

Spirituality – The Crown of Kashmir Culture

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The twinkling, starry skies changing their moods with seasonal changes in Kashmir, the magical dance of the full moon beams round and round chariots of light winged clouds in attending silent nights, the smiling showers of the morning sunbeams playing with the hymnal merriments of the opening buds, wild and cultivated, the lush green, emerald mountains surrounding the vale of flowers but enjoying eternal smiles of this flowery beauty. The songs of the flowers of various hues and dazzling colours, matched with the unending orchestra of birds playing hide and seek in the boughs and the branches of plants and trees. The murmuring brooks and streams flowing from springs gushing out of the warm and loveful bosoms of the earth and the frozen snows of the Himalaya, the foaming, roaring rivers amidst their zig zag method and manner but with commitment to sustenance and development of life at various levels – all feel highly proud seeing the mind of Kashmir enriched, matured and flowered by spirituality in her poetry and song. This pride is conscious of the role that natural surroundings play in providing warp and weft for designing Kashmir's poetic art.

But Kashmiris have poured their souls in many other forms as well. They have blended many things in weaving, for instance carpets and they have created colourful designs which, like the shapes of the Grecian urn of John Keats, assume immortal forms – observational, imaginative, sensational, emotional, aesthetic, musical and volitional. They have created stuffs to keep human beings busy in self discovery, self fulfilment and self creativity. Some have used chisels to carve their souls on wood or copper or silver or gold or yet stronger stone. It is only the rough and the vulgar who

think that chiselling craft feeds stomachs merely and the work is neither high browed nor subtle.

The drawing of lines on wood, metal or stone with elements of nature brought into interplay throw beatific puzzles open for observers and thinkers. The choice of materials, designs and shapes, the toss and lift of imaginative feats and harmonious proportion of inter relationships reflect the minds of those who chose chisels as their form of worship. Kashmiris again do a marvellous job in woodwork and the art of building. Dwellings, shrines, mosques, houseboats all exhibit that builders and architects try to compete with poets, thinkers and other seekers of truth in pouring their minds and souls into their building art. Women's ear rings are designed in wood and thrown hanging in building corners, particularly of shrines, lattices are carved out of wood to represent seeing stealthily under the pressures of super ego or regimental dogmatism. Window and door tops are arched round to indicate in the Quranic vein nearness between the lover and the beloved, the master and the disciple, in love – unison that promotes mystics as for instance, Bayazid of Bistam or Ibni Arabi, the Sheikh of Sheikhs, in spiritual matters. I am making very brief references to food preparations (as of Wazwan), pottery, needlework (as on pashmina), calligraphy, folk song, folk dance and drapery for fear of lengths that do not suit the occasion. In the context of drapery and costume, however, I refer to Shelley who, in his long poem Prometheus, praises Asia's limbs which to the poet appear to be burning through the vest which hides them. Then the radiant lines of the morning shroud them wheresoever she and her limbs shine. Kashmiri truth seekers and lovers see their beloveds through their costumes or forms. In a broad sense all forms of art serve as outer coverings in which artists' personalities are reflected. In fact all that human beings do, extraordinary or ordinary, through habit or deliberate

effort, represent their minds and souls, two in one or one in two. I am reminded of philosopher / poet Iqbal who defines the human soul as the sum total of man's actions.

Immediately we shall now refer ourselves to Kashmiri poetry which bears a very heavy responsibility on its shoulders in the same way as man bears the Scriptural Trust. Kashmiri mystical poets are almost as important as the masters of Persian literature, given that Persian literature has richness which has been seen in the most developed languages of the world. Besides, Persian has had very strong political economic, socialcultural and religio metaphysical grounds to stand upon to grow. Kashmir has never had such a fertile ground for its nourishment and growth. With all this, Kashmir's spiritual or mystical heritage has been considerably rich and she has not lagged behind if we keep the experience part of that heritage in view. This experience is the crown of Kashmir culture. We cannot in this paper detail out the contributions of all our Sufi masters from Khaja Habibullah Nowsheri, Momin Sahib down to Ahad Sahab Zargar and Mahjoor (God bless them all). We shall therefore be brief, precise and selective.

A close examination of Kashmiri mystic poetry reveals that our masters have attained self fulfilment and are bestowed with creative powers. Like Maulana Abdur Rehman Jami, Khawaja Habibullah Nowsheri, for instance, appears to be well aware of KUNTU KANZAN MAKHFIAN which provides extraordinary courage and spiritual satisfaction to fully matured mystics and to Nowshehri. He is Mansoor like on account of this but does not reveal the secret openly. However, he takes pity on the recluse for the latter's superficial knowledge and suggests to him to follow the religion of love. He does not, however, give vent to his secrets of love because tolerating these secrets in a closed society is not everybody's cup of tea. Shamas Sahab Faqir, to pick up another example, does not like to put labels on himself and, like Rumi, thinks to be neither

Eastern nor Western, nor an angel, nor a Djinn, nor a momin, nor a kuffar. He declares his freedom and assumes he is himself a Sarmad, a Skinder, a Solomon. Even from pre creation days he thinks that he has the wings to fly to spacelessness which flight is only a status of God. Moreover, he is not created by earth or air or water or fire which suggests that he is free from birth and death. Like Moses AS he listens to divine music and has the power of refulgent vision. In fact Mohammad SAW himself has enlightened him completely and he is placed at the creative stage. Ahmad Sahab Batwari, another mystic poet, catches unknown sounds of the mysterious flute with the mention of which Rumi begins his well known Muthnavi. So Batwari knows the value of flute music and its variations, the knowledge that places him at the throne of power. He is aware of the underworld which in the Quranic language is known as the music of these depths carries Batwari to the domain of Hallaj Mansoor. Ahmad Batwari's distinguished quality is that he knows Indianness of mysticism, an experience for which even world famous poet mystic Hafiz was prepared to surrender even Samarkand and Bukhara. Az Hindustan Saaz Kareth Aayikhay Padmanyay is his significantly famous song to illustrate Indianness. Besides, Batwari adopts Noorpore and Cheen (China) as symbols which explain a lot about his mystic experience. He is at a stage that he can bear the brunt of Prayer Calls of the Big Mosque and that takes him to God, the Immortal, the Eternal. Ahad Sahab Zargar of our time gives vent to this experience in his famous poem Akeh Nandun which to many mystics is a profound and perfect explanation of "God is Great". Zargar also asserts that he designs Adam, inspires soul into him, is well informed about the secret of Mohammad's SAW standing and also of revelation in the Quran. In fact, he thinks that he alone is responsible for the manifestation of God, the most Powerful. Zargar Sahab was ridiculed for his mystic ideas particularly in the poem Kafar Sapdeth Kurum Iqrar. Love as the fulcrum of mysticism has

been adopted ardently by almost all the Sufi poets of Kashmir. Some have written Mathnevis to adore and explain love. Maqbool Shah Kralwari's "Gulraiz", Lassa Khan Fida's Gul-i-Bakawali, Shaban Dar's "Shah-i-Behram" and Aziz Sahab Haqani's "Mumtaz Bainazir" can be cited as examples. Maqbool Sahab's pathetic songs through the lips of Nosh Lab and Ajab Malik for example are at the tip of every Kashmiri's tongue also for spiritual benefit. Subah Phool Bulbulov Tul Shori goga A sample: Rasul Mir's love songs are matchless and resound, even today, in the length and breadth of the valley, also in Mehfiles that Sufis arrange every now and then. His songs abound in flowery language to carry us far away together with their musical quality into the divine state of union and revelry. His masterly weave of the mundane with the divine, his imagination soaked in the insights of spirituality bewilder many and the vulgar undervalue him as a sensational beau. See how he sings :

- (i) Anti Gati Wanyam nani kathe
- (ii) Eim Lal Farooshan

Mahmood Gami is also impressive, for example in :

Nemah Sahab and Rahim Sahab of Sopore have also sung love songs but these songs carry more meanings than poetic beauty.

One of the striking features of our mystic poetry is MAJAZ or exoteric experience. It is an interplay of form and meaning, of course a very dangerous spiritual feat. It may cause serious dangers to the practicing mystic if his guide is not in full control. Some readers do not read deeper meanings in exoteric poetry particularly when carnality is versified. Some guardians of the system may also raise objections. Hafiz and Khayam, Rasool Mir and Mehjoor are infamous for indulging in formal play but it is this play that gives supreme value to their song in Sufi circles. We have named only two poets of Kashmir but there are many more who strike love tones and indulge

in revelry. Nemeh Sahab, Rahim Sahab, Wahab Sahab Khar, Wazeh Mahmood and Samad Mir are some who do. The formal approach to spirituality and mystic poetry provides the composer enough material to beautify his verse. He brings natural environment of Kashmir and biological nature of man together and with the help of imagination and figurative language produces a blend that serves as a beautiful mirror for spirituality. The dance of the formal with the real adds music to the song, grandeur to our culture and power to our other worldliness. Rasool Mir can be brought back to illustrate the point. Like a deep drunk lover he makes the earth and the sky dance in his poetry with all the juxtaposition of hue and colour that haunt our mind with beauty and sublimity. The *jamal* and the *jalal* is the powerful heritage of our culture. We must not forget Mahjoor who has done remarkable work hand in hand with Rasool Mir and has enriched our culture in the modern age. The beauty of Kashmir tosses its head in mirthful dance when Mahjoor's lines are sung in the fields and the in the dell and the dale. Listeners bring back his magnificent experience as contained in **GRES KOOR, YENBERZAL, WOZMAL, BULBUL SUND TCHOOG, TABRI CHOKH and ZOON**. We end this paper with some of the lines of this nightingale of Kashmir