Chapter III

(Customs and Habits—A General Survey)
CUSTOMS AND HABITS - A GENERAL SURVEY:

An individual's life in the sub-continent is mainly hitched to the band wagon of customs. These customs have been handed down to us through traditions and rituals. The customs are barometers of culture and continue to be a dynamic force in life even though they may not be recorded in black and white in codified form. They also play an important role in determining the procedure regarding rites and ceremonies. Throughout the whole life cycle, the lives of the Pandits and the Muslims from birth to death revolved round customs, ceremonies and rituals. Some of these had the sanction of religion while others were semi-religious in their origin.

Customs may be defined as a tradition coming down to us from generation to generation. The conduct of people in a particular locality or community assumes the force of law in their respective sphere of life. The holy Quran also defends customs by stating that "Whatever the people generally consider to be good for themselves is good in the eyes of God". The

2. Ibid., See also Saini, B. S., Social and Economic History of the Punjab, p. 61.
peculiarities mentioned in the life of an average Kashmiri or Indian may be equally applicable to those of people everywhere else. In every region there are peculiar customs. The same holds true about the habits of every individual. The habits of an individual are peculiar to the age, station and circumstances in which he finds himself. There are only few differences here and there in the observance of these customs and ceremonies between the two communities, the Pandits and Muslims of Kashmir. To a large extent these customs are similar if not identical, and are mainly determined by the distinctive regional practices which lend them new life.

The customary laws of the Valley have their own distinctive features which differentiate them from those obtaining in other parts of the country. Due to the inadequate means of transport in the past, the Valley remained isolated from the rest of the country. As such it developed a life of its own as distinct from that led elsewhere in the sub-continent.


5. Ganjoo, N. K., op. cit., pp. 1--3.
As elsewhere, in Kashmir too customs seems to have gained the force of law in a particular locality although it could be inconsistent with the general law of the realm. In such a locality it was authoritative and stood for law. It had very dominating influence in a simple society, and was unchangeable in its nature. It represented frequent repetition of the same act and habit. The latter was the direct consequence of such a repetition. It was by and large true of the Valley. Customs supposes an act of the will, while habit implies an involuntary movement. A custom is followed while a habit is formed. Custom is applicable to bodies of men, habit is confined to an individual. Custom is generally followed either by imitation or prescription, whereas habit may be adopted by a number of persons on their own. Habits stand for ability and are formed through experience. But an ability is limited to repetition of a past act adopted to past conditions. It becomes available for new emergencies depending upon the type of habits. At the same time, habit implies mechanism. Formation of habits is impossible without setting up a mechanism of action, physiologically ingrained and operating automatically whenever the cue is given.

6. Ibid.
Habits are conditions of intellectual perception and appreciation. They operate in two ways upon intellect. First they restrict its scope of action and also define its boundaries. In this way habits form negative limits for the initial positive agencies. Habits incorporate, enact or over-ride objects, but do not know them. All virtues and vices are habits which incorporate objective forces. They are interactions of elements contributed to by the make-up of an individual. We cannot change habits directly, though these can be changed through modification of conditions and similar other processes.

Habits in psychology mean customary or automatic ways of acting, always as a result of frequent usages. These can also be used to with reference to plants and animals and are connected with their appearance, place and manner of growth. Thus conditional responses are habits, acquired and modifiable based on variations in strength among individuals.

Those who recognize the value of customs in small social circles usually regard their presence in civilized society as a mere remnant of the past usages. Even savage customs may be reasonable if adopted to social needs and uses.

8. Ibid., pp. 177, 16, 20.
Custom is intimately connected with habit and with usage. But in some cases custom and habit may stand in sharp contradiction to each other. When all is said and done, habits should be formed with foresight; intelligent awareness and be such as are flexibly responsive and based upon sincerity and straight-forwardness. In this way they will be self-satisfying and self-improving. Customs and habits are mutually interactive. In primitive societies customs mostly form a potent factor in daily business of life. In the domain of religion it is customs which have largely influenced rituals and myths. The customs also influence the evolution of law and legal institutions. The mutual interaction of thought, habit and custom is obviously apparent enough to confirm our point.

A study of the previous customs and traditions reveals how they still continue to be followed by people in large numbers. These rituals and ceremonies do not seem to have undergone much change through the impact of western ideas of modernism. Except for a few highly modernized and westernized sections of population,


the people of the Valley, by and large, continue to follow the age-long customs and traditions come down to them from preceding ages.

The inhabitants of the Valley have developed certain peculiarities in their religious beliefs and superstitions which differentiate them from men living in other parts of the subcontinent. This type of distinctive traits have been referred to in historical sources—both Persian and English.

The Muslims of the Valley have been observing the custom of Naufal (ceremony) during times of natural calamities, as confirmed by Lawrence who states that during periods of drought, earthquake or cholera the people would flock to Tsarar-i-Sharif or Chrar-Sharif in thousands, confess their sins and ask for pardon and protection from the impending misfortunes.

The Idgah has continued to be an important place of congregation for the Muslims on the Eid (two Eids) days. It is a level grass plain lying between the city and the Anchar lake. It was also a resort of the Muslims during the times of disaster.

13. Khan Ishaq, History of Srinagar, p. 105. "Sacrifices and offerings have customs of their own. Whenever rains fail or rivers burst their banks, Muslims offer Niyaz. A kitchen goes up in a street corner and offerings pour in. Whenever a wish is fulfilled, yellow rice cooked in turmeric is distributed among the passers by. Hindus offer fish and delicacies made of rice and mutton to keep off evil forces; Kashmir Today, November, 1956, pp. 17—19.


15. Ibid.
or natural calamity. On such occasions the Muslims would carry holy relics and an emblem while coming in a procession to this place. They would confess their sins and pray to God for expiation for their sins of omission and commission. In this connection it will not be out of place to mention here that the Naufal processions in the city were often conducted by the Mullahs (priests) at the direction of the rulers. Maharajas Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh had faith in the efficacy of Naufal prayers. They also believed in the invocation of God's help and especially a resort to Sharka Devi (goddess) during times of distress. They entreated and invoked goddess Sharika for protection and help. Thus the rulers too showed faith in the religious practices of both the Pandits and the Muslims to ward off calamities.


17. Mirza Saif-ud-Din, op. cit., Vol. VIII, 1855, ff. 129ab; Waijizz-ut-Tawarikh, (MS), f. 69b.

18. Ibid.

"Evidence officially recorded mentions that His Highness sanctioned the proposal of performing the Shanti Puja in order to pacify the evil effects of the fall of snakes with snow in Kulgam Tehsil. The Dharmarth Department was directed to take necessary action in this matter. His Highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur ordered that an inquiry should be made if it was not a bad omen. Pt. Jagdish Ji was asked to prepare a report. According to Hindu Shastras it was an indication that war was likely to take place in immediate future. Ultimately His Highness was pleased to direct this office to arrange for necessary funds for the purpose. J&K, File No. 80/M-33 (General Records), year 1941."
In 1912 the falling of stones created super-natural ripples in the streams of Kashmiri life. His Highness the Maharaja Sahib Bahadur consulted Pt. Jogdish Ji in connection with this occurrence which was believed to have come from heaven. The Pandit predicted draught and trouble for the country or the sovereign due to this supernatural falling of stones from heaven. He suggested a havan and the following counter-steps to ward off evil. A sum of rupees five hundred was estimated to be needed for the performance of following ceremonies: (a) Yagyà (sacrifice) to appease the moon, sun, wind and Indra; (b) gold, rice and a white horse should be offered as sankalp (alms).

Like the Muslims Pandits also entertained several superstitions and beliefs in connection with various diseases which formed a regular feature of life in those days. Thus the occurrence of smallpox had been invested with so many practices among the Pandits. A child suffering from smallpox would be placed in a separate room surrounded by clay toys of several types and sugar-cakes, water chestnuts and shells. Her or his head-dress would be stitched with small patches of cloth containing some coins during the days of illness, meat would be prohibited from being...
used in the household. Afterwards the coins placed in the head-dress would be taken out and spent on making rice boiled in milk and sugar. This rice-porridge would be distributed among the relations and friends. Some part of this rice and toys would be thrown into the river to appease the Sitla Mata, the smallpox deity. Also on many occasions sheep, goats, horses or donkeys and eyes of gold or silver would be offered to priests on Hari—Parbat. Forty days later, rice boiled in milk and sugar would be distributed a second time among the relations and neighbours.  

When the Maharaja or his relative expired, the taking of meat and fish was forbidden for three months. Kripa Ram was working as the Wazir (Prime Minister) on the eve of Maharaja Gulab Singh's death. He managed the affairs in such a way that he got rupees placed on the corpse of Gulab Singh, so that people got absorbed in collecting this money instead of raising a hue and cry and including in wailing and mourning. After the cremation of his body, the Dogra folk of Kashmir and close relatives of the Maharaja were to have their heads and beards shaved. They

had to have it shaved under the directives of the government. Taking of meat and fish was being prohibited for a span of three months.

Lawrence has described certain observances which he states, resemble the English customs on so many points. The first festival celebrated by the Dogras was the harvest-home festival called Ankut, which took place on the second day of the Diwali. The people of the city would be fed at the expense of the state on the first fruits of the autumn harvest. This custom was introduced by Maharaja Gulab Singh, and continued to be in vogue during the reigns of his successors. On such occasions feasts of rice and other autumn cereals were prepared at six different places. The better section of Pandits, the common Pandits, the better circle of the Muslims, the Common Muslims, the Shiias and the Dogras would be recipients of these feasts at different places.

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19a. Khalil, Mirjanpuri, M.M., Tarikh-i-Kashmir, ACC NO: 3107, f. 147b.

Hartal was also observed the moment Maharaja Ranbir Singh passed away. Shops were closed on all sides. Mourning was observed throughout the city. Only the sale of Sag (vegetables) and milk was permitted. Taking of fish, meat as also transaction of business was prohibited or restricted during this period. Slaughtering of sheep, and sale of lambs and goats were forbidden for a fortnight. In this way, mourning was carried on in the whole Valley. This practice of mourning had started during the Dogra regime and continued during their rule. Miskin, Mohi-ud-Din, Tarikh-i-Kabir-i-Kashmir, ACC, NO: 2044, f.134b. See also Wajeez-ut-Tawarikh, p. 70a.

20. Ibid., pp. 271--272. The Dogra feast would be given at Basant Bagh. The idol of the royal temple would be carried there in the morning and only vegetarian diet would be given on this occasion. The feasts for the upper class Pandits and Muslims were very prettily arranged so that the quests would sit down to their white rice and other dainties— salbish and sweet in a formal manner. The common sections were offered platters of red rice with a portion of vegetables. However, in their case there was a scramble at the feast as was natural due to the over-crowding. Ibid.,
"Some of the customs of the country are of obscure origin and meaning, but Vigne remarks that they have one which closely resembles what we call making an April fool\textsuperscript{21}. In a similar manner the April fool celebration has certain traits which remind us of the gala spirit of care-free revelry and irresponsible foolery prevailing on the occasion of the new and first snow fall. Just as the April fool day was accompanied with happy-go-lucky fun and amusement in a spirit of irresponsible merriment, similarly the first snow-fall would be accompanied with letters demanding a feast and other forms of amusement. It would very often be accompanied with sending pieces of snow or other things primarily to the relatives of newly married brides and other friends and intimate acquaintances. These sports of fun and amusement which were expected to be carried on in a manner so as to deceive the other party, who would be shown the cleverness of the person making this type of amusing offer. If these sports of fun were successful, people making the fun expected to be rewarded by a feast by the party that was tricked into being deceived\textsuperscript{22}.

The Kashmiri Moulvis or Mullahs (priests) and Muftis would be given royal robes of honour, from early times and this practice continued during the Dogra period, when on the occasion of two Eids the Moulvis received royal robes. However, during

\textsuperscript{21} Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh, p. 477.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., Lawrence, Valley, p. 272.
the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh the conferring of the royal robes was curtailed on the eve of Idul-Duha. Instead of the robe each recipient was paid an amount of rupees three on this occasion. A list of the Kashmiri Moulvis and Muftis was drawn up through Sardar Mohd Hayat Khan.

Among the rural population, there existed the common custom of sprinkling meat water on the soil during the sowing and harvesting seasons to propitiate the supernatural powers to bless them with profuse production of crops. This custom was known as Bal and both the Pandits and the Muslims followed it. The Pandits and the Muslims would also distribute walnuts and rice among the people when they would start ploughing their fields.

In the Villages the habits of the people were the same as those of the people in towns and the city. The only difference was that due to the availability of fresh air in the rural areas,

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23. Tarikh-i-Kashmir, (Diary of Late Jenab Sdad Moulvi Mohammad Shah) during Maharaja Pratap Singh’s time (Urdu), from 1885—1947, p. 618.

24. Based on personal talk with Shri Moti Lal Saqi, (J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages). During the author’s conversation with Shri Moti Lal Saqi the author came to know about these customs in rural areas.

"Distribution of walnuts, providing rice to anyone passing by the field, and being present at the time of first ploughing were regarded auspicious and necessary for the safety and bumper production of crops." Sharma, D. C., op. cit., p. 87.
the health and physique of the rural people was much better than those of the urban population.

Lawrence observes that the Kashmiris were extremely dirty in their habits. They would wash themselves once in ten days, and this coupled with the fact that their clothes were equally dirty would make them unpleasant companions in warm weather. Soap was made in the Valley, but was never used for personal ablutions. On the whole in his opinion, the Kashmiris were dirty people. G. M. D. Sufi presents the opposite point of view and states certain extenuating points in defence of the Kashmiris. In his opinion, Kashmiri's dirtiness is the case of his degradation in the eyes of an outsider. According to him it is circumstances that are responsible for the development of filthy habits on the part of the Kashmiri. In fact, a European brought up in an environment of compulsory filthiness calling a Kashmiri bearded and dirty without realizing his environmental difficulties must be brazen-faced and shameless in his remarks.

The Kashmiris possess the same culture irrespective of caste, class or creed. Their customs and traditions, habits, rational traits and way of life are similar, if not identical.

25. Biscoe, Tyndale C. E. Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 64.


in the case of both the communities. They are all legacies of an ancient culture and have assimilated external elements in their fold. They observe ancient customs and traditions and follow their principles and ways of life with strictness. It is a child’s play for them to spend money lavishly on marriages and similar other festivals.

The Kashmiri Pandits were simple and frugal in their way of life. They were individualistic, men of egoistic self-respect and somewhat intellectuals in their cast of mind. They shirked manual labour and desired to pursue the white collar jobs. However, the changing conditions of the modern age have started eroding their outlook so that there seems a tendency towards change among the Kashmiri Pandits of this age.

On the other hand, the Kashmiri Muslims were great carafists-men excellent cultivators, self-sufficing producers working in their cottage. They were as a rule more energetic active and dynamic than their Pandit counterparts. The modern influences have had their impact on both, the Pandits and the Muslims and as a result they are being drawn towards modern ways of life in their respective spheres.

30. Ibid,
Both the communities believed in taking Saag-Bhatta (green leafy vegetable and boiled rice). They also wore similar dresses with slight difference. In fact, it was this type of identity of external get up that made every one feel that there was no perceptible difference between the Pandits and the Muslims. The Pandits as well as the Muslims derived their use of language from the common stock of traditions and folklore.

On the whole, the Kashmiri possessed certain peculiar habits of their own. They did not know much of fashionable life. They used Datya (a type of primitive tooth brushing device) cut out from the branch of a standing Aspen or Willow. They were used to taking large measures of tea and hubble bubble. They would entertain their guests. In short the Kashmiris were cultured, hospitable, hard-working, incisive in their intellect and a peace-loving lot. They were real specimens of the men of a great nation.

The Kashmiris as a rule are harmless and conservative; excessively poor and ignorant with a low standard of living. All these factors have contributed towards making them peace-loving. Consequently they have become backward and less advanced in their life. However, in spite of their backwardness they are extremely gentle, kind-hearted and sociable. They are free from

31. Koul P. N., op. cit., p. 64.
hypocrisy, malice, jealousy and cheating or subterfuge. They look upon other's difficulties as their own and lend a helping hand to every one in times of hardship and necessity. A Kashmiri is a great lover of gossip and enjoys rumour mongering. He is never afraid of hard work and never shirks difficult task. As such he is a very good craftsman and artist. He is a man of cheerful temperament hospitable and an embodiment of simplicity.  

Inspite of poverty and abject conditions, the people of this Valley have adopted the irksome practices of following various customs and ceremonies. The people of this Valley spend lavishly on the occasions of joy and sorrow. They spend thousands on feasts on very petty occasions. Due to the feeling of waste on these occasions, many leaders or reformers have tried to reform these customs. However, due to their inaction they failed in removing these social evils.

32. Ibid., p. 53.
33. The Khidmat, October 26th, 1948, (Urdu); p. 2. See also The Khidmat, June 15, 1947, p. 5.