

Influence of Folk Music on Sufi Music

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Abstract

Sufi music, with its deep spiritual resonance and emphasis on divine love, has been profoundly shaped by various folk music traditions across different regions. This abstract explores the multifaceted influence of folk music on Sufi musical forms, highlighting how indigenous melodies, rhythms, and instrumentation have enriched and diversified its expressive palette. Folk music's inherent simplicity, directness, and often communal nature provided a fertile ground for Sufi mystics to convey complex spiritual concepts in an accessible manner. From the Qawwalis of South Asia, which draw heavily on local melodic structures and poetic forms, to the ritualistic music of North African Sufi orders incorporating Berber and Arab folk elements, the interplay is evident. The use of specific scales (Ragas in India, Maqams in the Middle East) prevalent in folk music have been adopted and adapted within Sufi repertoires, lending distinct regional flavors. Furthermore, traditional folk instruments, like the Tabla, Daff, Sitar, and various flutes, have been seamlessly integrated, contributing unique timbres and rhythmic patterns. Folk storytelling traditions and narrative structures have also informed the lyrical content and performance styles, allowing Sufi messages to resonate more deeply with local audiences. This symbiotic relationship not only facilitated the spread of Sufi philosophy but also ensured its enduring relevance and adaptability across diverse cultural landscapes. The ongoing dialogue between Folk and Sufi music underscores the organic and evolving nature of both traditions.

Keywords: Sufi music, Folk music, Punjab, Qawwali, Kafi, Sama, Sufi poetry, Folk instruments, Baba Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Jugani, Dholak, Tambi, Chimta, Vernacular language, Mysticism, Spiritual, Divine Love Fusion paper

INTRODUCTION

Music is a powerful medium for expressing human emotions and spiritual experiences. Punjab, known as the land of five rivers, has been a center of cultural and spiritual heritage [1]. Here, Folk music and Sufi music have both developed in parallel for centuries, influencing each other. Sufi music, a spiritual art form based on Islamic mysticism, expresses divine love and the feeling of becoming one with God [2]. On the other hand, Folk music is the voice of the common people's lives, their sorrows and joys, and their daily experiences. The main objective of this research paper is to understand how Punjabi Folk music has influenced the form, melodies, instruments, and poetic style of Sufi music. This influence is evident not just only at musical level, but also at the cultural, social, and linguistic levels.

When Sufism arrived in India from Central Asia and Persia in the 12th and 13th centuries, it began to adopt local folklore and culture [3]. Sufi fakirs realized that to convey their message to the people, it was essential to use their own language and music. In this way, Sufi music adopted the melodies and styles of Folk music instead of courtly and Classical music, which made it more accessible and effective for the public.

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Sufi music, considered a symbol of spirituality and *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* (true love), is a musical form that has been rooted in people's hearts for centuries. It is not just a way of singing, but a journey of divine love and inner peace [4]. When we look at the journey of Sufi

music, its roots are very deep in Folk music. In fact, Sufi music cannot be imagined without Folk music. These two musical streams are connected to each other like the roots and trunk of a tree.aq.

FUSION OF FOLK MUSIC AND SUFI MUSIC

When Sufism traveled from Iran, Arabia, and Central Asia to South Asia, especially Punjab, Sindh, and Hindustan, it began to adopt local cultures and arts. The Sufi fakirs' aim was to bring people closer to God, and for this, they used music as a medium [5]. They saw that the melodies and songs of Folk music directly resonated with people's hearts. Therefore, they started presenting their spiritual teachings in the form of folk songs.

Folk Music Melodies in Punjabi Sufi Music

In Punjab, where Sufism has had a great influence, the fusion of Folk music and Sufi music is most visible. Punjabi Sufi poets, like *Baba Farid*, *Shah Hussain*, *Bulleh Shah*, *Sultan Bahu*, and *Khwaja Ghulam Farid*, adopted Punjabi folk poetic forms for their compositions [6]. They wrote their works in forms like *Kafi*, *Siharfi*, *Dohra*, and *Barahmah*.

Kafi: A Special Folk-Musical Form

Kafi, a popular musical genre in Punjab and Sindh, became an important part of Sufi music. Poets, like Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah, adopted the melodies and styles of folk songs in their Kafis. These Kafis are often simple and heartfelt, connecting themes of rural life, love, and separation with divine love. These Kafis are sung using folk instruments, like the *dholak*, *harmonium*, and *tambur*, which gives them a special folk color [7].

The Importance of Folk Instruments

The use of folk instruments in Sufi music is very old. Instruments, like the *dholak*, *ghara* (earthen pot), *tambur*, *rabab*, and *dhadd*, gave new energy to Sufi music. The melodies of these instruments have a charm that gives the listener a sublime experience. In Qawwali, the mix of the *harmonium*, *tabla*, and *dholak* shows the power of Folk music [8]. These instruments create a rhythmic atmosphere in the music, which helps enhance the spiritual experience during *Sama* (Sufi musical session).

Influence of Language and Dialect

To convey their message to the people, Sufi poets adopted local languages like Punjabi, Sindhi, and Saraiki instead of Persian and Arabic. Baba Farid's poems, which are in Punjabi, became rooted in people's hearts because his language was very simple and that of the common people. In this way, Sufi music came closer to the people and took the form of a mass movement.

Folk Melodies and Ragas

Many ragas and melodies used in Sufi music are taken from folk music. For example, *Raga Kafi*, which is based on Folk melodies, is used in many Sufi songs [9]. In addition, the simple and charming melodies of Folk songs are used to sing Sufi *kalam*, which makes them even more attractive to the people.

Folk Elements in Qawwali

Qawwali, the most famous form of Sufi music, is filled with folk elements. The use of clapping, which is very common in Punjabi folk music, creates a special rhythm [10]. Sometimes, the lyrics or melodies of Folk songs are also included in the performance of Qawwali, which makes it even more spiritual and vibrant.

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SUFI MUSIC

Sufi music, also called "Sama" (listening), is a spiritual practice whose purpose is to achieve spiritual ecstasy through music and dance. It is a way for Sufi dervishes and Fakirs to establish a dialogue with God. Its main characteristics include:

- *Divine Love*: This music expresses divine love, the separation from the beloved, and the longing to meet with him.

- *Simplicity and Spirituality*: Its purpose is to immerse the listener in spiritual meditation, not just to entertain.
- *Rhythm and Beat*: It has rhythmic and repetitive lyrics, which are helpful for meditation during *Sama*.
- *Importance of Poetry*: The soul of Sufi music is its poetry (*kalam*), which expresses spiritual teachings and deep philosophy in simple words.

NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF PUNJABI FOLK MUSIC

Punjabi folk music is vast and diverse. It is a mirror of Punjabi life. It has many forms [11], such as:

- *Boliyan*: Short poems often sung during Gidha and Bhangra.
- *Tappe*: Short lyrics of one or two lines that express a particular emotion.
- *Jugni*: A form of folk song that describes the journey of a specific character (Jugni) and her experiences.
- *Dhola*: Songs related to love stories and separation.
- *Mahiya*: Short songs of love and separation.

Folk music often uses local instruments like the *dhol*, *dholak*, *chimta*, *algoze*, *tumbi*, and *sarangi* [12]. This music is often sung in fields, fairs, weddings, and other social gatherings.

Influence of Folk Music on Sufi Poetry and Music

This is the main section where we will analyze this relationship in depth.

- *Influence of Poetic Forms*: Sufi poets adopted folk poetic forms to convey their message to the common people. These forms were simple and easily understood by people.
- *Kafi*: This is the most important form of Sufi poetry. Shah Hussain is considered the father of Kafi. Kafi, a short poetic form of Arabic origin, has two or more lines added to it while singing. Shah Hussain added the melodies and themes of Punjabi folk songs (like love, separation, and death) to it. Poets, like Bulleh Shah, Khwaja Ghulam Farid, and Sachal Sarmast, made Kafi even more famous [13]. The simple structure and heartfelt melodies of Kafi brought it closer to folk music.
 - *Example*: Bulleh Shah's Kafi: "I am not a body, not bones, not flesh, not a nerve" – Despite its philosophical depth, its melody and style match Punjabi folk melodies.
 - *Siharfi*: In this poetic form, each stanza begins with a letter of the Arabic alphabet. Sultan Bahu's Siharfi is a prominent example. He expressed Sufi spirituality in the style of Punjabi Folk poetry [14].
 - *Dohra*: This is a short and concise form of Folk poetry, which Sufi poets also used in their compositions. It is often sung as middle verses in Sufi songs.
 - *Jugni*: This is a form of Folk song in which a character named Jugni travels to different places and makes social and religious comments based on what she sees. Sufi singers also included Jugni in their singing but made its lyrics spiritual. Jugni is proof of how a simple folk form was used for spiritual purposes.

INFLUENCE OF FOLK LANGUAGE

Sufi Fakirs adopted Punjabi and local dialects (like Lahndi, Saraiki) instead of Persian and Arabic for their religious teachings. This allowed their message to reach the common people directly.

- *Baba Farid*: Baba Farid's *shaloks* are in pure Punjabi, which shows how he expressed deep philosophy in a simple language. His compositions include words from daily life (like roti, work, field), which help people connect with him.
- *Bulleh Shah*: He also wrote his Kafis in simple Punjabi, openly using folk words like *ghar* (home), *vihra* (courtyard), *charkha* (spinning wheel), and *mahi* (beloved). This made his message even more effective for the common people.

INFLUENCE OF FOLK MELODIES AND RAGAS

Many ragas and melodies used in Sufi music are directly inspired by folk music, e.g.:

- *Raga Kafi*: This raga is made from Punjabi Folk music melodies and is very common in Sufi *kalam*. It has a special kind of sadness and feeling of separation, which aligns with Sufi philosophy.

- *Adaptation of Folk Melodies*: The simple and charming melodies of Punjabi folk songs, such as Mahiya, Dhola, or Boliyan, are used to sing Sufi *kalam*. These melodies create a familiar feeling in the listener's mind and convey the message to the heart. Similarly, a mix of folk melodies is often seen in Qawwali.

USE OF FOLK INSTRUMENTS

The use of folk instruments in the performance of Sufi music is an important element.

- *Dholak and Tumbi*: These two instruments are the soul of Punjabi folk music. The fast beat and rhythmic sound of the dholak in Qawwali make the *Sama* even more energetic. The tumbi, a simple one-stringed instrument, is sung with Kafis and Sufi lyrics. This instrument itself represents the Sufi philosophy (one string – one God) [15].
- *Chimta*: A simple but effective instrument, the sound of the chimta creates a special rhythm in Sufi music, especially when the singer repeats the lyrics.
- *Harmonium*: Although it is not a native instrument of Punjab, it was adopted extensively for playing folk melodies.

Prominent Sufi Poets of Punjab and Their Works

The Sufi poets of Punjab took this fusion of folk music and poetry to its peak.

- *Baba Farid (1173–1266)*: He is considered the pioneer of Punjabi poetry. His *shaloks* talk about simple folk life, human sorrows, humility, and living according to God's will. His language is pure Punjabi, which brings him closer to the people.
- *Shah Hussain (1538–1599)*: He made "Kafi" the main form of Punjabi Sufi poetry. The color of folk songs is clearly visible in his Kafis such as themes of love, separation, and *ishq*.
- *Sultan Bahu (1629–1691)*: His poetic style is based on "Siharfi" (Alif, Bay, Pay, Tay...). His compositions have the sweetness of the Punjabi folk dialect and a deep experience of divine love [16].
- *Bulleh Shah (1680–1757)*: He is the most famous poet of Punjabi Sufi poetry. His Kafis are sung in folk melodies and express *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* very openly. He opposed religious fanaticism and spoke of finding God within oneself. His words are still rooted in people's hearts today.
- *Khwaja Ghulam Farid (1845–1901)*: His work is greatly influenced by Saraiki and Sindhi folk melodies. His songs also incorporate elements of Rajasthani and Sindhi folk music.

CASE STUDY: JUGNI, KAFI, AND QAWWALI

- *Jugni*: Jugni is a symbolic character who travels to villages, cities, and places in Punjab. Originally, it was a folk song that made social comments. But Sufi artists gave it a spiritual form. They made Jugni a symbol of the "soul" or "spirit", which is wandering in this world and searching for God. In this way, folk song form became a medium for expressing a spiritual theme.
- *Kafi*: As mentioned above, Kafi is sung in the style of folk songs. The blend of rhythm, beat, and instruments is like folk music. The way Kafi is sung, with the main singer and others accompanying him, is like the style of folk singing [17].
- *Qawwali*: Qawwali is the most influential form of Sufi music, with very strong folk elements. The use of clapping in Qawwali performances, which is an essential part of folk dances and songs, plays an important role. The lyrics sung in Qawwali are often from Sufi poets, but folk instruments and melodies are used in their performance. Qawwals, like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, made Qawwali even more famous by including the melodies of Punjabi Folk songs.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Folk music has played a huge role in the development and spread of Sufi music. It gave Sufi poetry and music a language, melody, and style that were familiar to the common people. When Sufi Fakirs adopted folk poetic forms, like *Kafi*, *Siharfi*, and *Dohra*, for their compositions, their message easily reached people's hearts. Similarly, the use of folk instruments, like the *dholak*, *chimta*, and *tumbi*, gave Sufi music a rhythmic and vibrant form that takes the listener into a state of spiritual ecstasy [18].

This was not just a one-way influence but a mutual exchange. Folk music made Sufi music popular among the masses, while Sufi music gave Folk melodies a deep spiritual meaning. Punjabi Sufi poets,

like *Baba Farid*, *Shah Hussain*, and *Bulleh Shah*, included Folk language and colloquial words in their poetry, taking Sufism to every home. In this way, Folk music became the soul and heartbeat of Sufi music, which is why it remains vibrant and influential even today.

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