

# Revival And Transformation Of Traditional Kashmiri Music In Modern Times: A Socio-Cultural Analysis

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## **Abstract:**

The revival and transformation of traditional Kashmiri music in contemporary times represent a dynamic socio-cultural phenomenon that reflects the intersection of tradition and modernity. This abstract delves into the socio-cultural analysis of this remarkable journey.

Kashmiri music, deeply rooted in the region's history and heritage, has undergone significant changes due to historical, political, and technological advancements. This transformation has been shaped by various factors, including the conflict in the region, migration, globalization, and the advent of digital platforms. In this analysis, we explore how traditional Kashmiri music has adapted to modernity while preserving its core essence. We examine the role of musicians, scholars, and cultural institutions in safeguarding and promoting this rich musical tradition. Furthermore, we investigate the impact of globalization and digital media on the dissemination and evolution of Kashmiri music, both locally and on a global scale. The socio-cultural lens provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by traditional Kashmiri music in the 21st century. This analysis underscores the resilience and adaptability of a unique musical heritage and its continued relevance in contemporary society. The study ultimately sheds light on the intricate relationship between culture, music, and societal change, offering valuable insights into the broader context of cultural preservation and transformation in the modern world.

**Keywords:** Kashmiri Music, Traditional Music, Modernization, Socio-cultural Analysis, Heritage Preservation

## **Introduction**

The evolution of traditional music in the face of modernity is a fascinating and dynamic phenomenon that reflects the intricate interplay between culture, heritage, and societal change. Among the myriad examples of this transformation, the revival and transformation of traditional Kashmiri music in modern times stand out as a captivating case study. Nestled in the picturesque Himalayan region of Kashmir, this ancient musical tradition has not only weathered the sands of time but has also adapted and thrived in response to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Kashmiri music is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the region, with roots that trace back centuries. [1] It encompasses a rich tapestry of vocal and instrumental expressions, each resonating with the unique ethos of the Kashmiri people. However, like many traditional art forms across the world, Kashmiri music has faced significant challenges in the wake of historical, political, and technological advancements. The history of the

Kashmir Valley is marked by periods of conflict and political upheaval, which have had a profound impact on its cultural landscape. Additionally, factors such as migration, globalization, and the advent of digital platforms have introduced new dimensions to the preservation and evolution of Kashmiri music. This transformation has been facilitated by a diverse array of individuals and institutions, including dedicated musicians, scholars, and cultural organizations, who have played pivotal roles in safeguarding and promoting this musical heritage. [2]

This socio-cultural analysis endeavors to delve deep into the intricate facets of the revival and transformation of traditional Kashmiri music in modern times. It aims to examine how this musical tradition has adapted to the challenges of the 21st century while retaining its fundamental essence. The role of globalization and digital media in reshaping the dissemination and evolution of Kashmiri music, both within the region and on a global scale, will be explored. [3]

By adopting a socio-cultural perspective, this study seeks to unravel the complexities and nuances of traditional music's resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing world. In doing so, it sheds light on the broader implications of cultural preservation and transformation, serving as a valuable reference point for understanding how heritage can thrive amidst the currents of modernity.

#### **Background and significance of Kashmiri music [4]**

Kashmiri music, deeply rooted in the cultural and historical tapestry of the region, holds a special place in the hearts of Kashmiris and music enthusiasts worldwide. Its significance lies not only in its melodious tunes but also in its role as a repository of Kashmiri heritage, identity, and emotions. To understand the revival and transformation of Kashmiri music in modern times, it is essential to delve into its rich background and cultural importance:

**Ancient Origins:** Kashmiri music traces its origins back to ancient times. It has evolved over centuries, influenced by various cultural, religious, and artistic traditions, including Persian, Sufi, and Central Asian musical styles. This fusion of influences has contributed to the uniqueness of Kashmiri music.

**Cultural Expression:** Kashmiri music serves as a powerful form of cultural expression. It conveys the joys, sorrows, aspirations, and daily life experiences of the Kashmiri people. It's a medium through which they celebrate their traditions and express their deepest emotions.

**Religious Significance:** Sufi poetry and mystical traditions have deeply influenced Kashmiri music. Sufi saints like Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani (Nund Rishi) have left an indelible mark on Kashmiri music through their spiritual verses set to music. This spiritual dimension adds a profound layer of significance to the music.

**Preservation of Language:** Kashmiri music has played a crucial role in preserving the Kashmiri language. Many traditional songs are composed in Kashmiri, helping to safeguard the linguistic heritage of the region.

**Identity and Unity:** Music has a unifying effect on communities, and this is particularly true in Kashmir. In a region marked by ethnic and religious diversity, traditional Kashmiri music has served as a unifying force, transcending differences and fostering a sense of shared identity.

**Artistic Heritage:** The music of Kashmir is characterized by its unique vocal and instrumental styles. The use of instruments like the Santoor, Rabab, and Tumbaknari adds to its distinctive sound. This artistic heritage is not only a source of pride but also a testament to the creativity of Kashmiri musicians.

**Global Appeal:** While deeply rooted in Kashmiri culture, this music has transcended regional boundaries and garnered international recognition. Its enchanting melodies have found admirers across the globe, contributing to the broader appreciation of world music.

In modern times, the significance of Kashmiri music lies in its resilience and adaptation. Despite facing numerous challenges, including political conflicts, migration, and globalization, Kashmiri music continues to evolve while preserving its core essence. This ability to endure and transform is a testament to the enduring cultural and emotional value of Kashmiri music, making it a vital element of both the region's heritage and the global musical landscape. The revival and transformation of this music in contemporary times exemplify the determination to keep its melodies alive and resonate with new generations. [5]

### **Challenges to Traditional Kashmiri Music: [6]**

Traditional Kashmiri music confronts a myriad of challenges in its path, many of which are deeply intertwined with the complex socio-cultural and political landscape of the region. Chief among these challenges is the prolonged conflict and political instability in Kashmir, which has cast a shadow over the practice and performance of traditional music. Curfews, restrictions on gatherings, and security concerns have disrupted the musical ecosystem. Additionally, the mass migration of talented artists to safer regions, driven by the turmoil, has resulted in a dispersion of musical knowledge and cultural fragmentation. This exodus threatens the continuity of traditional music as younger generations struggle to access the wisdom of their musical forebears. Furthermore, the influx of external influences and the homogenization of culture due to globalization and increased connectivity pose a risk to the unique Kashmiri musical identity. The changing socioeconomic landscape, with urbanization and shifts in lifestyle, challenges the traditional patronage systems for artists. Musicians often find it difficult to sustain themselves solely through their art, discouraging younger generations from pursuing music as a profession. In the digital age, while online platforms provide opportunities for global reach, they also present the challenge of competing with diverse musical genres, potentially eclipsing traditional Kashmiri music, particularly among the youth. The transmission of knowledge, traditionally oral, is under threat with the passing of older generations of musicians, necessitating documentation and systematization efforts. Furthermore, the commercialization of music and the rise of pop culture have led to shifting musical preferences among younger audiences, adding complexity to the preservation of traditional music. Inadequate infrastructure, limited educational opportunities, and challenges in integrating traditional instruments into contemporary contexts also hinder the growth and development of aspiring musicians. Finally, the preservation of the Kashmiri language in song lyrics faces concerns, as younger generations may gravitate towards songs in languages like Hindi or English, potentially diluting the cultural authenticity of the music. Despite these formidable challenges, traditional Kashmiri music persists, buoyed by the unwavering dedication of musicians, scholars, cultural institutions, and the global Kashmiri diaspora, who collectively strive to safeguard and revitalize this cherished musical heritage. [7]

### **Digital Age Challenges: [8]**

In the digital age, traditional Kashmiri music confronts a unique set of challenges that are reshaping its role and relevance in contemporary society. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for global distribution and access to a wide audience, they also introduce complexities in ensuring the

music's visibility and authenticity. The prevalence of mainstream and commercially-driven music on these platforms poses a formidable challenge, potentially overshadowing traditional Kashmiri music, particularly among younger listeners who are more exposed to global pop culture. Moreover, the digital landscape contributes to a sense of cultural homogenization, making it vital to preserve the uniqueness of Kashmiri musical traditions amidst the vast digital sea of global music. Striking a balance between authenticity and adaptation is a delicate task for musicians, who must navigate the evolving tastes and habits of their audience. The shift to digital formats also raises questions about the tangibility of music and the preservation of traditional physical formats. Copyright concerns and digital piracy add a layer of complexity to the protection of intellectual property rights. Additionally, changes in listening habits and the rise of personalized playlists challenge traditional music presentation and structure. In this digital age, a proactive approach to documentation, archiving, and online education becomes imperative, ensuring that the wealth of Kashmiri musical knowledge is preserved and transmitted effectively to future generations while harnessing the global reach and collaborative potential of digital platforms.

### **Changing Socioeconomic Factors: [10]**

Changing socioeconomic factors have introduced a new set of dynamics and challenges to the realm of traditional Kashmiri music. Historically, the support system for musicians relied on patronage from the elite or the communal bonds within local communities. However, the changing economic landscape has disrupted these traditional sources of sustenance. Many traditional musicians now grapple with the daunting task of making a sustainable livelihood solely from their art, thereby raising questions about the economic viability of pursuing music as a full-time profession. Urbanization, another facet of evolving socioeconomic conditions, has not only transformed the environment within which traditional music thrives but has also altered its character. [11] The rural-urban divide can pose challenges in terms of accessing urban audiences, resources, and opportunities for musicians from remote areas. Concurrently, cultural preferences are undergoing shifts, with the commercial music industry often overshadowing traditional art forms. This presents a hurdle in connecting younger generations with their musical heritage. Furthermore, limited access to formal music education and training facilities impedes the development of aspiring musicians, highlighting the need for accessible and high-quality training programs. Balancing the economic sustainability of traditional music, cultural adaptation to modern tastes, and the preservation of its authenticity remains an intricate challenge in this evolving socioeconomic landscape. The response to these challenges must be multi-pronged, encompassing support for traditional musicians, investment in education and training, and a thoughtful approach to adaptation, all aimed at ensuring that the melodious legacy of Kashmiri music endures amidst changing times. [12]

### **Methodology:**

#### **1. Research Design:**

**Qualitative Research:** Qualitative methods, including interviews, surveys, and content analysis, were employed to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural aspects and experiences related to traditional Kashmiri music.

## 2. Data Collection:

### a. Interviews:

- **Key Informant Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including traditional musicians, scholars, and cultural experts, to gather insights into the challenges, adaptations, and preservation efforts in traditional Kashmiri music.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with musicians and cultural practitioners provided rich qualitative data on their experiences, perspectives, and strategies in preserving and revitalizing the music.

### b. Surveys:

- **Survey Questionnaires:** Surveys were administered to a diverse sample of individuals, including musicians, music enthusiasts, and members of the Kashmiri diaspora, to assess their perceptions of traditional Kashmiri music, its challenges, and its role in contemporary society.

### c. Content Analysis:

- **Analysis of Traditional Music Archives:** Historical and contemporary archives of traditional Kashmiri music, including recordings, manuscripts, and publications, were analyzed to trace the evolution and transformation of the music over time.

## 3. Data Analysis:

Qualitative data from interviews and surveys were analyzed thematically. Themes related to the challenges, adaptations, and significance of traditional Kashmiri music in modern times were identified, coded, and organized into a coherent narrative.

## 4. Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and privacy were ensured in reporting and publishing the findings.

## 5. Limitations:

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, including potential biases in the data collected, the representativeness of the sample, and the challenges inherent in interpreting qualitative data.

## 6. Conclusion:

The chosen research methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding traditional Kashmiri music, its challenges, and its adaptation in contemporary times.

This methodology allowed for a holistic exploration of the topic, capturing the perspectives of musicians, scholars, and the broader community while respecting ethical considerations and addressing potential limitations. It provided a robust foundation for analyzing and discussing the revival and transformation of traditional Kashmiri music in past contexts.

## Some of renowned & Known Kashmiri Singers

Kashmir has produced several renowned singers who have made significant contributions to both traditional and contemporary Kashmiri music. Here are a few renowned Kashmiri singers:

**Kailash Mehra:** Kailash Mehra was a celebrated Kashmiri singer known for his soulful renditions of traditional Kashmiri folk songs. He played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting the rich musical heritage of the region. [13]

**Raj Begum:** Raj Begum was a legendary Kashmiri singer whose melodious voice and timeless songs made her an icon in the world of Kashmiri music. She was known for her Ghazals and Sufi compositions.[13]

**Pran Kishore:** Pran Kishore was a versatile Kashmiri singer who excelled in both classical and folk music. He was instrumental in popularizing classical music in Kashmir. [13]

**Shazia Bashir:** Shazia Bashir is a contemporary Kashmiri singer who has gained recognition for her fusion of traditional Kashmiri music with modern sounds. Her innovative approach has garnered a new generation of fans.

**Kaiser Nizami:** Kaiser Nizami is known for his contributions to Sufi and Kashmiri folk music. His powerful and emotive voice has earned him a prominent place in the music scene of Kashmir.

**Abdul Rashid Hafiz:** Abdul Rashid Hafiz was a celebrated Kashmiri singer who specialized in Sufi and devotional music. His soul-stirring renditions have left a lasting impact on Kashmiri music. [14] Recently Abdul Rashid Hafiz collaborated with renowned music director of Bollywood Salim- Sulaiman for the song Meri Jaan included kahsmiri song in it and has garnered millions of views.



Fig 1 Youtube screenshot showcasing the impact of Kashmiri music in today's era

**Bashir Ahmed Bashir:** Bashir Ahmed Bashir is known for his melodious voice and renditions of Kashmiri folk songs. He has been a prominent figure in preserving and promoting traditional Kashmiri music.

These are just a few examples of the many talented singers who have enriched the musical landscape of Kashmir. Their contributions have played a vital role in preserving the cultural and musical heritage of the region, making them beloved figures in Kashmiri music.

### **Kashmiri poets with significant contributions**

Kashmir has a rich tradition of poetry, and many poets have made significant contributions to its literary and cultural heritage. Here are some notable Kashmiri poets and their significant contributions:

#### **Lal Ded (Lalleshwari):**

Lal Ded, also known as Lalleshwari, was a 14th-century mystic poetess. Her Vakhs, which are short verses, are considered some of the earliest compositions in the Kashmiri language. She is revered for her spiritual and philosophical poetry that reflects Kashmiri Shaivism and the search for self-realization.

The first esoteric spiritual dialogue between the two is possibly found in Lal Ded's renowned vakh (verse), "You were not ashamed of being born, why then of suckling," addressed to Nund Reshi. According to legend, Sheikh-ul-Alam, the patron saint of Kashmir, received direction and inspiration while in a state of contact with Lal Ded. [15-16]

#### **Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani):**

Nund Rishi, often referred to as Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani or Sheikh-ul-Alam, was a 14th-century Sufi saint and poet. His poetry, written in the form of mystic verses called Shrukhs, emphasizes the importance of love, tolerance, and unity. He played a significant role in shaping the spiritual and cultural ethos of Kashmir. One of the famous writing of Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani Fig.2



**Fig.2 One of the famous writing of Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani)**

#### **Habba Khatoon:**

Habba Khatoon, also known as Zoon or Zoon Begum, was a 16th-century poetess. She is celebrated for her romantic poetry and songs, often expressing her love for her husband, Yusuf Shah Chak. Her verses, known as "vaatsun," are not only romantic but also offer vivid descriptions of Kashmir's natural beauty. [17]

Poetry, feminism and freedom are related concepts and there is a relationship between them were defined by the literary traditions of poetry in a particular language. Out of The tradition of poetry in all

languages goes back to popular poetry and has its roots in oral poetry. average. All cultures before the advent of modern lifestyles were oral and This lyrical mode was the original poetic mode and at the same time the most popular expressions. Lyricism in poetry is based on various linguistic pathways and means is generally accepted. Habba Khatoon's 16th century poetry is They try to use language to create the appearance of personal freedom to express themselves repressed feelings of a woman. It is anchored in oral tradition and follows poetry different universal models, uniform across eras and cultures. It is open and does not adhere to the strictness of the classical structure. The lyrical form of poetry is not sectarian, community and covers a wide range of human passions that cannot be classified valued for a particular faith. It remains unchanged under the influence of social changes However, and business economic models adapt to these changes in their terms lexical items. [19]

Habba Khatoon is honored to have an underpass in Mughalpura in Lahore named after him. CGS Habba Khatoon is named after the Indian Coast Guard. Habba Khatoon (1978), Indian television film set in Kashmir for Doordarshan. Rita Razdan played the main role of the queen. Doordarshan on DD National also aired another Hindi television program dedicated to poet Habba Khatoon. [18] Her role was played by Mrinal Kulkarni in the 2000–2001 season of DD National's Indian drama television show Noorjahan. Muzaffar Ali's unreleased film Zooni, scheduled for release in 1990, was eventually postponed. Previous failed attempts to portray his life on screen in Indian films include Mehboob Khan in the 1960s and BR Chopra in the 1980s. [19]



Fig.3 In Gurez, Kashmir, she is commemorated by the pyramid-shaped Habba Khatoon mountain.

### **Rasul Mir:**

Rasul Mir was an 18th-century Sufi poet known for his ghazals and mystic poetry. His verses explore themes of love, spirituality, and the divine. Rasul Mir's poetry continues to be cherished for its lyrical beauty and philosophical depth.

### **Mahjoor (Allama Muhammad Iqbal):**

Mahjoor, whose real name was Allama Muhammad Iqbal, was a 20th-century poet and philosopher. He is considered one of the pioneers of modern Kashmiri poetry. His poems, often addressing themes of freedom, resistance, and social justice, played a significant role in the Kashmiri awakening during the early 20th century.



## **Dina Nath 'Nadim':**

Dina Nath 'Nadim' was a prominent 20th-century Kashmiri poet and playwright. He is known for his revolutionary and socially relevant poetry. His works, including the famous play "Bomba Duniya" (The Bomb of the World), tackled contemporary issues and advocated for change.

## **Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor: [20]**

Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor was another renowned 20th-century Kashmiri poet. His poetry reflects the beauty of Kashmir, its culture, and the struggles of its people. Mahjoor's verses have a timeless quality and continue to resonate with Kashmiris.

These poets have left an indelible mark on Kashmiri literature and culture. Their works continue to be celebrated and cherished, reflecting the diversity of themes and emotions found in Kashmiri poetry, from mysticism and spirituality to love, beauty, and social consciousness.

## **Mohammad Muneem (ALIF)**

Mohammad Muneem Nazir, an Indian singer, composer, and poet, was born in 1983. He sings and writes in Kashmiri, Urdu, and Hindi. The main singer of the rock group Alif, which Muneem established in 2008, is a native of Srinagar in the Kashmir Valley. Muneem is renowned for creating music that fuses western and modern genres with traditional and folk music from Kashmir. [21] Alif gained recognition when they performed on an episode of the Indian TV show "Coke Studio @ MTV" in 2013, where they presented their rendition of "Sahibo Sath Chum Mei Chenei," a Kashmiri prayer by poet Mehjoor. In 2014, they recorded a version of the folk song "Cheerith" for Kappa TV. However, the band truly rose to prominence with the release of their album "Sufayed" in 2017, which garnered significant mainstream attention. Notably, the music video for the song "Lalnawath" from the album received the Best Music Video award at the 2018 Dada Saheb Phalke Film Festival. Another track from the album, "Jhelumas," also gained substantial popularity. [22]

Aashima Mahajan, a singer from Jammu, provided the main female vocals for the song Kya Kari Korimol, which was written by the band and Noor Mohammad for an episode of Coke Studio Bharat in May 2023.[14][15] The song is a reworking of the band's first single from that year. The song also had a group of ladies singing wanvun, a form of traditional Kashmiri wedding chorus singing. Within 13 days of its debut, the song received 10 million YouTube views.[23]



### Current situation of Kashmiri Music [21]

**Impact of Political Situation:** Kashmir has a long history of political conflict, and this has had a significant impact on its cultural activities, including music. Periods of unrest, curfews, and security concerns have disrupted live music performances and cultural events.

**Traditional Music Preservation:** Despite the challenges, efforts to preserve and promote traditional Kashmiri music have continued. Cultural organizations and musicians have been dedicated to safeguarding the region's musical heritage through performances, workshops, and educational initiatives.

**Adaptation to Contemporary Styles:** To stay relevant to newer generations, some traditional Kashmiri musicians have experimented with contemporary music styles and fusion. This adaptation has been a way to bridge the gap between the old and the new while maintaining the essence of Kashmiri music.

**Global Outreach:** The digital age has opened up opportunities for Kashmiri music to reach a global audience. Musicians and cultural organizations have used online platforms to share their music with a wider and more diverse audience, including the global Kashmiri diaspora.

**Cross-Cultural Collaborations:** Collaborations between Kashmiri musicians and artists from other regions have become more common. These collaborations often result in fusion music that blends traditional Kashmiri elements with other musical styles.

**Challenges in Music Education:** Limited access to formal music education and training remains a challenge for aspiring musicians in Kashmir. More investment in music education and training programs is needed to nurture talent and preserve the traditions.

**Preservation of Language:** Some musicians have made efforts to ensure that Kashmiri language and lyrics remain a vital part of their music. This is important for preserving the linguistic heritage of the region.

**Cultural Identity:** Music continues to play a role in preserving and expressing the cultural identity of Kashmiris. It serves as a means of connecting with the region's rich history and traditions.

**Economic Challenges:** Like many artists, traditional Kashmiri musicians often face economic challenges. The economic sustainability of a career in music remains a concern, which can affect the continuity of musical traditions.

**Music Festivals and Events:** Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, music festivals and cultural events were held in Kashmir, providing a platform for local musicians to showcase their talent and connect with audiences.

In summary, while the political and social context of Kashmir has presented challenges to the music scene, there is a continued dedication to preserving and promoting traditional Kashmiri music. Adaptation to contemporary styles, global outreach, and cross-cultural collaborations are some of the ways in which this rich musical heritage is being kept alive and evolving. However, ongoing political and social tensions in the region have had a complex impact on the music scene, making it important to monitor developments in Kashmiri music for a comprehensive understanding of its current situation.

### Discussion & Conclusion

"The revival and transformation of traditional Kashmiri music in the contemporary era is a multifaceted journey marked by a delicate balance between preservation and adaptation. In the face of significant socio-political challenges stemming from the region's long-standing conflict, Kashmiri musicians and cultural institutions have embarked on a resilient quest to safeguard their musical heritage. The impact of globalization and the digital age has amplified the reach and accessibility of traditional Kashmiri music,

presenting both opportunities for wider recognition and concerns about cultural authenticity. This musical tradition, deeply interwoven with the cultural identity of Kashmiris, continues to serve as a vital means of expression, both within the region and among the global Kashmiri diaspora. However, the path forward is not without obstacles, particularly in the realm of music education, economic sustainability for musicians, and the preservation of linguistic and cultural nuances in the music. Cross-cultural collaborations and cultural festivals have emerged as catalysts for innovation and broader appreciation. Nevertheless, the need for meticulous documentation and archiving efforts is imperative to ensure that this cherished musical legacy endures amidst the evolving dynamics of the modern world. As we delve into the socio-cultural analysis of Kashmiri music, we uncover a rich tapestry of resilience, adaptation, and unwavering dedication to the preservation of a musical heritage deeply rooted in the hearts and souls of the Kashmiri people."

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