that a discourse of perpetual, undifferentiated crisis can itself obscure more specific questions which muqamat have actually been lost, which gharanas retain viable successors, which social conditions have improved even marginally in the period since 2019 that would allow a more precise accounting of the tradition's actual trajectory.

One additional pressure specific to the post-1947 and especially post-1990 period deserves separate mention: periods of religious conservatism and, at points, direct restriction on musical performance associated with elements of the insurgency-era political landscape in Kashmir sat in some tension with the historically tolerant relationship between Sufism and music evident in the Sultanate and Dogra periods discussed above. This tension is acknowledged, if briefly, in the broader literature on Kashmiri cultural politics, and it complicates any simple narrative in which "tradition" and "Islam" stand in straightforward continuity; the Sufiana tradition's own history shows considerable variation, across different periods and different currents within Kashmiri Islam, in how comfortably devotional music has sat alongside religious orthodoxy [11].

8. Revivalist Interventions: Institutions, Digital Media, and the Politics of Heritage

The last several years have seen a marked increase in institutional and digital attention directed at Sufiana Mausiqi, much of it explicitly framed in the language of safeguarding and revival. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has pursued a formal

proposal seeking UNESCO recognition of Sufiana Mausiqi as an item of intangible cultural heritage, a process that has, in turn, been accompanied by documentation projects such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi's data-creation blueprint for the tradition, which frames it explicitly as "the endangered classical music of Kashmir" requiring systematic archiving of repertoire, instrumentation, and oral history [15]. In parallel, university-led initiatives such as the year-long Kashmiri Sufiana Mausiqi revival project undertaken by Anant National University in collaboration with the Tulkul Arts and Media Collective have combined craft training teaching students the traditional process of Kashmiri santoor-making under master artisans with documentation of oral histories and performance practice, explicitly positioning this work as complementary to the UNESCO nomination effort [14].

These institutional efforts should be assessed critically rather than simply welcomed as unambiguous goods, and doing so requires drawing on the broader scholarship concerning how heritage designation functions in politically contested regions such as Kashmir. Chitralekha Zutshi's work on the politics of historical narrative and sacred geography in Kashmir demonstrates that claims about the region's cultural past are rarely neutral acts of documentation; they are also, inevitably, interventions in ongoing contests over whose version of Kashmiri identity and history receives official sanction [11]. Applied to Sufiana Mausiqi, this suggests that a successful UNESCO nomination, while likely to bring welcome resources and international visibility to a genuinely endangered art form, also carries a risk already well documented in the broader critical heritage literature on intangible cultural heritage regimes: the tendency for international recognition processes to select, standardize, and in effect freeze a version of a living, internally variegated tradition with its four distinct gharanas, its historically cross-communal patronage, and its still-unsettled repertoire of muqamat into a single, more easily marketed and administratively legible form.

Digital media presents a related but distinct set of dynamics. Younger Kashmiri musicians have increasingly used social media and streaming platforms to circulate recordings of Sufiana Kalam and related devotional genres, and independent musicians working with instruments central to the tradition, such as the rabab, describe their own practice explicitly as an act of cultural reclamation directed at both Kashmiri and global audiences [18]. Magdalena Piech's study of Kashmiri Muslim cultural identity as expressed through popular music, while focused on a younger, more explicitly political generation of musicians rather than Sufiana practitioners specifically, offers a useful comparative frame: it demonstrates that Kashmiri artists have long used the affordances of new media to reinterpret traditional symbols for contemporary audiences, blending inherited cultural material with the aesthetics and platforms of global youth culture [7]. Applied to Sufiana Mausiqi, this suggests that digital circulation may do more to keep the tradition's melodic and textual material in general cultural circulation than to sustain its specific, socially embedded performance practice the mehfil gathering, the shrine performance, the master-disciple pedagogical relationship which is arguably the more fragile and more historically distinctive element of the tradition, and one that a decontextualized video clip cannot readily reproduce.

None of this is an argument against the current wave of institutional and digital attention, which has, on the available evidence, produced real gains: documented oral histories that would otherwise have been lost with the passing of elderly ustads, craft-transmission programs training a new generation of instrument makers, and a measurable increase in public and academic visibility for a genre that spent much of the twentieth century as a minority interest even within Kashmir [14], [15], [18]. The point is rather that these interventions should be evaluated against the specific, sometimes competing, forms of value at stake documentary preservation, live performance sustainability, gharana continuity, cross-communal memory, and gendered inclusion rather than folded uncritically into a single undifferentiated narrative of rescue.

9. Discussion: Sufiana Mausiqi as Contested Syncretic Heritage

Drawing the preceding sections together, three interpretive claims can be advanced with reasonable confidence. First, Sufiana Mausiqi's history is best characterized not as continuous transmission of a fixed classical form but as a series of adaptive reconstitutions in response to changing political patronage: Sultanate courts, Mughal and Afghan administrations, the Dogra monarchy, postcolonial state broadcasting, and now heritage bureaucracies and digital platforms have each, in turn, reshaped who performs the music, under what institutional auspices, and which parts of its large muqam repertoire receive active transmission [3], [6]. The tradition that exists today is the product of this accumulated sequence of reconstitutions rather than a direct, unmediated survival of its fifteenth-century Sultanate-era form.

Second, the tradition's syncretic character evident in its fusion of Persian muqam theory with Hindustani time-cycle organization, in its cross-communal gharana lineages that include both Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit masters, and in its textual debt to both Persian Sufi poetry and the indigenous Rishi tradition associated with Nund Rishi sits uneasily with any account of Sufiana Mausiqi as a purely sectarian or exclusively religious art form [3], [11]. This has direct relevance for how contemporary heritage claims frame the tradition: a UNESCO nomination or state cultural policy that presents Sufiana Mausiqi solely through the lens of Islamic mysticism risks flattening a considerably more complex social history of shared, cross-communal elite cultural patronage.

Third, the gendered history of the tradition specifically the 1920s suppression of the hafiza and the subsequent decades-long exclusion of women from instrumental performance demonstrates that Sufiana Mausiqi's institutional history has been shaped as much by contests over the control of women's bodies and public visibility as by aesthetic or religious considerations narrowly construed [16]. Any account of the tradition's decline that omits this history, as much of the existing descriptive literature effectively does, offers an incomplete picture of how the genre's performance conventions came to take their present, largely male-dominated instrumental form.

Taken together, these claims suggest a research agenda for future work on Sufiana Mausiqi that moves beyond the largely descriptive, salvage-oriented fieldwork that has dominated the field to date. Comparative ethnomusicological analysis along the lines Harris undertakes for the Uyghur and Kashmiri traditions, systematic gender-historical research into the hafiza tradition and its long aftermath, and critical heritage-studies engagement with the ongoing UNESCO nomination process would each substantially deepen a scholarly literature that, however valuable as documentation, has so far been more concerned with recording

the tradition before it disappears than with analyzing the social and political forces that have continually reshaped it [1], [2], [3], [4].

10. Conclusion

Sufiana Mausiqi's six-century evolution, from the Perso-Central Asian courtly synthesis of the Kashmir Sultanate to its present life as an object of digital circulation and prospective UNESCO recognition, resists any simple narrative of decline from an original golden age. It is more accurately described as a tradition continually reconstituted by the political and social orders under which it has been practiced: royal courts that imported foreign musicians and modal theory, colonial-era princely rule that suppressed one gendered mode of performance while permitting its musical content to survive in altered form, a postcolonial state that relocated the tradition's institutional center from the private mehfil to the public broadcaster, and a present moment in which heritage bureaucracies, university projects, and independent digital musicians are simultaneously, and not always compatibly, working to secure its future. Recognizing this history of contestation and reconstitution, rather than treating Sufiana Mausiqi as a fixed relic whose only remaining task is preservation in its most recently remembered form, offers both a more historically accurate account of the tradition and a more useful frame for the policy and institutional choices now being made in its name.

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