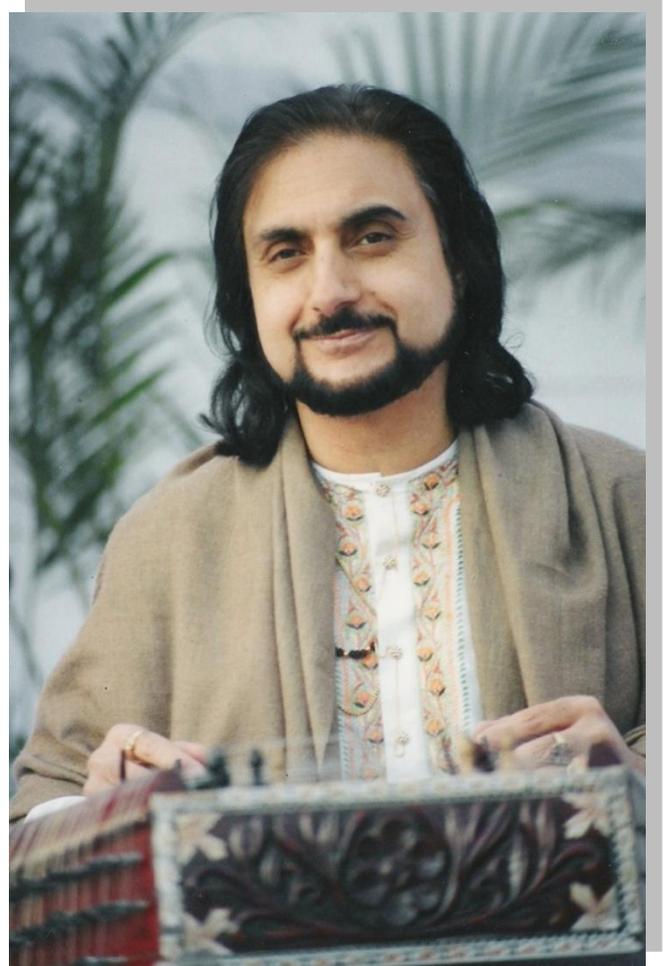


PANDIT BHAJAN SOPORI

– “A Living Legend and a Musical Genius”

A Living Legend and a Musical Genius Pandit Bhajan Sopori is more than an individual – a performer and composer par excellence, musicologist, teacher, writer, poet, and an extraordinary human being – he is a complete institution in himself. Regarded as the cultural bridge of the State of Jammu & Kashmir and the rest of the country, Pandit Bhajan Sopori is hailed as the “Saint of the Santoor” and the “King of Strings”.

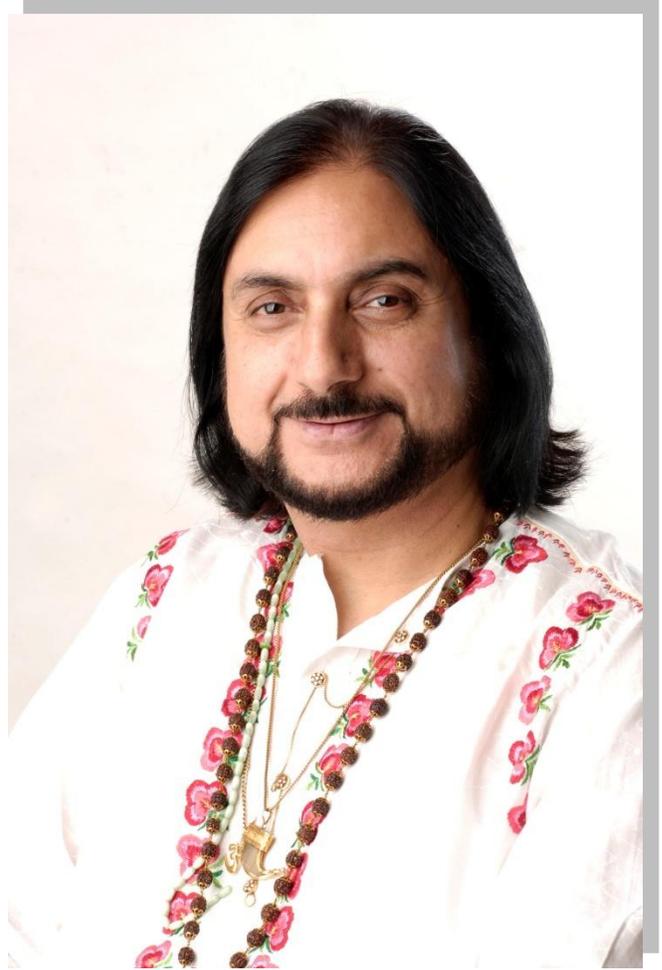
Pandit Bhajan Sopori was born in Srinagar (Kashmir) into a family of musicians of the fabled ‘*Sufiana Gharana*’ of Kashmir (the exclusive traditional Santoor family of the country). The mystic master is the bearer of a rich musical legacy and is the great-grandson of Pandit Shankar Pandit, the great master who developed the style popularly known as the ‘*Sufi Baaj*’ (style), based on *Sufiana Qulam* music and Indian classical music. Pandit Bhajan Sopori was initiated into Santoor playing by his grandfather Pandit S. C. Sopori and later by his father Pandit Shamboo Nath Sopori (hailed as the father of music in the State of Jammu and Kashmir).



Pandit Bhajan Sopori, the Legendary Santoor Maestro and Music Composer, has been the pioneer in establishing the Santoor on national and international platforms as a complete solo instrument. The quiet and unassuming maestro has come long way since he created history by being the first person to play the Indian Classical music on the Santoor in concerts way back in the early 1950’s. In his five decades of dedicated work he has explored various dimensions of the Santoor, carrying out many path-breaking innovations. He has increased the range of the Santoor from the conventional one-and-a-half to more than 5 octaves, balanced the ‘*Kalam*’ (strikers) with ‘*boles*’ and attached the ‘*Tarab*’ and ‘*Tumba*’ for enhanced tonal quality, etc. These innovations combined with his strong base in traditional ‘*Raga-Sangeet*’ allow for a systematic exposition of the *Raga* combining both the ‘*Gayaki*’ and the ‘*Tantrakari Ang*’ (style) in his recitals, demonstrating all the essential stylistic nuances of *Hindustani* Classical Music such as *Meend*, *Glides*, *Gamak*, *Boles*, including the ‘*Dhrupad Ang*’ with the accompaniment of the *Pakhawaj*. His recitals are known for their high degree of technical virtuosity combining highly intricate ‘*layakari*’, legendary ‘*chandhkari*’, speedy ‘*taan*’ patterns running through three octaves and a melodious ‘*alaap*’. He has thereby expanded the scope of the Santoor as a classical instrument and formally established the ‘*Sopori Baaj*’ in the realm of Indian Classical Music for which he is hailed as the “Saint of Santoor” and the “King of Strings”. It is also entirely to the credit of the Sopori Family that *Hindustani* Classical and Light Music acquire legitimate space in the State of J&K.

A highly learned person, Pandit Bhajan Sopori, has a double Masters degree in Indian Classical music, specializing in both the Sitar and the Santoor, besides having a Masters degree in English Literature. He has also studied Western Classical Music at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

Pandit Bhajan Sopori combines a profound knowledge of music and musicology and has carried out immense research on *Naad* (sound) and *Naad Yoga* (sound therapy). A pharmaceutical company released one of his highly commended albums on sound therapy – ‘*Doctor to Patient -Naad Yoga on the Santoor*’. He has also composed music for films, commercials, documentaries, serials, operas, chorals, etc. and has been the youngest ever composer of the National Orchestra of India - *Vadya Vrinda*. He is the only classical musician of the country to have composed music for almost 5000 songs in almost all the languages of the country like *Hindi, Kashmiri, Dogri, Urdu, Sanskrit, Bhojpuri, Punjabi, Himachali, Rajasthani, Telegu, Tamil, etc.* and also foreign languages



like Persian, Arabic, etc. His acclaimed work includes compositions for various musical genres like *Ghazal, Geet, Bhajan, Choirs, Devotional (Hindu, Sikh and Muslim), Children songs, etc.* He has composed the works of almost all the eminent *Urdu and Persian Ghazal* writers of India and Pakistan like *Hali, Jammi, Ghalib, Daag, Momin, Bhadur Shah Zaffar, Iqbal, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Firakh Gaurakhpuri*, and others, to name a few. He has also composed the works of *Kabir, Rai Das, Sur Das, Meera Bai, Bhramanand, Guru Nanak, etc.*

Pandit Bhajan Sopori has led the revival of Sufism to spread the message of humanism amongst the masses especially the youth. Steeped deeply in the Sufi *Parampara* (tradition) by way of his *Gharana* and also his own spiritual leanings, he started performing for Sufi saints in Kashmir at the tender age of eight. He has since then composed the works of most of the legendary Sufi saints of the country like *Lalleshwari, Sheikh-ul-Aalam, Amir Khusrau, Kabir, Hafiz Sherazi, Bulle Shah, Ghani Kashmiri, Baba Farid, etc.* Further, he has also composed *Naats (Islamic devotional songs), Vedic and Sanskrit Chants*. Many of the *Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit* phrases have been set to melody and rhythm for the first time ever by him. He has also composed and introduced three new *Ragas: Raga Laleshwari, Raga Patwanti, and Raga Nirmalranjani.*

Pandit Bhajan Sopori has composed various patriotic songs of India which have been received as master pieces and major musical hits of the country like ‘*Bharat Bharat Hum Iski Santaan*’, ‘*Hum Honge Kaamyaab*’, ‘*Vande Maataram*’, ‘*Naman Tujhko Mere Bharat*’, etc. He has also recomposed and revived the INA songs like ‘*Sarfaroshi Ki Tamanna*’, ‘*Vijayee Vishwa Tiranga*

Pyaara, *'Kadam Kadam Badhaye Jaa'*, *'Bharat Ki Beti'*, etc. for national integration and also composed anti-terrorism songs like *"Savdhan"*, and *"Mere Jannath Mere Kashmir"* for the National Network. His compositions bear the distinctive stamp of his virtuosity and erudition and have featured most of the eminent classical musicians and also popular playback singers of the country. His classical version of *'Saare Jahan Se Achha'* and instrumental version of *'Vande Maataram'* are recognized pioneering efforts.

He created a new wave in the music of J&K with light and folk music and musicians practically grooming under him. This period from 1974 onwards is known as the "Renaissance of Music" in the Valley. He revived and innovated the Folk music in the State making it popular amongst the masses. His compositions became extremely popular becoming a part of the folk music culture. He has his notable contribution in grooming up various writers to write literary, sufi, devotional as well as commercial lyrics. To bring the youth in the Kashmir Valley in the mainstream he composed a collection of prayer and *Tarana-e-Watan* (patriotic songs), sung by large public choirs comprising of almost 6000 youth and school children as a Common Prayer in the Valley.



Through his profound analysis, survey of history and various musical cultures, he established the *Kashmiri* Santoor as the predecessor to the resembling Santoor like instruments found in various other parts of the world. His propagation of music brought a revolution in the world of music and he has established a system for solo performance, voice culture, composition, arrangement, orchestration, conducting, designing of choral music, etc. He has also widened the scope of devotional and religious music.

To further his quest of promoting music as a medium of peace and harmony, Pandit Bhajan Sopori has traveled widely and performing extensively at all the prestigious festivals and conferences in the country and abroad, propagating Indian Classical Music and culture all over the world and going to the remotest of places. He has performed at various art museums, painting exhibitions and art centers in the country and abroad with the sole purpose of creating awareness and a sense of appreciation for all forms of arts amongst the masses as well as reinforce the importance of *Sahitya*, *Shastra* and the tradition in the field of music. In this pursuit, he has hundreds of disciples in the country and abroad in the field of *Santoor*, *Sitar*, *Tabla*, *Guitar*, *Sarangi*, *vocal music*, *music direction*, *Rabab*, *Clarinet*, *Violin*, etc. both in classical and light music. It has been his constant endeavour to patronize the upcoming artists and help them establish themselves in the music stream.

Pandit Bhajan Sopori has used his Santoor and his compositions to highlight the concept of oneness and foster unity enshrining the idea of national integration, humanism and peace amongst the common man and the youth in particular.

For his enormous contributions, he has received numerous awards including the prestigious:

- Padma Shri (one of the highest civilian awards of India),
 - Sangeet Natak Academy Award (highest performing award of India),
 - J&K State Award (highest civilian award of Jammu & Kashmir),
 - National Flag Honour of the Arab Republic of Egypt,
 - National Shiromani Award,
 - Rajiv Gandhi Pratistha Samman,
 - Delhi Ratan Award,
 - Delhi Telugu Academy Award,
 - Beenkar Award (Title honour),
 - Baba Allauddin Khan Award,
 - Sangeet Bhushan Award,
 - Maa Shardey Samman (lifetime achievement award),
 - Sangeet Vibhuti Award (lifetime achievement award),
 - Raag Sagar (lifetime achievement award),
 - Sangeet Ratna Award (lifetime achievement award),
 - Shree Bhatt Kirti Award (lifetime achievement award),
 - Gama Maharaj Award (lifetime achievement award),
 - Sharda Samman (lifetime achievement award),
 - Ustad Chand Khan Award,
 - National Dogri Award,
 - Akashwani Annual Awards,
 - Punjab Sakha Award,
 - Kala Yogi Award,
 - Abhinav Kala Award,
 - Shree Bhatt Kirti Award,
 - Munnu Guru Sangeet Award,
 - Shama Award,
 - Sumadhur Hansdhvani Award,
 - Distinguished Leadership Award,
 - Radio Kashmir Srinagar Golden Jubilee Celebrations Award,
 - Kashmir Overseas Association Award –USA (lifetime achievement award),
 - Kashmir Society KOA Award (lifetime achievement award),
- and many more...

