Chapter – II

FOLK HINDUISM AND SANSKRITIC ALL INDIA HINDUISM:
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

In this chapter an attempt is made to understand the relationship between folk Hinduism and Sanskritic All India Hinduism. This has served as the backdrop to analyze the form of deity worship among Jamwal-Pandits, a clan of local Brahmin caste of Hindus in Jammu region.

India is a land of diverse culture since the ancient time. The pre-Aryans, Indo-Aryans, the Greeks, the Scythians, the Huns, the Turks and others got attracted towards the culture of India and made it their home. Each ethnic group contributed its mite to the evolution of the Indian social system, art and architecture, language and religion. For many centuries India was known to the World only through the stray references in the classical literatures of Greeks and Romans. Only in the eighteenth century, a systematic effort was made by the Jesuits missionary to understand the life of the Indians. Father Hanxleden and Father Couerdoux are few of them who made significant contribution to understand the relationship between Sanskrit and other European Languages. Then East India Company laid the foundation of Indology, the perspective adopted in the works of Sociologists like Ghurye (1969) and Dumont (1970) who relied heavily on the classical Sanskritic texts to understand the caste system as an important component of Hindu religion based on varna-ashram dharma (religion based on one’s place and stage in society).

Theoretically speaking, there are different sociological interpretations of religion that seek to explain its origin and functioning. The functional and the structural-functional approaches represent the understanding of the role of religion in sustaining social solidarity and the presence in the minds of members of the society of certain sentiments which control the behavior of the individuals (Durkheim, 1912). According to Durkheim, ‘a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred
things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them’ (Durkheim 1995 [1912]:44).4

The phenomenological approach looks upon the religion as that special human activity through which a comprehensive, meaningful, sacred cosmos is constructed. Religion helps to build, maintain and legitimate universes of meaning. Peter Berger, an eminent social theorist, influenced by Max Weber emphasized the importance of interpretive understanding. Berger and Luckmann state that ‘throughout human history religion has played a decisive role in the construction and maintenance of universe’. Religion for Berger is ultimately the means to bestow ‘legitimacy’ on social life and to help it to resist the onslaught of chaos. In simple words religion legitimates social institutions. It does this ‘by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference’5.

From the beginning of history, the idea of religion has manifested itself in diverse forms, across human societies. These forms which constitute the body of knowledge, beliefs, faith and social organization formed an ordered system. Religion gradually emerged as the members of a particular tribe or society build a system of beliefs and rites that bind them. From these ideas, beliefs and practices, more elaborate systems of ‘sacred’ scriptures and oral traditions emerged which were accepted and were passed from one generation to the other. The concept of religion is linked to the Latin verb relegere, to reread, read over repeatedly, to consider something with diligence. Another variant of Latin origin of the meaning of religion goes back to the original interpretation of the word religare, that is, to tie, attach, unite, or conjoin. This meaning suggests a relationship, a bond, but also an obligation, a commitment, or a submission. Evident in this relationship is the position of superiority assumed by the divinity, which functions as the obliger with regard to the human subject, who is consequently the obliged (Capriani, 2007: 3853-854)6.
In the Indian context, the macroscopic view on religion and on the process of Sanskritization also reflects the presence of folk religion as an invisible reality. According to Bhatti\(^7\) those who believe in it may not be entirely conscious of the fact and for a rational modern educated person it is simply a survival of primordial superstitions. Strange but true the practice of folk religion is growing. People unconsciously transform the practice of high religions into their own framework of folk religion. In this regard, the ‘Mel’ congregations (community gathering) through ‘kuldevta’ worship in Jammu region of J&K state are adaptation of traditional practices to modern circumstances. Every important religious persona, scripture or shrine is invested with a number of folk notions of power. This infinite capacity of transformation makes folk religion a mine of folk materials, worthy of sociological investigation\(^8\). These primordial practices and symbols provide a subconscious background to that very religious system. The common and traditional notion of religion is that it validates the social value scheme with divine sanction and thus reinforces the social order.

Hinduism, more than a singular religion, is rather a collection of various doctrines, dogmas, beliefs and rites combined through a link forming an organic whole unlike monotheist religions of Islam and Christianity. Its’ character is not monolithic but it is largely polytheist. It does not have a founder, a single foundational scripture, or a set of fundamentals of beliefs and practices (Madan, 2006: 297)\(^9\) and is characterized by strong pluralistic and syncretic tendencies (Madan, 2004: 12)\(^10\). It has tended to absorb many religious ideas and practices since a long time whether folk elements like worship of trees, rivers, mountain, cults of ancestors and village and other deities, or the profound philosophy of Upanishads and Vedanta (Srinivas, 2003 [1952]: 213)\(^11\).

Though Hinduism existed from time immemorial and can be traced back to the beliefs and rituals of nature worship by the Aryans about 3,200 years ago, in fact elements of Hinduism even go back to the Harappan civilization of 5,000 years ago. The word ‘Hinduism’ and the idea really got consolidated during the British rule, especially with the works of the Orientalists around the middle of the nineteenth century (Madan, 2007: 2128)\(^12\).
The worship of clan deity, as among the Jamwal-Pandits reveals the characteristic of what Srinivas calls sanskritization. The concept of ‘sanskritization’ is not limited to understanding the process of social mobility in which a lower caste or a tribal group move higher in the caste hierarchy in a generation or two by ‘adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon’ (1962:42), but also refers to the spread of what Srinivas calls Sanskrit Hinduism, an All-India Hinduism.

All castes and communities according to Srinivas (2003 [Reprinted]) represent a fusion of Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit systems of ritual and beliefs in different proportions, maximum being in Brahmin castes with emphasis, for example on vegetarianism and teetotalism, offerings of fruits and sweets during worship etc. as different from the non-Sanskritic ones where meat and alcohol is distributed and animal sacrifices are performed. Correspondingly, there exists, for instance in the Southern Peninsular India the Sanskritic Gods like Ayyappa, Bhagvati, Mahadeva and non-Sanskritic ones as Rakteshwari, Mari or Mariyammei, and Karuppan (Dumont, 1999[Reprinted]: 44-46).

The concept of Sanskritization was refined by Srinivas himself and by others in the mid 1950s. Mckim Marriott (1955) in his study of a village Kishan Garhi in northern Indiae, used the terms ‘universalization’ and ‘parochialization’ to understand the two way process. He finds that in the structure of the village culture and its social organization elements of the Little tradition, indigenous customs, deities and rites circulate upward to the level of the Great tradition and ‘identified’ with its legitimate forms. Likewise, some elements of the Great Tradition also circulate downward to become organic part of the Little tradition, and lose much of their original form in the process. The former process is called ‘universalization’ and the latter ‘parochialization’.

All India Hinduism, which is chiefly Sanskritic spreads in two ways according to Srinivas and found to be existing all over the country: by the extension of Sanskritic deities and ritual forms to an outlying group, as well as by groups inside Hinduism. The
first results in Sanskritic deities assuming different forms in their travels all along India, while the second results in local deities assuming Sanskritic labels and forms. The Vedic deity *Kshetrapala* (protector of field) becomes *Ketrappa* in Coorg, while the local cobra-deity becomes identified with *Subramanyam*, the warrior-son of Shiva. The Sanskritic deity *Ayyappa* (son of Shiva and Mohini) is as popular as the folk village deity like *Mari* (chicken-pox Goddess among all people) (Srinivas, 2003 [Reprinted]: 224-26)\(^\text{17}\).

Therefore, All India Hinduism has plasticity and possesses certain features which make easy the absorption of local elements – worship of rivers and mountains, treating cow as sacred, worship of domestic wells etc. The presence of Sanskritized local cults and village deities in Hinduism makes easier the further absorption of local phenomena like propitiating dead ancestors and offering food during *shradhs* by the clan members (Ibid.: 227)\(^\text{18}\). It is this characteristic of the folk deity in the form of *kuladevatas* that has acquired significance in the local culture of Jammu region by all castes, including the Brahmins.

Besides this, the ‘Regional’ or even ‘local’ Hinduism often contains some Sanskritic elements in which it directly stresses regional ties, and indirectly All-India ties. In such regional areas, all castes possess a certain common cultural characteristics – a kind of ‘vertical’ spread, as different from ‘horizontal’ spread where a caste shares common characteristic with one caste all over the country. Srinivas believes that the new means of communication have resulted in greater Sanskritization of Hinduism in which there has been both vertical and horizontal spreads, i.e. the higher castes links have been consolidated (horizontal) as well as many lower castes have also emulated the beliefs and rituals of the higher castes (vertical) (Ibid.: 218-19)\(^\text{19}\).

The worship of clan deity – *devta/ devte* is a regional and localized phenomenon in Jammu region practiced by practically every caste which suggests a ‘vertical spread’; and its worship by the Jamwal-Pandits, a clan of the Brahmins, a ‘horizontal spread’ bring them closer to the Brahmins across country. This is particularly reflected in the
manner in which Sanskritic rituals are ascribed to Datti Ji at the main temple in Purmandal and other minor temples of the deity in Jammu region.

In the case of non-Brahmin castes, the spread of Sanskritic Hinduism is seen in different ways while propitiating clan or lineage deity in various temples. Dumont brings this out clearly while mentioning about the lineage temples among Pramalai Kallar, a caste of low status in Tamil Nadu. These temples consist of at least two categories – the pure (Suttam), like Aiyanar, who do not eat meat and the meat-eating impure Gods (asuttam) like the Karuppan – the Black God (Dumont, 1999[Reprinted]:44). This opposition is strongly marked and expressed in a dichotomy bearing on space, priesthood and the cult implements. Though the people are meat-eaters and offer blood sacrifice, and are themselves priests (not the Brahmins), but install Gods who are recognized as superiors and from whom the people derive their reality – Aiyanar is the pure God for the people, the Lord par excellence by his sacerdotal purity and by the temporal power (Ibid.: 45-47).

**Hinduism in India**

Religion in India is marked by the plurality of traditions and syncretism of its culture. It has been a home of many Great religions of the world Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, called the Indic religions which were originated endogenously, as well as the religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Zoroastriansim which arrived exogenously from outside at different points of time during the last two centuries (Madan 2004: 1).

As different from other monotheistic religions, Hinduism is a federation of faiths, having a vertical and horizontal distribution. Religious beliefs and practices of Hindus vary from one cultural region to another as well as from one caste or community to another across the country (Ibid: 1-2). Religion played an important part in the lives of the Hindus from the earliest times, as in the case of many other ancient nations of the world. From the pre and proto-historical periods up to the beginning of the 13th century...
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A.D., it assumed many forms with manifold designations in relation to different groups of people associated with them. Religious ideas, thoughts and practices differed among these groups, and transformations and developments took place in them in course of time. These changes were very often brought about by the ideas and actions of intellectual thinkers, while environment and association also played a major part in the process. Religion in India was never static in character. An inherent dynamic strength was there indeed at the root of various religious movements that marked this country’s history and culture.

In Hinduism, there are abstract notion of ‘Essence’ or ‘Being’ as the source of all that truly exists (the Brahman of Vedantic Hinduism), or polytheism (as in Puranic Hinduism), or the elements of folk Hinduism. The notion of Sanskrit dharma is widely used as synonym to Hindu religion, its Pali equivalent being dhama (from the root dhri) denoting the ideas of maintenance, sustenance, steadfastness and moral virtue. This is different from the notion of religion derived from the Latin word religio which means bonding or cohesiveness. This notion conveys the dependence of human being on supernatural or to the submission of God’s Will in other non-Indic religions in which the concept of self-sustaining cosmo-moral order is found (Madan, 2004: 2-3). The concept of religion is therefore different in Hinduism (Dharma) than in other religions.

Religious development in India can be studied well from the time of the hunters-gathers. There are no means of definitely ascertaining the nature of the religion of the pre-Aryans settlers in India, though the archaeological finds in the pre and proto-historic sites throw light on it to some extent. It seems that these men believed in the sanctity of the creative forces, and venerated the male and female aspects of the divinity and their emblems. They appear also to have had some respect for the forces of nature like the sun and the moon. The early literature of the Aryan immigrants partly substantiates what is known from archaeology. For instance, in Harappa, a civilization of nearly five thousand years old numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found. In one figurine, a plant is shown growing out of the embryo of a woman which shows that Harappan looked upon the earth as fertility Goddess. The male deity depicted on a seal
has three-horned heads, and is represented in the sitting posture of a yogi and is identified as Pashupati Mahadev\textsuperscript{27}. There seem to be some form of public religion, ritual bathing place, worship of Gods and Goddesses, fertility rituals, and perhaps animal sacrifice (Thapar, 1966: 83-6)\textsuperscript{28}.

The Aryan culture, characterized by nomadic people from Central or West Asia brought with them a distinct religion from the earlier Indus Valley Civilization around 1500 BC. The Vedas (Knowledge, wisdom), the body of sacred text or literature believed to be ever-existent (\textit{sanatana}) stretching over a thousand years indicates the nature of religious beliefs and practices of the Aryans in India. The \textit{Rig} Veda is the oldest of them (1200 BC). Its ten books of hymns in praise of divinities represent ten family traditions among the Brahmans (ritual specialists) and were composed over several centuries. It depicts people’s beliefs in many Gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Surya and Rudra, some of whom were undoubtedly personifications of the forces of nature. Sacrifices, ritual offering of oblations of food, meat and drink to fire in honour of the Gods, constituted the main religious practices. Animals were sacrificed and soma juice offered and drunk. The subsidiary Vedas, the \textit{Sama} and \textit{Yajura}, while incorporating much of what was in the \textit{Rig}-Veda, elaborated the different aspects of the sacrificial acts, and this ritualism was further elaborated in the \textit{Brahmanas} and \textit{Aranyakas}\textsuperscript{29}.

People worshipped God for the same material reason in this period as they did in earlier times. However, the mode of worship underwent substantial change. Prayers continued to be recited, but they ceased to be the dominant mode of placating the Gods. Sacrifices became far more important, and they assumed both a public and domestic character. Public sacrifices involved the king and the entire community, which still in many cases coincided with the tribe. Private sacrifices were performed by individuals in their houses because during this period the Vedic people maintained regular households. Individuals offered oblations to Agni, and each of these took the form of a ritual or sacrifice. Sacrifices involved the killing of animals on a large scale and, especially, the destruction of cattle wealth. Towards the end of the Vedic period a strong reaction arose against priestly domination, against cults and rituals, the Upanishads were compiled.
These philosophical texts criticized the rituals and laid stress on the value of right belief and knowledge.

The *Upanishads*, the treatise on philosophy also called *Vedanta* (the culmination of the Veda) became part of Schools of Vedic learning and ritual by the close of 300 BC. The *Aranyanka* and *Upanishad* sections of the Vedic literature envisage a progressive outlook. The former group of texts usually deal with the interpretative aspects of sacrificial acts, while the latter, especially some of the major *Upanishads* are concerned first with pantheism and then with theism centered on one eternally existing absolute entity, Brahman or *Atman*, also known by several other names.

In the course of time, Vedism gradually gave way to what is generally understood as Hinduism in the entire sub-continent and beyond. It brought more texts into existence like the *Grihya Sutra* (guides to the performance of domestic rituals) and the *Dharma Sutras* (which have social ethics and law as their subject matter). *Shruti* (that which has been heard by the inner ear) constituted the first source of *dharma* understood as both the law and righteous conduct. After the *Sutras* the second source was *Smriti* (that which is remembered). These are known to be written down by the known authors. The *Dharm Shastra* came later and continued with the same theme, but in greater detail. The best known text is *Manav Dharma Shastra* attributed to its main author, the seer Manu, therefore known as Manu Smriti. It is believed to be written between 200 BC to 300 AD and contains the institutional framework for the conduct in domestic and public life. In domestic life the main principles of *varna* (social class including occupation) and *ashram* (stage of life) defined the conduct and behaviour of a social and religious life of a Hindu (Madan, 2004: 8-9).

The Hinduism developed thus far was characterized by Brahmanical orthodoxy which was challenged now and often as was seen in the emergence of philosophical doctrine of *Upanishad* vis-a-vis the elaborate rituals of that time. The *Tantra* texts are believed to be non-Vedic with their origin in folk cults of Assam and Bengal. The human body is the key element of Tantrik secret rituals performed at specific place like
cremation ground usually at night. In about middle of the 1st millennium B.C. another important religious movements started which were centered on the charismatic personalities like Mahavira and the Buddha which questioned the Brahmanical supremacy. About that time there flourished several other religious teachers who were connected with such movements.

Buddhism emerged as a revolt against the Brahmanical preoccupation with the supernatural and beliefs and rituals associated with it. Gautam Buddha (563-483 BC), the founder of Buddhism though a Kshatriya by birth and destined to be the ruler of Kingdom in Nepal, achieved enlightenment and attracted a number of disciples who were taught his ‘four noble truths’ that constituted the fundamentals of Buddhism (Harvey 1990). Propagated by King Ashoka and his children and followers, Buddhism spread more outside India, especially in South-east Asian countries. In Jammu and Kashmir, most of the residents of Leh- Ladakh are the followers of Buddhism. Jainism arose around the same time for similar reasons under Mahavira (599-27 BC) though different from Buddhism in many ways. It emphasized on life of ascetics (monks and nuns) as different from the laity (householders), Karma and transmigration of soul, self-purification, ahimsa (non-violence) and renunciation. However, Jains are also successful merchants and traders visible in urban centres (Laidlaw 1995).

With the appearance of religions of non-theistic nature, creeds of a definitely theistic character came to be evolved. The central figures around which they grew up were not primarily Vedic deities but came from unorthodox sources. Pre-vedic and Post-vedic folk-elements were most conspicuous in their origin. There were also some semi-historical personages at the focal points of the movements. The important factor that activated these movements was Bhakti, the single soul devotion of the worshipper to a personal God with the postulation of some moral link that developed in India around 14th Century, again a reaction to the rigidity of caste system. This stimulus led to the evolution of different religious sects like Vaisnavism, Saivism and Shaktism, all of which came to be regarded as components of orthodox Brahmanism. It also had a significant impact in course of time on the popular forms of Buddhism and Jainism.
The two epics, the sacred texts *Mahabharata* (400 BC - 400 AD) and *Ramayan* (AD 200 in the category of the *Smriti*) marked the transformation of the Vedic Brahmanical religion into what came to be known as Hinduism. Shiva and Vishnu emerged as supreme Gods, and the concept of incarnation (*avatar*) developed within Vaishnava tradition with Krishna (of the *Bhgavata Purana*) and Rama (of the Ramayana) being the most notable of the ten *avatars*. The *Puranas*, composed between the sixth and the sixteenth centuries describe in detail about the trinity – Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). Vishnu and Shiva and also Surya are of Vedic origin, while Shakti represents the folk religious cults. From the fifth century itself, the various sects of Vaishnavas were formed and in the seventh centuries, the liturgical texts of Vaishnavas and Shaivas, *samhita* and *agamas* respectively were developed. Each claimed the supremacy over the other (Bhattacharji, 1988; Brockington 1992).

Thus around the closing of the centuries of the last millennium BC, a number of elements from various sources whether Sanskritic or folk religious traditions fused. The relationship of the devotee to the deity, whether expressed in human (anthropomorphic) or through abstract formulations, formed the thought of these religious traditions ranging from absolute monism (*advaita*), associated with the name of Shankara (788-820 AD), to qualified non-dualism (*vishishadvaita*) of Ramanuja (1017-1137 AD), and dualism (*dvaita*) elucidated by Madhva in the thirteenth century. The teachings of the latter two saints combine the metaphysics of the Upanishads with the theism of Vaishnava and Shaiva cults. There is a third tradition associated with both of these but emerged independently, that is the *Shakta* (from *Shakti*, power) tradition. The roots of this can be traced from the time of Harappan culture, and later developments capture the amalgamation of Puranic, Tantrik, and folk Goddess (Madan 2004: 11-2).

The Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu is a benign bearer of auspiciousness, as Parvati or Uma as the consort of Shiva, she is the mother of the universe and, as Durga or Kali she is the highest manifestation of divine power, she is the fearsome destroyer of evil and regarded as greater than all the male Gods for she comes into being through the pooling of their powers. In the folk form she operates at a different level. As the village
Goddess she appears as a Goddess who removes illness and misfortune, like the Shitala Mata who is worshipped to prevent small pox (Hawley and Wulff, 1996)\textsuperscript{40}.

The folk tradition continued in various ways. The most important part of primitive religious beliefs has been the worship of Yaksas and Naags and other folk-deities in which Bhakti had a very conspicuous part to play. Early literature and archaeology supply us with ample evidences about the relevance of this form of worship among the people. The Puranic story of Krsna’s subjugation of Naag Kaliya really indicates the overthrow of the Naag cult prevalent in Mathura region through the growth of the Vasudeva-Krsna cult there. A Sutra in Panini’s \textit{Aastadhya}y\textit{i} refers to the worshippers of Vasudev-krsna whom Epic and Puranic traditions describe as a hero of the Sattvata race.

The Vedic civilization was internally differentiated and it was pluralistic. It was a mixture of Aryan, non-Aryan and tribal elements. From beginning Hinduism has been a "mixture of distinct cults, deities, sects and ideas". Most records reveal that \textit{totemic deities} such as fish, tortoise and pig were made into incarnations of Vishnu. Shiva was formed by a union of the Vedic Rudra with some non-Aryan deity. Shiva in its folk and tribal form is observable in many parts of peninsular India and plains of northeast India. An enough amount of material exists which confirm the fact that Brahmanism immersed the deities of tribes people and ‘low-castes’. The popularity of the saga of Jagannath cult in Orissa and that of Viththala in Maharashtra testify this.

Similarly, serpent worship and phallus worship, which later found their way into classical Hinduism, were taken over from local communities. Unorthodox sects and cults, such as Shakta and the Tantric tradition, incorporated several esoteric features from indigenous, including tribal cultures. Thus, some interrelated critical foundations of unity may be delineated at the pan-Indian level.

The framework used by Srinivas to explain and classify different forms of Sanskritic and folk deity worship for Coorgs can be useful to understand the phenomenon
in Jammu region as well (Srinivas, 2003: 185-86).41 According to him there are following temples and deities:

1. Temples of the Sanskrit deities which are worshipped by high castes.

2. The temples where the priests are usually Brhamins, but refrain on certain occasions like deity worship during which the animal has to be sacrificed. The act is then performed by a non-Brahmin.

3. The temples in which there are non-Brahmin priests and Brahmins may occasionally propitiate a deity, like during famine or some other disaster or crises. Here, though Brahmins perform rituals by offering fruits, flowers and sweets they get animal sacrifice done through a non-Brahmin priest.

Srinivas has explained the phenomenon of deity worship from the structural view of caste system – Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic deities as well as temples where the high caste and Sanskritic go hand in hand and stand higher than the folk traditions. In Jammu region, such a hierarchy is not so pronounced. Rather the distinction between Sanskritic and folk Hinduism cuts across caste and occurs at the level of region, area, group or community. It is not uncommon in the deity worship of a Brahmin caste to find occurrence of animal sacrifice and a considerable number of them are non-vegetarians unlike those in other parts of India.

**Hinduism in Jammu and Kashmir**

The state of Jammu and Kashmir represents a composite culture where most Great religions of the world have flourished – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism during various rulers from the time of Mauryas, Kushans, Guptas, Mughals Afghans, Sikhs and the Dogras. Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shakta tradition, Sufism and its local version Rishism coexisted in varied forms. At the folk level, it has been a home of several saints, pirs, Babas, *kul devi, devta*, worship of village deity, ancestors and spirits.
The deity worship in Hinduism included mainly female deities which were both of Sanskritic forms like Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati or Parvati, usually the consorts of Great Gods; and the non-Sanskritic ones like Kali, Chandi or Sambhavi. The latter can be benevolent and destructive at the same time while the Sanskritic ones are caring, loving, pleasant and docile. On the one hand there are shrines of national importance like Sanskritic Goddess Mata Vaishno Devi; on the other hand, there are various small shrines, dehris, temples of folk deities in most of the towns and villages of Jammu region. Some Goddesses like Chandi Mata of Machail in Kishtwar district are becoming famous in recent years and adopting Sanskritic features and losing some of their folk forms.

The religious history of Jammu and Kashmir suggests the amalgamation of various Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic elements whereby many folk forms were absorbed into Classical Hinduism and also many Sanskritic features were adopted at the local level over a long period of time. The earliest inhabitants of Kashmir probably cherished some aboriginal beliefs, the details of which are not traceable now. The snake-cult or Naag (serpent) worship seems to have been established in the valley from a remote period and undoubtedly had been one of the earliest religions of the land. Regarding the exact date since when the snake-cult was prevalent in and no direct testimony is available. But there are reasons to believe that in the fourth and the third centuries B.C., it might have been the principal religion of Kashmir.

The worship of mother Goddess too seem to have existed then. In the third century B.C., Buddhism seems to have made some headway, converted a large number of people and overshadowed the Naag cult which ultimately sunk into oblivion. Both Buddhism and Hinduism flourished peacefully together for a long time. Among Hindu Gods, Siva either originated or entered the valley sometime before followed by Vishnu, Surya and other Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses.

The history of the introduction of Shaivism in Kashmir is shrouded in mystery. Archaeologists have discovered traces of Siva worship in the proto-historic Harappa
culture. It is not known, whether the Siva of Kashmir was an immigrant from the neighboring Indus Valley or was of local origin. The conception of Rudra Shiva of the Vedic Aryans perhaps might have had some influence on the development and early growth of Shaivism in the valley. However, whatever may be the origin of Shaivism in Kashmir, Shiva as a popular deity was widely worshipped in the valley from a remote period. Kashmir Shaivism was of the Pashupata sect. According to a tradition recorded in the Mahabharata, the Pashupata doctrine was preached first by Siva Srikantha, who was regarded in the valley as the promulgator of Sivagama or Agamanta.

The early Kashmir Shaivism based on a number of tantras seems to have preached a dualistic doctrine. From the eighth or ninth century, however the Shaiva system of Kashmir assumed a new character based on pure Advaita tatva, a sort of idealistic monism and the new form of Kashmir Shaivism was Trikasastra Trika sasana. As the folk form of Shaivism in phallic worship continued, the Great tradition was legitimized and propagated by the rulers of that time. Lalitaditya (724-761) for instance, was a great believer of Lord Shiva and composed various hymns in Sanskrit in his praise. Kashmir Shaivism also known as Trikha Shastra flourished between the fifth and the eleventh centuries as blend of Buddhism, Vedanta and folk Shaivism which was also influenced by Naag culture in some ways (Madan, 2006: 176-79).42

Vaishnavism or the cult of Visnu seems to have existed in Kashmir from a very early period. There is lack of material regarding its origin and early character. The earliest reference to the worship of Vishnu occurs in the pages of the Rajatarangini. In the Vashinavism of Kashmir there is a synthesis of the different Vashihnava cults, which were current in ancient India. In it seems to have mingled the faith of the Vedic Vishnu, the system of the Pancaratra school, the religion of the satvats and the faith in the cowherd God Gopala Krishna. Rama was worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu, but there is no definite evidence of the existence of Rama cult in early Kashmir. As discussed ahead, it was later on popularized by the Dogra rulers in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Jammu and Kashmir (Madan, 2006)43.
Besides Vishnu and Shiva, there were many other minor Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the early Kashmirian pantheon. The most important of them include Surya, Karttikeya, Ganesa, Agni, Lakshmi, Durga, Ganga Yamuna and Kamadeva. The worship of Surya was brought into the valley from Iran at an early period. Karttikeya worship in early Kashmir is borne out by the discovery of a fine six armed image of the general illisimo. The Nilmata Purana refers that the worship of Karttikeya was performed on the 6th of Lunar Caitra every year and this was supposed to ensure the welfare and safety of the children of Kashmir. Ganesa, the brother of Skanda according to the Hindu mythology was one of the popular deities of Kashmir. According to Nilmatapurana the 8th of the darker asadha (fourth month of the year, beginning on 22 June and ending on 22 July) of every year was dedicated to the worship of Ganesha. About Agni, no sculptural representation has yet been discovered from Kashmir. A passage from Rajtarangini however refers to the worship of agni and records that king Uccala’s father Malla, observed from his earliest time the cult of a sacred fire.

Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth was quite a popular deity. King Parvarsene II of 6th century A.D. is credited with the establishment of five shrines of the Goddess Sri. Worship of Shakti, the energetic principle seems to have been widely prevalent. In the worship of Goddess Durga, who is but an embodiment of Shakti, animal sacrifice played an important part. Goddess Sarda was one of the most celebrated deities of the valley in early times. Representation of the Goddess Ganga sometimes accompanied by the Goddess Yamuna is found among the old sculptures of the valley but they do not seem to have any particular cult associated with them. Related with Kamdev there is a literary evidence of Kamdeva’s popularity in ancient Kashmir as an iconographic representation of Kamdeva seated between his wives Rati and Priti.

The 14th century saw the arrival of Islam and almost simultaneously of Sufi saints. Some of the important ones were Bulbul Shah (Suhrawardi Order), Ali Hamdani and Mir Muhammad (Kubravi Order). In Jammu region, the first Sufi saint to arrive was Pir Roshan Wali Shah. His dargah (tomb) and of others like Pir Lakhdata, Pir Mitha, Baba Budan Ali Shah (Jammu district), Sharif Hazrat Asrar-ud-din (Kishtwar district), and
Baba Ghulam Ali Shah Badshah (Rajouri district) are immensely popular and visited by people of all faiths. This saw the fusion of both Great and Little tradition of Islam in Kashmir (Dewan, 2007).

The local Rishi order that developed almost contemporaneously had a great influence on the people, particularly with the presence of famous Muslim mystic Nur-ud-din or Nund Rishi (1379-1442) and poetess Lalla or Lal Ded of Shaiva Trikha tradition (Kaul, 2011). Many Kashmiri people, barring some Pandits converted to Islam in a large number. Some of the important factors were degeneration of Kashmir in the last few years of Hindu rulers, growing orthodoxy and corruption of Brahamanical traditions, persecution by some Muslim rulers and their acute intolerance of other faiths, role of Sufi saints and the folk version of Islam and the contribution of local Rishi Order which was eclectic and assessable to people (Hangloo, 2000).

The Dogra rule from 1846 to 1947 saw propagation of Vaishnavism, though they supported other forms of worship as well like Shaivism and Shakta tradition. The first Dogra ruler Maharaja Gulab Singh laid the foundation of Ragunath temple and his son, the second Dogra ruler Maharaja Ranbir Singh got the magnificent Ragunath (Rama) temple complex constructed in Jammu in 1860. The other initiatives were also taken like the establishment of Royal Dharmarth Trust to manage temples, promotion of Vaishnavi shrines like Mata Vaishno Devi in Jammu region and Kheer Bhavani in Kashmir region (Madan 2006: 188-90).

Somewhat similar culture is found in Jammu region as it was the part of the Dogra rule as well as the other erstwhile rulers during different periods of time. Shaivism, though different from Kashmir Shaivism, is as popular in Jammu as it has been in Kashmir. Like Amarnath Shivlinga (ice) in Kashmir, there are important places of worship related to Lord Shiva and his female consort, Parvati or Uma in Jammu region. Ranbireswar temple (in Jammu built by Maharaja Ranbir Singh), Umapati temple (Purmandal), Sudh Mahadev (Chennani, Udhampur district), Shiv Khori (Reasi district),

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Buddha Amarnath (Poonch district) are very popular and visited by people in a large number, particularly on the days like Shivratri when fair is also held (Dewan, 2007).  

_Shakta_ tradition is visible in numerous shines from national and Sanskritic to local and folk female deities. Mata Vaishno Devi (Reasi District), Sukrala Mata (Billawar district), Chandi Machail Mata (Kishtwar district), Mahakali or Bawe Mata (Jammu District), Sharika shrine at Sarthal (Kishtwar district), Chi Chi Mata (Samba district) are only a few examples showing the importance of deity worship in Jammu region. All of them have a history and a legend of their origin and their own ways of worship incorporating Sanskritic and folk dimensions in different proportions (Jerath, 2001).

**Folk Hinduism and Deity Worship in Jammu Region**

Folk religion is an open non-exclusive combination of different religious beliefs, practices and customs, characterized by a pragmatic attitude towards powerful beings for the satisfaction of the worldly needs. The basis of the folk religion is pragmatism; it is not concerned about the construction of an abstract theological system though it recognizes the basic notion of causality. Deities are treated like human beings and supposed to behave in mature manner. Negligence can irritate the deity while reverence and dedication can appease her.

Folk religion includes many features of nature worship and ancestor worship without recognizing any contradictions in beliefs and practices associated with different deities. The structure of folk religion being open and unifying, a particular deity may show a unique combination of elements of different religious traditions. All religious Gurus, saints, heroes are generally adopted into the folk tradition by attributing the powers to them. Thus, a religious reformer or hero may transform into a powerful deity with the growing popular association of some realistic functions with his powers.

In some of the folk rituals, animal sacrifice is or was performed, while in others no sacrifice is performed or was ever performed. The more the deities are folk in nature,
more is the prevalence of animal sacrifice, liquor offering, possession of Chela (Shaman) and his going into trance to act as an intermediary between the people and the supernatural are found. The deities are propitiated and given offerings to make them happy or avoid their wrath. They are worshipped to meet people’s requirements and serve their pragmatic needs. Naag Devta (Serpent God) and Kali Mata or Durga (Goddesses of vengeance) are most popular in the hilly areas to whom sheep and goats are or were sacrificed. Besides these, in the folk religion of Jammu region, the people who have either been great social reformers or leaders and those who sacrificed their lives for the good of people are revered. Their statues are built and people pay homage to them at appropriate times. ‘Mel’ or congregations are organized and fairs are held in their names (Kapur 1992).

In this context, the current ‘Mel’ (congregation) through kuldevta/kuldevi’ worship, like modern caste associations, are adaptation of traditional patterns to modern circumstances. Although there is talk of a sect-less, casteless, ecumenical form of Hinduism, already tendencies have appeared towards new forms of ritualization, intellectualization, and sectarianism which render such an outcome unlikely. It may be that this ‘Mel’ congregation will lead to structural revision of caste and sect among its adherents. The growth of the ‘Mel’ congregation illustrates only part of the historical cycle of religio-caste regrouping. Jammu region, which is known as city of temples, is a frequent practitioner of the ‘kuldevta’ worships during the community ‘Mel’ congregation. They are normally done annually during the later phase of the year or sometimes even bi-annually. This phenomenon attracts the community people from different regions for a collective gathering and thus stabilization of their community identity.

The families of Dogra have its individual history of sacrifice and remorse. The most pitiable as well as element considered heroic of social history in the Duggar region has been the performance of Sati (self sacrifice) i.e. an act of a woman by putting herself in the pyre made for the dead body. It was a general custom among all communities and classes of Dogras. The Dogras being a soldierly community, was used to the tradition of Sati, since their identified history. The gallant death of soldiers and rulers was general in
this area because of regular struggle of the *Dogras* against invaders and Mugal emperors. The wives of the gallant soldiers habitually committed self sacrifice. The custom of *sati* (self sacrifice) had somewhat degenerated in its beginning and performance. This custom of self sacrifice was performed in two conditions, firstly on the death of husband and secondly, at the time of attack of a place, then by some of the Muslims in which case, women irrespective of caste, married and unmarried, performed collective *sati* (self sacrifice) also called *johar* in several parts of Rajasthan.

The main objective of the *sati* was to preserve female respect and loyalty towards husband and also of the family and clan. But in most of the cases in the *Dogri* literature, the *sati* performed was not considered a good decision. It occurred under the pressure of emotions, in majority of the cases wives for their husband, daughters for their father, sisters for their brothers and mothers for their sons.

The females of *Duggar* land have courageously ended their lives also in protest against injustice and abuse. They not only proved the innocence of their character but earned reverence and are worshipped as *kul-*deities. These are generally deceased local celebrities, deified for the occasion, or worshipped. However, performance of *Sati* i.e. self killings for a good cause were considered noble acts in society and such events are commemorated in the form of memorials. To immortalize the sacrifice of these deities their memorials in the form of *dehries* were raised. These memorials are worshipped mostly by the families having same surname and *gotra* as a *kul-devi* from generations to generations. Some of the *kul-devis* which are usually worshipped among the different communities of the *Dogras* are called as *Shilawanti* or *Satyavati*.

In the same way, a number of men who sacrificed their lives either to protest against the ill treatment or for some noble cause, are worshipped as *kul-devta* such as *Bawa Jitto, Bawa Kalibeer, Bawa Ambo, Bawa Sidh Gauria* and *Bawa Raja Mandlik*. *Raja Mandlik* who was noted for his justice, meekness and mercy towards his subjects, is worshipped throughout Jammu region. One of the most prominent personalities is that of Baba Jitto, a fourteenth century peasant leader who fought against the injustices of the
local Zamindar. At a place called Jhiri near Jammu city, is his temple. The place consists of many small temples (Dehri) showing the place of deity worship of different communities. Some people also install Morhas (small stones with carvings of an ancestor or of the person who is to be propitiated). ‘Mel’ congregations are organized and an annual fair is held (Jhiri Mela) on the day of Kartik Poornima (month of November on full moon night).

These folk deities were great men and women of the past who sacrificed their lives in order to get their rights and justice for their people. Such persons are not only worshiped but their names are perpetuated in karaks (emotional songs). To remember the sacrifice of these folk deities, melas (fair) are organized on traditional days at their shrines annually by the community members. The Jhiri Mela is an example of this kind of fair which is organized to commemorate the supreme sacrifice of Bawa Jitto. At that time the ‘Mel’ congregation is also organized by the communities to worship their respective kul-deity.

According to Atrey (2008:4) Jammu region also has its own complex hierarchy of local deities consisting of what are popularly called as kul-devta (clan male deity) and kul-devi (clan female deity). They are worshipped by the entire extended family, lineage and the clan members. Every event in life like marriage or birth of a child is marked by the performance of a ritual or a ceremony in which the kul or clan deity is worshipped. This cult forms an essential part of the living heritage of the region and as such can help us to understand the socio-cultural and religious life of the Dogras of Jammu region. In general there are following categories of local deities in Jammu region based on region and caste (Saxena, 2009).

**Village Gods:** There are approximately fifty major and minor village gods in the region as identified by some scholars. These deities are called gram devtas because they protect the people of a particular village and their area of influence is limited to that village. Geographically, the larger concentration of the gram devtas is in the hilly areas of Jammu region such as in Bhadrwaha, Rajouri, Udhampur, Reasi and Katra. They are
worshipped for meeting the immediate and pragmatic needs of people like protection against natural calamities, for agricultural prosperity, for cattle wealth, for justice delivery, family prosperity etc.

**Village Goddess:** These are local Goddesses who largely exist in the form of village Goddesses and are called *gram devis*. Most of them have been identified with *Durga* and *Shakti* cult, but many are purely folk deities like *Sithala* who are revered in the villages of Jammu as a protector from chicken and small pox diseases. Some of the local Goddesses especially *Mata Vaishno Devi* have attained national character, widespread popularity after their absorption into the Pan-Indian hierarchy. Chandi Mata of Machail in Padar region is a folk deity that is acquiring Sanskritic form but its folk character is still intact. They are worshipped to get favors in the form of agricultural prosperity, cattle wealth and protection from dreadful diseases and believed to perform miracles.

**Serpent God:** The worship of Serpent God is found mainly in the Eastern hills, especially in Bhaderwah, Udhampur and some parts of Jammu and Kathua districts and is known as *Naag devta*. Since *Naags* were also the ruler of the region, many of them appear to have worked for the welfare of the people especially in the field of irrigation. After their death they were probably raised to the status of the deity. Over a period of time, these *Naag* deities came to be symbolized through snake as a totem. These deities usually reside near water resources. In many places the water resources itself is considered as deity especially in the form of waterfall or a pond (*bowli*).

**Martyr God:** Martyr Gods include both male and female deities and known as *Shaheed devta*. They have ballads and legends connected with them. They are probably the common folk people who were either killed fighting for their land or nation and were sacrificed for the cause of humanity or any other reason. When the victim dies, the people or community starts revering the dead person, to escape his wrath and anger. Many times they are the ancestors who are not satisfied and seek attention from the family members.
They are venerated through Morhas (small stones with the figure of the ancestor carved on it) till they redeem the members from their curse and finally bless them.

The major reasons for the martyrdom of people were largely: atrocities of the feudal lords, killed in land disputes, human sacrifice (practice of parha) and, unnatural death. It has also been noticed that many of the shaheed devta include Brahmans who gave their life for justice through the practice of Praha Pratha (a kind of passive resistance or self torture sometimes culminating in self-immolation and self-killing).

**Sati Deities:** Those who sacrificed life for their husband, brothers, father or sons are called Sati deities and they are usually known as Shilawanti or Satyavati.

**Exotic Deities:** The local deity cult also assimilated some of the exotic deities who have been termed as Aaghat in the sense that they came from outside regions. They include the deities such as Raja Mandleek, Baba Kalibeer and Narsimha. Raja Mandleek also known as Gugga Chauhan is a folk deity widely worshipped throughout the Jammu region. He is said to have travelled through Jammu province (Dewan, 2007: 463).

**Conclusion**

It can thus be concluded that folk Hinduism exists in different forms in Jammu region even today. It operates at the levels of extended family, lineage- clan, village and the region. Several forms of beliefs and rituals are associated with them which are practiced by the people to a large extent. They not only provide solution to people’s immediate needs, but also help in maintaining the unity and solidarity of the group. Their performance helps to transfer the tradition and knowledge from one generation to the other.

It is also seen that local people have high regard for virtues like valour and bravery. Their acts are incorporated in the local folk songs and their idols are also built at several places. This may be due to the strategic location of the state at the international border and line of control, which makes it prone to wars and conflict and raises insecurity
and lack of safety. General Zorawar Singh, at the instruction of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu attacked Ladakh four times between 1834 and 1841 and conquered many places. While on his way he liberated the fort in Paddar region from the rulers of Chamba and named it Gulabgarh. He passed through Machail seeking the blessings of Chandi Mata and got her temple constructed to a higher level after coming back victorious from Zanskar. Similarly, Col. Yadav chased away the raiders during 1947 war and cleared the area of their influence showing exemplary bravery. As he promised at the shrine of Machail Mata, after coming back from the successful mission he got the silver idol of deity Saraswati installed in the temple (Dewan 2007). The devotional songs sung in praise of Machail Mata include the names of the two great warriors.

The chapters also brought out that, some of these folk deities are acquiring pan-regional and national forms as well. Increase in communication facilities and role of media have resulted in this process. Pilgrimage of Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu region has become very popular and earns biggest revenue in the country (after Tirupati Balaji). Chandi Mata of Machail (district Kishtwar, Jammu region) is also acquiring popularity in recent years, though it has also maintained its folk characteristics. Thus in Jammu region, one finds transition from folk to all India Sanskritic Hinduism, yet at various levels, the significance of folk deity still exists. At the level of Kul or clan they maintain their folk form. This is shown in the worship of Datti Ji of Jamwal-Pandits in the following chapters.
End Notes


4. Ibid.: 44


18 Ibid.: 227

19 Ibid.: 218-19


21 Ibid.: 45-47

Chapter 2  Folk Hinduism and Sanskritic All India Hinduism: Understanding Relationship

23  Ibid.: 1-2

24  *India, Society, Religion and Literature in ancient and Medieval periods.* Publications Division. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India:14


31  Op. cit. Ref. 23, p-14


33  Op. cit. Ref. 23, p-14


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36  Op. cit. Ref. 23. p-16-17


43  Ibid.


Chapter 2  Folk Hinduism and Sanskritic All India Hinduism: Understanding Relationship


54  Ibid.