Chapter-V

RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FOLK DEITY WORSHIP AMONGST JAMWAL-PANDITS: THE HINDU BRAHMINS OF JAMMU

Introduction

Rites and rituals are important components of all world religions. This is equally true of Hinduism and various communities that follow it. This chapter brings out the rites and rituals associated with Jamwal-Pandits, the Hindu Brahmins of Jammu and Kashmir State. The rites and rituals are connected with day to day affairs of people’s life. They play vital role in any society. In one way or the other, these rituals also become the binding factor of the society. It is pertinent to say that these rituals and rites were conceived with an idea to unite the societies, which from time memorial have divergent and different views and opinions. They thus become essential for having a minimum level of understanding on which society agrees and on the basis of which it performs day to day functions. The findings are based on the field work undertaken among Jamwal-Pandits of Jammu region, related mainly to the worship of clan deity among them.

Rites and rituals may be defined as major pillars of any society and connect people with each other through their adherence and performance. They also serve as vital component for the solidarity of the society, as some rituals are performed by the whole society, which brings people together on one platform. They are deep-rooted ingredient of any society. For every action of life there are rites and rituals. They are associated with faith of the people and their religion. From ancient times, societies have devoutly believed in natural forces and to please these forces, people used to worship, thus eventually leading to existence of many types of rituals. The Jamwal-Pandits of Jammu region also perform many such rites and rituals which are related to their deity worship on different occasions.

Understanding Rituals: Theoretical Perspectives

Rituals may be defined as a kind of patterned activity oriented towards control of human affairs, primarily symbolic in character with a non-empirical referent, and
as a rule socially sanctioned (Firth, 1971: 222). Each society has a body of ritual and each ritual action has its meaning and the totality of such meaning constitutes the expression of that system. Rituals are actually the way of expressing the religious sentiments. There are different theoretical perspectives on ‘Rituals’ in sociology and social anthropology that help in understanding the ways in which the topics of rituals, rites and practices are approached in studies on religion.

The pioneer work in this field is of the 19th century French sociologist, Emile Durkheim on elementary form of religious life (1912). Religious rituals according to him are ‘the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of sacred objects’. He sees ‘rituals as serving the function of maintaining social order’. According to him ‘the aim of rituals is to uphold the community and renew the sense of belonging to the group’. So, the social functions of these rituals are viewed as expressing and maintaining the solidarity and continuity of the structural system (Radcliffe Brown, 1952).

Durkheim’s theory from functionalist perspective focused on how rituals reinforce collective sentiment and social integration. His work was on totemism as one of the earliest forms of religion among the aboriginals of Australia, but it is equally applicable to the modern society. He emphasized on the importance of religion-like institutions as moral individualism and humanity being important values to maintain the integrative character of the modern societies.

Malinowski, in his study (1922) on the Trobriand Island in the Papua New Guinea near Australia elaborated several rituals among the tribal people, especially those related to Canoe building, Kula expedition and other religious and magical rites. According to him, these served to meet different primary and secondary needs of the people which were functional for them and for the culture as a whole. Radcliffe-Brown and other British social anthropologists elaborated the study of what ritual does and how it expresses features of the social structure. Radcliffe-Brown’s work in particular in the Andaman Islands (1922) showed the significance of many types of rituals (like weeping when two friends meet) emphasized on the integrity and continuity of the structure of the primitive tribes.
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Besides the focus on functionalism and structural functionalism on the one hand, Durkheim’s theory of the formation and transformation of collective representation on the other hand, influenced the development of the analysis of the content of ritual or what ritual says. The works of social anthropologists like Marcel Mauss (1925)⁶ were of great importance in influencing the development of the British social structural interpretation of ritual and also of French structuralist approach to ritual and symbolism (Charlotte, 1986:248-49)⁷.

Unlike the British social structural approach which examined ritual categories and actions as expressions and maintenance of social order, the French structuralists paid attention to the symbolic content of ritual or how rituals express symbolically. The structuralist theory argued for the study of systematic nature of the content of cultural system which incorporated the aspect of symbolism. Social Anthropologist, Leach (1961)⁸ regarded ritual not as a category of behaviour but as an aspect of behaviour, i.e. as the aspect of behaviour related to its symbolic value rather than to its practical utility. Most studies in contemporary modern times of ritual and religion in general are in agreement that it is necessary to study both what ritual does and what it says, as these are interdependent and mutually reinforcing aspects of religious and symbolic phenomena in human society (Ibid)⁹.

Rituals and beliefs are understood to be very closely related. Earlier sociologists and social anthropologists saw rituals as expressing or reinforcing beliefs and beliefs as being underlying or justifying rituals. However, modern thinkers have demonstrated that there are differences between the two- rituals and beliefs and that an accepted social form of expression or action like those embodied in ritual do not imply that the actors concerned share the same beliefs or feelings about the ritual. Nevertheless, all religions of the modern or primitive, classical or folk, have both rituals and beliefs as their foundation. Rituals consist in the observance according to the prescribed procedure of certain actions designed to establish relationship between the performing individual and the supernatural power. Beliefs are a charter for the rituals and also their rationalization, as well as ensure that rituals are observed (Majumdar and Madan, 1999)¹⁰.
In the Indian context, the work of M. N. Srinivas (1952)\textsuperscript{11} is very important regarding religion and the role of rituals. His book *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* is an impressive and significant contribution. It is an empirical study of Hinduism covering nearly all aspects of Coorg society including religion, caste, kinship, village, deity worship, *mangala* or marriage rituals and joint family called *okka*. Following his teacher and mentor, Radcliffe-Brown, Srinivas broadly followed structural-functional approach in his study of Coorgs analyzing rituals at every level – joint family, lineage or clan, village, peninsular region and All-India level. His emphasis was on Hinduism at all levels, and according to him, Coorg religious community with the time has incorporated their local deity as a part of the wider Hindu religious community through the process he called Sanskritization.

The ‘rituals’ performed during various religious and social ceremonies have special importance in Srinivas’ work. Religion among Coorgs is centered around what Srinivas calls ‘ritual idiom’. According to him, ‘every society has a body of ritual, and certain acts forming part of the body or ritual repeat themselves constantly. Not only ritual acts but also ritual complexes, which are wholes made up of several individual ritual acts, frequently repeat themselves’ (Srinivas, 1952:70)\textsuperscript{12}. In this way rituals contribute to social solidarity. The connected beliefs and values like ritual purity and pollution, and notion like *dharma* and *karma*, *paap* and *punya* underlie the ritual practices among Hindus.

Hinduism consists of both rituals and beliefs of folk and Sanskritic nature. In many situations though the two overlap, there is a clear difference between the two. Hinduism according to Srinivas is based on the structural principle of caste system, though there are practices that can be classified as having beyond caste dimension. He is of the view that every caste in every region has both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic beliefs and rituals, the former more in the higher castes, particularly the Brahmins (Srinivas 1952)\textsuperscript{13}.
The difference between the primitive or folk and higher or classical or Sanskritic form of beliefs is that in the former, there is relative absence of philosophical speculation and spiritualism. Accordingly, the rituals in the folk form are based on experiencing life or living life as it comes. Their performances satisfy people’s primary and practical needs and adopt rudimentary methods like use of intermediaries to achieve a specific end. The higher or classical forms or rituals are performed as ends in themselves, for the general prosperity and happiness. They have more philosophical element and are often recorded as documents or texts. They follow proper procedures with much sacred and auspicious base.

The rituals of the Brahman Varna, caste and sub-caste are understood to be more Sanskritic though among Brahmins also they vary from region to region. The Saraswat Brahmins of Kashmir are mostly non-vegetarian and follow certain rituals of non-Sanskritic type as well. Madan notes in his study of the Pandits of rural Kashmir regarding rituals and ceremonies connected with childbirth that there is a Sanskritic ritual performed 2-3 days before the marriage of a woman to ensure her fertility, while there is also a non-Sanskritic ceremony in the seventh month of pregnancy called ‘the giving of milk’ when a woman goes to her natal home for a few days. Similarly the birth of the child which involves pollution also have several Sanskritic and Non-Sanskritic rituals. Non-Sanskritic ceremonies are distinguished from Sanskritic rituals by the fact that priests and mantras have no place in the Non-Sanskritic traditions (Madan, 1989: 69-71).14

However, most of the rituals among the Kashmiri Pandits from birth (or even before) to death are Sanskritic. There are in general rituals for the ‘good of the body’, called the sharirsamskar. The first of these, kahanethar is a purificatory bath performed around twelve days after the birth of a child. Then there are rituals of first hair cut for boys (zarakasai), piercing of earlobes of the girls (kanchombun), ritual initiation of boys before they are twelve years old (Mekhal) after which they enjoy the full status of a Brahman and entitled to go through the important ritual of marriage (nether) and perform other rituals as their duties. The girls do not go through an initiation rite till marriage, when both the bride and bridegroom go through a series of
rituals. The main ritual during marriage consists of father’s giving of his daughter as a gift to her future husband and his acceptance of her as a wife. Finally, there are rites related to death, the *antisamskar* (last rites) culminating in cremation which is usually done by the eldest son or someone equivalent (Madan, 1989)\(^{15}\).

Besides this, there are other several rituals *sharirshamskar* for the benefit of manes. After the death, it is believed that the soul travels to *pitra-lok* (land of manes), and to assist it in this travel, several rituals are performed for 12 days after the death and fortnightly for three months, and thereafter monthly for the whole year. There is also first death anniversary libations (*tarpan*) and food offerings (*shradha*) at particular times to the ancestors including the offerings of cooked rice balls (*pinda*) (Ibid.)\(^ {16}\). Similar rituals with different names are followed by other castes, but among Brahmins they are more elaborate and complex. The Brahmins of other regions in the country too follow these rituals with slight variations.

The Dogra Brahmins too are Saraswat Brahmins and many of their rituals are related and similar to those of the Kashmiri Brahmins, though in some ways they are different, particularly those related to the folk and local level. The *Dogra* Brahmins are believed to have descended from the famous and legendary family of the Aryans and speak Dogri language. The presence of clans in most of these communities and worship of their deities constitute an important component of the Hindu Dogra culture. All over Jammu region people have established the worshipping place of their family or clan deities and Goddesses in a big or small temple where they congregate into a gathering called ‘*Mel’* worship, eat together and express clan solidarity (Chauhan, 2011)\(^ {17}\).

Rites and rituals play a very significant role in the culture of the Dogra Hindus of Jammu and Kashmir. There are various rituals which are involved in a normal Dogra life cycle institution, such as birth, marriage, death and various rites and rituals associated to *kul-deities. Here* is an attempt to present features of these rites of Jamwal-Pandit Community. The Jamwal-Pandits are basically Hindu Brahmin by caste. They mainly inhabit the hilly side of Chenab River, especially the areas of Akhnoor, Gajansoo, Udhampur, Reasi, Katra and Jammu. The Jamwal-Pandits is a patrilineal clan
among the Dogras of Jammu region. The rituals related to their birth customs, mundan (tonsure) ceremony, marriage and death are discussed below.

**Birth Customs**

Every family is incomplete without descendants. The birth of a child gives opportunity to the couple to become parents i.e. father and mother. It is a time of rejoicing for the entire family. On the birth of a child among Jamwal-Pandits, the senior family member with ‘virtuous qualities’ writes, with gold coin or gold ring (whatever is available) dipped in honey, the word ‘Om’ on the tongue of the child in the hope that the infant will inherit good virtues and qualities of the family. To ward off evil, a small ‘dot’ is drawn behind the baby’s ear using Kajal, a carbon based eye ‘make up’. In this community it is believed that on the birth of a male child the mother and the new born son should not wear new clothes. The mother has to wear petticoat (geedy) and should not wear the salwar/pajama till the Mundan ceremony (tonsure) takes place. The new born baby can only wear the old clothes given by the maternal family and they cannot wear the pink, yellow and red colour clothes till the Mundan ceremony (tonsure) is performed.

When a woman has given a birth to a male child, her husband and family members are careful to note the exact time, the day, the date and the year in which the child has been born. Usually the father of the child carries this information to the astronomer, to enquire whether the infant is born at favorable moment, who casts the Janam Kundli (horoscope) of the new-born child, covering the ups and downs relating to the life span of the child. If the child is born at favorable moment, a message is sent around to call the relatives and friends, who tender their affection and best wishes to the family. Feasting and rejoicing is held for a couple of days. The sootak (pollution) is observed for ten days after delivery. It means household remains ceremonially impure for ten days after the birth of a child. Childbirth causes ritual pollution to the woman who gives birth, her husband and some agnatic kin. The house is purified by sprinkling Ganga-jal (water of the holy river Ganga) and reciting of mantras by the priest.
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Though both boys and girls are welcomed, Jamwal Pandit being a patrilineal community, where son has many rituals to perform towards his parents and the household, the birth of a son is particularly welcomed. The descent and inheritance follow patriline. There are therefore some differences in the celebration of the rituals of the two. On an auspicious day, the child is given a name according to kundli (horoscope), the original name is kept secret due to fear of getting the child affected by the black magic. The sutra (thread) ceremony is generally performed after the 12th and before or on the 21st day of the birth of the child.

The Jamwal-Pandits are firm believers of the clan or Kul-deity. On the 12th day they offer jaggery also called gur (a traditional uncentrifuged sugar) to Kul deity as a part of their custom. The sutra (thread) ceremony indicates the purification of the family which is believed to have become impure on the birth of the child. The ceremony is performed when the infant is carried outside the house for the first time. The ceremony consists in tying a cotton thread (pink colour in case of the girl child and white colour in case of the male child) round the neck of both the mother and the child by the family members of maternal side.

After this, the mother carrying the child is made to sit on a wooden stool and wear a pink colored suit gifted by her parents. The ceremony starts with the tasting of the cow's urine under the guidance of the priest followed by elaborate feast. People give gifts, dresses etc. for the new born baby. The maternal relatives give expensive dresses to the child, his mother and his relatives. No such ceremonies were performed earlier in the case of birth of a girl child. But now it is observed that there is change in the society and these ceremonies are also performed when a girl child is born.

On the occasion of a death in the family or of a close relative, the details of the sutra ceremony are curtailed down merely to the putting of the cotton threads round the neck of both the mother and the child as long as the family remains under sootak (pollution). Purification process takes place when the sootak period is over.

**Mundan Ritual**

The mundan (tonsure) of the male child is an important ceremony and
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performed in the first, third or fifth year of the birth of the child. Jamwal-Pandits like other Hindus of Jammu perform mundan ceremony of their children at Devsthan (place of deity) of Baba Pehad.

**The Legend:** Baba Pehad (also known as Dibbi Wala Baba, Pehar Devta, Bhed Bhaid Devta) devta’s main sathal (place) is in village Katal Batal near Nagrota, Jammu.

It is a belief of the locals of Jammu that the Tawi river was brought to Jammu by ‘Raja Pehad Devta’. Baba Pehad was the son of Vasuki Nag, the king of Serpents who handed over the rule of Jammu to Raja Pehad Devta when he brought waters of Tawi from Kali Kundi glacier of Bhaderwah to Jammu with the blessings of Bawe Wali Mata (Goddess) or Kali Mata, the famous Goddess of Jammu.

![Figure 5.1: Picture of Baba-Pehad-Devta Temple, Nagrota, Jammu and Kashmir, India](image)

The people in Jammu region have been the believers of Vasuki Nag, the snake God. Basak Nag was the King of Bhaderwah in Kishtwar district of Jammu region, one of the most beautiful places of J&K state. In Jammu district also, at a place called Nagbani, there is an old temple of Nag devta. The devotees make offerings of milk, cereals and other uncooked stuff (Dewan, 2007)\(^9\). Sometimes the animal sacrifice is also performed at some places and the meat is distributed first to the deity and then among the devotees. Throughout the state of J&K, and particularly in the Jammu region, Nag devtas (serpent Gods) are worshipped as folk deity, for
example Nag Devta in Mansar (Udhampur district) and Kali Nag in Sungli, Bhaderwah (Doda District). Their shrines are usually located near the source of water, like stream or a pond, a waterfall, or a river. Bhaderwah town, whose presiding deity is Basuki Nag, itself is in the upper Neeru, neer meaning water in Sanskrit (Ibid.)²⁰.

After taking the blessings of the Baba Pehad, the head of the boy is shaved for the first time and the hair is either thrown into the river or buried deep in the earth. The maternal uncle, the mama plays a significant role in this rite and also gives some gifts in the form of valuable dresses, eatables and other items to his nephew. A feast is organized on this occasion. After performing rites at Baba Pehad, the new clothes consisting of Chunni (Red, Pink or Yellow coloured cloth, decorated with golden or silver coloured lace), dhoti (long piece of cloth) and towel are offered to the kul-deity.

Though most of the Jamwal Pandits give gifts and offering of sweet dish, or fruits and flowers, i.e. vegetarian, it was informed by some devotees that they also sacrifice animal, usually goat at the premise of Baba Pehad. This is then distributed and taken home for others as prashad (offering from God). Some of the respondents told the researcher during the fieldwork that though they were non-vegetarians, they never used to perform animal sacrifice and they met with several misfortunes. So it was told to them, that Baba Pehad get angry at them because though they themselves eat meat, they do not offer the same to the Baba. Since then many of the non-vegetarians have started conducting animal sacrifice and making offering of the same to the Baba. About 35 percent of the Jamwal-Pandits who visited the shrine of Baba Pehad perform animal sacrifice. This reflects the characteristic of folk or non-Sanskritc ritual among the Jamwal Pandits. However, this phenomenon is not restricted to the Jamwal Pandits but the people of other castes and clans who are non-vegetarians also do the same²¹.

There is no mundan (tonsure) and yagyopavita (white coloured thread investiture, around the neck and the arm) ceremony for the girl child. Only few rites are observed on the birth of a female child. The investiture of janeu (combination of six white coloured sacred threads) represents his formal admission into the ranks of his caste. This ceremony is called as yagyopavita. In the past yagyopavita ceremony
was conducted when the boy attained the age of ten years but now this ceremony is clubbed with the marriage so that the time and expenses can be saved. No marriage is conducted unless the yagyopavita is performed. This also marks the entry of a person into adulthood and ready to enter into the grahastha ashram (the stage of a householder).22

Marriage Ceremony

The Jamwal-Pandits who are Brahmins by caste follow the rules of caste endogamy and clan exogamy i.e. they marry within Brahmin but into the clans and gotras other than their own. The gotra of Jamwal-Pandit is Koundinya though they trace their descent originally from Rishi Vashistha. They follow the rule both of clan and gotra exogamy. Marriage for Jamwal-Pandits is a sacrament and an indissoluble holy union of a man and a woman. It is one of the sanskaras (rituals) and an essential socio-religious duty for every member of the community. It is solemnized with great enthusiasm.

A series of rites are performed as a part of marriage ritual. As also noted by Madan for Kashmiri Saraswat Brahmins, most of these rites are of Sanskrit origin, especially with priest following Sanskrit marriage rituals, performing of hawan (in sacred fire) and chanting of mantras and shlokas. However, there are a few rituals that may be non-Sanskritic, particularly when ritual pacification rites are performed few days before marriage to intercede with Gods and evil spirits so that supernatural interference does not harm or preclude the performance of marriage rituals (Madan, 1989: 104-08).23

In the Jamwal-Pandits’ community, it's the girl's father who approaches the boy's father through the middle man called ravara for the settlement of marriage for his daughter. At the satisfaction of both the parties, a date of kurmai (betrothal) is fixed by the two families. Now-a-days, Jamwal Pandits also take the help of the Marriage Bureau for this purpose.

On the fixed day, a shagun (gifts along with marriage card) is sent to the boy's
residence. The brother of the girl, along with some cousins and friends, takes the *shagun*, which consists of dry nuts, sweets, fruits, at least one silver rupee and a large pink scarf. A musical band is engaged by the boy's parents, sweets are distributed among the invited relatives and friends and *tilak* (red mark on the forehead) is applied by the girl's brother to the bride groom’s forehead with the chanting of the *mantras* by the Pandit.

The date of marriage is fixed and communicated to the boy's parents. In both the houses, marriage ceremonies start with the installation of temple shaped wooden frame at the front of the house. This ceremony is called as *gandhian*. Before the actual day of marriage the girl and boy in their respective homes have to undergo the ceremony called *saant*. On this occasion the married women of the house apply oil and *butana* (a mixture of *multani* sand, oil, gram flour, turmeric etc.) on the body of the boy and the girl in their respective houses.

The *barat* (marriage procession) is led by the bride groom to the bride's house with the beating of the drums and playing of the band. The marriage party is entertained with the warm reception. For the marriage ceremony at the house of the bride a *bedi* (a place where marriage takes place) is constructed and *havan* fire is lit in front of which the whole ritual of marriage is undertaken. As per the *mahurat* (the auspicious time), the *lagan* (here marriage) ceremony takes place with the recitation of *mantras* (kind of hymns) in front of the sacred fire. The couple goes around the fire seven times and this process is called *phera* i.e. round around the sacred fire. The groom ties the *mangalsutra* (holy thread worn by married Hindu women) around the bride’s neck and place the *sindoor* (dry red colour, also adorned by married Hindu women) between the partition of the hair called *maang*. Then both bride and bridegroom take blessings of their elders.

The bride is then given emotional send off by her natal family members in a ceremony called *bidai*. She is accompanied by gifts given by her family members usually called ‘dowry’ which also includes clothes and jewelry and other items for her in-laws’ family. The dowry increases the status of a woman in her conjugal household called her *sasural* and has lot of significance among Brahmins. The bride is
welcomed and the lunch/dinner is hosted in connection with the reception of the bride by her in-laws. The marriage ritual beginning with the \textit{kurmai} (betrothal) and completed with the second \textit{phera}, \textit{(daphera)} is a comprehensive affair.

After this the newly married couple has to visit the temple of \textit{kul}-deity to seek her blessings and perform the ritual called ‘\textit{tarage}’ (visit to deity site to pay homage in order to seek the blessings before starting of their martial life) at the Main temple of Kul deity \textit{Datti Ji} at Purmandal in Jammu. Though many people in Jammu have started visiting the Sanskritic shrine like Mata Vaishno Devi after marriage which has developed as the centre of pilgrimage or religious tourism (Foster and Stoddard, 2010)$^{25}$, the visit to the Kul deity is a must and essential task for every newly married couple. This shows the significance of folk Hinduism in the rituals of Jamwal Pandits.

\textbf{Ceremonies related to Death}

Various ceremonies related to death are prevalent among the Hindus of Jammu, the rituals are called \textit{antim sanskar} (last rites). In case of Jamwal-Pandits when the death is approaching (and if it is not too sudden), the dying man is laid down on the ground. The attending priest performs certain rituals, sprinkles \textit{gangajal} (holy water from river Ganga) on the dying man who is made to give something in charity called \textit{daan-punn} such as cow, grain etc. before he breaths his last. \textit{Panjratani} (five precious stones) and \textit{Ganga} water is put in his or her mouth. He calls upon the dying man to repeat the God Vishnu’s name like Rama, Narayan or Hari.

After the death, as among the Hindu communities elsewhere, the dead is laid on a pyre which is lit by the eldest son. The \textit{kriya-karam} (funeral rites) are performed by a special class of Brahmins called as \textit{Charjee}. These Brahmins do not have the same status as those who perform marriage and other such rituals. On the fourth day, the remains (ashes) are collected to be immersed in the holy rivers like \textit{Ganga} or any other sacred river. In Jammu region it is also done at Purmandal by those peoples who cannot afford to visit Ganga. Thirteen days are observed as \textit{mutak} (pollution due to death). Till recently, mourning by women is performed all through the thirteen days. The kith and kin (males) had to get their heads shaved. On the eleventh day, \textit{kriya}
karam is performed by the Charjee Brahmin.

In the name of the departed person a bed along with bed sheet, mattress, grains fruits, vegetables, clothes, shoes, utensils, umbrellas, sweet etc. are put together and offered to the Charjee Brahmin. The display of these gifts is known as sheaj. On the thirteenth day the Charjee Brahmin performs the rituals of first shradha (offering to the soul of ancestors) and the priest purifies the house, and the next of the kin (usually the son) is made to wear pagri (turban) in the presence of near ones gathered for the purpose. This symbolizes the transfer of power from one generation to the next.

After this, aadh-barkhi, barkhi and chaubarkhi ceremonies are performed in the name of the dead after six months, a year and four years respectively. On all these occasions, gifts similar to that of kriya-karm (death rituals) are offered to Charjee Brahmin. The married daughters and sisters of deceased are given clothes and sweets. Garud Puran (religious text) is read out during the mourning days by the Pandit at the time convenient to all. People keep visiting the house of the deceased but they do not come to sit all together for ten consecutive days because some days (Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday) are considered as khora din (inauspicious days) and on these days no one pays visit to the house of the deceased.

Rites and Rituals associated with Kul-deity

Local or folk deity is treated like human being and is supposed to behave in a worldly manner. Negligence can provoke the anger of a deity while respect and devotion can appease him or her. The clan or Kul-deity of Jamwal Pandits is Datti Ji and she has a very important role in all that happens in their family and clan. This reflects the importance of folk elements in her worship. She is their principal and presiding deity. The shrine of the deity is the chief place of Jamwal-Pandits pilgrimage which is visited by the community people on various occasions. They turn to deity in all such cases as diseases or suffering to family members as well as to the cattle, monetary losses, accidents, fires etc. Deity is also approached by those who are without any offspring.
It is believed that deity *Datti Ji* bestows son to sonless, light to the blind, tongue to the dumb and relieves distress. It is also believed that if anyone fails to observe his rites, he would be punished severely. The Jamwal-Pandits worship kul-deity on all occasions, right from child birth to *mundan* ceremony (tonsure) to marriage and on different festivals, and particularly during their ‘Mel’ congregations.

There are certain rituals, which are associated with the *Kul*-deities worship on the birth of the male child. The birth of a male child is a time of rejoicing. After the *sutra* and *mundan* ceremonies, special homage is paid to the deity. The family offers new clothes to the deity, and gifts in cash and kind. They also organize feast at times and perform votive rituals, i.e. give what they had promised to if their wish is fulfilled.

There are some rituals associated with the *kul*-deity which are followed by the community members in case of the marriage ceremony. The first marriage invitation card is offered to the deity, after that it is distributed among relatives and other people. In fact the name of the deity is also inscribed on the top of the invitation cards of marriage. The ‘*tarage*’ ceremony is performed by the newlywed couple who accompanied with the beating of the drums, visits the deity site to pay homage in order to seek the blessings before starting of their married life. The female is dressed like a bride by wearing her bridal outfit as well as the ornaments.

When the families visit the deity, on the way they make a special mark or sign by using the *sindoor* (vermillion) and rice flour which is locally called as *Bathleikni*. It shows that the family pays visit to the deity's place. It is observed that the temple is situated at far flung area and walking distance today is about 3-4 kilometers. Earlier it was much more and visitors had to pass through forest and mountains and therefore they started making a special mark or sign called *Bathleikni* so that they can come back easily by tracing these marks. The newlywed couple pays their obeisance to the deity by taking four rounds or *parikrama* (locally called as *phere*) and feed either 3, 5 or 7 married couples and offer gifts to the deity.
Along with the rituals there are certain religious sanctions which the people of this community follow, as negligence on their part can provoke the anger of their deity. There is tradition to offer the new crop, first fruit or vegetable of the season to the deity before it is consumed in the house. In fact the families in the cities which are associated with the occupations other than agriculture also perform this ritual. The *Karkha* (Offering of new crop to the deity) is offered twice in a year. After offering *Karkha* the families feed the married couple or Brahmin or *kanjaks* (minor girls).

The Jamwal-Pandits are strong believers of their deity. They consider deity as their guardian Goddess and turn to her to satisfy their many and varied expressive and pragmatic needs. The blessings expected could be the bestowal of the son or a child, eyesight, relief from pain or suffering. It is fascinating to know that in the age of modernization, people from various communities have not forgotten their age old traditions and rituals related to their deity as set up by their elders and worship the deity by them with full gaiety and faith.

**Views of Some Respondents (Jamwal-Pandits)**

**Case 1:** Sh. Bhagwan Dass Sharma, a 54 year old man is a retired army personnel (premature retirement). He is a resident of Village Goshan, tehsil Akhnoor, district Jammu. He has four sons and two of them are married. They all have strong and firm faith in their *Datti Ji* (Folk Deity). They feel that every good and bad thing which happens in the family is because of *Datti ji*. They never miss to attend the ‘*Mel*’ congregation which takes place bi-annually on the day of Dwadashi (Lunar Day
of Shukla fortnight). They visit their local deity temple which is situated at village Goshan. According to Sh. Bhagwan Dass, people from other villages also visit the local temple on the day of ‘Mel’ congregation. Some villagers visit Purmandal on the day of ‘Mel’ congregation but it is not possible for them to attend it after every six month due to long distance and it is too expensive for them to visit Purmandal along with the entire family.

In his view people have faith and that faith is the reason behind their regular participation in ‘Mel’. He further narrated about the miracle that happened to him. A few years back he was not able to move due to his knee pain. He consulted and took treatment of many doctors including Allopathic, Homeopathy and Ayurveda but all in vain. Later on, he was advised to visit Datti Ji Temple, which he did not visit since last few years. After regularly visiting Datti Ji Temple, he was able to move and he is of the opinion that Datti Ji has punished him for not visiting her temple and after that he and his family became the regular visitors and firm believers of Datti Ji.

**Case 2:** Mr. Manik Jamwal, 30 years old is a Teacher in Government School, Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir. He is a resident of Reasi, Katra. He has stated that even after acquiring higher qualification, he was unemployed. He tried his level best to get any job private or government but he was not able to get it. His grandparents advised him to visit Datti Ji temple and after their repeated suggestion he started visiting Datti Ji temple. To his surprise he got the government job within six months. Now, he has a strong faith in Datti Ji (Local Deity) and became the regular visitor at the Datti Ji Temple.

**Case 3:** Ms. Shweta Sharma D/o B. L. Sharma is a 28 year old woman. She is a resident of Jammu. She has firm faith in Datti Ji. She stated that her parents were very upset about her marriage. They tried their level best but could not find a suitable match for her. She narrated that ‘I have strong faith in Datti Ji and I visited Datti Ji temple and took “sukhan” (conditional promise made in front of Local Deity/God) that if a suitable match was found in the current year, I will offer you something’ (she does not want to disclose the offerings). Within three months after taking sukhan, she got engaged. She was very excited and said that her match was sent by Datti Ji. Her
faith in the deity enhanced further. She desires to fulfill her promise as soon as possible.

**Case 4:** Sh. Ram Rattan Sharma, 60 years old is a resident of Channi Himmat, Jammu. He has two children. His whole family has firm faith in *Datti Ji*. They are pure vegetarian. According to them everything that takes place in their life is as per the will of *Datti Ji*. If good thing happens to them this indicates that *Datti Ji* is very happy with them and if anything goes wrong this shows the anger of *Datti Ji* and could be because they might have done something wrong or not worshipped her properly.

They treat *Datti Ji* as a living being. Sh. Sharma said that ‘whenever I was in trouble I prayed to *Datti Ji* and sometimes instantly *chamatkaar* (miracle) happened’. He is completely a satisfied man and said that ‘sometimes impossible things just happen and we call them *Datti Ji*’s miracle because for us *Datti Ji* is behind every action of our life’. They frequently visit *Datti Ji* Temple not only during ‘*Mel*’ congregation but also whenever any good thing happens in their life or simply because they want to seek her blessings.

**Case 5:** Mr. Gara Ram, 38 years old is a resident of Gangochak, Jammu. He is a contractor by profession. He got married eight years before at the age of 30. According to him, after 6 years of marriage, he was not able to become a father. Due to this he was very upset. He along with his wife took many treatments but all were ineffective. At last, he decided to visit *Datti Ji* Temple and after taking water in his hand (a way of taking *sukhan* – a conditional promise), he promised *Datti Ji* that he will never take liquor if he became father. Thereafter, he regularly started visiting *Datti ji* Temple and within a short span of time he was blessed with a son. He has promised to offer feast to 101 Brahmins at *Datti Ji* temple. Now, he never misses to attend the ‘*Mel*’ congregation which takes place bi-annually and come with his whole family to attend the same.

The findings of the study reflect that rites and rituals play a vital role among Jamwal-Pandits of Jammu region like other clans in any society at large. A significant
percentage of people cutting across all generations follow these rites and rituals even today. Most of them are tied around the worship of their clan or *Kul* deity. With the passage of time there have been some changes in them but still they exist in an influential manner. There are few aspects which have some scientific reasoning and are thus making it more acceptable. Like in other communities, these rites and rituals among Jamwal-Pandits are functional for the community and bind people together. In the words of well-known social anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown, it can be said that rites and rituals provide continuity and consistency to the social structure of the Jamwal-Pandits.

The chapter also shows that though Jamwal-Pandits are Brahmins by caste and most of their rituals are Sanskritic in character, the worship of their clan deity is an element of folk Hinduism among them. The cases narrated above show that people have faith in the miracles of the deity and that she fulfills their pragmatic needs and resolves their problems.
End Notes


9. Ibid.


Chapter 5  
Rituals associated with the Folk Deity Worship amongst Jamwal-Pandits: The Hindu Brahmins of Jammu

12  
Ibid.: 70

13  
Ibid.

14  

15  
Ibid.

16  
Ibid.

17  

18  
Also noted by T. N. Madan for the Kashmiri Pandits. See Madan, 1989: 64-72

19  

20  
Ibid.

21  
It must be kept in mind that unlike Pehad Baba, the Kul deity of Jamwal-Pandit *Datti Ji* is purely vegetarian

22  
According to Hindu religion, every person goes through four stages or *ashrams* in life of hundred years, each divided equally. These are: Brahamcharya [bachelorhood], *Grahastha* [Householder], *Vanprastha* [leaving for forest away from worldly affairs], and *moksha* [salvation].

23  
In sociological studies it is noted that dowry transaction is usually associated with higher castes and bride price with the lower caste or tribal groups.
