

Daastan: At the brink of extinction

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Abstract

Daastan literally means story/ tale. In Daastan, a group of story tellers start the Daastan with an old folk story or a tale and during the narration of tale Daastan tellers take pause and during that pause give a poetic touch to the story and various musical instruments are also used while the story is expressed in poetic form. Thus Daastan is a unique combination of story, poetry and music and as such an indispensable part of the Kashmiri music. In Daastan not only old Kashmiri folk stories like Krali Koor, Aknandun but also other old stories like Laila Majnoon, Shireen Farhad, and Yousuf Zulikha etc are also narrated.

Keywords: daastan, stories, Kashmiri folk

Introduction

During winter season the life in the Kashmir valley used to get paralysed with no means of communication, entertainment and amusement. Farkhunda Bibi 82 ^[1] a local resident of Gamroo Bandipora says during her childhood almost in winter season there was not any source of entertainment; their life was boring during chilly nights of winter. When all passages for outdoor entertainment got paralysed due to heavy Snowfall. The only source of recreation left for Kashmiri people was to listen to the adventurous and romantic tales of Arabian Knights, Persian heroes and tales of legendary heroes of ancient Kashmir. There were professional storytellers whose services were sought to entertain the common folk and people who assembled somewhere for the purpose. This process continued for nights together until the story or tale reached to its end. The professional storytellers were in great demand and they were paid in both cash and kind. Daastan was very popular in among people in earlier times but in recent time s people are losing their interest in Daastan.



Fig 1: Mohammed Ismail Mir and Party Narrating the old Folk Tales known as Daastan

Style of singing

The style of singing of Daastan is somewhat different. In this style of singing a story is narrated in the form of singing. The compositions of such style is simple. The main leader or the

narrator starts the story telling and the chorus or other instrumentalists follow the same. The narrator takes a pause in between and during this the narrator narrates the story and the instrumentalists stops playing instruments and listens to the leader carefully. One of the famous daastan wuzramal is given as under.

Daastani wuzramal

In the beginning the Daastango or story narrator starts to narrate the Daastan of wuzramal in the form of song and then takes a pause and explains/narrates the story in the form of a passage and after that again continues the song and takes a pause and same style is adopted by the story teller during the daastan upto its end like as under:

*Shehri Ajmas manz ha oas Baadshah,
 Tas wanan Daryadin tai,
 Sath Haram aasya Dardeenas,
 Awlaaduk na oasis Shahwai tai... (In Kashmiri language)*

Once upon a time there lived a king, his name was Daryadin and his capital was called as Shehri Ajam. The king had seven wives but none among them were able to provide a child to him and a successor to his throne. The king was desperate for a child who could takeover the responsibility of kingdom after him. The king was a kind ruler and dispensed justice among his subjects without any discrimination, bias and favor.

*Beyi ha oas wazeera Daryadeenas
 Tas wanan Manik Wazeera taai... (In Kashmiri language)*

The king had an obedient and loyal Minister namely Manik Wazir who also was very concerned about his king for being childless and his successor to the throne. The king was God fearing man and took all the measures even gave lavishly in charity, which included gifts of land, garments, gold coins etc but all in vain.

*Doh aki yeme drai saelas,
 Dandakvan kunye lo tai lo.. (In Kashmiri language)*

¹ Inteviu with Farkhunda Bibi a local resident of Bandi Pora on 11th of June 2010 at 2 p.m.

One day Manik Wazir and his King decided to go for a hunt in the forest used to be called as Dandakwan. It is said that they met a saint on their way to the forest. They narrated the whole story to him. He suggested them to visit a place where a person/saint namely Hazrat-e-hadi lived and who could provide a solution to the King's problem for not having a child but the place where said person/saint lived would take twelve long years to reach that place. On their return to palace one of the members of the crew who accompanied the king and his minister to the forest created a misunderstanding between them. As a result of which the king assigned a hard task to the Manik Wazir and ordered him to get the blessings of the saint Hazrat-e-Hadi for the child and successor to his throne Whose name was suggested by the saint who met them in the Dandakwan forest failing which said wazir was threatened of dire consequences. Having no option the Minister started his expedition to comply with the orders of the king. It took twelve long years for Manik Wazir to reach the place where saint Hazrat-e-Hadi lived. After seeing him in octogenarian and shabyish condition Manik Wazir was disappointed and got fainted but after regaining consciousness he was surprised to see the saint in a completely changed better outlook sitting on his cart and Manik Wazir felt highly relieved.

*Asalamalikum Hazrat Haadyo,
Bah wari gayim pakaan tai..
Walikum salam Manik Wazeero
Jal wan panin daastaan tai.. (In Kashmiri language)*

After that Manik Wazir gave his greetings to hazrat-e-hadi who accepted the same and said Wazir started to narrate his story to the saint. The saint listened to his story carefully and gave him two mangoes as consecrate, one was fresh and the other one was rotten. The saint advised him to give these two mangoes to the first wife of the King and told that the moment mangoes would be eaten/consumed by the queen, she will conceive. But at the same time saint asked him to make a promise that the child will be returned back to him on his twelfth birthday. The Wazir was reluctant and said that it will take twelve years for him to return why should he make such the promise. But then Hazrat-e-hadi said that he will help wazir to return immediately, if he makes the promise. The wazir agreed and made the promise. Then Hazrat-e-hadi used his magic to help the wazir to return immediately to sehr-e-ajam.

When Manik Wazir reached his own city nobody recognized him. Everybody got frightened as if he was a beast because of his long hair and appearance. Then a barber was called to cut his long hair and soon after that he was produced before the king. The King asked for the child and the wazir produced the two mangoes and explained the scheme. But due to mistake one of the mangoes slipped out his hand and which was picked up by a female sweeper/servant namely 'watej' or sweeper. Now both the queen and that female sweeper consumed at the mangos. Both conceived and delivered the child. The Queen delivered a male child and was named as 'Shah Dilawar' and also the servant delivered the female child which was named as 'wuzra mal'. Days passed they started to grow with a rapid pace like one month in one night. The upbringing of the shah dilawar took place in the royal atmosphere whereas after the birth of wuzra mal the days her family changed and one day they became very rich. The Wuzra mal

became very beautiful in her youth with the additional qualities of intelligence and wisdom in addition she also got education in a school.

One day shah Dilawar made a visit to the city and saw wuzramal there. He fell in love with wuzra mal and wanted to marry her. After so many difficulties finally the day of their union reached but the same day happened to be his twelfth birthday. On the same day hazrat-e-hadi appeared and reminded manik wazir of his promise. Manik wazir also showed his willingness to abide by his promise but the King and the Queen refused to surrender the prince and with their tearful eyes requested to Hazrat-e-hadi to spare their son in the following words:

*'Hata taj gasiyo takh gachiyo
Kino dimyo maal doulat...'* (In Kashmiri language)

We offer you the crown, the throne and the alms but don't snatch our only child. And the Hazrat-e-hadi replied:

*'Taj no gachimo takht noa gachimo
Kath bakar che mea maal doulat...'* (In Kashmiri language)

I don't need the crown, the throne or the alams what I want is the fulfillment of the promise in the shape of Shah Dilawar. With their tearful eyes they showed their unwillingness to handover Dilawar. Hadi left in fury and anger and put the prince under his spell who forgot everything even his parents. The only thing which he reminded was Hadi to whom he considered his father and started to follow him. Hadi took the prince with him in his own world of sainthood. But after sometime Hadi realized that the prince had taken birth to rule but not to live the life sanyasi (a saint) and sent him back to his place of birth shar-e-ajam. The prince there again met Wuzramal and they reunited again. Wuzramal sang to the fullest extent in jubilation. And the story ended there.

Daastan in recent times has almost lost its relevance and is almost taking its last breaths. There are various factors responsible for the same especially modern means of entertainment like television etc. Though govt. has taken various steps to revive this dying tradition but it seems that such steps have not proved to be effective in reviving the dying tradition.

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