Chapter IV

(Customs of the Hindus (Pandits) pertaining to birth, marriage and death)
The Hindu Dharma has given a prominent place to customs from its very inception. The Gautama, the Budhayana, the Apastamba and the Vasistha, Dharmasutras, Manu and Yajnavalkya—smritis—all give a due place to the customs. However, Sainskāras have been based more on customs than any other branch of the Hindu Dharma. These Sainskāras have originated from popular beliefs and usages. They have developed independently without any interference from the state. In reality the customs may be looked upon as the only source of the Sainskāras before they were given a codified shape in the Grhya manuals. At the same time it must be conceded that a mass of floating customs were such as could not be codified though they were looked upon as authoritative on the Sainskāras.

The customs are attractively woven round the individual and the community life. As such they assume great significance. The Pandits and the Muslims of the Valley have their own customs. The customs and ceremonies associated with the birth, marriage and death are

1. Panday, R.B., Hindu Sainskāras, p. 11. "The actual origin of these sacraments are not historically known. They are, however, observed in all countries and by most of the civilized races." Acharya, Prasanna Kumar, Elements of Hindu Culture, and Sanskrit Civilization, p. 10.


death continued, during the period under study, to be very elaborate and interesting. These still continue to be such— both among the Pandits and the Muslims of the Valley\(^4\).

The impact of modern education and modern trends of thought has produced some minor changes in the observance of these ceremonies and rituals. Also socio-economic forces have been responsible for producing reforms in the performance of various customs and practices. However, these changes are minor like ripples in the vast ocean of life\(^5\). It would be of interest to describe some of the rituals punctuating the life of an average Kashmiri Pandit and to mention the purposes which these rituals served\(^6\).

**Pre-Birth Ceremonies:**

Certain rites were performed prior to the birth of the child. Certain others on the main occasion while still others were observed after the child was born.

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4. Lawrence, Valley, p. 257; Gervis Pearce, *This is Kashmir* pp. 263–75; *Kashmir (Journal)*, 1958, pp. 147–148; See also *Keys to Kashmir*, pp. 70–73; *The Pamirs*, Vol. II, p. 36.


The Pre-Natal Samskaras:

The Garbhādāna (conception) of the twenty-four rites, the first one was called the Garbhādāna. It was also known as the "Beej Vapanam" rite as well. Garbhādāna meant impregnation rite—a ceremony performed before conception or after menstruation as mentioned in the Vajnavalki Smriti II. probably the rite was performed after a girl had attained the age of sixteen but the ceremony is now held as the first rite at the time of Mekbala where the mother of the boy (whose ceremony was to take place) was invited to the sacred Yajna Mandapa and the priest purified her with the sacred water after observing rites before the holy fire.

This Samskara presupposes a well-established home, a regular marriage and a desire to get children. It came to be looked upon as a religious duty in which beneficient gods help men in the birth of children.

7. "The rite by the performance of which a woman receives semen scattered (by her husband) is called Garbhālambhanam or Garbhādāna."

In the Vedic period an idea regarding conception and the sacred duty of begetting children incumbent on every individual was getting shaped out in the minds of the people. This Samskara indicated an advance on the primitive and pre-Vedic conception when begetting of a child was simply looked upon as copulation undertaken in a fit of animalism. However, the evolution of the idea of this Samskara reveals a social set up in which perpetration of race and desire for progeny was no more looked upon as something haphazard but a scientific process and sacred duty binding on every individual who is physically fit for procreation. Panday R.B., op. cit., pp. 48—59.


9. Panday R.B., op. cit., p. 48; See also Acharaya Prasanna Kumar Elements of Hindu Culture & Sanskrit Civilization, pp. 11—12.
The Puinsavana was (desire for a male child):

Puinsavana was the rite connected with bringing forth a male child. It was considered second of the twelve Samskaras performed in the third month of gestation and before the period of quickening for bringing forth male and only male child. The root word is purn which means male. It is also the masculine gender in Sanskrit grammar. Purn also means connection or relation with a man. Puruswarupa means the form or shape of a man. All these indicate that the rite was and is still connected with the birth of a male child. This rite was performed in continuation of the preceding sacrament, specially meant to pray for the birth of a male child. Thus the Samskara of Puinsavana was celebrated as a sort of consecration after the conception was ascertained.

This word means, "that rite through which a male child was produced!" Vedic hymns were recited on this occasion to favour the birth of a son or male child. (Panday, R. B., op. cit., p. 60). Williams


Ibid.


Panday, R. B., op. cit., p. 60.
The significance of this *Saṁskara* consisted in a desire to have male progeny looked upon as the most potent agency for future advancement of the family in particular and race in general. Originally the ceremony was performed in the fifth, seventh, or eighth month of pregnancy.

The *Simantonnayana* — (Hair-parting):

The *Saṁskara* of *Simantonnayana* was performed through the rite of parting the hair of a pregnant woman. It was believed that evil spirits try to harm a pregnant woman in the first pregnancy. This ceremony was meant to ward off influence of the evil spirits and to bring about prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child. These ceremonies were believed to result in saving the child to be born from mental or physical deficiency which might otherwise occur to him.

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13. Panday R.B., *op. cit.*, pp. 60—63. Among the Kashmiri Pandits, the birth of a male child has always been hailed with joy, while that of a girl has been accorded a cold reception or evoked little pleasure.


15. This sacrament was performed during the first pregnancy only. Panday writes the *Grhyasutras* describe the *Saṁskara* of hair-parting in detail and develop all its features in full. Acharya Prasanna Kumar, *op. cit.*, pp. 14—15., Panday, R. B., *op. cit.*, p. 65.

The literary meaning of the term is "parting of the hair" and the term, as such, means dividing of the hair into two parts. It is also the name of one of the twelve Sanskāras observed by women in the fourth, sixth or eighth month of pregnancy. It is also known as a line of separation on the human body or a boundary or a limit separated or parted by a straight line.  

Originally the ceremony was held in the third month of pregnancy but now the rite is performed on the occasion of the Mekhala ceremony. Probably it appeared that making of a single lock of hair had been in vogue for all ladies (married or unmarried) except the pregnant ones who were allowed to make two locks as a sign of pregnancy in the society. The rules of preservation of physical and mental health of the pregnant woman were very carefully followed in the light of the medical knowledge of the Hindus.

The desire for a male offspring was a strong urge among both communities (the Pandits and the Muslims) all over the Valley. Nobody appeared to be content without leaving a male heir behind. We find references in a number of books regarding the customs prevalent among both the communities, for childless women, tying knots, (dush) on a string and hanging them on the enclosure of the saint's tomb making a wish for a son. And when their wish was fulfilled, appropriate gifts were ceremoniously offered there. In fact, "the birth of a male child brings un-mixed joy to a Kashmir household, for it means not only the continuance of posterity but an addition to the family income too. A female child is often a liability for the dowry system is so deeply entrenched, that you cannot get out of its meshes." No doubt the birth of a male child was an occasion for great rejoicing among the two communities. However, among the Pandits the birth of a son was looked up as a religious necessity, because son's presence was held necessary for the performance of certain ceremonies whereby his parent's salvation was to be secured according to religion. Thus it becomes clear from the above lines that religious obligations made it necessary to have a male child among the Pandits.


Several taboos were applied to an expectant mother. She was forbidden to go to each and every place. She could not move about at particular hours of the night lest evil spirits, which were supposed to be always on the prowl, should do her any harm. At the same time her domestic chores were lightened. The mother of the baby had to take great care of herself during the period of her pregnancy—say on the occasions of solar/lunar eclipse; at the time of thunder or roaring of clouds. There were certain superstitions connected with these occasions. The labour pain of the mother too was connected with certain superstitious acts like burning of ingredients like Til and Kangra. Drinking of the water with which the right thumb of the foot of the husband had been washed would reduce the labour pain of a woman. Also a pregnant woman would unlock all the locks which had been bound by her previously. Salty tea and butter would be served to the labouring mother.

The Satmasg, the rite in the seventh month was the most important among them. The expectant women was invited to her parent's house. She received clothes, some jewellery and cash from them. But it is relevant to note here that now this rite is almost conspicuous by its absence.

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Among Kashmiri Pandits a few weeks before the delivery of the child the pregnant lady was sent to the husband’s house with a few pots full of butter, which was distributed among the husband’s relatives. The lady was given new clothes by her father on this occasion.

The mother was provided with a good amount of curd by her parents in the ninth month of her pregnancy and it was called Dod Dury (the giving of curds). A feast was arranged at the in-law’s house on this occasion. According to T. N. Madan, there is a non-Sanskrit ceremony in the seventh month of the first pregnancy called the giving of curds. The pregnant woman returns to her in-law’s from her parental home laden with gifts of ornaments and new garments for herself, as also gifts in cash and kind for in-law’s relatives. The most important of these gifts is Yoghourt, which is preferred to milk because it is regarded as most auspicious. This is distributed among close relatives of in-law’s and the neighbours.

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While in another source we find that the Satmasa rite in the seventh month was the most important among Kashmiri Pandits. The expectant woman was invited to her parents house. She received clothes, some jewellery and cash from them. But it is relevant to note here that now this rite is conspicuous by its absence. Kashmir Today, (Journal), Year 1980, Vol. VI, Nos. 5-6, pp. 36-38.
T. N. Madan further writes that this ceremony serves a three-fold purpose: a) It enables the young pregnant woman to spend some time with her natal family. She receives physical rest. She feels less tense and nervous than she would otherwise; b) Secondly, in fact, the giving of curds ceremony is the public disclosure and celebration of a woman's first conception which is to some extent the biggest event in her life. It is also intended to ensure the safe birth and survival of the child. Among the Pandits the distribution of Yoghurt is believed to ensure the flow of mother's milk which is a vital factor in the child's life.

The rituals of a Pandit's birth were and still continue to be most elaborate, with mystic figures chalked on the floor, fire pots and pestle being worshipped by a girl, presents offered to the priest accompanied with shouting and rejoicing if a male child be born.

At the time of the birth of a child in the case of a Pandit, exact time was noted to prepare his or her horoscope which tells the events of his or her future life. Always a most careful note of the exact time of the birth of a child was made for the astrologer's benefit.

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Originally the custom of casting a horoscope was and still continues to be confined to the Pandit community (Hindus) However, it is also getting into fashion among the Muslims. Consequently, the day, the time and the constellation, under which the child is born are carefully recorded. Ibid.
It appears from the sources that the universal practice of delivery was to have it effected on the floor. But now-a-days the mother gives birth to a child in a Hospital or in the home where she sleeps in a cozy bed. Hence nothing of the past practice is observed now-a-days.

Child birth occurs either in the pregnant woman's natal or conjugal home, though it is considered preferrable to send a woman to her conjugal home for her confinement. Rejoicing was a common feature on the auspicious occasion of the birth of a child. The celebrations lasted eleven days. These celebrations were more prominent in case the child was a male. All friends and relatives came to congratulate the mother and blessed the child.

The following superstitions were also associated with the mother who had recently given birth to a child:

a) No pregnant lady could enter the room of a labouring lady;

b) A barren lady would be expected to bear a child if she entered the straw bed arranged for the lady who had given birth to a child just then.

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34. Madan, T. N., op. cit., p. 80.


36. Ibid.
The following things too demand notice:

a) Knife or a skull was kept under the pillow of a mother to save the child and the mother from bad and frightful dreams;

b) The lady was not allowed to touch or drink unboiled water. She was not allowed to walk on the ground or floor barefooted;

c) The place around her was cleaned (brushed with clay-water).

**Trui—Celebrations:**

For three days after the delivery the mother would eat but little, but on the fourth day in a Pandit family, a feast called Trui or Panjiri was performed. A mixture of sesamum, kernels of walnuts, almonds and sugar or sugar pieces or sweet meat fried in oil, was prepared and distributed among relatives and friends.

On this day the mother would take some food in earthen vessel, and on the same day the mother's parents would send her presents of roasted meat and unleavened bread. A few packets of sweets were also sent by her parents to her in-laws which the latter distributed among the near and dear relatives. A little of ghee or oil

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37. Ibid.,


"The third day of the birth called Trui is also regarded auspicious. On this occasion near relatives and neighbours are served with meals." *Census of India, 1961, A Village Survey Report, Vol. VI, Part VI, pp. 12–13."
was also applied on the head of the baby. The mother who till date was sleeping on grass was allowed to use the usual bed. But now-a-days her bed-sheet or quilt is changed before she takes to it.

The bed in which the child was born was known as Huru; and near the bed was placed an earthen vessel known as hurlij. Close to the vessel the floor was carefully swept, and a mystic figure was traced on it in lime chalk, and on this figure was placed a stone pestle which was worshipped by some girls of the house. Around the stone and on all the four sides of the bed boiled or uncooked rice was daily scattered (rit). The mother was known as Losa, and if this was her first child, she was called Sadh piai. The governing spirit of the birth was called Hur-raz or Hur Yachini. Child birth produces ritual pollution as everything that comes out of the body causes pollution not only to the woman who gives birth to a child but also to her husband's kin who are supposed to pass through the period of Honchh (impurity) for eleven days.

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41. Madan, T.N., observes that the ritual pollution is a ritually initiated person's fall from a state of ritual purity and prohibits him from the performance of normal religious chores during this period. Ritual pollution actually starts at the very moment of a child's birth, op. cit., pp. 80—81.

This state of impurity is applicable only to a woman’s parental home and her-in-law’s nearest of kin. In case a woman delivered the child in her natal home, only those ladies were affected who helped at that time. So that they took a bath afterwards and then were restored to their normal state of purity. However, it is no longer possible to observe. This rule strictly as the patrilineal kinsmen may not be concentrated at one place. The Pandits believe that pollution begins “when you hear of it.” The day’s of pollution to be observed are in fact, counted right from the day of birth or death.

The accounts of Shran-Sundar ceremony or rite on sixth or ninth or eleventh day are very diverse. Some say that it was performed on the sixth day while others state that it was held on the ninth or eleventh day. The first Sanskriti rite called Kahanethar which is purificatory in character is also performed on this day or soon after.

43. Madan, T. N. op. cit., pp. 80--81.
44. Ibid., p. 81. During the first eleven days in a Pandit family after birth or death outsiders would not eat anything in the house, with the exception of the near relatives, the house being considered infectious and unclean. Its duration was in theory, ten days, but in practice it is eleven days among Kashmiri Pandits.
45. The Shran-Sundar ceremony was common between the Pandits and the Muslims alike. Infact, the function on this day was and is still known as Sundar. Biscoe Tyndale, Anand Koul Banzai and other historians write about the sixth day while Lawrence, Gervis Pearce and others mention that Shran-Sundar was celebrated on the ninth day after the birth.
On the sixth day after the child's birth, both the mother and child were bathed at an auspicious hour suggested by the purohit (priest), and the ceremony was called Shran-Sundar. It was on this occasion that the baby would get its first bath and was given a name. On that day, too, the child was given clothes Zafiru, the mid-wife would throw away the old straw bed and make a fresh one in its place. The child and the mother were bathed in a decoction of herbs and leaves. On this day the mother would also put on new clothes made for her by her husband.

Immediately after the bath, a special ritual was celebrated known as Shok-ta-punasun (happiness and more children). A piece of burning birch bark was waved over or passed round the head of the mother and the infant and all persons present and then dropped into a water pot. This was done under the supervision of the eldest married sister. This ceremony was supposed to ensure the child's safety and the mother's future fertility.


It was the ceremony of baptism when the child was named. Pandit names were and still continue to be in most cases the names of Hindu gods and goddesses or abstractions of virtues.

48. Ibid.,
After bathing seven vessels either of clay or of bronze, were filled with food. These vessels represent seven deities, and as some were flesh-eating deities and some vegetarian, the food chosen had to be selected with care. Pulses, rice, walnuts and meat were put in different vessels, and worshipped. Seven women of the household had to be present to symbolize the seven deities. After the food had been made holy through religious incantations it was distributed among relatives and neighbours. In fact, a feast was served to the ladies in the neighbourhood. The relatives were also invited to the feast, on this day (either sixth or ninth) the mother was allowed for the first time to eat from bronze vessels, and her parents sent gifts of roasted meat, bread, and cash to her in-laws.

On the eleventh day a purificatory ceremony, the Kahnethar, would take place. Because the mother was considered unsanctified or unholy till this date and on this day she would become purified, she could help in day to day work of the family as before. Till then she was treated as impure or untouchable.

49. Lawrence, Valley, p. 259.
50. Ibid.
On this occasion was held the ceremony called Kahnether, a purificatory religious ceremony. This could be performed on the eleventh or any subsequent day or on the following Wednesday or Friday. In this ritual ablution a brief religious ceremony was held followed by a feast. The seven vessels were again filled with food, of which relatives and friends would partake. On that day, the mother of the child would leave her place of confinement and move out into the courtyard or compound of the house for the first time, would sit down on the same type of mystic figures as mentioned elsewhere and the sun would be shown to the infant. The house was swept clean, the bed was again thrown away and remade and everything was believed to have become clean.

A havan or yagnya was performed. It was known as Kahnether. The family purohit or Brahmin (priest) was called and he would perform the most curious ceremony in which the mother and the infant had to take the five ingredients or products of the cow-milk, curd or butter, ghee, cow-dung and calf's urine, thus purifying herself. These products were called pancha-gavia.

52. Ibid.,
53. Ibid.,
54. Kahnether celebration has been of great importance in the Valley as is evident from the Folk Lore of the Valley. On this day all the clothes that have been used since birth till then were given a wash and the house was purified. Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 10-43.
and were also prepared on the occasion of yagnopavita ceremony. Thus, it was the purifactory ceremony after confinement. Once the ceremony was over, the astrologers of the father and the mother cast the child's horoscope or zatuk (a scroll of paper showing the planets that were favourable or unfavourable to the baby); this was most necessary for the time of his or her marriage. Sometimes on this day, when the child took its first look at the sun, a pen box was placed before the child if a boy and a stone-pestle if a girl. But the following rituals could not be observed in the household till this celebration remained unobserved:

1. The six-month or yearly shraddha of a deceased.
2. The yagnopavita or marriage ceremony of the family member in that household.

When the child was a month old marnethar was celebrated. The child on that occasion received new clothes, and a feast of rice and milk was served to relatives and friends. These first clothes were supposed to be made by the priest's wife who would use in their making a rose thorn as a needle. Infact, there was a

55. Lawrence, Valley, p. 259; Gervis Pearce, op. cit., p. 263; Ft. Sheonarayan Gurtoo, op. cit., pp. 54-55; Qazi Nazam Zahoor-ul-Hasan, Nigaristaan-i-Kashmir; For a detailed description or discussion on this ceremony, See Dubios, J. A. Hindu Manners, customs and ceremonies, p. 155.


superstition that the child whose first clothes were made with a thorn of the wild rose would never handle a sword, or hurt man or beast. The ceremony of clothing a child for the first time was usually called chola (cloak) in other languages. Speaking generally, the customs connected with this rite were social rather than religious.

By the time the child attained maturity, he or she had to undergo a number of ceremonies and rituals.

The Anna Prasana or Ann Prashun (First Feeding):

When a Pandit child was six months old, its parents chose an auspicious day to have its anna prasana ceremony (solid food eating ceremony). The giving of solid food to the child, usually a son was also a celebration in a Pandit family. It had a social touch. The child was given a few presents, like a cap, a plate with a spoon and a quarter plate. All these utensils were generally made out of silver. But these days these are made of stainless steel. These are (usually presented by the maternal

58. Ibid., Lawrence, Valley, p. 260; Gervis Pearce, op. cit., p. 264.

It was on this day the housewife would prepare turmeric rice and throw a part of it to dogs and birds after mixing oil and some salt with it.

59. Anna prasna or first feeding was an important stage for a Hindu child meant to wean it away from the mother's milk. This sariskara which was initially connected with the satisfaction of the physical need of the babe; later on assumed a religious significance. The ceremony of feeding the child for the first time thus took a ritualistic shape during the sutra period. Panday, R. B., op. cit., pp. 90-91; See also Dubois J. A., op. cit., pp. 156--157.
uncle of the child). The child and its mother were also presented with a fresh suit of clothes. All these things were presented by the parents of the mother.

On an auspicious day a pudding or porridge of rice, sugar, milk called kheer was prepared in the house and a bowl of kheer was given to the child. Two women opened its mouth while a third poured some of the mixture contained in the dish down its throat. Also some writing material (like a wooden tablet called takhti, an ink-pot and a pen or some writing paper) were placed before the child. In case the first attempt of the child was towards the writing material—the parents would become very happy as it was considered a lucky omen indicating that the child would be very good at his studies. Then they sat down to a feast and the ceremony would end with the distribution of kheer.

In case of a girl her ears were pierced for ear-rings at that time.

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"Feeding the child with solid food after (or before) the teeth appear, generally between five and six months", op. cit., p. 18.


Tonsure Ceremony or Zara-Kasai— (First Hair-Cut):

The first tonsure of a child was an important rite, but it was known by various names and celebrated in various ways by different people in different localities. This ceremony known in the Hindu Shastras as Chuda Karana or Mundan, was also known as the Chand elsewhere and Zara-Kasai in Kashmiri language. This rite was performed with reference to the hair, this was the initial hair-cutting ceremony. In a well-to-do family the rite was the occasion for a feast to Brahmans, relatives, neighbours and friends.

No definite time was fixed for the shaving of the head of the child. However, we find some references regarding the performance of this rite being postponed up to the time of the upanayana (initiation) usually representing yagneopant (sacred thread) ceremony, and performed with it. This was the practice generally followed among the Hindus. Infact early age was regarded more meritorious for its performance. From scriptures it is quite

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clear that this rite or sanskar was performed in as early times as the Vedic period. An auspicious day was fixed for its performance. In the beginning, preliminary ceremonies (e.g. Samkalpa, worship of Ganesha, Mangala, Sraddha etc.) were performed before the tonsure took place.

However, in modern times several ceremonies connected with Mundan are fast disappearing from the society. These are now generally confined to the occasion when the yagneopavita ceremony of the child is celebrated, but in earlier days, the celebration included offerings to Ganesha and other deities. A perusal of the Kashmiri Folk songs as sung on the occasion of this ceremony would show that the custom is very old and can be traced back to the Sutra age.

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65. Ibid., Also See Census of India, 1961, (A Village Survey Report), Vol. II, Part VI, p. 13. In this ceremony the following main features could be traced. In the first instance the head would be moistened to facilitate the shaving. Secondly hair would be cut to the accompaniment of prayers for non-injury to the child. In the third instance the hair would be reserved or thrown away with cow-dung. The fourth feature was the keeping of the tuft of hair. Panday, R.B., op. cit., pp. 94–100; See also Rose A., op. cit., pp. 33–35.

66. For details on this ceremony, see Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 27–29.
In Kashmir a havan (yagya) was performed on the occasion of a boy's head being shaved, leaving the choti or bodi (a tuft) to grow at the highest point of the skull or at the top of the head. After the havan the relations and friends were treated to a feast. 67

The day before the ceremony the boy's hands and feet were coloured with the dye of mendhi (lawsonia inermis) or of a lichen, and a great feast was thrown by the paternal aunt. The custom of dyeing the hands and feet with mendhi was known as menzirat, and was also observed on the occasions of assuming the sacred thread and of marriage. The food or feast distributed among relatives and neighbours on this occasion was known as var or wari. There were three kinds or types of wari. 68

The celebration would start early. The barbar would be called into cut the hair of the child. Besides some money, the barbar would get some presents like rice, some clothing and a towel on this occasion. The hair of the child was kept safe along-


68. Lawrence, Valley, p. 260; Gervis Pearce, Op. cit., p. 264. Lawrence writes about three kinds of wari or wari. The first consisted of rice, the fat of sheep or of goats, ginger, caraway seeds, salt and oil, and was known as Wari-bat. The second was made of turmeric, salt, caraway seed, assofoetide and pulse, and was known as masaladar wari, and the third, which was known as wari, consisted of pulse and rice fried in oil. For her services the paternal aunt received congratulatory gifts (zang) of rice, salt and cash, and all the relatives and friends feasted on the waris. In short, this was and still continues to be an occasion for grand feasts and merry-making. Ibid., p. 260.
with some walnuts (five or seven in number) and was either buried in a park or kitchen garden or taken to a place of religious sanctity like Tula Mula, Hari-parbat and buried there. The hair is believed to be the most efficacious medium in the performance of witch-craft, as such the hair of the child is buried under ground. In short, the boy's hair was carefully buried under a tree. In the case of a girl there was no shaving of the head.

The Investiture of Jeneo or Yagneopavita or Sacred thread ceremony:

The yagneopavitam is a ceremony invested with religious sanctity among the Hindus; it being the sign of the second or spiritual birth and initiation into Hinduism. With his Cord (sacred thread) the Brahmin is not looked upon as perfect in his caste. Brahmins and the other castes which are entitled to wearing

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Either the child is taken to such places of religious sanctity where this ceremony is celebrated. If the mother has made a vow prior to the birth of her child to observe the rite at a certain shrine or temple, it is duly carried out there. But generally most of the Kashmiri people observe the rite at home. Ibid.
the thread (cord), consider it as very essential and feel proud being entitled to wear it. It is well known that all Brahmins wear a thin cord or thread (called yagnopaistam in Sanskrit also known as jeneo); this ceremony is called the upanayang (the third-eye opening) which means initiation or introduction to knowledge. By it a Brahmin would acquire the right to study. Several of the rites performed on this occasion are also performed at the marriage ceremony.

The tagadhri was formerly customary among Hindu children to wear the tagadhri before they reached the ages at which the jeneo could be worn. Tagadhri was worn round the waist and was made of ruti or (if the parents were wealthy) of silver.

The sacred thread ceremony has been of great importance among the Kashmiri Pandits. In Shastras it is known as upanayan or Mekhal Sanskar. In ancient times the education of a child was entrusted to a renowned teacher known as Reshi or Guru who had

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generally his abode in far off forest known as Reshikul or Gurukul. The ceremony of sending a child to Gurukul was, probably known as upanayana. In Gurukul the guru would first celebrate the Mekhala ceremony of the child and thus initiate him into Brahmanism.

The Dharma Shastras have set forth different age groups for performance of this ceremony for different castes in the Hindu society, except the Shudra who could in no case wear a sacred thread. As it was invariably worn by the three higher or twice born castes and not by the fourth or Sudra caste.

Pandit Kesho Bhatt of Kashmir has given the following age groups for the ceremony in his book Mekhala Pustaks:-

1. Seven years for a Brahman's son;
2. Nine years for a Khsatriya's son;
3. Eleven years for a Vaishya's son.

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75. Acharaya Prasanna Kumar, op. cit., pp. 20--21; Kashmir Today, year 1956, Nov., pp. 17--19. The main age groups are:
   1. Eight years of age for a Brahmin;
   2. Eleven years for a Ksaatriya; and
   3. Twelve years for a Vaishya.
77. However, nowadays these limits of age restriction are not strictly followed. Also Harijans or Sudras and others are being honoured with the use of sacred thread in the modern age of reform after Gandhiji's taking up the cause of untouchables.
He has also elaborated that after attaining the following age groups the child or the youth loses his caste entirely in case his upnayana ceremony is not held:
1. Brahmin after attaining the age of sixteen;
2. Kshatriya after attaining the age of twenty two;
3. Vaishya after attaining the age of twenty four.

Thus they should get the sacred thread before attaining the said age.

The yagneopavit, commonly called yoni—the sacred thread is made of three strands or strings of cotton thread which is further made three-fold or each strand by nine threads and then closed with a reverse knot known as Brahma Gand. The three strands or strings of the sacred thread are further made three-fold (i.e. nine threads of an approved length—its one end should touch the upper left shoulder tip and the other end should be just below the right hip with head and right arm—half breast and half of the back being encircled by the thread). The three strands represent the following three stages of human life:

Ibid., See also Rose, A., op. cit., pp. 33—35.

80. Yagneopavit (wearing of the sacred thread) is the combination of two words yagna + upavait which literally mean coming close to holy fire or wearing of the sacred thread in the presence of sacred fire. It was only after the completion of this ceremony that the guru would enlist the child among his students, or "to bring (the child) near the (guru)" for the purpose of learning the Vedas. Quoted in Acharya Prasanna op. cit., p.20; Pt. Somnath, op. cit. pp. 31—104.

81. The position of the sacred thread is changed on certain occasions. At the time of performing the annual ceremony for deceased ancestors the position is reversed in direction. It is then placed in a different direction. It is placed over the right shoulder and is hung down on the left side. On certain other occasions or times of religious function it is worn as a garland round the neck. Whilst at other times it
1. **Brahmachari** — (period of celibacy or stage of absolute discipline)

2. **Grahasta** — (Period of the house-holder or stage of married life).

3. **Vana-Prastha** — (the age for leaving the family and doing meditation).

Each stage in human life including the teen stage comprised twenty five years and thus the total age of a man ran to a hundred years.

However, James Dubois in his book, states that these three strands represent the trinity (a) *Brahma*, (b) *Veshno*, (c) *Shiva*.

Besides, the three strings of the yanamayitr depicted one's reverence towards (1) the *Devas* or deities known as Deva *Kin.* (2) The *Reshis* or great teacher known as *Kashir Kin* (3) The fore-fathers known as the *pitri Kin*.

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81 cont.

is used as a rosary type—the worshipper winding it round, the fingers to keep count as to how often the *mantra* is repeated. As a rule, however, sacred thread is worn over the left shoulder and hung down across the body under the right arm.


It is in view of this reverence that the Kashmiri Pandits offer water to all the three listed above while taking bath in the morning. Further more the three strings depicted the three castes (Varna) of the Brahmanas, Kshastriyas and Vaishyars (the Sudras not being allowed to wear the sacred thread).

In view of the fact that at present all the Kashmiri Pandits residing in the Valley, are Brahmins, there is no question as to who shall have to wear the sacred thread and who will be debarred from its use. As such, the Mekhala ceremony has gained much importance in Kashmir as compared to other parts of the country. It is the prime duty of the head of a family to arrange the Mekhala ceremony of his child or children at the appropriate age. Nowadays, however, this ceremony is taking place just before the marriage ceremony i.e. Mekhala ceremony is usually held a day or two before the marriage. A person cannot initiate any sort of Hawan known as (Deva Kriya) or any sort of Shraddha.


84. Ibid., Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 31—104. There is another version regarding the use of the sacred thread. At the age of four the length of the thread (after having been made three fold second time) is ninety six turns on one's hand at the centre depicting ninety six years of human age and thus taking the total age of a man to one hundred years.

85. Ibid., Madan T.N. op. cit., pp. 89,91—93. "The Mekhal or ritual girdle, made of cotton strands, is tied round the neophyte's waist by his father, grand-father, father's brother or if none of these is alive, by some other close male agnate, who himself has been initiated." Madan, T. N., op. cit., p. 91.
known as (pitri kriya) until he wears the sacred thread. There might be instances in a Pandit family of non-celebration of the first hair-cut, name giving or kahnetar ceremonies of a child but there is not a single instance of not having celebrated the Mekhala ceremony. A person has to complete this ceremony at any cost.  

In order to cut short the expenditure on the ceremony which has been mounting fast over last several years, there are certain instances of group ceremonies being held at Tulamula or at some other places of religious sanctity where such ceremonies are being held by the Pandit families.

Kashmir situated to the north of India, was considered a celebrated seat of learning during the ancient times. Many Indian parents sent their children for education and Mekhala ceremony to Kashmir in those days. This practice underwent a change in later ages and the custom of sending the children to the extreme North for learning ceased. Nevertheless, probably for the same reason even today during the ceremony of Makhala the child undergoing the ceremony anywhere in India, is asked to


87. Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 31-104.
tread three steps towards north before the actual Mekhala ceremony takes place. That is why this ceremony has attained such a prestige among the people. 

Like the marriage ceremony the main celebration of the Mekhala is held during three complete days which include the Hena night, the Devgon and the Mekhala. Generally, the house remains busy for a much longer time than three days. The main sociological functions celebrated in this connection are:

1. Chopping of the fire-wood;
2. Cleaning of the house/rice/spices etc;
3. Sending out invitations;
4. Hena night/Myrtle night
5. Devgon/ a religious ceremony of bathing the groom;
6. Mekhala/ sacred thread ceremony and prayschit;


89. "The ceremony lasts for three days. On the first day called Menzirat mehandi is applied to the hands, and feet of the child. On the following day known as Devgon religious rites are performed and vegetarian lunch and dinner are served to friends, relations and others. The third day is regarded the most important. On that day is performed a Havan. A good quantity of ghee, rice, barley, dry appricots, dates, alms is consumed by the sacrificial fire. The recitation starts at about mid-night and continues till next evening. The child is made to wear the sacred thread about six hours after the Havan starts... Late in the night when the rites are over the assembled gathering and close relations including the child and the priest who observe complete fast throughout the day, are served with Naveed followed by a vegetarian dinner." Census of India, 1961, (J&K), A Village Survey Report, Vol. VI, Part V, Nos. 7--8, pp. 14--15.
All these celebrations are similar for Mekhala as well as the marriage ceremony. The first three items listed herein include, besides preparation of the special rice called var. The respective functions as contained in the headings above. The relatives and the neighbours who come to participate in the function are served with var and tea.

This ceremony was generally performed before the boy attained the age of twelve years. The sacred thread was put round the boy's neck by the priest and he would beg alms for the priest from his relations present and they would give him money ranging from four anna piece to ten rupees as a good omen (during our period of study value of money was very high). All this money (which might amount to anything like rupees seven hundred to one thousand in the case of rich man and just rupees twenty only in a poor man's case) was given to the priest.

90. *Keys to Kashmir*, p. 71; 


Deogun was an important ceremony that preceded the Mekhala. Through the observance of the ritual of Devagun protection of sixty-four deities called yognis was invoked. Relatives and friends would give the boy's father money (wurbal) and sometimes considerable sum were received. At the main ceremony the boy was conformed as a Brahman in front of a sacred fire (a small earthen dais was made in the courtyard on which a fire was lighted) into which he would throw almonds and pistachis nuts to the accompaniment of the chanting of mantras from the Vedas by the priests. He was then shown a virgin and a heifer seven times, and the sacred thread of three strings (jeneo) was placed on the boy. This thread was put round the boy's neck by his kulquru (family priest). Immediately following this investiture the youth would proceed to ask alms of those present, beginning with his mother and then his father and afterwards the other.

The youth or the boy was seated on the skin of an animal (deer, sheep, goat etc.) According to James Dubois the skin of tiger or antelope was considered extremely pure and used as a mat on which the priest would sit. Then the priest seated the youth or the boy on his left side, and after making him promise to obey the orders he would receive, covered both their (his and his father's) heads with a long cloth and whispered in his right ear a mantra expected not to be revealed to anyone else but himself. This mantra is known as the Gayatri and runs;

"Tat Savitur Narenyam Bhargodevasya Dhimahi dhi yo yo nah prachadoyat?"

"Let us worship the supreme light of the sun, the God of all things, who can so well guide our understanding, like an eye suspended in the vault of Heaven." Quoted in Rose, A., op. cit., p. 38.

relatives or friends. Alms were thrown by them into his jholi and were offered to the priest. Later the boy would stand on the mystic figure Vyug to the accompaniment of the songs of the women around him. Coins and shells were thrown over his head, and he was then carried in state down to the river to offer samkalpa or sandhis (prayer ceremonies) to the souls of his departed relatives.

Next day after the yagya the koshal-homa was performed to mark the safe and pleasant termination of this important event and the invited guests were entertained to a feast. Then they would return to their homes. The whole arrangement was in the hands of women. The eldest paternal aunt played the most important part during the day and received a tip for performing the work. Aunts (both paternal and maternal) of the child would also provide tea to all the participants in the Mekhala. The married girls among the guests were given a rupee each as atagat. Their husbands were also presented with a few rupees each, and young children of the invited guests were given one or two rupees each. The priests were also given money.

94. Ibid.


From the above discussion it is quite clear that it
is not by birth that a Brahmin is superior to other people. It
is this regenerating ceremony or ritual which gives him a new
existence and makes him worthy to be elevated in his capacity
as a dvija or twice born (his genitus) to the sublime status
of his ancestors.

96. Dubois, J. op. cit., p. 169. *Elements of Hindu Culture and
The institution of marriage has been found to be more enduring than any other social institution. The people in every civilized society are interested in the maintenance of the institution of marriage as it is the foundation stone of society of which family forms an important organ. Thus marital relationship is very vital as the basis of society.\(^1\)

The Pandits regarded marriage the most significant stage in the life of man; without which the continuance of progeny and the ritual offerings of food and drink to manes through them becomes impossible. The parents are supposed to be morally bound to arrange the marriage of their children, particularly daughters.\(^2\)

Among the Pandits marriage might be looked upon as a systematically organized compact between two families and not a result of choice or agreement between the persons to be married. It brought together not only two individuals and two families but also two households.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Diwan Paras and Kumar Virendra (Eds.), Law Towards Stable Marriages (Select papers presented at the memorable first All-India Family Law Conference, first held in the Deptt. of Law, Punjab University, Chandigarh on January 15—17, 1982, organized under the auspices of the Indian Society on Comparative Family Law), p. 201; See also Dubois J.A., op. cit., p. 205; See also Alberuns India (tr.) Edward Sachau, Vol. II, p.154.

"The 'Vivaha' is the most important of all the Hindu 'Saniskaras. The 'Ghryasturas' generally begin with it, because it is the original and centre of all domestic sacrifices. They presuppose that every man, in his normal condition, is expected to marry and run a home." Pandey R.B., op. cit., p.153


The Pandits would take a lot of care in the selection of the household for their marriageable daughters. The formal proposal would be initiated by the girl's parents though there would have taken place much of the spadework before the actual proposal. The choice of the household depended upon the proper adjustment of the horoscopes of the boy and the girl. As such the initial stage would start with the girl's side getting a copy or out-line of the boy's horoscope before taking any further step in the negotiations. The priest sent for getting this horoscope or out-line would keep the identity of the girl's undisclosed till the compatibility of the horoscopes was verified. After this the negotiations would start and in case the two horoscopes were not compatible, the matter would be dropped there and then.

The Pandits recognized that marriage was one of the rituals for the spiritual good of the human body. A number of rites were performed in the two families. Various rites were of Sanskritic origin, while others (non—Sanskritic ceremonies) were also


performed. The marriage ceremonies also differ in different localities. But religious and social conservatism is so strong in India that the main outlines of the 'Saniskara' are continued from the Vedic period down to the present time, and its general features are universal throughout the country. We may now describe the more essential rites and ceremonies concerned with marriage. Infact, here we are concerned with local customs connected with a Kashmiri Pandit marriage.

Types of Marriages:

There were three types of marriage among the Pandits. The ideal one was represented by marriage with dowry (ornaments and clothes for the bride, domestic utensils and other gifts in cash and kind for her relatives-in-law). In the opinion of Pandits such a marriage was unsullied by any elements of bargaining on either side. In the second type of the incidence of reciprocal marriages, had for its basis the principle of give and take of women alongwith gifts and money. The third type of marriage involved payments in cash and kind by the girl to the boy's side.

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6. Madan, T. N. op. cit., pp. 107--108,. There were many points of resemblance between the marriage customs of the Pandits and the Muslims of the Valley. However, a Kashmiri Pandit's marriage, abounded in colour gaiety and mystic rites and ceremonies associated with Shaivism. (Kashmir Journal,) year August 1955, pp. 72--77, Vol. V, NO: 8.


7. Ibid., p. 114,. For a detailed discussion on the forms of marriage see Panday R.B., op. cit., pp. 158--159,. Please see also The Pamirs, Vol. II, p. 36.
After the verification of the horoscopes and the decision on the suitability of a household being taken, there would start a formal negotiation from the head of the chosen household through a priest, a common friend or a relative or a go-between. The final decision would depend upon the other party to the proposal. There would follow much of enquiry and hearsplitting by the other side before the actual proposal would take a practical shape. The horoscopes or tekni of the boy and girl were compared and if the combination were found to be benevolent a difficult hurdle was crossed. Even after this the final decision in the matter rested with the parents of the bride and the groom.

From now onwards the teth (the standard of exchange of money or gifts) would come into operation. Generally, the teth would correspond to the material condition and status of the girl’s father. A serious consideration was then given to the whole matter. Family antecedents, material condition and the gotra or the original clan, which must in no case be the same ultimately determined the result in the entire contract. If both parties


agreed, an auspicious day for the meeting of some elderly men from both sides at the house of some common friend or relative would be fixed for a simple ceremony known drei-qasam or oath-taking. The father of the boy would solemnly undertake to treat his would-be-daughter-in-law as affectionately as his own daughter. The girl's father would then consent to the marriage and a bouquet of flowers would be exchanged in token of the agreement.

After drei-qasam would come the betrothal ceremony. An exchange of kum kum would take place and the auspicious thread was tied round the wrists of the girl and the boy. The girl's people were expected to send rich gifts in cash and kind to the would-be-son-in-law or his parents or close relatives.

Promise-Giving and Betrothal:

Prosperous households regarded it a matter of prestige to announce a forthcoming wedding by holding a betrothal (gandun or binding) ceremony. Poorer classes tried to avoid it. Among certain families a betrothal or the promise-giving wakadan

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or drie kasam oath ceremony usually would take place. But none of these ceremonies were finally binding upon the two parties.

Promise-giving was more common than betrothal. A party of a dozen men or so from the boy's side would pay a visit the girl's house. After the pleasantries were over the leading member of the visiting party formally asked the family members of the girl's household to promise that the chosen girl would be given in marriage to their boy. The promise was formally given and then small gifts, sometimes only flowers and dry fruits, were exchanged between the two parties as a token of the solemn agreement just entered into.

On the other hand, the betrothal ceremony was more elaborate accompanied by exchange of gifts of money as also celebrated with feasts to relatives and others. The astrologer would fix an auspicious day for the marriage, and information would be sent to the bride's parents intimating the number of

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13. Madan T. N. op. cit., pp. 118-119; Rose A. writes, "Shri Ganeshji is worshipped in a brass dish (thali); rice is thrown on Ganeshji and the boy's party, and sometimes red-coloured water is also sprinkled over them. The girl's guardian then announces that the girl, daughter of so-and-so, is betrothed to the son of so-and-so. This is called wakdan i.e., the dan or gift by word of mouth, and is the essence of the betrothal contact... Once the promise has passed the lips it can only be withdrawn for grave causes." Rose, A., op. cit., pp. 69-70.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.
guests likely to join the marriage procession. This would be done a few days before the actual marriage ceremony.

The marriage or vivah ceremonies would also begin like the yajnapavita or sacred thread ceremony with the gara-naval or levun (a general cleaning up) of the house. After this the rites of mengirat (hennabandi) and devacon or deogun were performed. The ritual of sweeping clean the houses signified the custom of pacifying gods and evil spirits (supernatural agencies) for acts of omission and commission during the ceremonies of marriage, so that their interference might not adversely affect the performance of the marriage rituals. In the case of the bride, the ceremony of nine other rites, which should have been ideally performed between her birth and marriage.


18. Madan, T.N. op. cit., p. 119; Census of India, 1961, J&K A Village Survey Vol. VI, Part VI, No. 7, p. 18. The actual marriage festivities would commence with the ceremony of levun or a general cleaning up of the house. Panday observes, "some ceremonies are connected with the idea that some danger is attendant on every transitional period of life and it should be averted by proper rites. Because marriage inaugurated the most important epoch in one's life, many ceremonies were performed toward off the evil influences connected with the event. Other features of the marriage are essentially religious in their origin. The beneficient gods are invoked for boons and blessings and specific appeals are sent to unseen powers with definite rites of sacrifice and prayer". Op. cit., pp. 99—100.
With Menzi-raat (the night of Henna) would begin the marriage. But before Menzi-raat, the loosening of the hair plaits of the bride called Mas-Muchravun would take place. On the eve of Menzi-raat, all members of the household and the relatives present would take a bath and during the day an interesting ceremony of Vyog would be performed with hilarity by young girls and women. The door of the house was painted in colours. White-washed gates of the house were decorated in gay colours with diagrams and sketches of flowers and several other creatures. These colourful patterns would reflect the aesthetic taste of the Kashmiri Pandit women.

The next ceremony in importance and precedence was known as Devagon (the invocation to 64 yognis). Religious rites were performed in the respective homes of the bride and the bridegroom by the family priest and both would go through a purificatory ceremony after being washed with milk and puja-water. Some of the puja water was sprinkled on the dowry to be given to the bride.

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19. The Menzi-raat (henna-night) was essentially a women's affair and Mehendi or henna was applied to the hands and feet of the bride. Other ladies, particularly close female relatives, also would follow suit. Dinner was served to neighbours and relatives who were expected to stay on for the night. In case of the boy, a simple daubing of the palms was enough. Kashmir (Journal), year 1955, Vol. V, NO: 8, pp. 171--77. See also Census of India, 1961, (A Village Survey Report), Maheshwarpur, NO: 7, Vol. VI, Part VI, p.18.

The bride's initiation into Brahmanism started from the moment her Devagon was performed. At noon, lunch on a huge scale was given exclusively in honour of the maternal relatives. This ceremony was called Dur-butta\textsuperscript{21}.

**LAGAN OR NUPTIAL CEREMONY:**

The third or chief ceremony was the last indeed, the busiest one, when the final ceremony of the Lagan or marriage would take place. The performance of rituals on this occasion would take most of the day or an evening and the night\textsuperscript{22}.

It was on this day, that groom was dressed in an achkan and choridar pyjama with a saffron coloured turban. Heavily garlanded, he would proceed from his own house to his bride's home in a procession comprising his relatives, friends and children. Usually the baraat or marriage procession would proceed in the morning or after dusk depending upon the instructions according to the Hindu calendar by the family priest who determined an appropriate time.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., Madan, T.N. op. cit., p. 120. Panday R.B. op. cit., pp. 226--227, Koshur Samschar year 1980, April, Vol. XV, No. 4, Census of India, 1961, J&K, Vol. VI, Part VI, No. 7, p. 19. The lagan (propitious hour) may be at any time during day or night, and the timing of the baraat (marriage procession).
auspicious time. The procession would move in a boat or on foot except for the groom who would go on horse-back.

Before the procession would start, the bridegroom was made to stand on the Vyug (a circular pattern drawn on the ground in a dry colours) or a place decorated with an outline with mystic signs drawn in lime and coloured clay in the compound of his house. At the bride's home too, the Vyug ceremony was repeated on the arrival of the groom. Back home, the groom accompanied by his bride had to go through the ritual of Vyug.

As the marriage procession approached the bride's house conches were blown, and a near relative or honoured guest of the bride's family would come down to meet the party. Then a procession was formed in the courtyard of the bride's house, where the bridegroom before entering the main building would stand on the Vyug.

Lawrence observed that four Hindu attendants (three with yak's tails and the fourth with silver cup and shell) accompanied the bridegroom in addition to a Muslim, known as the Shahgasi, who would hold an umbrella over the bridegroom's head. A Potmahiara (substitute bridegroom) attending the bridegroom would accompany the baraat. He was supposed to replace the bridegroom in case a untoward incident took place on the occasion. However, such occurrences were rare, if any. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 261.


Women would chant blessings and conch shells were blown. Here the bride was escorted to the Vyug to stand on the left of the groom. Cloaked in shawl from head to foot, she would bashfully stand with bent head.

The yazmanbai (the eldest lady of the house) walked in gracefully attired in a pheran, tied at the waist by loongi and starched taranga would come out holding a thali containing lighted lamps made out of kneaded flour, some flowers and a piece of candy in her hand which she would pass round the heads of the bride and the groom. She would then offer a piece of candy in the mouth of the bride and groom and would kiss them affectionately on the forehead.

The darpuzã (worship of the threshold), would take place after which the bride and the groom were led to the sacred fire. A feast was given (dinner or lunch) to the party and the groom according as the lagen would take place in the morning or after sun-set.

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The party would be served with meal, which besides rice, consisted of a large variety of vegetarian dishes. The party would disperse after the feast and only a few close relatives would remain with the groom till the end of the final ceremony. The stage was now set for the lagana. This ceremony was performed by the family priests of both the bride and the groom. A fire was lit to serve as a divine witness (fire is looked upon as presiding deity, the god Agni), purifying agent and the convey or of food offering to gods. This act atonce would establish the religious character of the rite. The bridegroom was then called upon, by the bride's father, to accept kanyadan (ritual gift of the virgin). This ritual gift of a virgin would bestow ritual merit upon the person who would give her and the person who would accept the gift. 

The girl might be given away in marriage by her father, grand father, if he is alive, father's elder brother, or her own elder brother. In some cases a mother's brother might be called upon to give away his niece in marriage, if her father and future husband be of the same gotra. After the ceremony the bride's father would add three more strands to the bridegroom's sacred thread-- a new vagnopavit of six strings would thus be put around his neck removing the previous vagnopavit of three strands which the groom had been wearing since his mekhal. This rite would signify

the assumption of the responsibilities of bridegroom towards his wife. After reciting various incantations, (loud chanting of vedic hymns) by the priests, the couple was served with food, which they would partake of in one and the same plate.

The most thrilling moment in the course of the lagan was, perhaps the athwass (hand in hand) or long handshake, but it differed from it in spirit. The bride and the groom, until then complete strangers, were asked to entwine each other's hands crossways. It was here that the sweet gentle tussle between her and the groom over the ring worn by the bride would take place under a shawl. Meantime, the bride and the bridegroom would see each other's faces for the first time in a mirror put before them.

Then followed the most important rite called saptapadi (walking seven steps), seven coins were laid around the sacred fire. The bride and the groom were made to step on them. The bridegroom would then hold the hands of the bride and would lead her step by step over the seven coins. As he would guide her over the seven coins, the priests would make him repeat the mantra which they themselves recited. The bridegroom would take upon


himself the responsibility of performing seven duties by
the bride or for her viz., feed her, look after her health,
give her wealth, be answerable for her well-being, give her off-
spring, be good to her at all times, be bound to her in mutual
friendship. After this rite the marriage would be deemed as
irrevocable. Thus the priests would read aloud from their
religious texts the implication of these seven steps, after the
completion of which the two were said to have lost their separate
identity and to have become one.

Towards the end of the ritual, the bridegroom would give
some walnuts to the bride who would give them to her father-in-
law, who would bless her. This usage was perhaps symbolic of the
fact that the children which the husband would have by his wife
would belong to his father's patrilineage.

The most touching or sentimentally fascinating part of
the lagna would be the posh-puza or floral tributes or adoration.
The bride and the groom would be invariably covered with a sheet

30. Ibid., Madan, T. N., pp. 120—121. Bamzai, P. N. K., Socio-
Economic History of Kashmir, p. 27., Kashmir (Journal), year
1958, pp. 147—48. Keys to Kashmir, p. 72. Sheonarayan,
Vol., II, p. 36., Koshur Samachar, April, 1980, Vol. XV, No: 4,
p. 9.

31. Ibid.,

32. Ibid.
and the parents of the bride along with the next of the kin would shower fresh and fragrant flowers on them to the chanting of the hymns by the priests.

Immediately after the lagan ceremony was over, the bridegroom with his party would return to his own home. The ceremony of Vyug was repeated before departure of the marriage party for the bridegroom's house. As the bridegroom would step into the Vyug a conch-shell would be blown as a signal for preparation and also to ward off evil spirits. The bride was helped out by her maternal uncle to step out through the window of a room on the ground floor. The father would give away his daughter in gift to his son-in-law and according to the Kashmiri Pandit religious faith, a thing once given away should never return through the portals of the giver's house. The daughter would, however, visit her parents from time to time.


34. Ibid., Thus her subsequent visits to her parental home would become possible as she had left the parent's house not through the front door but through a window in the room on the ground floor of the house.

35. Bamzai, Pandit Anand Koul, The Kashmiri Pandit, p. 78; Madan, T.N., op. cit., p. 121., Kashmir (Journal), 1958, pp. 147-148, Keys to Kashmir, p. 72, Socio--Economic History of Kashmir, (1846--1925), p. 27., Lawrence, Valley, p. 261., Kashmir (Journal) 1955, Vol. 5, No: 3, p. 174--77. Madan writes marriage among the Pandits is looked upon as a sacrament rather than a contract. It is an indissolvable bond between the husband and the wife after the bride being gifted away by her parents and accepted by the in-laws. The rituals are supposed to be witnessed by God. The Pandits call marriage as nether which means a permanent bond that can never be changed. Thus Sanskrit term Vivah means carrying away and refers to the bride being carried away to her conjugal home as the wife is gifted away, she can not be taken back. That is why a Hindu bride does not leave her parental home through the front door, but through the window. In this way she is left free to return through the main door afterwards, Madan op. cit., pp. 120--121.
On reaching the bridegroom's house the Vyug ceremony would again be performed there and after that the couple would enter their home. The couple would be received with full honour by the Zaam (the bridegroom's eldest married sister) though maternal or paternal aunt also must serve the purpose in some cases, who would bar the door. The bridegroom must pay Zambrand or money to her. Flowers and coins would be showered and women would sing all the while. The mother would serve the newly married couple in the kitchen with her oon hands from one plate or thali in token of their love and inseparable entity.

On the evening of the same day, or the next day (if the lagam had been performed during the night), a feast to which only a chosen few were invited, was given to the new son-in-law by the bride's father. Younger brothers and sisters of the bridegroom would accompany the couple to participate in the feast. The bridegroom would receive presents from them in cash and kind, while the bride would receive a new dress. The function was known

36. The convention would be that Zaam or her substitute would not allow the bride and the groom to pass unless they gave some gift in cash or kind to allow them to pass through the portals of the house. This gift would be called the Zambrand.

Sat-Raat. This was not performed on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, so that there was bound to be a modification in the date of its celebration. Late at night the couple would go home where the bridegroom’s mother was waiting again with thali full of curds, candy and special kind of soft bread, which she would take to their room.

A few days later, (two, three or four days at the most), the bridegroom’s parents would receive roths (specially prepared large sized baked sweet breads), a few packets of sweet-meats, some dry fruit, a suit for the bride. The roths were distributed among all neighbours, relatives and friends. This was known as Roth-Khabar. Roth was typical kind of bread got prepared by both Hindus and Muslims for special occasions, and Khabar means well-being or message. Therefore, it might mean the message of goodwill from the bride’s parents to their son-in-law and his household.


39. Ibid.,

It was only after this ceremony that the girl could go to her father's house for the second time. The bridegroom was once again invited by his in-laws to stay with them for a few days and was presented with some cash and clothes. This was called Phirsaal (second feast) and henceforth he could visit his in-laws according to his convenience or without any restrictions of ceremonial protocol.

After a few days stay at the in-law's house the bride, on an auspicious day, would prepare a special tea and serve it to all her in-law people—young and old. The persons, both male and female, after taking the tea, had to offer a tip to the bride; the amount so offered would differ from house to house and from person to person. The mother-in-law would settle with all her near and dear relatives a date convenient to almost all and on this day she would open the trunk (boxes) brought by her daughter-in-law. She then offered suits and chappals as gifts to her nearest female relations. A couple of the finest suits among all these suits would be offered to bridegroom's mother and sister. The sister's suit was known as Shandaker.

41. Ibid., See also Pt. Sheonarayan Gurtoo, op. cit., p. 61.

The bride's parents were expected to pay a large sum of money (cash) and gifts on several occasions like birthdays of the bride, bridegroom and his parents or nearest relatives in addition to the important festivals like Shiv Ratri, Nawreh (New year day). This would be in addition to the above mentioned socio-religious functions connected with marriage and the marriage anniversary of the bride and the bridegroom. These practices would be followed by both the rich and the poor, though with some difference in the amount of payment or the value of presents depending upon the status and position of the families.

In the month of Poh (December) the Shushar ceremony would be performed. Relatives, friends and neighbours would be entertained to a heavy non-vegetarian lunch at the bridegroom's house. The bride once again would receive presents on the occasion.

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"The value of these presents goes on diminishing from year to year, but if the parents are still surviving, presents of nominal value are offered to the bride and the bridegroom even when they are of advanced age." (Census of India), A Village Survey Report, p. 20.

This was the ceremony of conjugal union. In the case of grown up couple it was performed on the occasion of the wedding, but in case of minors it would be deferred till they would attain the age of puberty. On this occasion the head-dress of the girl would change, thenceforth the gold-embroidered cap was replaced by kelposh, Zuji, taranga and putsi and she would bind a girdle round her waist. On this occasion also the bride’s father would invite his son-in-law to his house and spend a good amount of money on a feast.

Dowry:

Practice of giving dowry seems to have prevailed since time immemorial. Infact the system of offering dowry was looked upon as a merit or ideal among the Kashmiri Pandits. With the passage of time the system of dowry assumed virtually the force of law. Many parents were forced to incur huge debts at exorbitant rates of interest. In this way, they spent almost half their life in worries and liquidation of debt. Another custom also continues to prevail among the Pandits known as proqg. Every time a Pandit father would wish to see his married daughter, he...

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is expected to pay some money in cash. A Hindu family has to provide for gift-money (stridhen) now mis-called dowry. And now-a-days people spend lavishly on dowry. In addition to the dowry, there were also several ceremonies to be held at weddings. These involved substantial expenses—the guests forming the wedding party were entertained to sumptuous meal in which the Dodas professional gate-crashers or uninvited guests formed a major portion. It was a convention that no one's participation in the meal would be challenged even if he be an uninvited guest.

The girl’s father was expected to prepare meals for as many guests as were present. Any shortage in the meals would mean loss of prestige to the family and would incur the wrath of the groom's father. In this way the marriage of a girl was a great liability for her parents, who had to incur debts. These debts were virtually like national debt of England which would continue to be paid

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46. Koshur Samachar, May 1980, Vol. XV, NO: 5, pp. 2-3, 7--8, NO: 11, Vol. XIX, November, 1981, pp. 7--9; Bazaz, P. N., Daughters of Vitasta, p. 253., The Ranbir Year, 1940, January 15, Lawrence, Valley, p. 262, Khasta Hargopal Koul, op. cit., p. 96, Bamzai, P.N.K., Socio-Economic History of Kashmir, pp. 303--304, The dowry system among the Kashmiri Pandits was different from that prevailing among other communities of the Valley. Besides a lump-sum dowry at the time of marriage, a Kashmiri Pandit girl was supposed to present to her mother-in-law an amount of money, according to teth. This system known as ataqat was strictly followed for the first year of marriage, but slackened in course of time. Ibid.,
from generation to generation and crush the life of the small community as if under a steam roller. 47

P. N. Bazaz complains that matters have started taking worse shape so far as the practice of dowry system is concerned. In his opinion this practice was not very much in vogue till 1931. However, after 1931 this system became dominantly prevalent in Kashmiri Pandit marriages. In this respect it may be stated that dowry consideration is common among all Hindu communities in India. Though there may be difference in degree here and there 48.

In the early period of the present century child-marriages were largely very much in vogue. But during the later period a significant change took place in this regard as

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"In 1960 Dowry Restraint Act came into force in this state under the signatures of Sadar-i-Riyasat. This Act made the acceptance and offer of dowry a criminal offence which would be punishable with imprisonment or with fine, or both. The Act elaborately states the cases and time limit when the demand of money or value of the dowry either directly or indirectly from the parents or any other person who was the guardian would be looked upon as dowry. It is a cognisable offence and can be dealt with in a court of law and in no way by a person inferior to the position or status of a judicial magistrate of the first class cadre, (Jammu and Kashmir Laws, Vol. V, Act NO: XXXVI of 1960, pp. 255--57).
a consequence of ban imposed on child—marriages in the
Valley just as in other parts of the country. 49

Reference may be made to the enactment preventing
infant marriage which was promulgated within the dominions of
the then Jammu and Kashmir state. It was an act in the spirit
of a similar act passed in British India and represented a full
proof document containing many provisions and exceptions to be
faced in the daily performance of matrimonial alliances in those
days. A mention of this regulation is found in the records

Raghvan, G.S. The Warning of Kashmir, p. 25.; Census Report,
Editor) Jammu and Kashmir Information, Information Bureau,
His Highness Government(Ed.) March, 1947, Vol. 4, NO: 3,
pp. 110—111., The Gazetteer of India, Vol. I, p. 587,
Census Report, 1911, Vol. XX, Part I, J&K, p. 147. Bamzai,
Anand Koul, The Kashmiri Pandit, p. 32,Das NarSingh, Tarikh-i-
Doora Desh, p. 862. We find references to the effect that
the early marriages were common among the Kashmiri Pandits
just as they were among the Muslims of the Valley prior to
the passing of the Infant Marriages Prevention Act.

Pandit Anand Koul expresses his opinion that during
the early phase of this century the early marriage was looked
upon by the Pandits as a proper and necessary religious duty.
It was also considered creditable and prestigious for the
family which preserved the tradition of performing marriage
at an early stage, Bazaz, and others also agree with Anand
Koul Bamzai, in this opinion.

A strong agitation was set a foot by the social reformers
in the whole country with a view to stopping the practice of
child—marriage. Men like Harbilas Sharda played a prominent
role in the social reform movement, so that they persuaded
the Govt, to enact a law for abolition of the practice of
child—marriage. Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh was also
convinced of the necessity of social reform as set afoot by
several reformers in the country. As such the Maharaja also
imposed ban on child—marriage on his own initiative as also
due to the incorporation of a similar law in the Statute
Book of the Govt, of India. This corporation of the law had
paved way for the local reformers to fight for the emanci-
pation of women. Ibid.
available in the Repository at Jammu. This enactment was a necessity as infant widows galore existed in those days, mainly among the Hindu so that there was a necessity to cry a hell to this miserable state of affairs. Amendment to this Act was made later on as the problems cropped up in connection with these marriage alliances already contracted and consummated. These amendments can be found in file available in the Jammu Repository.

The following figures, extracted from the Census Report of 1921, throw light on the number of the married, unmarried and the widowed persons of different ages among the Pandits:

50. J&K, File No. 52/J--14, Year 1927, (General Records), Political Department, pp. 37, 69, 44.

To prevent infant marriages in the State The Infant Marriages Prevention Act was passed in 1928. Under this act, the age of marriage for girls and boys was fixed at fourteen years and eighteen years respectively. The marriage of a girl below fourteen years of age or of a boy below eighteen years of age was prohibited under the Act. (Kashmir Trade and Tour), 1946, p. 86, See also Koul Gwash Lal, Kashmir Through the Ages, p. 127.


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<td>4,830</td>
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<td>103</td>
<td>4,831</td>
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<td>2,369</td>
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<td>432</td>
<td>6,858</td>
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<td>1,180</td>
<td>1,685</td>
<td>1,832</td>
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Anand Koul writes that the number of widows was appalling, and so far as their wretched condition was concerned, the less said the better. Many of them were quite young, innocent girls and were cast on this inhospitable world rudderless and helpless. In fact, this evil was very much prevalent among the Pandit community.

Polygamy

In ancient times polygamy was prevalent among kings, nobles, and well-to-do classes. Later, this evil practice had spread to the middle classes also. In fact, it was more common among Muslims. However, some Pandits also were not uninfluenced by this practice, so that they had violated the law of monogamy.

Polygamy was practically not much known among the Pandits. But Lawrence says Hindus might remarry and they often did take second wives on the death of their first ones. Remarriage was, however, not looked upon with much favour among the Kashmiri Pandits.

**Divorce and Remarriages**

The Shastrakaras like early Smritikaras disapproved the practice of remarriage of widows or divorce. They did not allow the women to seek divorce except in rare cases where the man was impotent or he suffered from dreadful disease like leprosy. Thus we can say that the remarriage either of widow or divorced women was not approved by the Smritikaras.

The detailed study about the concept of Hindu marriage from the vedic times to the end of Dharmastras would reveal the marriage to be looked upon as a socio—legal institution. It was

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Pandits were monogamous though there was no restriction to bigamy. It was usually found that most of the people had a record of having married more than one wife in succession. Bigamy was rare among the Pandits. Madan, T. N., op. cit., pp. 121—122.

55. Diwan Paras and Kumar Virendra (editors), op. cit., p. 55; Alberuni's India (tr.) Edward Sachau, Vol. II, p. 154,
purely sacramental and indissoluble. In fact, idea of divorce or dissolution of marriage is not referred to in sacred texts. Thus in the Shastraic Hindu Law there is no provision for divorce or widow-remarriage among the Hindus particularly among higher castes.

It is due to the efforts of social reformers that the liberal concept of divorce has been introduced in modern times. The Act of 1955 and its later amendments introduced many changes in the fundamental conception of Hindu marriage. Thus, divorce, remarriage, judicial separation are some of the most fundamental corollaries to this act. These were introduced only to put an end to the indissolubility concept of Hindu marriage; the customary form of dissolution in extreme cases has been replaced by a statutory right guaranteed in spite of the opposition of orthodox and conservative sections of society. The opposition to this reform Act (1955) did not die down on the passing of the Act. The practice of divorce and remarriage among women was looked upon with derision by some Pandits who attached religious and

56. Ibid., p. 56; See also Rande Ram Keshan, The Hindu Code, 1948, Census Report, 1911, Part I, p. 142.

57. The divorce has attained the sanction of law after the Act of 1955 was passed for the first time. It is common knowledge that the Hindus considered marriage as a sacrament an indissoluble union of body and mind to be continued, upto eternity. The aim of this Act was to amend and modify the law relating to marriage among the Hindus. Diwan Paras and Kumar Virendra, op. cit., pp. 25, 59.

moral inhibition to these during the period under review. These unfortunate women victims of social evils remained under male domination for the whole of their lives.\(^{59}\)

Marriages performed according to the religious scriptures (Hindu Shastras) could not be dissolved at all among the Kashmiri Pandits who followed the identical tradition as that of the Brahmins in other parts of the country. This view is confirmed by the fact that we find no reference in the religious text about dissolution of a Hindu marriage. The Hindu marriage under all circumstances was indissoluble. In spite of social reform in so many spheres divorce was not openly encouraged during the period under review. The majority among the Kashmiri Pandits were monogamous.\(^{60}\)

**Widow—Remarriage:**

Widow remarriage was strictly prohibited among the Pandits (Hindus). On the other hand according to the Muhammadan Law there is no restriction to widow-remarriage among the Muslims.\(^{59}\)

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inspite of this even the Muslim women of Srinagar city look upon remarriage with disfavour. Thus they toe the line of their Pandit brethren on this point.  

In the stages earlier to our period of study the child-widow could in no case resort to second marriage. No doubt she had the privilege of adopting a son and for the most part the widow lived in her deceased husband's family. It was the persistent effort of the social reformers that led to the passage of the Widow Remarriages Act of 1933. This Act legalized widow marriages of Hindu ladies (Panditanis) during Maharaja


Bazaz writes, "The great social evil among Hindus is the ban on remarriage of widowed women. About twenty five percent of the Pandit women are widows, most of them quite young. Their remarriage was disapproved by society. What was worse, it was not recognized even by the Law of the land. In 1928 a movement was started to combat this evil. It was very unpopular at the start, and those who identified themselves with it had to pay heavily. But in 1930, the Law was amended so as to legalize such marriages." Bazaz, Inside Kashmir, p. 296.

Hari Singh's reign. In 1920 A.D., during the reign of Maharaja Preteb Singh thirteen percent of young Pandit widows had lost their life partners in early childhood when they were unaware of what marriage meant or what the implications of widowed life were.

The Hindu widow's Re-marriage and property Act Samvat, 1989(1933 A.D.) sanctioned by His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur conceded the necessity of enfranchisement of women and removal of obstacles to Hindu widows remarriage. The Act was a comprehensive document dealing with several problems in this regard.

63. Bazaz, P.N. Daughters of Vitasta, p. 252. The Ranbir, May 29, 1928, June 5, 1928. Census Report, 1931, Part I, p. 141. In 1930, a group of young educated Kashmiri Pandits came forward to fight against all social and other evil customs among their community. This group was known as the Fraternity. The Fraternity was later on changed to the Sanatan Dharma Sabha in 1931. The aim of this Sabha was to safeguard the interests of the Pandit community. The Sanatan Dharma Sabha set afoot a reform movement in the case of such matters as dowry system and expensive marriage festivities. A desire for change was dormant in the conscience of the Pandit community, though the progress in this direction was slow. Even foreign missionaries started taking interest in the social conditions of the Valley. Besides other social reformers, Mr. Biscoe also contributed his bit in the eradication of evil custom which forbade Pandit widows from remarriage. It was in May, 1928 that two young Brahman widows of the city were remarried due to the efforts of Shankar Kou, Head Master and Pt. Gobind Bhat Shastri the Sanskrit teacher of C. M. S. School, Srinagar. Biscoe says that this marriage caused a great commotion in the city. But like all storms this also blew over in course of time. Biscoe, Autobiograph, pp. 93-97; Against The Current in Kashmir, year 1937--38, (Annual Report of the C.M.S. School, Srinagar), p. 11. See also Riding the Storms in Kashmir, year 1932--33, (Annual Report of the C.M.S. School, Srinagar), p. 13.

and was aimed at ameliorating the condition of His Highness subjects who were victims of the misfortune of widowhood.

This Act extending to the whole of the then Jammu and Kashmir State was meant to legalise the marriage of Hindu widows. It covered various points to protect the rights of a widow and her children in respect of her property, maintenance, inheritance and what not. The aim of this act was mainly to extend a protective umbrella to a widow under all circumstances. The preamble to the Act stated:

"Whereas bearing in mind the advance in ideas recently made in Hindu society, the recognition by the majority of Hindus that the incapacity of Hindu widows to contract a second valid marriage is harmful to Hindu society and the progress made all over the world as also in other parts of India towards the enfranchisement of women, we consider that the removal of obstacles to remarriage of Hindu widows in the state will lead to the promotion of good morals and to the public welfare."


66. Ibid.,

67. Ibid.,
Inspite of strenuous effort of the Arya Samajists and other enlightened Hindu reformers the widow-remarriage did not make much headway at the moment, though it received a fillip some two years later.\(^{68}\)

The custom of **Sati**\(^{69}\) had been prevalent in Kashmir so that even a great scholar like Kalhana mentions this custom as an act of merit. There are references to the heinous custom of **Sati** in Rajatarangini and some other ancient books. This custom was abolished by Sultan Sikandar while his son also continued his father's efforts. It seems that Sultan Zainu'l-Abidin withdrew the restriction imposed on the custom by his father. However, it was during Mughal period that the Valley was freed from this inhuman practice. It prevailed in the Rajpura which formed a part of the Mughal province of Kashmir where the practice of **Sati** seems to have been observed during Jahangir's reign. When

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\(^{69}\) Widows had to burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, this was known as **Sati**. Infact, it was an old custom performed by Hindu widow. However, this custom was not so rigid in Kashmir.
Aurangzeb saw some cases of Sati performed in the lower hill states, he got it stopped there and then. Thus in ancient Kashmir we find examples of Sati, particularly in the upper stratum of Hindu society. There are also many documents containing the reference to the Sikh and earlier Dogra period. These confirm the fact that the custom of Sati must have continued even during the reign of Afghans. Even during Sikh period Vigne states that this evil custom was resorted to though only rarely in Kashmir. There is a mention of such cases in that period. One took place in the time of Sher Singh and the other in that of Kripa Ram.

Incidents of Sati in Jammu have been reported in 19th century in the political Diaries of Lahore as also in the work of Frederic Drew. In these there is mention of Maharaja Ranbir Singh having inflicted exemplary punishment on the parties that

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had abetted this custom. It is relevant to state that in these cases it had been the low caste chamar and not upper caste Hindus that had performed this cruel and inhuman custom.\(^1\)

The widows of the Mian Rajputs supposed to form the first line in Dogra ruling hierarchy performed Sati on two occasions. Among these there is the mention of Raja Suchet Singh's (brother of Maharaja Gulab Singh) wives and attendants performing Sati with his body as well as otherwise after his death. While another case of Sati took place at Purmandal. When Raja Hira Singh (the son of Raja Dhyan Singh) was killed. His widows also committed suicide at that time.\(^2\)

Drew also mentions certain cases of Sati in some of which this custom was inflicted on ladies against their will.\(^3\) However, on the whole the cases of Sati were virtually rare so that this custom had ceased in practice during the period under study.\(^4\)

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Kashmir Times (English), Article on Sati System, March, 6, 1988, p. 10.

73. Ibid., "These were perhaps the last instances of Sati having been performed in the State." Jala, Z.L., op. cit., p. 448.


Maharaja Ranbir Singh contributed a lot in the direction of public welfare and made many important reforms in social and other allied spheres. His reign was remarkable for various activities in connection with the public life. It was during his reign that the evil customs of Sati and female infanticide were prohibited in the whole state. In this regard a proclamation dated 2nd Baisakh Samvat 1916, the Maharaja enjoined upon his heirs and successors as also his subjects to ensure that these evils were rooted out from the precincts of his state.

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76. Jammu and Kashmir Records, File NO: 215, Notification dated 3 Baisakh, S. 1916 (A.D. 1859), Persian Records, Jammu Repository. See also Charak S. S. Life and Times of Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1830--1885), pp. 238--39. On the whole the evil customs of Sati and female infanticide was banned during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule throughout the whole state, so that this practice got eliminated from those areas of the State where it had prevailed upto that time. Ibid.
The Antyeshti Samskara or *Funeral *Ceremony:

**Antyeshti** is the funeral ceremony is the last sacrament in the life of a Hindu and it marks the finale of his earthly life. Several rites and ceremonies are performed at different stages marking the progress of his life's journey to the next world. The dead men's survivors perform religious ceremonies for the future felicity of the departed person in the next re-incarnation. This *Samskār* which represents the stage beyond this earthly life is very important for a Hindu as he attaches more value to the next world than to the present one.

The rite of cremation or burning of the dead body is the most approved mode of the disposal of a corpse among the Hindus. This practice has its origin in the Vedic times and has

1. *Antyeshti* means the last sacrifice performed at the time of cremating or burning the dead body as well as daily sacrament after cremation until the performance of the first *Shraddha*. Also daily *pindas* (sanctified food) is offered to the spirit of the dead (pitra) to lend arms, legs, heads and other limbs so that the floating and limbless spirit (butha) may be transformed into a father (petri) and be fit to be received into the *Shraddha*.

   *Antyeshti* is performed to keep off evil spirits as those who go without its performance remain as *preta* (evil spirits) and haunt the *sapindas* (beloved relations), and others. See Acharaya Prasanna Kumar, op. cit., p. 31.

continued in the same form up to the present age. It is the most scientific and refined mode for the disposal of the dead and it evolved in due course of time when civilization attained a very high stage of development. However, there are certain exceptions to this practice. Members of a certain segment and orders are buried and similarly the bodies of young infants are also disposed of in this manner. There is also the method of floating a dead body down a stream, followed in certain cases. In all these cases the principle of faith is the same in the case of the Hindus who believed in reincarnation or redemption (in the most exalted stage of bliss) for a dead person depending on his or her karmas. Most of the ceremonies connected with the death of a Kashmiri Pandit were similar to those performed by the Brahmins (Hindus) of India—but as far as Kashmiri Pandits were concerned these ceremonies were more elaborate.

When a person would be on the point of death a straw bed of koin grass with a sheet over it was spread and the dying person was laid on it, with his feet to the east and his head resting on the lap of his or her eldest son or next-of-kin. The mantras were recited to the dying person. Some Ganges water was very commonly dropped into his mouth. After death the corpse was covered with a sheet of cloth and its face turned towards the Ganges. It was extremely inauspicious to die on a bed.

The Kashmiri Pandits would place the dead body on a kind of grass (Daras) considered to be holy. It was spread over a spot already washed, and a priest or Pandit was sent for to recite verses from the Bishanu Sahasar-nam and Bhagwatgita. Verses from the Gita would be recited into the ear of the deceased. When he was breathing his last, a lamp would be kept lighted at his head. The dead body would be washed with warm water and then wrapped in white muslin or long cloth (white shroud). It consisted of a loose toga, cap and sranpat (loin cloth—a piece of cloth about two yards long and a quarter of a yard wide).


would be wrapped round the waist. A brief ceremony called kriya karam would be performed before the dead body would be carried to the cremation ground or Shamshan bhumij (place of cremation). There the ceremony would be more elaborate, and would take in some cases five or seven hours. After the performance of the kriya-karam ceremony, the dead body would be placed on a wooden plank, covered with shawl etc., and either borne on the shoulders of four men or carried in a boat amidst the chanting of hymns. The men that would accompany the dead body would continue: "Sheo, Sheo Shamboo" etc. ("O God of peace, forgive our sins."") The procession to the cremation ground was led by the eldest son of the deceased. He would carry a basket containing an earthen lamp etc. Before the dead body was put on the pyre a nirvana ceremony (absolute calm) was performed with invocations to the Bharayyas or Barous — attendants of the god Rudra, the master of death. Also chanting of hymns and mystic sounds of religious rites would be performed at the moment.

If death would take place late in the evening or at night then all the funeral ceremonies would be postponed till the next morning.


The funeral pyre would be lighted by the eldest son of the deceased or any near relative, but the work of cremation was done by Musalmans known as Kawji. For this they would receive half of the shroud (kef an, shawl, ornaments) and about rupees three to rupees six during the period under review. In return they had to supply wood for the funeral pyres. The other half of the shroud would be burnt with the corpse. After the dead body would be consumed by the fire, the mourners or processionists would take bath in the river, burn a little fire on the river bank, turn round it seven times and then go to their houses. After purifying themselves of the pollution of having carried a corpse they all would return to the door of the deceased's house. Finally every body would take leave of the relatives of the deceased return to their own houses, where it was usual to sprinkle water upon the clothes in order to completely purify oneself. Many would wash their clothes and bodies.

12. The next of kin or nearest agnate of the deceased was, it might be said ex-officio the chief mourner and master of the ceremony was commonly called Karmi dharmi. On the tenth day he would shave his head and beard to indicate the end of mourning. In theory the chief mourner would be a Brahmacharya until all the rites due to the dead had been completed. Also he had to avoid several ceremonially impure acts, such as eating more than once a day and taking medicine and what not. He would take bath at least twice daily and would practise other ablutions. Besides these, he would also avoid sleeping too long and, more especially anywhere but on the ground and lastly he would abandon secular business for the time being and meditate on God day and night. Rose, A., op. cit., p. 140.

The Kapal Kirya or breaking or smashing of the skull was performed by the chief mourner. As a rule no food would be taken by outsiders in the deceased's house. On the day of death no food would be cooked until all these funeral rites and formalities had been accomplished. The people of the house were not allowed to take food as only later on they would take something as they had taken nothing since the moment the deceased had expired.

In short, for ten days the house of the deceased would be looked on as unclean and no one would eat food cooked in it during this period. Rites for the dead would be performed on the river bank. Water would be sprinkled and balls of cooked rice (pindas) would be offered. In the case of elders, in the evening the priest would read a portion of a book containing a description of purgatory, heaven and hell and the state of the departed.

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For all days from the very first day the food is prepared by the householders themselves and the outsiders cannot take the food in case it is prepared by the ladies (including daughters-in-laws) of the house. In case it is prepared either by the unmarried girls of the same house or by their aunts' father's sisters or by ladies having no blood relation with the family of the deceased, then it can be served to all. It is considered that all the family members of the deceased's house are impure for first ten days. This is called Honchh in Kashmiri and Ashoch in Hindi. This impurity is washed away when on the tenth day the son or sons of the deceased gets himself or themselves clean shaved and changes his or their clothes on the tenth day after performing the prescribed rites on the river or spring bank.
soul in the next world before their reincarnation. For the next nine days clothes would not be changed nor any meat taken. If the deceased be an old man Kirya would be performed on all the ten days following his death, but in case of a young person, it would be confined to the tenth day only. This ceremony was attended by all relatives, friends and neighbours. The son of the deadman would shave his head and beard on the tenth day which indicated the end of mourning. On the third day of the death, a few bones of the corpse and ashes would be collected and placed in an urn. This practice was universally called Phul chunna.

These ashes would be immersed in the river at Shadipur which is the confluence of two rivers—Jhelum and Sindh. The bones after being taken from the place of cremation were kept in an urn or an earthen pot put in a hollow of a tree or wall.


The death of a person in a Pandit family though having a mourning period of nearly a fortnight is extended over a period of a year so far as the relevant religious ceremonies are concerned. Pandit mourning lasts one year, during which a large number of ceremonies have to be observed. Dubios, J. A., op. cit., p. 489.

of the house till such time as these were finally immersed at praying or a lake at Gangabal which was supposed to possess the same merit as the Ganges (Ganga).  

The Kashmiri Pandits carried the ashes of their departed parents and relations to Gangabal lake as an alternative to Haridwar due to want of easy means of communications in those days. However, majority of people undertook the journey to Haridwar inspite of the great distance and owing to the hazardous pilgrimage to Gangabal (sacred lake).  

The Shraddha ceremonies for the deceased and for ancestors upto the seventh generation would be performed on the eleventh and twelfth days. The family which has abstained from the use of flesh since the occurrence of the death would now have no restriction to the taking of meat. The Brahmans would have no restriction to the taking of meat. The Brahmans would

19. Ibid., Gervis Pearce, op. cit., p. 269.  

"Important pilgrimage which has lately become less popular was to Gangabal lake which rests deep and still under the snow-capped Haramukha. Banzai, P. N. K., Socio–Economic History of Kashmir, (1846–1925), pp. 351–354.

21. Saraddhas— "These on the other hand are considered auspicious (mangala) ceremonies."

For a detailed discussion on several varieties Shraddhas, see Acharya Prasanna Kumar, op. cit., pp. 32–34.
be feasted and would be given clothes and cash in the name of the deceased\textsuperscript{22}.

The kriya karm rite would last for several hours and the ceremonies connected with it were complicated and numerous. If the deceased had sons the eldest would perform the kriya-karm. This ceremony was generally performed on the eleventh day among Brahmans, and the family suffering death would be considered to be impure until the performance of the kriya karm rites\textsuperscript{23}.

On the thirteenth day or some auspicious day all the family members of the house including the ladies would take a bath and wash the dirty clothes. In case the deceased being a grown up person a feast was held on this day and the near and dear relatives were invited to participate in the feast\textsuperscript{24}. After the performance of this rite, fortnightly, then monthly, six monthly and after the first anniversary and ultimately annual ceremonies would be performed\textsuperscript{24a}. On these occasions the presence

\textsuperscript{22} Pt. Sheonarayan Gurtoo, op. cit., p. 70, Lawrence, Valley, p. 263; Keys to Kashmir, p. 73. Bisoe, Kashmir In Sunlight and Shade, p. 158, Banzai, F.N.K., Socio-Economic History of Kashmir, p. 28, Gervis Peace, op. cit., p. 269. The eleventh & the twelfth days of the deceased see the completion of all the prescribed rites which include a Hawan done for the peace of the deceased.

\textsuperscript{23} Rose A., op. cit., pp. 161, 165.

\textsuperscript{24} Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 160–177.

\textsuperscript{24a} At the end of the first month, a religious rite known as Messawar would be performed. These rites were also observed every fortnight for the next two months. At the end of six months and the first year religious rites called as Shadmos and Vohr-Var respectively were performed. On both these occasions priests would be entertained to non-vegetarian diet Alms in cash and kind were also given to the priest in the name of the deceased. In the case of an old person, a religious function would be performed in the month of Kartik, Magh or Phalgun (Oct., Nov., or Dec.) when fried fish would be distributed among priests, neighbours and some close relatives. This practice was repeated twice every year and...
of son, the performer of the Shraddh would be deemed as essential, water would be sprinkled in a peculiar way in the name of the deceased, and balls of cooked rice would be offered in religious performance and small fire would be kindled as an indispensable part of the ceremony.25

Thus ends the first fortnight of the deceased. The other religious ceremonies which include a form of Hawan for the year are:

1. During the first three months on particular lunar date the fortnight when the deceased had breathed his last a small Hawan was held in memory of the deceased.

2. From the fourth month onwards the function was held after every month on the same lunar date. There was a prescribed rite to be held when the deceased completed six month period.

F.N.24a contd.


3. The Annual ceremony was held after one year.

A widow mourning for her husband, and the women of the family mourning for a relative, prolonged their mourning for a year. They would not change their clothes (phirmal) for some months. If, however, they be bidden to a marriage they would be allowed to wear clean clothes and resume the neck thread cut off at the occurrence of the dooth. Throughout the year, a lamp was burnt in the evening outside the house. Cooked rice balls (pinds) with vegetables were kept at a place constructed for the purpose in the premises of the compound.

As a general rule children would be buried and not burnt, if they died before attaining a certain age, others would, however, set the body of a child afloat on a stream.

Though cremation of children was not usual, it was not the rule to perform all the rites if they died before the age of ten or even fourteen.

25a. After the lapse of a year or in the year of malamas, the son who performed all the ceremonies of the deceased performed a Shraddh ceremony of the deceased at a place of pilgrimage and after that the anniversary function was held in house every year except the year when a marriage or Mekhal ceremony was held in that household. Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 160--177.

26. Lawrence, Valley, p. 263.


After marriage or attaining of puberty the rule was that the body of a child (whatever its age) should be cremated.\textsuperscript{29}

Kambar Pach or the dark fortnight of Assuj (September—October) is a period of fifteen days which is entirely devoted to the Shraaddha ceremonies, in which rites for the dead are performed in the houses of the Pandits. A Shraaddha is performed in memory of the departed pitris on the days corresponding to the tithi of the day of his or her death.\textsuperscript{30} On the monthly and annual Shraaddhas the sons, daughters and daughter-in-law would keep fast throughout the day.\textsuperscript{31}

Besides these rites, the Kashmiri Pandits held several other ceremonies on many occasions and festivals:

Khichri Amavas: A peculiar ceremony among Kashmiri Pandits known as Khichri Amavas would occur in the month of Poh (December—January) on the fifteenth day of the waning moon. The day was

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{30} Lawrence, Valley, p. 266., Keys to Kashmir, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{31} Rubbani, G. M. \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{32} Kashmir is believed to have been the abode of Yakshas in ancient times. The Yaksha spirit was invited to accept and eat Khichri (rice cooked with dal and ghee). It was believed that during the night the Yaksha would come and taste the Khichri served and placed for him in the compound. Dhar Somnath, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25., Hamara Adab, (Urdu), Art, 1974, pp. 157–158. The Sharada Peetha Research Series, Feb.—July, 1960, Vol. I, Part III, pp. 78–84.
meant for propitiation of the evil spirits. It was on this day that the offering of cooked rice mixed with pulses would be given to the evil spirits in an earthen tray. The tray would be placed in the middle of the compound for the demons. A line was drawn round the whole house with lime. It was believed that these demons had no power to over step this line.  

Pun is another ceremony held in honour of the goddess/ Lakshmi. Bread would be prepared in each household on any auspicious day during the bright fortnight of Bhadon and after performing the necessary religious rites, would be distributed among relatives and neighbours.

Worship of Nags (Serpent Worship): Worship of nags is as old as thousands of years in Kashmir. The symbol of this worship is found in the hanging tail of the dupata of the old Pandit women even up to this day. This hanging resembles the figure of a snake (samp). The practice of making offerings to nags in different forms was common among Kashmiri Pandits residing in different regions or parts of the Valley. But now the only festival celebrated and associated with nag worship is that of Anant Chaturdashi. It is held in the month of Bhadon.


34. Keys to Kashmir, p. 75.

(August—September) in memory of the famous Hāg Rāja named Anant. On this day the Kashmiri Pandit women wear a snake shaped thread in their ears. Rich women get gold ornament of this shape made for themselves. This snake-shaped Anant made of thread was got by the Guruji (family priest) and was worn as an attachment to the ear-ring by a lady throughout the year. Women would sprinkle water over it in the morning after having washed their face. Lately this festival got confined only to aged men and women, and now it is extinct.

Gada Bata The Kashmiri Pandits cook rice and fish during the dark fortnight of January. A big bowl full of rice and fish, both cooked and uncooked, would be placed in the upper most storey of the house. A lamp was kept burning and no one would be allowed to sleep in that place. This practice would be observed on a Tuesday or a Saturday.

36. Ibid.,

37. Gada Bata (festival of fish and rice) is offered in honour of Ghar devta (household deity). It is celebrated in the month of Poh. Initial portion of food is placed in the upper storey, for the Ghar devta and is called Bog (the part meant to be reserved for the deity). After this the meals consisting of fish and rice are served to the members of the family and guests that may have been invited on the occasion. On this day the kitchen is cleaned with clay and water. The pots and pans are also scrubbed clean for preserving the sanctity of the occasion. Hamara Adab, (Urdu), 1974, p. 158.

38. Lawrence, Valley, p. 266; Biscoe, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 68., Dhar Somnath, op. cit., p. 25.
Kao Punim. This ceremony was generally performed in the month of February. Cooked rice would be formed into balls and these balls of rice would be placed in a kind of big spoon made of twig and grass, and would be put in a prominent place in the house for the goblins in the shape of crows.39

The Pandits (like the Hindus in other parts of the country) kept fast and offered worship on the day of solar or lunar eclipse. Pregnant women were not allowed to go out or do any work as the child was believed to bear the impress or marks of their work on its body. No food cooked, prior to the eclipse was subsequently used. It was believed that unwholesome atoms emanated from the discs of the sun and the moon at the time of an eclipse.40

On birth days it was a usual practice on the part of the Pandits not to wash clothes. Similarly their women folk would not comb their hair on these festive occasions. The same practice obtained during the Shraddhas as well. The Muslims did not believe in the celebration of the birthdays, so that these

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40. Biscoe, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 160; See also Pt. Somnath, op. cit., pp. 221-226.
practices had nothing to do with them. Tahar is being distributed by the Pandits on the birthday.\textsuperscript{41}

In addition to these customs, the Kashmiri Pandits had a tradition of observing good omens like time, day and Nakshetra, for starting any kind of work. There were certain superstitions which they have entertained since long and continue to persist. The important ones among these having a superstitions colour are as follows:-

If any one were to sneeze before the start of a work or were to leave his house and the first thing in the morning confronted by him be an old or ugly woman, or a one-eyed person, or a dog, a donkey, a cow, or cat coming from the opposite direction, the person would have either to retrace his steps or pass the time in great anxiety, fearing some misfortune. Thus, superstitious persons would never do anything if someone even sneezed.\textsuperscript{42}

Barking of a dog in a weeping tone, mewing of the cats, braying of the donkey and the hooking or screeching of an owl, crow or kite were considered inauspicious. Spilling of milk, rice and paddy seeds were also regarded ominous. The spilling of

\textsuperscript{41} Based on personal talk with Shri Moti Lal Saqi, (Cultural Academy).

country oil would be interpreted as escape from disease. Calling from the back when a person left for work was bad. Seeing the face of a person after waking up in the morning would be looked upon both as good or bad, depending on the nature of superstitions belief. Almost all these rites and ceremonies are still in vogue among Kashmiri Pandits.


44. Biscoe, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 68.