Chapter-IV

FOLK DEITY OF JAMWAL-PANDITS AND ‘MEL’ CONGREGATION

Introduction

The folk deities constitute a part of folk Hinduism, which is emphatically polytheistic and can be distinguished from ‘high’ forms of Hindu philosophy, or mystical or ascetic forms. They are different from Sanskrit form of Hinduism based on literary ancient texts and comprising of worship of Great Gods and their consorts. These are established with proper rituals and timings in a temple. Folk religion is related to everyday life and is experienced and felt. Folk deities are usually associated with local and rural areas and with particular places, temples, fields and streams. They are not pan-Indian or pan-Hindu in character but specific to persons’ tribe, caste, clan or village. They are usually worshipped for some practical end or immediate end (rather than high devotion and spiritualism) like good harvest, productivity etc. Folk deities also have a human element, they can be happy or angry and can accordingly reward or punish their worshippers, and therefore, must be propitiated with great care and concern. Rather than the Goddesses of pure and abstract nature, they are usually associated with a person and have a legend of origin and worship (McDaniel, 2003).

In Folk Hinduism there are certain distinct characteristics which make them different from folk deities of other religions. These are also quite true of the folk deities of Jammu region as well. The important folk characteristics in Hinduism are: people like Shamans and Chela and their significance as mediums between the people and the supernatural, particularly during trance and possession; the intimate and close relationship with the deities having a sense of feel, touch, and conversation with them; prevalence of offerings of non-vegetarian food and consumption of alcohol; absence of text-based ritual procedures; and worship of the deity for pragmatic day-to-day concern (Sinha, 2007: 1764). The priests of the folk deities are often non-Brahmin and are worshipped to protect the people from fears and crises. Mari, is a common village deity in peninsular India that presides over epidemic diseases such as plague, smallpox and cholera (Srinivas, 2003 [Reprinted]: 180-81).
The etymological meaning of the word ‘folk’ has a connotation of ‘ordinary’, ‘common people’ and the ‘masses’. The use of folk dimension and ‘little community’ was made by Robert Redfield (1956) and became prominent in sociological and anthropological literature. The concept ‘folk’ became equivalent to peasant and rural populations who were further typified as being illiterate, unsophisticated and simple-minded as different from urbane and the cultured. The differences between the two are captured in the broader metaphor of the ‘Great’ and ‘Little’ traditions (Singer 1972), and in the context of Indian society and Hinduism, in ‘Sanskritic’ and ‘Non-Sanskritic’ aspects (Srinivas 2003 [Reprinted]).

In reality, the two often co-exist, one taking from the other. Usually the Little traditions are taken over by the Great traditions, either the latter absorbs them or the former sanskritize their rituals that leads to the process of social mobility. Srinivas has given many examples of such kinds where the Sanskritc deities spread horizontally on all-India level, while at the regional or local levels there are vertical movements (Ibid.).

The presiding folk deity of Jamwal-Pandits is ‘Satyavati Ji’ or ‘Datti Ji’ and her main worship location is at Purmandal in Samba district. Besides the Main temple, there are various small local worship spots of the deity situated mostly on the outskirts of the villages. Jamwal-Pandit is a clan of Dogra Brahmins and follows the rituals of other Brahmins. They worship all the pan-Indian Gods and Goddesses with equal devotion with Sanskritic rituals. Their acts are closer to the ritual aspects related to caste system. However, like all other castes of the Jammu region, they have a folk form of worship in their Main deity. Every clan of different castes in Jammu have their principal deity who is venerated on all important occasions. This makes the folk form of Hinduism an important regional phenomenon.

This chapter has focussed on the worship of the Main clan deity of Jamwal-Pandits in its folk form and the tradition of ‘Mel’ congregation among them. It has shown how their rituals have both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic features, and how through worship of clan deity, the folk elements are preserved and maintained by the Jamwal-Pandits of Jammu region.
Jammu Region and Folk Clan Deity

The name Jammu is derived from the name of its leader Raja Jambu Lochan who founded this city and named it Jambupura which was later changed to Jammu. Many historians and locals believe that Jammu was founded by Raja Jambu Lochan, the descendant of Kush, the elder son of Lord Ram, the King of Ayodhya. Jambu Lochan’s brother Bahu Lochan who died fighting in the war against the King of Punjab built the Bahu Fort. It is generally accepted that the two brothers, Raja Jambu Lochan and Raja Bahu Lochan founded the twin cities of Jammu and Bahu respectively in the fourteenth century BC (Dewan, 2007:43-4).

The legend says that during one of his hunting campaigns, Raja Jambu Lochan reached the Tawi River where he saw a goat and a lion drinking water at the same place and after that the animals went their own ways. The Raja was amazed, abandoned the idea of hunting and returned to his companions. Recounting what he had seen, he exclaimed that this place, where a lion and a goat could drink water side by side, was a place of peace and tranquility. The Raja commanded that a palace be built at this place and a city was founded around it. This city became known as Jambu-Nagar, which then later changed into Jammu (Ibid). At present, this can also be seen in the form of statue of Raja Jambu Lochan along with statues of lion and goat in the park near Sri Ranbireshwar Temple, Jammu.

Jammu city is known as the city of temples because of the presence of several big and small temples. It has been a part of Jammu Province which was much bigger in size and was divided into a number of principalities ruled by different rulers. Ranjit Dev, the Dogra King of Jammu was an able ruler and asserted control over 22 principalities. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the power of Jammu ruler had extended east as far as the Ravi, and west to the Chenab. The power however waxed and waned as some petty Rajput and Muhammad rulers became independent time and again. By the middle of the eighteenth century Ranjit Dev became a powerful ruler, but died in 1780 (Lawrence, 2010: 27-9).
As the successors of Ranjit Dev could not control the empire properly, it went into the hands of Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore. Since he also had problems retaining the territory, Ranjit Singh sent Gulab Singh, a descendant of Raja Ranjit Dev to put down the rebellion. Gulab Singh was able to control most of the territory, but as Maharaja Ranjit Singh died the Sikh Empire started disintegrating. Gulab Singh paid the indemnity of Rs. 7.5 million to the British under the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 and was given all of the Valley of Kashmir and a few other territories. Gulab Singh became the Maharaja, followed by his son Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-85), who in turn was succeeded by his son Pratap Singh in 1985 and finally his nephew Maharaja Hari Singh, the last Dogra ruler succeeded him in 1925 and remained so till the accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian Union in 1947 (Dewan, 2007: 43-4)\(^1\).

The ancient religious school of thoughts like Shaivism and Vaishnavism are fast losing their distinct identity in Jammu region as many of the temples now days at various locations house several deities within one temple which earlier used to be dedicated to one deity or God within Hindu religion. Though one Great God or Goddess is still important there are many other statues of male and female deities that are found to exist with them. This is the common feature developing in many temples across the country. Most of the magnificent temples in Jammu city (which is known as the city of temples) or in its vicinity of Great Gods like Shiva, Vishnu and his incarnation, have their idols along with their consorts. The *Devi* (Goddess) or *Mata* (Mother) temples, which are many in Jammu region, house the female deities as central figures with minor or smaller idols of other deities.

The family deity or *kul* deity tradition is also losing its cultural and religious moorings, due to urbanization and the fast pace of life of people especially in cities. The people do not participate in *kul* deity’s religious ceremonies on regular basis and many of them have also migrated to other cities and states from their places of origin, the location of deity worship. Special efforts are made by them to reach the place of their principal clan deity. Though new forms of communication and better transport facilities are used and the numbers of people visiting the temples have increased, a large number of people expressed their inability to reach the destination at the desired time. Anxiety and insecurity of job have rendered their visits difficult.
The partition of the country in 1947 has dealt a blow to many families whose religious *kul* deity’s temples got divided due to the international border. It is common knowledge that many families in the tehsil of R. S. Pura in Jammu district had their *kul* deity on the other side of the International border, now in Pakistan. The people once left their country were not able to go back and hence, lost touch with their original residence as well as the place of deity worship. Some of them made new places as their worship area, but the situation has never been the same for them.

These folk deities are represented in the form of simple stone or statue. Mostly these temples are not closed place but are small worship areas. The folk deities in Jammu have interesting stories behind them. In olden days, when people commuted from one village to another village they started relaxing near these stones. In the due course of time they started praying to them for their safe journey. Thus, slowly these milestones attained the position of village Gods and Goddesses and the protector of the entire village. These deities are worshipped by all the villages and they are supposed to protect the people from any harm, spread of disease, failure of crops etc.\(^\text{12}\).

The worship of the brave warriors is one of the popular forms of worship in Jammu region as one finds their statues with inscription written in many villages, especially those near the international border or the line of control (LoC). There are also more common variants of female deities representing the characteristics of purity and chastity. Anyone who stood for fairness and valiantly fought for justice or lost life for the cause of justice has become part of worship like *Baba Jitto*. Living some five hundred years ago, he was a sincere and simple farmer who chose to kill himself rather than surrender to the undeserved demands of the local landholder to part with his crop. Baba Jitto sat on the heap of grain and stabbed himself with a dagger and all the grains were smeared with his blood. Various worship places have been created to remind the people not to commit or repeat the same social mistakes of the past (Dewan, 2007).\(^\text{13}\).

There are many temples dedicated to Lord Shiva (Ranbireshwar, Peer Kho, Aap Shambu Temples) and Goddess Durga (Bawe Wali Mata, Chichi Mata, Kol
Kandoli Temples) in different parts of Jammu region. There are diversified characteristics between the Vedic and the folk tradition that induct these deities in various spectrums. One finds changes in the worship of many of these deities, mainly in the popular ones like Mata Vaishno Devi. One of the reasons of increasing popularity of Mata Vaishno Devi shrine is her Vaishnavi status which was also promoted by the Dogra rulers. She has always been a vegetarian Goddess and has no history of animal sacrifice (Erndl, 1993)\(^{14}\).

The folk deities are mostly found at the outer parts of the Jammu region. The maintenance of these deities temple is taken care of by the village members. It is believed that these Gods prevent all evils and devils from entering the village. More importantly, it has been the belief of the village people that God remains disguised in the form of the man who predicts the future. The social issues are discussed in the presence of Purohits (Priests) and the people consider their decision as the voice of the deity. The Purohits (Priests) address the people on various issues of life.

Thus, folk deities in the villages of Jammu region play an important function of protecting the village and its’ people and in looking after and solving their day-to-day problems. The deities are accordingly respected and propitiated. The various folk deities like Kul devta, Kul devi, Nag devta and Shaheed devta have been described in detail in chapter two.

**Worship of Folk Deity Datti Ji**

In Jammu region as elsewhere there have been some people considered noble who sacrificed their life for truth and justice. It has been since ages that the persons who belong to Brahman community were referred to as Baba. One of the noble persons known as Datta Gopaldass was a Dogra Brahaman. The Jamwal-Pandit community worships him along with his wife Sati Sheelawanti. They are firm believers of the kul-deity. They perform all the customs and rituals with great zeal. For Srinivas (2003 [Reprinted])\(^{15}\), the social function of these rituals as he sees in his study of the Coorgs of South India, is to express and maintain the solidarity and continuity of the structural system. Though Baba Ji is a central figure in the legend of
the deity worship, it is Datti Ji who is regarded as the Kul or clan deity of the Jamwal-Pandits.

_The legend:_ Baba ji (Gopal Dass), the husband of Datti Ji was born at Gangochak near Ghajansoo, Jammu more than five hundred years ago. He was the son of Pt. Ganga Dass and was the Grandson of Pt. Sagar Ji. Once, when he was going for his marriage to a Brahman girl, daughter of Pt. Sukhi Ram of Patoli Mangotrian, Jammu, the baraat (marriage procession) passed through a village of Charak Rajputs. They used to take money from the Baratis forcibly. They threatened the purohit (priest) accompanying the marriage party of Babaji and demanded money. The Purohit said that he had no money but just a religious cloth. As Babaji reached earlier at the marriage spot, somebody told Babaji about the purohit’s detention. Babaji had completed only five phera (rounds around sacred fire as a part of Hindu religious marriage), when he decided to take the balance two phera only after knowing about the purohit. The Babaji went to the spot where the Charaks held the Purohit as hostage. Babaji asked them to release the Purohit and requested them for farrat (religious cloth) which was very important for marriage ceremony, but the Charak’s did not heed to his request.

On this, Babaji climbed on the tree and started cutting his body parts. When Babaji’s would be wife (Datti ji) heard that Babaji was sacrificing his life, she started running to that place. On her way, she was offered water by a girl from Jamwal-Pandit family. It is learnt that Datti ji was very pleased and thanked the girl for offering water. When Datti ji reached the spot, she stood below the tree and started catching the parts of Babaji’s body and after that she too sacrificed her life for Babaji. Before dying, she requested the people (Jamwal-Pandits) gathered there to build a temple for Babaji and for her near Purmandal in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir. Since then she is revered by all Jamwal-Pandits. As the water was given by a girl, the daughters have a special place in their society. It is also said that Jamwal-Pandits no longer marry in Magotra clan of the Brahmins as Datti Ji was from that clan and Jamwal-Pandits do not have any purohit after this incidence. 

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The Main temple of *Datti Ji* is situated at Purmandal (District Samba) in Jammu region. Purmandal is also called Chotta Kashi or little Varanasi. Purmandal is situated on the banks of the sacred river Devak. The temples are on both sides of the river, which is mostly dry and this river is *Gupt* Ganga (invisible Ganga). The river has an equal importance as compared to river Ganga and believed to clear a person of his sins (Dewan, 2007)\(^\text{17}\).

It was asked to the respondents as to how frequently they visit the temple at Purmandal and the responses given by them were tabulated as follows:

Table 4.1: Frequency of Visits by the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in about 3 months</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is clear from the above Table 4.1 that most of the respondents visit Main temple at Purmandal twice a year.

### Table 4.2: Purpose of the Respondent’s Visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of visit</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Mel’ Congregations</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage related rituals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth related ritual</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other (to thank or seek blessings)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, as the Table 4.2 shows, an overwhelming majority of the respondents visit *Datti Ji* temple for ‘Mel’ congregations.

‘Mel’ Congregation among Jamwal-Pandits

Jamwal-Pandits from all the corners of Jammu region visit this temple on various occasions throughout the year, especially during their ‘Mel’ congregation, held once in every six months as shown above. On this occasion they perform certain rituals and present new food grains and fruits to the deity and receive her blessings. As the name shows the local term ‘Mel’ means ‘meeting’ or ‘gathering’. The ‘Mel’ is all about the assembling or gathering of the people of the same clan (having same surname) and gotra annually or bi-annually to pay obeisance to their Kul deity at their worship site i.e. at Purmandal, district Samba in Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir state.

The ‘Mel’ is a common ritual among all castes of Hindus in Jammu region. The basis of such congregations is clan of each caste. Though all castes in Jammu organize ‘Mel’, it operates at the level of clan and/or gotra. Each clan and gotra maintains exogamy and no marriage is permissible within these groups. All members
of a clan and a gotra are regarded as related by blood.

However, there is a difference between ‘clan’ and ‘gotra’ as explained in the first chapter. According to Madan, under the influence of Indologists, sociologists and social anthropologists working in India have regarded the gotra to be the same as clan and many times the two terms are used synonymously (Madan, 1989:91-2)\(^\text{18}\). There may be a few gotra in a particular clan, but there are clans who have only one gotra, in which case the principle of exogamy works at both the levels. In case there are more than one gotra, the exogamy operates primarily at the level of gotra.

Besides not marrying within their own gotras and clans and of their mother or in some cases grandmother they also do not marry among certain clans with whom they have avoidance relationship. In the local language it is called chhinna (broken). For example, a Dube cannot marry a Badiyal or a Kesar cannot marry a Badgotra (Dewan 2007:390)\(^\text{19}\). Even among Jamwal–Pandits chhinna exists with Magotra, so marriage among them is prohibited and in the case of Sadhotra they have chhinna with charaks.

The annual congregation or ‘Mel’ of a clan is held at a place or a temple of its presiding deity. Some of the clans of Brahmins of Jammu are as follows: For instance, ‘Mel’ of the Khajuria clan is held at Sangwali in Hiranagar, of the Barkula clan at the temple of its presiding deity, Datti Shila Wanti at Birpur in Jammu, the Ganotha and Degyal Brahmin Biradaris hold their bi-annual congregations at the Devsthan Kharha Madana at Purmandal, the Balotra clan congregates at the darbar (court, temple) of Bua Painthi Ji in Samba ever year, the Sapolia-Padha clan meets annually at the temple of Bua Baba Ji in Paloura, and the Dube clan meets on Baisakhi day at the Ram Krishan Agastya Muni temple in Muthi in Jammu (Ibid.)\(^\text{20}\).

Among the Jamwal-Pandits, ‘Mel’ is organized biannually at the temple in Purmandal every year. The first ‘Mel’ is held in the beginning of the year (in the month of April or May) which falls on the day of “Dwadashi” (Lunar Day of Shukla fortnight). Another ‘Mel’ is held in the month of October or November on the day of “Tulsi Vivah” (marriage ceremony of Basil Plant). There is a great enthusiasm amongst the devotees and they are seen standing in queue holding garlands and
sweets in their hands waiting for long hours to have glimpses of the deities. A huge Bhandara (feast) is also organized. Similar type of function is usually organized at other local places also.

On the day of ‘Mel’ all the community members along with their families join together at the worship place and perform certain rituals. These rituals are performed by the clan members and imbibed by them. In this way they are passed on from generation to generation.

Table 4.3: Frequency of Attending ‘Mel’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency to attend ‘Mel’</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both the times in a year</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in a year</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As shown in the Table 4.3, more than half of the respondents attend ‘Mel’ both times a year and about one-fourth attend at least once a year.

Table 4.4: Reasons for Attending ‘Mel’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community or Biradari Feeling</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family tradition</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting people, renewing old ties &amp; seeking solutions to problems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table 4.4 shows that the first preferential reason for most of the respondents of attending ‘Mel’ is their deep faith in the worship of *Datti Ji* followed by community feeling and family tradition.
The traditional \textit{puja} in the early hours of the morning marks the beginning of rituals associated with the ‘Mel’ congregation. \textit{Puja} or worship is the core ritual of Hinduism. ‘It is a ritual to honour powerful Gods and Goddesses, and often express personal affection for them as well; it can also create a unity between deity and worshipper that dissolves the difference between them’ (Fuller, 2004: 107-08)\textsuperscript{21}.

The rites consist of welcoming the deity as a distinguished guest, bathing with \textit{Panchamrit} (five ingredients) which comprises of milk, curd, honey, ghee and \textit{Ganga jal} (holy water of river Ganga). Then it is followed by the dressing of the deity with new clothes. This is done by the male member who performs the \textit{puja} (worship). The \textit{puja} is performed by putting vermillion on the forehead of the deity, burning of \textit{jyoti} (light) and incense (\textit{agarbatti}), offering of flowers and fruits. Then it is followed by \textit{arti} (devotional songs) with moving flames accompanied by prayers in the vernacular which is attended by members of the community. Afterwards, the \textit{Bhog} (offering) is offered to the deity. This is followed by \textit{bhandara} (feast) where the clan members dine together. The offerings in cash and kind are also made by the worshippers.

These steps in the worship of the deity show the influence of Sanskritic Hinduism. Fuller notes similar kind of process in the worship of Goddess Minakshi in a temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. The rituals are performed by the priest starting with bathing ritual (\textit{abhisheka}); pouring of \textit{panchamrita} (sesame-seed oil, milk, curd, ghee, green coconut water); decoration and dressing ritual (\textit{alankara}) with new clothes, ornaments and flower garland, \textit{kumkum} (red powder) and \textit{vibhuti} (white powder) among others; offering ritual (\textit{naivedya}); and finally display of lamps ritual (\textit{diparadhana}). Thus, bathing, decoration, food offering and waving of lamps rituals are normally considered to constitute the full \textit{puja} (Fuller, 2004: 113-17)\textsuperscript{22}.

After the traditional \textit{puja} among Jamwal-Pandits, the families which pronounce their daughters as \textit{kul-devis} (clan deity) worship \textit{kanjaks} (minor girls) and offer them \textit{halwa} or \textit{karah} (sweet dish) and other gifts. In this community the daughter is given the status of the deity. All the Dogra clans have their clan deities known as \textit{kul-devta} and \textit{kul-devi} who are propitiated on religious and social occasions. The important features and functions of ‘Mel’ among Jamwal-Pandits are:
To enliven the age-old tradition of Jamwal-Pandits.

Offering of new crops like wheat, maize etc. and new seasonal fruits to their deity for getting blessings. The clan members do not eat the new seasonal fruit unless the same is offered to their deity.

Social bonds are strengthened.

Social welfare of poor people belonging to the community is ensured and maintained.

Interaction and exchange of views on vital matters take place.

Members contribute for betterment of Temple.

New generation gets chance to meet the old age people of their community and learn about their tradition and culture.

Offering of food to the people gathered there on the day of ‘Mel’ is made. This community feast is called ‘Langer’. Everyone sits and eat together.

Some Cases

During the fieldwork, some cases were recorded which gave the firsthand account of the faith people have in their clan (Kul) deity Datti Ji.

**Case 1:** Smt. Shrishta Devi, 42 years old, a resident of Akhnoor, Jammu, married to Sh. Bodh Raj, is a mother of three children, two daughters and one son. In the year 2013 her husband left her and started staying with another woman. She faced several problems because of this. Her children were small and she found difficult to look after them and their needs. She also did not get much help from any quarter. She tried her best to get him back several times but all in vain.

Finally, she knocked the door of Datti Ji and prayed to her with full devotion. She religiously performed all the rituals and paid regular visits to the temple. She was sure that Datti Ji would listen to her problem and resolve it. Within a few months her prayers were answered and her husband came back. Now they are living together.
happily. She believes that her husband was back only because of Datti Satyavati Ji’s blessings.

Case 2: Mr. Shonku Ram, 48 years old, resident of Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir, is a shopkeeper. He was married at a young age, when he was only 20 years old. He has three daughters. His wife is a housewife and helps him in the field. They have a piece of land and cultivate seasonal vegetables. One day he went to attend a marriage along with his family members and on his return he found that the lock of his house was broken and it appeared as if someone had stolen things from his house. He immediately brought this to the notice of senior villagers. They found that the goods amounting to rupees five to six thousand were stolen. He along with senior villagers went to the local temple of Datti Ji and they all prayed to her to punish the thief, if the thief does not return the goods within a week’s time.

This statement was made public for everyone to hear. The strategy of declaring this was to force the thief to return back the stolen things and also to serve as a lesson to others not to do such kinds of things in future. To the surprise of all after a couple of days someone kept back all the stolen things at the door of Shonku Ram’s house. This incident reflected the importance of Datti Ji in the lives of people and their faith in her of resolving all problematic cases as well as those of everyday life. Even the thief was influenced by her and feared her wrath.

Case 3: Mr. Sandeep Sharma, a resident of Jammu is 32 year old man who got married to a girl without the consent of his parents. He tried his best to convince his parents but they did not agree because the horoscope of both did not match. They however got married in the temple without the presence of parents and later informed the parents about their marriage. The parents did not accept their marriage. He left his home and started living in the rented house with his wife.

One day he remembered that his father always used to pray Datti Ji whenever he was in trouble. So he started praying Datti Ji, so that his parents could accept his marriage and his wife. With the passage of time they were blessed with twins’, one boy and a girl child. Somebody gave this news to his parents and after hearing this good news the parents of Mr. Sandeep Sharma immediately rushed to his home. They
were very happy to see their grand children and accepted them willingly. The family was united again and they are all living happily now. Mr. Sandeep has firm belief that all this was made possible due the blessings of Datti Ji. He expressed his complete faith in her.

**Case 4:** Mr. Prem Chand, 40 year old resident of Jammu, is a married man and has one girl child. He narrated that initially he visited Datti Ji temple only because of his parents. It was more a part of family tradition and he attended the same with his family members and participated in all the rituals related to the worship of their clan deity. But now he has full faith in Datti Ji.

He stated that during the delivery his wife’s condition became very serious and she was shifted to Ludhiana for further treatment. He prayed to Datti Ji for her speedy recovery and promised that he will never miss any ‘Mel’ congregation and attend them regularly. He took an oath that he will visit the Main temple along with all family members. His wife finally recovered and gave birth to a healthy baby. Since then he makes a regular visit to the temple and attends all ‘Mel’ congregations. He also gives donations, offer grains as well as whatever he can afford.

**Case 5:** Mr. Shatrughan Jamwal, a 63 year old is a resident of Jammu. He is the President of Jamwal-Pandits community since 2011. He is a firm believer of Datti Ji. Mr. Jamwal started worshipping Datti Ji at a very young age. He is living a happy and smooth life now and considers all this as her blessings. According to him, once a bus was carrying devotees of Datti Ji from Jammu and heading towards Purmandal. In between the journey the Driver lost control of the bus and it went about 25 feet down in the gorge. It was a big surprise for all that no one got injured or even received a single scratch in the accident. When Mr. Jamwal went to the spot after hearing the news to help the victims he found that no one was injured. Like him, everyone believed that this was due to the blessings of Datti Ji who came to their rescue at an appropriate time. This incident further increased the belief in the performance of miracles of the folk deity.
There are various other occasions in which the Jamwal-Pandits visit their deity: newly wedded couple to get blessings, in case of a new-born child, if any good thing happens etc. They go to the temple of Datti Ji not only to seek her blessings but also to thank her for her benevolence. They perform what are called votive rituals. These rituals are performed for the fulfillment of an initial vow, a rite of thanks giving to God or Goddess. If a person fails to perform the votive rite, he or she runs the risk of facing the wrath of the deity and lose the divine protection (Tanaka 2003: 867-68).

Besides the Main temple at Purmandal, the members of Jamwal-Pandits have constructed one small temple of their local deity at their native place also because on every occasion they cannot visit Purmandal which is quite far from the main Jammu city. They make regular visits to their local temples and worship their folk deity. Being close to their vicinity they find it easier to seek her blessings in everyday life. However, there are certain rituals that can be performed only at the Main temple at Purmandal like ‘tarage’, a ritual which is performed after marriage. A person can take blessings of the folk deity at the local temple nearby immediately after marriage but has to perform ‘tarage’ ritual at the Main temple at Purmandal ultimately. This ritual is performed to seek the blessings by the couple at the time of starting a new journey.

The Jamwal-Pandits Community has constituted a Management Committee for supervising/development and welfare of the community. Shri Shatrugan Jamwal is the acting President of this Committee. The temple at Purmandal is the Main temple of Jamwal-Pandits, previously there had been small Dehri (small temple like structures) where small coils (Morha) were stored. Mohra are structures or figures carved on stones and are symbols of ancestor worship. They are venerated to satisfy the insatiate souls or those who are not happy or angry. Mohras find place at home and at times in Dehri. The presence of Mohra and Dehri among Jamwal-Pandits suggest the folk form of deity worship among them.

In the process when there is mobility from folk to Sanskritic form, the deity moves from small Dehri to bigger temple. She is installed properly with Sanskritic rituals by the priest at proper muhurat (auspicious time). Similar to this case was one of Machail Mata as informed by one of the pilgrims who go to Machail in Kishtwar.
district regularly. He told that the statue of Chandi Mata appeared in the house of Thakur Kulvir Singh in 1982 at Bhadarwah in Doda district of Jammu region. The idol was shifted and installed with all the rituals to the beautifully constructed temple at Chinnote Bhadarwah. In this temple, the Great Goddesses were emphasized and the folk deity was subsided.

In Sanskritic Hinduism, images or *Murī* thus are very important and they become deity with proper *vidhi* (procedure) of *sthapana* (installing the idol). Only after going through this process the images acquire the sacred status of deity and is imbued with power of *shakti*. At the folk level, there are aniconic images that include unhewn or roughly etched stones, sometimes painted red, that serve as a little village deities throughout India. They are either housed in crude shrines or left standing under a tree or in the open air. These stones serve a similar purpose as the sculptured images and *lingas* found in the larger temples, but they do not fit in the category of classical iconographic rules. The same applies to other representations, such as the metal tridents or pots that stand at small shrines in some areas of the country (Fuller, 2004: 108-09)²⁴.

At Purmandal, in the year 1989 Bansi Lal Sharma and Shiv Kumar Sharma in collaboration with some locals brought statue of clan or *Kul Deity* and installed (*sthapana*) on the eve of Basant Panchmi, fifth day of the *phagun* (February) month in the temple²⁵. The devotees contributed financially and the temple was developed and improved from time to time. This shows that the worship of *Datti Ji* is acquiring a Sanskritic form from the earlier folk form.
Figure 4.2: Main Temple of Jamwal-Pandits at Purmandal, Samba (J&K)

Figure 4.3: Local Temple of Jamwal-Pandits at Goshan, Akhnoor (J&K)
Changes in the Worship of Folk Clan Deity: *Datti Satyavati Ji*

- **Technology and Media:** Advancement in technology and exposure to media leads to huge gathering during ‘Mel’, *Kharka* and other religious occasions.

- **Open to others:** Believers from other castes as well as communities also participate.

- **Serving System:** Food during *Langar (Feast)* is now served in buffet system. This differs from earlier method where people use to sit on the floor and food was served by others.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Infrastructure is developed i.e. accommodation for devotees, wash rooms, toilet facility, etc. are made.

- **Income and expenditure:** Better infrastructural and other facilities have added to the income of the temple but it has also increased expenditure. The annual income now approximately has increased by 80 percent in comparison to the year 2007-08\(^2\).

- **Communication:** In older days it was very difficult to reach the religious site in time. It used to take a lot of time to send messages to the person/s. Therefore, the gathering at the ‘Mel’ congregation of the clan used to be less. But the institution of Postal department/s gave boost to the attendance during bi-annual ‘Mel’ congregation and other occasions. Now-a-days information is given through media, both print and electronic. For instance, the news is advertised in the local newspaper and sometimes given on television as well. The posters are put up and banners are also displayed. Many times people take pictures of information and send through or share it with the help of multi media.
The telephone is playing a vital role which during early years was not affordable to all. Nearly everyone at the ‘Mel’ congregation was found to be using Mobile phones, the most important and popular channel of communication and information dissemination today. As soon as Mobile Phone took over, it has become the necessity rather than luxury for all. It is also affordable to all due to lot of brands and service providers with range of schemes.

The facility of SMS through mobile has played a major role and it easily reaches to all. It can even be forwarded by one person to another and the process goes on with ease. Now-a-days Whatsapp application is in vogue which is more economical and easy to use application and is growing at faster pace. One can send pictures also through this application. Because of these means of communication, nowadays one can see huge gathering during ‘Mel’
congregation and on other occasions as people know in advance and they plan their schedule accordingly.

➤ Offering Food during Langar/Food Fest - Way of Serving

Earlier food was served on the leaves of Malungad (Dogri Name)/Camel’s Foot (English Name) and worshippers used to sit in the rows on the ground and the people (anyone who is willing to render his services) use to serve them. Now-a-days food is served in buffets in crockery and not on plates or bowls made of leaves.

Figure 4.5 : Food served on the leaves of Malungad

Figure 4.6: Food served in the Parats and Iron Buckets

Figure 4.7: Food served in Buffet/s
Prashad was earlier served in bowl made up of leaves of Malungad (Dogri Name)/Camel’s Foot (English Name) called “Doone” and now days it is distributed and served in poly bags so that one can take it home to serve to other members also. However, the earlier form of serving on leaves was much more hygienic and environment friendly. Poly bags not only create garbage but are not good for health when used. In many states its use is banned.

➢ Other Facilities: As the devotees come from far flung areas and it is not possible for them to go back on the same day, therefore, to meet the needs of the devotees accommodation facility is also available for those who want to stay there overnight. Earlier visitors use to go in open fields for nature’s call but now-a-days washrooms have been constructed for visitors.
Earlier notice of the next ‘Mel’ congregation was announced at the time of ‘Mel’ congregation and later on it was written on the notice board with the chalk as shown below (Figure 4.11). At present, the notice board is displayed in computerised format as shown below in Figure 4.12.

![Previous Notice Board](image1.png) ![Present Notice Board](image2.png)

During sunny days in summer months, a tent is installed in the open area to protect visitors from direct sun light and heat and in winters, visitors enjoy and take sun bath after having darshans and blessings of Datti Ji.

![View of summer days](image3.png) ![View of winter days](image4.png)

- **Process of cooking / People involved in cooking:** It is interesting to know that the process of cooking food is the same as before. The food even today is
still cooked on wood fire but utensils are changed. Earlier, it was cooked in big pots made up of brass metal called ‘Sagle’. Now days it is cooked in big pots made up of steel.

Further, the use of onion and garlic is strictly restricted since the beginning and this practice still exists very strongly. Excluding schedule caste or tribe cooks can be hired from all the castes. Usually the Jheewar caste (OBC in J&K) members have been the traditional cooks, preparing food during different occasions like marriage or ceremonies like mundan (tonsure). Though not all are engaged in this profession today, quite a number of them are still continuing with this work.

Figure 4.15: Brass Pot (Sagle)  
Figure 4.16: Iron Pot (Patila)

➢ Dishes served during Langar/Food Fest

There have been lot of changes in the style of serving and eating but dishes served remain almost the same i.e. Rajma pulse, Rice, Chana/Maa pulse and Ambal (sweet n sour pumpkin dish) and in sweet dish, sweet rice and halwa (sweet dish) is served. In any Dogra festival or ceremony, dishes like Rajma, Plain Rice, Ambal and sweet rice are always there in the bhandara/ langar (feast). They are the main dishes of local people in Jammu and constitute important part of Dogra food culture. Recently, a culture of stalls of other items is also seen during ‘Mel’ congregation. One can also witness stalls of other food Gol Gappa, Fruit Chart, Jalebi, Pakora etc.
Collection of donation for upliftment of the community, improving facilities for the devotees and maintenance of the temple premises are done by the members of the Jamwal-Pandits Biradari. The collection of amount through donation or charity is also increasing day-by-day. People donate in both cash and kind for the welfare of the temple and the community. Proper maintenance of accounts is maintained by the Committee and receipts are given to those who donate.

Figure 4.17: Collection of donation  Figure 4.18: Receipt of donation

Believers from Within and Outside the Community

It is revealed by the priest of Jamwal-Pandits that rituals performed during worship are only external procedures and actions, but the devotee has to involve internal self also if he or she wants to gain blessings of Datti Ji. According to the devotees, when they perform rituals as per past tradition/customs, they are benefitted from these and this gives them immense satisfaction and determination and strengthen their will power. On the whole, it helps them to live a moral life, according to them.

As expressed by the devotees, there are many benefits that flow from rituals - they help people to come together, share their feelings and problems, provide solidarity to their clan and family and overall help them to become better human beings. Religious head has its own say in the society, influencing the decision making
in the families and clan. Attending ‘Mel’ also relieves their stress and gives outlet to their problems.

Now days, it is observed that people of other communities have also started worshipping the deity of Jamwal-Pandits. Few families who belong to Sikh community and are residents of Gurdaspur in Punjab were also seen during ‘Mel’ congregation at Purmandal. They also have full faith in the kul deity of Jamwal-Pandits. People use to take “Sukhans”. Sukhan is a conditional promise i.e. they promise deity, if what they want is received they will give what they promised. Once their wish is fulfilled, they complete their Sukhan or we can say that they fulfil their promise. This is like a votive ritual which is performed as a thanks giving gesture to the deity of being so kind and benevolent.

An interesting thing is that people of other communities also believe this and one Sikh devotee, after his wish was fulfilled donated electrical appliance for the use in the temple at Purmandal. This shows how ‘Mel’ congregations strengthen the unity not only among Jamwal-Pandits but attracts other communities also which enhances the feeling of fraternity in the society as a whole, as people sit together and discuss things and share their views.

Conclusion

The study has tried to explore the changes in the worship of folk clan deity of Jamwal-Pandits. During the entire period of study, it was revealed that even though the digital divide has hampered the gatherings of people or believers or visitors and followers in ‘Mel’ gatherings, still the prior intimations of ‘Mel’ congregation and advancement in technology like mobile services, Whatsapp, SMS, fixed computerized boards etc. has played a major role in again gathering and assembling the worshippers at one place during the ‘Mel’ congregation. This clearly indicates that the mode of communication is high-tech. The other reason behind the increase in the devotees is mode of transport, which is now easily available. Earlier it was very difficult to move from one place to other, as no private transport was available. At present, accommodation is also available for those devotees who want to stay there. New and modified ways of cooking food, types of dishes prepared as well as the serving procedures have been adopted.
The major reason behind the coming of a larger number of devotees is their unflinching faith in folk deity due to complexities of life and search for peace and prosperity. Writing about the pilgrimage to Mata Vaishno Shrine in Jammu region, Foster and Stoddard (2010)\textsuperscript{27} were of the view that besides the spiritual and religious reasons of the visit to the shrine, a large number of pilgrims undertake the \textit{yatra} (pilgrimage) for tourism and recreational purpose and to find solace from the everyday mundane life.

Migration of people to outside world has given them opportunity to meet each other at least once or twice a year on the day of ‘\textit{Mel}’ congregation. By attending ‘\textit{Mel}’ congregation the devotees also get a platform for fulfillment of their other social needs. Not only the members of Jamwal-Pandits visit their deity temple and the ‘\textit{Mel}’ congregations but also the believers of other communities approach from within or from outside the State thus showing full faith in the \textit{kul} deity of Jamwal-Pandits. Due to this, large donations are coming up thus resulting in an overall development in the infrastructure and other facilities at the temple complex.

In this way, we can say that with modernization process, the Indian traditions are getting a new form and image as people across the community and region participate in gatherings and congregations of others strengthening the network of relationships in society. One can also find changes in the folk dimension of the deity worship with more Brahmanical procedures of \textit{puja} (worship) being adopted and vegetarianism and purity of food and other things being maintained. However, it still serves the interest of the smaller number of people, of one clan and, of the immediate needs of its members. At the level of clan it binds people together and in which lies her strength as a local Goddess.
End Notes


7. Ibid.


9. Ibid.


12. The information was shared by the Jamwal-Pandit Committee President in a personal communication.
Ibid.


16 This information is based on the personal communication with the priest of the *Datta Ji* temple.


20 Ibid.


22 Ibid.: 113-17


25 The said information was given by the President of Jamwal-Pandits Community during interview with him at Purmandal.
Record/account statement of temple of *Datti Satyavati Ji*, situated at Purmandal, Samba, Jammu and Kashmir.