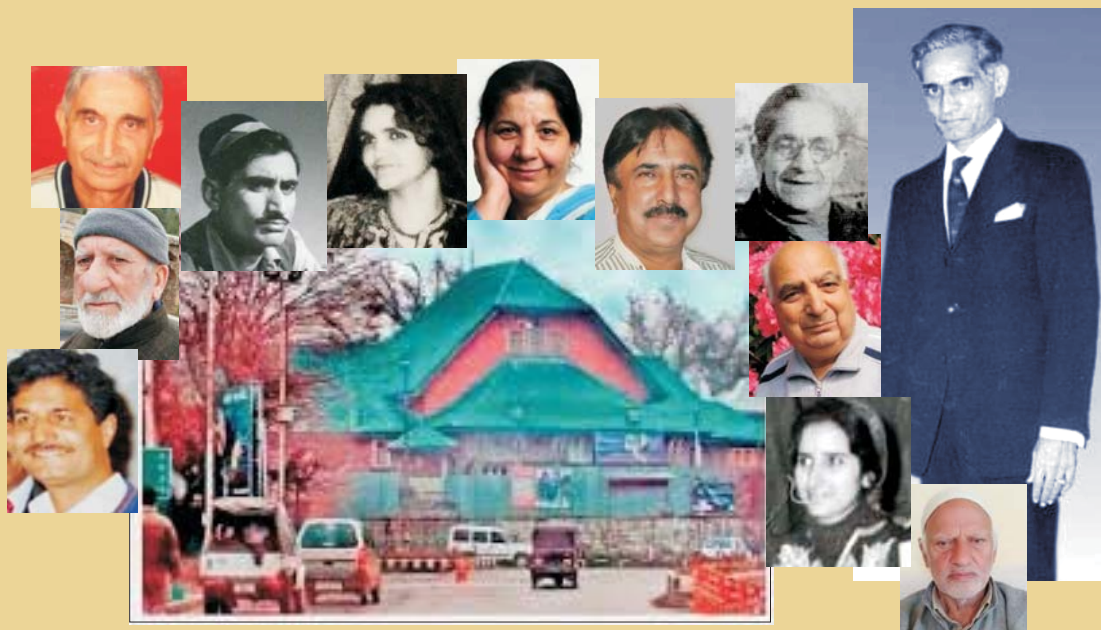


**Supplement**  
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**Zoona Dab**  
The Flagship Programme of  
Radio Kashmir, Srinagar



**M.K.Raina**



## Zoono Dab

### The Flagship Programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar



- M.K.Raina

**C**irca 1972: TV Tower of the Srinagar Doordarshan was under construction at the top of Shankaracharya hill. Midway through the construction, a portion of the tower collapsed. Why? It was not known to public, so became talk of the town. In one episode of Zoono Dab, this was the subject discussed in the family. Elders and some guests were expressing their views with regard to the collapse. No concrete reason could emerge. Mama Pipji, the servant of the household came up with his idea thus:

(Note: Mama Pipji had a speech problem, would pronounce words in a defective way, and that was the beauty of his performance. Given below, the words are however written in their correct form):

**Mama Pipji:** Hà, mó haz chhay patàh yi kithû pàthi pèv.

**Agha Saeb:** Kithà pàthi, téli vanàn kyàzi chhúkh nû?

**Mama Pipji:** Ath haz òs kàv akh péthi kini pakàn, támì kârûs rêkh. Adû tàwar àv pathar làyinû.

This was a satire, reflecting on the work of those involved in the construction, and this was the popular family drama Zoono Dab.

**Year 1982:** Mama Pipji was seriously ill and had been admitted in AIIMS, New Delhi. (In fact Pushkar Bhan had met an accident in Srinagar and had to be operated upon for some grave neurological problem). So he was absent from the Zoono Dab. There was a wave of shock in Kashmir and everybody wanted to know about his welfare. Agha Säb explained about Mama Pipji's health condition in the household but people were still





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anxious, wanting to know more details. So a neurologist doctor was brought in the show itself who explained in detail the medical problem and the treatment given. Mama joined the show back after a long time and people got a big relief. Pushkar Bhan had in fact lost his memory in the accident. It took him long time to get his memory back in which Som Nath Sadhu played a vital role.

Krishnamachari Srikant was brought into the Indian Cricket Team some time in 1981. He was playing well in an ODI match most probably against England. The show at Zoona Dab ran like this:

**Agha Saeb:** yí Srikant chhú jàn gíndàn

**Mama Pipij:** yí haz chhúy tàp khíladi. bû haz zànûnay yí lôkûchârû pêthay.

**Agha Bai:** tsû katyù zànûhan yí? tsû katyúk tà, yí katyúk tà?

**Mama Pipij:** hà yí haz chhúy aslì sàni gàmúk. âmís chhúy aslì nàv Siri Kanth. Pòshí kújí hùnd néchúv haz

**Agha Saeb:** Hahaha .....

Mama Pipji's usage of words was unique. Some distorted words



Radio Kashmir

became famous because of him like wash-gun-ton for Washington and thapaankot for Pathankot.

Present generation of Kashmiris may not know anything about the 15 minute daily serial **Zoona Dab** broadcasted from Radio Kashmir, Srinagar (now All India Radio) during 1960s - 1980s but if they ask their elders, it may turn them (elders) emotional. It was really a mesmerizing serial. There would hardly be a Kashmiri who would not listen to this programme before leaving for his or her daily work.

Earlier, Radio Kashmir used to broadcast a programme named Wotal-Buji to counter Pakistan's propaganda against India. This programme, humorous in content, was very popular with the listeners. After its closure, Radio Kashmir started Zoona Dab to fill the void created by stopping Wotal-Buji.

Zoona Dab literally means



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Moon Balcony (balcony open to moonlight). Sartaj Hussain (@SartajHussain\_) a member of the Twitterati describes Zoona Dab in his **‘Architecture of Kashmir - A Thread’** as a small wooden structure balcony made outside the main body of the house to view the Moon.

So Zoona Dab was the name conceived for the 15-minute programme written by Pushkar Bhan and Som Nath Sadhu which broadcasted on Radio Kashmir, Srinagar in the morning hours for a full 19 years, 6 days a week without break. The play, showcased a common Kashmiri household where members of the family and the guests who would occasionally step in, shared happy moments with the public and also discussed hardships and day to day issues concerning common Kashmiris. Anybody facing a problem in the society or with the administration, could contact Zoona Dab and they would in turn discuss it in the play. A

guest or a known friend would come in and meet Agha Säb for his advice. This way, the individual problems would come into the limelight and get bigger publicity. Zoona Dab could also be categorised into an educative programme which imparted knowledge in a homely atmosphere.

Zoona Dab was the most popular family serial ever presented on radio. Even after four decades, all those who listened to it, carry sweetest memories of the family called Agha Säb’s family.

Head of the house, known as Aga Säb, was a highly respected character. He would usually deliver his opinion on the issues discussed and share information related to them with the family members and in turn with the audience. It could be the case of a pensioner facing difficulties to get his pension case settled one day, or a ration ghat owner selling grains in black the next day, or the public works department making mockery in the name of repairing roads, another day. There was no issue which public faced at large and which would not be discussed in the Zoona Dab. Zoona Dab was meant to address all such issues and not only find solutions but bring the government officials concerned live on the programme at times and seek answers from them if the problems persisted. People were



**Zoona Dab**  
The Flagship Programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar



**Team Zoona Dab :**

From left to right : Nayeema Akhtar (Nana Koor), Som Nath Sadhu (Agha Saeb), Maryam Begum (Agha Bai), Pushkar Bhan (Mama Pipjee), Usha Nehru (nosh), Ashok Kak (Ismala), Bashir Arif (Nazir Lala)  
(Image courtesy : Bashir Arif)

mad after this programme. Though the administration was not comfortable with the programme



**N.N.Chawla**

because government's weak points were discussed openly, it continued to broadcast with the blessings of the then Station Director N.N.Chawla. Mr Chawla is said to be the one who gave a new dimension to broadcasting in India. He was responsible for bringing in public voice on the radio. If the credit for starting a programme like Zoona Dab goes to anybody, it is undoubtedly Mr N.N.Chawla.

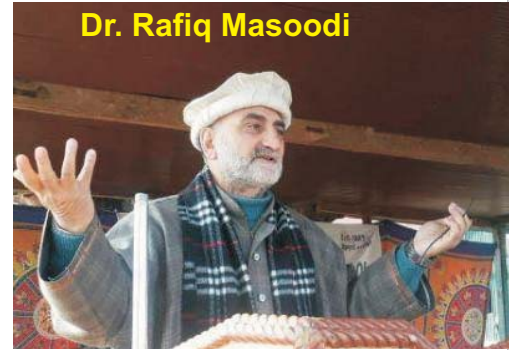
The then CM G.M.Sadiq was said to have directed all DCs, Commissioners and Secretaries to monitor Zoona Dab on regular basis and address the issues raised



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therein. It was for the first time in the history of broadcasting that any radio programme was on air for so long and yet remained popular till its closure. It was this programme which won Padam Shri for its three main actors namely Som Nath Sadhu, Pushkar Bhan and Marriyam Begum. It may also be mentioned here that Somnath Sadhu, Pushkar Bhan, Marriyam Begum, Sharif-ud-Din, Bashir Arif, Ashok Kak and Usha Nehru, all from Zoona Dab got Sadiq Memorial Awards in the year 1981.

“Zoona Dab was a conception of Pushkar Bhan when he was in charge of rural programme 'gāmi bāyan hūndī khātrū', says Dr. Rafeeq Masoodi, former Dy Director General, Doordarshan. “It was thought to be a family serial to give new and modern dimension to then family fibre in the valley. Main characters of the serial were developed to give representation to



Dr. Rafiq Masoodi

all sections of the society. Mama Pipji was a rural character, Agha Säb urban and Ismal, Mama's friend was a mixture of semi-urban and rural culture.”

Regarding scripting of the serial, Dr. Rafeeq Masoodi says, “Highlighting public issues and grievances was an add-on part of this family feature. Scripting was exclusively done by Pushkar Bhan. Characters were flexible. Presentation of the drama was so forceful that it had become non-separable part of morning Chai-chat of Kashmiri families.





## Zoona Dab The Flagship Programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar

Dr. Rafeeq Masoodi cites an interesting anecdote:

“The name of my village, now a town, Dangiwacha, was in the news for wrong reasons those days (1970s). Copying in Matric was a serious issue. We had a High School in the village and truth of the matter was that during Matric exams, all of a sudden we would witness rush of fashionable boys and girls in the narrow bylanes. Those days one had the choice to prefer his or her examination centre and since copying was attributed to Dangiwacha with motives, Mama Pipji in one of the episodes took up the issue thus:

(Note: Original dialogues were in Kashmiri)

**Mama Pipji:** I want to go to Dangiwacha for a few days.

**Agha Säb:** Why?

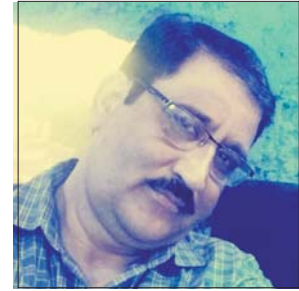
**Mama Pipji:** I have to clear my Matric.

**Aghabai:** Matric? But you never studied. At least I have not seen you studying ever.

**Mama Pipji:** That is why I want to write my examinations at Government High School, Dangiwacha as every help is available there even from outside.

This was how the daily drama used to take up the social issues and reach the administration for suitable action.”

Dr. Rajesh Bhat, Writer, Journalist with All India Radio, New Delhi writes in his book ‘**R a d i o Kashmir in Times of Peace and War**’:



“Zoona Dab (Moon on a Wooden Balcony) was an iconic programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar through which Pak media's gross propaganda was at times effectively repulsed. Although a family serial, mostly focussing on grievances of the public, its stock characters would, however, touch upon the goings-on in the neighbouring country. This feature that went on air in 1965 came in handy during the war and even after the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict. Considering its tremendous listenership, the messages guarding the strategic interests of the nation, were conveyed across the masses through its three important radio characters - Pushkar Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu and Marriyam Begum - and this trinity was conferred Padma Shri in 1974, thereby creating history in Indian broadcasting, as far the very first time radio artistes became



### A rare photograph of 1970s - Ace Artistes of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar

(Image courtesy : Dr. Rajesh Bhat)

**Sitting L to R :** Marriyam Begum (Agha Bai of Zoona Dab), Amrit Lal Maini (Station Director, Radio Kashmir), Raj Begum (Renowned Kashmiri Ghazal Singer)

**Standing L to R :** Pran Kishore (Prolific Drama Producer), Pushkar Bhan (Mama Pipji of Zoona Dab), Som Nath Sadhu (Agha Säb of Zoona Dab), Mohd. Abdullah Tibet Baqal (Renowned maestro of Sufiana Kalaam)

Pran Kishore, Pushkar Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu, Marriyam Begum and Raj Begum were all recipients of Padam Shri Awards. Mohd. Abdullah Tibet Baqal was the recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Traditional Music.







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recipients of the Padma awads. The people of Kashmir, now living across the globe, miss this highly popular serial which delved into public and social issues with all the elements of an absorbing radio feature, lending it high credibility and acceptability. After the closure of the programme in the late Eighties, Radio Kashmir, Srinagar could not, somehow, produce such a highly commended programme, although some efforts had been made to resume it in October 1997.”

Engineer Manzoor Ahmad Nawchoo, now an Engineering Consultant with Rodic Consultants India Ltd. was a huge fan of Zoona Dab. He would not move an inch from his radio set till the episode ended with the closing tune. He remembers many episodes of his pet serial, one of which is given below:

Indian Cricket team was playing a match at a foreign soil. Due to time difference, the match was played when it was night in India. Madan Lal, a top batsman got hit wicket out, sending his fans into shivers. Mama Pipji had a small transistor radio which he had kept under his pillow. He listened to the commentary whole night. In the morning, Agha Bai asked him to bring tea for Agha Säb. Mama Pipji took some time.

**Agha Saeb:** yí Màmû kót gav?  
chày katí chhé?

**Agha Bai:** banàvàn àsí.

hayò Màmà!

**Mama Pipji:** hà às haz às. zû  
mínat pyàr haz!

Mama Pipji came in a while. Agha Saeb was slightly furious.

**Agha Saeb:** yùt vakht kath lóg akh  
c u p c h à y  
banàvûnas?

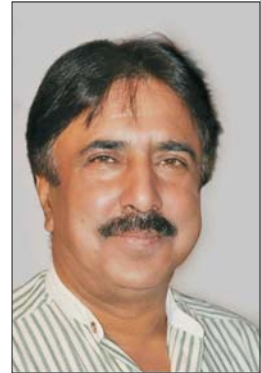
**Mama Pipji:** hatû haz àghû säb.  
kyah vanay. àmi  
Madanan zòlûnam  
badan. ràtas òsús  
húshàrûy. yí bíchòr  
chhú bàl vúchhíthûy  
pathar pèvàn.

**Agha Saeb:** ahànù tû yí chhí khèl.  
tsû kath rùdúkh  
húshàrûy?

**Mama Pipji:** bù haz òsús pyàràn  
àmís mà dín béyí  
gíndnû tû kanh nafar  
mà dínas sùti thaf  
karûnas.

Mama Pipji’s dialogues and the way he spoke, were 99.9 % humour, always.

Bashir Arif who played Nazir Lâlû in the serial is a class humourist and a lively character even now. It was a great pleasure talking to him. Whenever I asked for some info on a





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particular point, Bashir Saab would not answer immediately. He would first tell me a short story or an anecdote or a joke, having some relation with our topic and then answer my particular query. I always felt honoured to talk to him. And he never let me feel that he was tired, even if he was. At times, I was sure he would be annoyed with the repetition of questions but sound waves generated by my phone would only confirm Bashir Sahib’s smiling face at the other end.

Asked, when did the Zoona Dab start broadcasting and how did it take shape, Bashir Arif said, “It was 3rd of October 1966 when first episode of this Radio family feature was broadcasted from Radio Kashmir, Srinagar. Months before its broadcast, the then Station Director Mr. Nand Lal Chawla had hand picked a junior officer, an assistant producer, Shri Somnath Sadhu and discussed with him as to how to go about a programme where public grievances would be highlighted in a way that would entertain the listeners and apprise the authorities about the sufferings of the common man. And this gave birth to a serial which made Radio history.”

“Why was the Station Director Mr Chawla so keen to start such a kind of programme?” I asked.

“The inner story of this whole process had a political back drop. In September 1965 war between India and Pakistan saw a simmering



G.M.Sadiq

public anger and people used to listen to Radio Pakistan morning news bulletin at 07.30 all across the valley. To counter it with a more public friendly programme, Mr. Chawla had a differently innovative idea which turned to be a great success. Chawla Sahib had the blessings of Delhi and at the same time, he had on board the then state CM, Late Mr. G M Sadiq. An official communication was sent to all heads of institutions directing them to monitor closely and attend to on priority whatever public grievances were raised in Zoona Dab. Common Kashmiri started relating himself with the stock characters like Agha Säb, Agha Bâi, Nazir Lala, Mama Pipji, Nana Koor, Ismala, Ramba, Sula Sahab, Sharief-ud-din, Nôsh (wife of Nazir Lala), Butt Säb, Jaga Kak, Mokhta and some more characters who participated occasionally. Above



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all, there was a character named Radha Mâl, an old Kashmiri Pandit lady of Zoona Dab neighbourhood. Radha Mâl never appeared physically in the feature but her simple mention would personify her.”

### Characters :

Head of the family was Habibullah Sahib, lovingly called Haba Säb by outsiders and Aga Säb by family members. His role was played by Som Nath Sadhu. His wife was Aga Bâi played by Marriyam Begum. They had a son called Nazir Lala, played by Bashir Arif. His wife Nôsh was played by Usha Nehru. Nazir’s cousin Nana Koor was played by Nayeema Ahmad. Servant Mama Pipji who was centre of the attraction in every episode, was played by Pushkar Bhan. Another character Ramba was played by Farooq Nazki.

Introduction of Ramba has a story behind. It so happened that in 1969 Pushkar Bhan was sent to Australia for specialised course of Farm Broadcast. In his absence a new character of Ramba Lala was introduced to keep the humour going. This led to induction of Farooq Nazki in the scene and the character proved successful. Afterwards Farooq Nazki also contributed in scripting the Zoona Dab. Mohd Sultan Pandit, Sharief-ud-Din and Bashir Arif too scripted Zoona Dab occasionally.

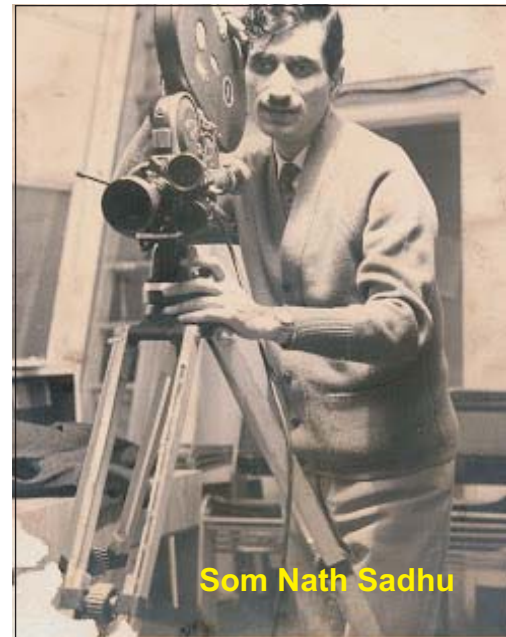
Ismal, the friend of Mama Pipji was played by Ashok Kak. Sharif-ud-Din played the role of Mam (Agha Bâi’s brother).

A regular visitor at the Zoona Dab used to be Jaga Kâkh (nicknamed Jaga Pensioni), a friend of Agha Saeb, who was frustrated because of non-settlement of his pension case in a government office. His role was played by Jagar Nath Saqi.

Another occasional character in the serial was Sulû Säb, played by Mohd. Sultan Pandit.

### Som Nath Sadhu :

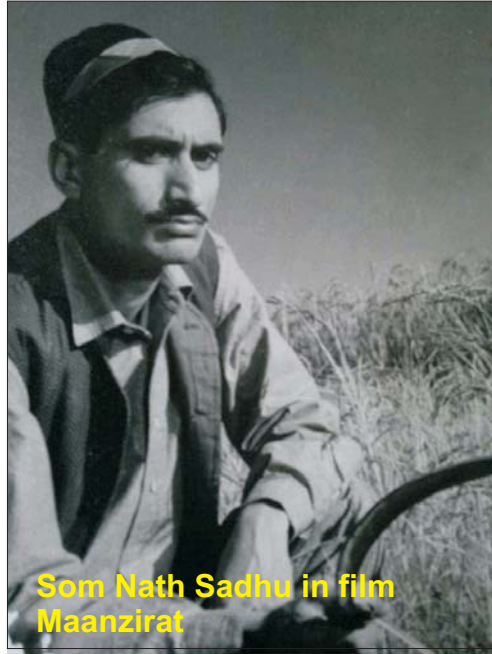
Born in 1935, Som Nath Sadhu died in 1982 at a young age of 47 years. Son of a veteran playwright Prem Nath Pardesi, Som Nath Sadhu had



Som Nath Sadhu



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Som Nath Sadhu in film  
Maanzirat

joined Radio Kashmir in 1955 where he rose to the level of Station Director. He was awarded Padam Shri in 1974.

Som Nath Sadhu wrote several plays. Janaki, Lôkútboy (Younger Brother), Zû rang (Two Colours), Shamà dâ n (Candlestand), Avihin (Vortex) and Sharàrat (Mischief) are among his notable works. He also acted in two Kashmiri films, Shayar-e-Kashmir Mahjoor and Mainz Raat.

Bashir Arif adds: Somnath Sadhu had the honour to put the brain child of Nand Lal Chawla to action when he scripted the first episode of Zoona Dab. Somnath Sadhu was studying in Agra when he had to return in a huff in 1954 when his father Prem Nath Pardesi

passed away. Pardesi Sahib was a programme assistant at Radio Kashmir, Srinagar. He was a great playwright and short story writer. After his sudden death, Somnath Sadhu had to abandon his further studies. He was appointed in Radio Kashmir Srinagar and with the passage of time, he rose to the position of the Station Director. Zoona Dab was his passion. After some months of its broadcast from 3rd October, 1966, Pushkar Bhan was inducted as Mama Pipji. Since Bhan Sahib had a theatre background, he had good command on scripting skills and thus became the duo of Zoona Dab to script it for years.



Pushkar Bhan

### Pushkar Bhan :

Born in 1926, Pushkar Bhan became associated with the Cultural Forum of the National Cultural Front and in this capacity, acquired unprecedented acclaim



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### Pushkar Bhan in Film Maenzirat



under the leadership of Dina Nath Nadim, the foremost luminary of new cultural awareness in Kashmir. His plays, *Lalkar* (in Urdu) and his *Ya Tan Ya Tadakh* received captive public attention. In 1956, a special performance of *Bomber Yambarzol* was staged in Srinagar's Nedous Hotel when the special guest was none other than the then Prime Minister of Russia, Kruschov. So mesmerizing was Pushkar's unparalleled playing of the lead role of Harud (Sharat), that Kruschov stepped onto the stage to offer his personal greetings to Pushkar Bhan.

Pushkar Bhan joined Radio Kashmir as an artist & playwright in

1952 and retired as a senior producer in 1985. He played the role of a villain in first Kashmiri film *Maanziraat*. He also acted in another Kashmiri film *Shair-e-Kashmir Mahjoor*.

Pushkar Bhan was awarded the Padamshri in 1974 for the script writing of *Zoon Dab* and for his role as *Mama*. He got the Sahitya Academy Award for *Machama* drama in 1976. He left his mortal frame in the year 2008.

Bashir Arif adds: Pushkar Bhan was an ace broadcaster. It is he who as a humorist gave new dimensions to Kashmiri humour and satire. It was he who penned *Wotal Buji*, *Machama* series and many more humorous serials. His equation with *Sadhu Sahib* was tremendous. Both would sometime script *Zoona Dab* jointly and the continuity of the subject would never derail.

### Marriyam Begum :

It was 1965 when a senior broadcaster of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar *Taj Begum Renzoo* brought a lady *Raj Begum* from *Khawja Bazaar*, down town Srinagar for participation in women's programme '*Majên Bénên Hûndi Khâtrû*'. She was given a different name '*Marriyam Begum*' for obvious social reasons. Thus she started her carrier as a casual compere.

Soon after the conception of



## Zoona Dab The Flagship Programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar



**Marriyam Begum**

Zoona Dab, Marriyam Begum was the final and unanimous choice for the character of Agha bai.

Marriyam Begum continued to participate in other programmes too. It was Chawla Sahib, the Station Director on who's recommendation Marriyam Begum was appointed as compere. She was a great lady of high moral values. She was awarded Padam Shri along with Som Nath Sadhu and Pushkar Bhan for Zoona Dab. Marriyam Begum is no more now.

### **Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor :**

She was an announcer who also took part in Children's Programmes. Nayeema rose to the level of Chairperson of State Commission for Women. She started her illustrious stint with BBC, working as a producer of BBC Urdu Service for 22 years. Even her year-long



**Nayeema Mahjoor**

sabbatical from BBC in 1997 saw her trying to work for her people back in Kashmir as broadcaster of 'Shaherbeen', one of the oldest and most popular show in Srinagar. Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor is a senior journalist, penguin author and columnist. She is married to Abdal Mahjoor, grandson of renowned Kashmiri poet Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor.



**Farooq Nazki**



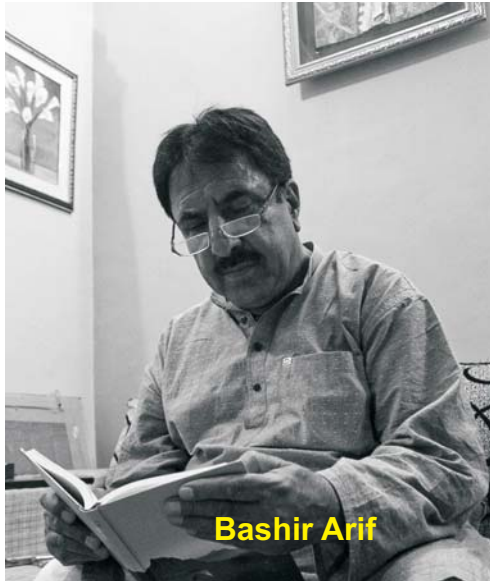
Zoona Dab  
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### Farooq Nazki :

Farooq Nazki became head of Doordarshan Srinagar and retired as Dy Director General, Doordarshan. He was media advisor to two chief ministers of State Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah. He won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1995 for his book of poetry *Naar Hyotun Kanzal Vanas*. He also won J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages Award for *Naar Hyotun Kanzal Wanas* and *Lafz Lafz Noha*.

### Bashir Arif :

He is a noted poet and broadcaster. He became Director Radio Kashmir and finally retired as Dy. Director General, Prasar Bharati in the year 2014. He was re-appointed in Rajya Sabha as Senior Private Secretary to Leader of Opposition Ghulam



Bashir Arif

Nabi Azad, where he is still continuing,

It may be mentioned that Bashir Arif penned the lyrics of the NFDC produced and Jyoti Sarup directed 2001 film *Bub*. He has also written the lyrics of recently released Vidhu Vinod Chopra's film *Shikara* portraying 1990 exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.

### Jagar Nath Saqi :

He was a veteran stock character and Compere in Rural Programme 'Gämi Bàyän Hûndi Khätrû'. He had a good voice, did a lot of stage. His pet name was Rustom Chacha. He was brought to Radio Kashmir by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, the then Prime Minister of the State.

Jagar Nath Saqi was a person full of life. His roles like Kakh of



Jagar Nath Saqi

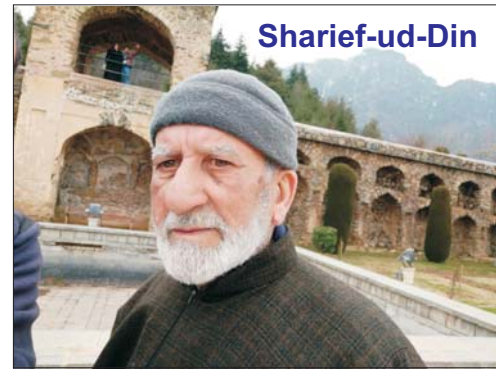


Machama series or Wali Mot of play Túnti kór were unforgettable.

Jagan Nath Saqi was originally from Khankah-e-Sokhta, Nawa Kadal, Srinagar. It is said that, being a theatre artist, he didn't have a good standing in the society. Theatre artists then had to face social boycott and were nicknamed as Rasakath.

An episode of Saqi is very famous in the radio circles which also gave him the name of a real ethnic Kashmiri. Once, being ill, he came to his office in Kashmiri Pheran. The Station Director Mr Chawla got furious and told him that it was not his kitchen but office

where he need to dress like a gentleman. Saqi did not take it lightly and replied, “Sir, you have insulted my national dress.” From that day onwards, Saqi never came to office wearing coat and pant but



Sharief-ud-Din

**Another rare photograph :** Pushkar Bhan, Jagan Nath Saqi, Mohd Sultan Pandit, Ghulam Nabi Baba, and others in live programme ‘*gāmi bāyan hūndí khātrū*’ (Image courtesy : Bashir Arif)







a Pheran.

Jagan Nath Saqi was living in a single storey house inside the Emporium Garden till his death. He died in late 1973.

### Sharief-ud-Din :

He was a stock character and Comper in the Rural Programme. He has since retired from Radio Kashmir.

### Ashok Kak :



Ashok Kak



Usha Nehru

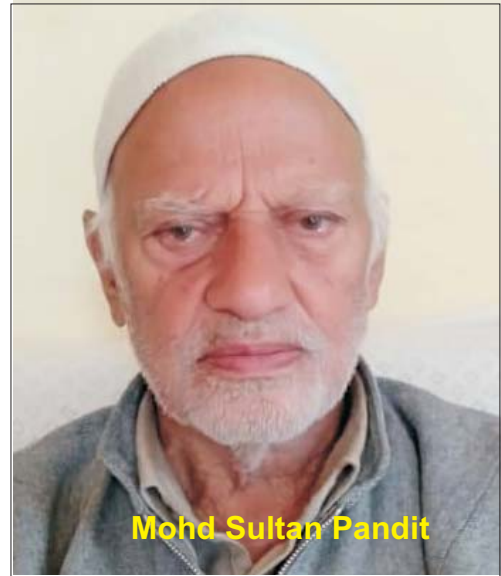
He is a writer and has written number of plays for Radio. He continues with the Radio Kashmir (now All India Radio) Srinagar as Announcer.

### Usha Nehru :

She got married to a Kashmiri Pandit settled in America but got separated reportedly because of domestic violence. She has a daughter and both live in US.

### Mohd. Sultan Pandit :

A versatile artiste, he was part of Zoona Dab. He was also Comper of Dehati Programme. His famous character was Mōgūli Dār. He was also a stock character of Machama series where he played the role of Rehman Daddū. Somnath Sadhu played the role of Sulū Gotū in this serial.



Mohd Sultan Pandit



Zoon Dab  
The Flagship Programme of Radio Kashmir, Srinagar

### Zoon Dab Archives :

While most of the recorded material at Radio Kashmir is said to have been destroyed in the floods of 2014, some recordings of Zoon Dab are said to be safe in its archives.

*With inputs from : Pran Kishore, Dr. Rafeeq Masoodi, Munir Lone, M.K.Parimoo, Bashir Arif, Dr. Rajesh Bhat, Ashok Bhan, Koshur Samachar and Wikipedia. Thanks all.*

*I am particularly thankful to Bashir Arif Sahib whose contribution in this write-up has been immense. He has been kind enough to provide bulk of information and valuable photographs in spite of the fact that we were not known to each other earlier. I owe him a lot. Thanks Bashir Arif Sahib.*

## Praagaash

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Dedicated to

Kashmiri Heritage,  
Kashmiri Culture  
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Kashmiri Language

### TEAM ZOONA DAB

