



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

“Laddishah”: A Conceptual Analysis and Study of Kashmiri Folklore

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ABSTRACT

India is land of cultural diversities; every region in India has its own form of folk music. This rich tradition of folk music is very much alive in not just rural India but also in some metro cities. Like other parts of the country, Kashmir has also a rich and pure socio cultural background, which is quite visible in its folk forms and folklores. Kashmir has been a grand arena of folk music, since time immemorial there have been poets, writers, Musicians, Dramatists, dancers etc., who have attained glory in the literacy and art world of Kashmir. From the very beginning Kashmiri people love singing and dancing and have always been a part of their literary culture. Festivals, fairs, marriages, receptions each have a particular folk style to suit the occasion. The characteristic feature of Kashmiri folk songs like “Laddishah” has its direct mass appeal. “Laddishah” the folk songs of Kashmir carries the message of nature, mind and soul of the simple and pure Kashmiri people.

Keywords: Laddishah, Idiosyncratic, Mantras, Purity, Kashmiri language

1. Introduction

Laddishah is a literary term which has multiple meaning. Ladi means a row or line; shah has been added afterwards with the advent of Muslim rulers. “Laddishah” has a very significant historical background. The said genre especially flourished during the region of imperialism and colonialism, when our state was under the control of Non-Residents or outsiders. In those grim days “Laddishah” used to provide some sort of entertainment and pleasure to the native Kashmiri's even though the pleasure was temporary. Laddishah used to wear some typical things such as, turban on his head, a hanging piece of cotton cloth, white in colour, on his right shoulder a long white robe traditional sort of Kashmiri sleeper made of dry paddy and long moustaches, all these typical things were the identity of a “Laddishah”.

The idiosyncratic feature of Kashmiri folk songs like “Laddishah” lies in its direct mass appeal. These folk songs become a medium of conveying the serenity and purity of Kashmiri people. The rhythms are slow and controlled yet full of enlightenment. Kashmiri folk songs sustain within them a bewitching and aesthetic charm which transforms it into something engrossing and thought-provoking. These folk songs not only manifest the melodic traditions of Kashmir but also carry a sense of inspiration and motivation for the indigenous masses.

2. Origin and Meaning

Most of the researchers are of the opinion that “Laddishah” might have been a village “Faqir” (mendicant) who hailed from “Ler” a village in district ‘Pulwama’. Since the village “Ler” fell in a flood prone area it could have been possible that due to the catastrophic consequences of the inundation, some elderly members of the Shah family (professional folk singers) of “Ler” village might have composed a poem explaining the devastation caused. A

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legendary figure Nishat Ansari considers that Ladishah is not at all the contribution of folk literature while as famous scholar Dr. Farooq Fayaz keeps Ladishah within the domain of folk literature.

According to Dr. Farooq Fayaz, "It is slightly similar to ShahrAshoob of Urdu poetic form, which is a folk ballad caustically comic-cum-satire in text and historically acting as a representative to voice people's genuine grievances which has proved to be a source of mental consolation for the enslaved folk". He adds, "the originality/ charm of this folk gets lost when it is written so its originality lies in oral form only."

However, Zareef Ahmad Zareef, disagrees and says, "The word "Laddishah" originated from 'Ladi' which means a row or line and 'Shah' has been added with the passage of time with the coming of Muslim rulers. In spite of being uneducated "Laddishah" were the best history describers." Zareef further adds, "Although, "Laddishah" was an important part of Kashmiri culture with hundreds of years of history. Laddishah were an institution in themselves as they were the real communicators with the mastery of conveying serious messages blended with satire and humor".

Dr. Farooq Fayaz nevertheless argues, "There is no reference of "Laddishah" in Rajtarangini so it is believed that Laddishah came into existence in late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century. And most probably in the late eighteenth century when natural calamities like floods, drought and famines were on rise, which ultimately remained the focus of Laddishah rhythms for a long time".

The historical background of Laddishah is quite noteworthy. Garbed in a pheran, white trousers and a white turban, Laddishah would arrive with his musical instrument known as "Trum-Trum" and nowadays known as "DEHRA". The genre is believed to have flourished during the barbaric eras of colonialism and imperialism when Kashmir was under the occupation of outsiders.

Dr. Farooq Fayaz says that in that era the natives of Kashmir were divided into two segments or classes; the elite who were religious and political, familiar with the religious Scriptures and controlling literature and the common masses who were sufferers. From 1585 to 1947, Kashmir was ruled by non-local rulers who institutionalised a feudal government having no connectivity with their subjects. The authoritative government in order to seek legitimacy carried out illegitimate political mechanisms which along with natural calamities resulted in utter misery of Kashmiri people.

In this perspective that Laddishah would enter the streets of a village or someone's courtyard or in the paddy fields hitting his musical instrument and would sing poems on various themes like buniyl- nam'e (earthquake), sehlab-nam'e (flood), AngrezQanoon (Colonialism) and on special occasions like Eid, religious festivals and marriages. The poems were full of messages about the social, cultural and political vandalism. Laddishah sang against the barbarity of the Kashmiri rulers to show his resentment, was a classical character of Kashmiri literature and a staunch believer of constructive criticism.

Some of the famous verses composed by Laddi Shah are:

**1: "AsalamAlaikumLadishahaav
Kadamthavpatharhaezkanmekunthav"**

Meaning

Ladishah has arrived wishing you the best. Come on sit and listen to me.

2: "IllahirahamkarmiskeenunKumkumkarkaersehlaban"

Meaning

Oh God save poor people of Kashmir.

Let there be no floods it caused havoc. God save us and our country.

3: "Mulki Kashmir KyahWanithaavShersingh drag mokulbanithaav"

Meaning

When Sher Singh was the governor of Kashmir natural calamities skyrocketed in Kashmir.

Despite carrying a sense of resentment and abhorrence towards the imperialist regimes, Laddi Shah's poems were full of satire which made people laugh. It entertained them but simultaneously was a derision on the existing occupation. The language of Laddi Shah used to be simple and lucid so the listeners could comprehend it easily. The term itself inclined towards a folk artist who opted for comical, critical and tragical verses. Thus, simplicity used to be the hallmark of Laddi Shah's poems. In those grim days, Laddi Shah used to provide some sort of entertainment and pleasure to the natives of Kashmir although the bliss was temporary. As soon as Laddi Shah made his way into a village or town, in a very short span of time almost the whole village folk assembled there to entertain themselves with his lively and comical performance. As a token of love and reward, the singer was given a handful of rice grains.

3. Conclusion

There was a time indeed when majority of the Kashmiri's were illiterate and same was the case of the folk artists. Those artists presented their performances without the support of piece of paper. Memorization is also important in the sense that it provides opportunity for the artists to use good body gestures and facial expressions. The language of "Laddishah" should be simple and lucid which would become easy for viewers and listeners to comprehend. So simplicity of the language is the hall mark of "Laddishah". One can conclude by saying that Laddi Shah represents an interesting and significant part of Kashmiri music tradition and so being the genre of folk poetry should be passed on to the next generations. It must be provided patronage by the government and other private institutions. Dr. Farooq says, "A careful analysis of these songs of "Laddishah" is sure to help in understanding the otherwise hidden aspects of Kashmiri social life as we can find names of places, local names, flora and fauna mentioned in different "Laddishah" folklores which helps in building up local history." He adds, "History doesn't revolve only around literate class now, we have the local history in different folktales."

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