CHAPTER - II

THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY
The TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Kashmiri society was steeped in its past traditions till the beginning of the 20th century. It was until 1890 that the society retained the old customs in almost every aspect of life to a marked degree. Before the opening of the Jhelum Valley Cart Road, Kashmir was in complete isolation. The condition of the roads in the valley was deplorable. It would not be wrong to say that there was no road worth the name. It was because of this isolation that Kashmir developed parochialism and remained backward.

A study of the previous customs reveals that the social set-up in Kashmir did not undergo a drastic change. Kashmir retained its old customs, rites, rituals and superstitions, in spite of the impact of western ideas of modernise, except for a few sections of the population of the valley, during the Dogra rule. By and large, Kashmir continues to follow its age-old customs and traditions.

Joint family system was in existence, and was regarded as an index of good relations among the members of the family. Joint families were believed to be cultured families. It appears that the system was in existence due to the fact that economic condition of the family did not allow new couples to maintain a separate kitchen for them.¹ Traditional sentiments might also

¹ M.I. Khan, History of Srinagar, p.84.
have played their role for the existence of the system in the valley. 

**Position of Women**

Women folk in medieval Kashmir may be divided into two major categories: the upper class women and the lower class women. The former, who lived in the seclusion of their houses, belonged to the Wani, Qazi, Dhar, Mulla, Sheikh, and Pirzada families. There was hardly any contact possible of the lower class women with the upper class women. However, the ladies of the upper class did not exist in their own right. They were denied free movement and restrained from main training, free relationship with other ladies of their neighbourhood. Contrary to this, the women who belonged to the lower middle class as well as those of peasantry and labour classes, moved freely and helped their men folk in their fields. Besides,

---


5. In rural Kashmir, women would also flock to near by or distant Jungles to collect fire-wood and wild vegetables. They would also go to Jungles to feed their cattle.
preparing food, their most laborious work was that of husking and grinding of food grain.6 The paddy was put in a wooden mortar, in which it was pounded with a heavy wooden pestle. It was work which made for physical development in those accustomed to the exercise. The women of urban areas also help their husbands in their work. For example, the potter's wife dug clay for her husband and painted the pots before they are baked.7 In the medieval times, for both the rural and urban women folk, the spinning wheel was their only dependable friend.8 It symbolized the endurance, hard work, cooperation and self-reliance of Kashmiri women folk. In times of economic distress and disability, they would act as good counsellors and come forward with wit and intelligence, to help their life partner to come out of poverty. In case of domestic feuds, the defeated women would derive not only their livelihood, but mental peace and solace in the company of the spinning wheel.9 The daughters-in-law were subjected to harsh treatment at their in-laws' house. Education was rare among the women folk. Domestic feuds among the women, social

7. Ibid., PP.143-145.
8. Spinning Wheel Still plays its role in the poor section of Kashmiri society.
9. Lal Ded, Habba-Khatoon, are the suitable examples of this nature.
jealousies and mis-understandings had become a common phenomena.  

During the medieval and Dogra period, the institution of prostitution was in existence. During the latter period, there were two ill-famed centres of prostitution, one at Tashwan and the other at Maisuma. There were licensed prostitutes, from whom the state received 15 to 25 per cent, of their earnings which accounted for a part of the whole revenue of the state. There were 18, state licensed prostitutes in Kashmir in 1880. Though the Maharaja received a lot of revenue from them, was no money was spent for their benefit. Mr. Henrey, officer on special duty in Kashmir, in 1880, writes that no care was taken of the sick prostitutes and as a result, syphilitic disease was spreading throughout Kashmir.

The position of upper and middle class women was not good. Marriage was the great event of their lives. Arranging a marriage of a daughter was the most pressing duty of a father. Bisco says, "Self-respecting women are obliged to wear dirty garments for if they were clean ones, they might be taken for women of

---

11. Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, P.256, Ernest Neve, Beyond the Pir Panjal, p.240.  
12. NAI/Foreign, Sec, E, May, 1983, No.86.  
13. Ibid.  
This is evident from the Srinagar mission hospital report, which says that during 1877-1878 the total number of new cases treated was 12,977 of these 2,516 were entered as "venereal diseases".

loose life". Almost no upper class woman was ever seen in the streets as the purdah was common among the Muslim women. 14

Child marriage was common among the Pandits and the Muslims. Widow remarriage was common among the Muslims and not Pandits. Some Pandit women, after their husbands' death, had to live at their in-laws' houses and had to bear a lot of cruelties. 15

Dress and Ornaments

The dress of the common people in the valley, both male and female, commonly consists of a pheran (long loose Wrapper) and trousers. 16 The pheran consists of two garments of equal size. 17 The Muslim women use a pheran of a shorter size than that were by men. The pheran is mostly suitable for the users of the kangari, because they sit down and place the fire-pot between their legs "it forms an excellent tent." 18 The head-dress


16. Pheran, covers the body and the arms and falls below the calf of the leg. In winter, the people of Kashmir both Hindus and Muslims put on pherans, so as to keep themselves warm.

17. The inner garment is called Pochh.

of a Kashmir Muslim woman was the *kasaba*, whereas a Pandit women wore the *taranga*. Veil was not worn by common women. It was in fact used strictly by the women folk of upper classes, particularly, the Sayyid families, tracing their descent to Central Asia, Persia and Arabia. Men generally wore the *kalposh* (turban) on their heads. Some affulent families also used the *dastar* in place of a simple kalposh, Likewise, women belonging to well off families were the *takani*, a specially made cap of Turkish style. A change in the head-dress was visible when the dastars and kalposhs were replaced by caps and fur-caps during the Dogra period.

The *pulhor* (straw sandal) and the *khraw* (wooden chappal) were used for shoes by common Kashmiris throughout the Valley until the first quarter of this century. The Kashmiri pandits did not use leather shoes because of religious grounds. That is why they wore wooden clogs instead of leather shoes. But the Muslims used leather shoes in addition to wooden clogs. Gradually the use of

---

19. It was during the Dogra period that changes in the dress of Kashmiris began to take place. Kasabas and Tarangas were disappeared, with the advent of Dupotta, Shalwar, Churidar-Pyjama and frocks were also preferred.


wooden clogs began to be discarded by the literate Pandits. It is significant that during the medieval period, the purdah was in vogue, but its use began to decline after the National Movement in 1931. Women leaders like Begum Abdullah and Zainab were the first to discard the purdah.

Ornaments

A woman without ornaments is like a field without water. Just as the field without water appears desolate, ornamental deficiency makes her devoid of much fascination. In fact, gold and silver ornaments in their crude form have formed an indispensable ingredient of life among human beings since time immemorial. It was in the past times that man discovered precious and rare metals. For ages, silver and gold have been used for making of ornaments. There are always and still continue to be some festive occasions and ceremonies such as marriages and the like, when women put on their ornaments. Females young as well as old have ever been fond of wearing different ornaments. These delicate articles, in due course of time, came to be

22. Ibid., p.99.
25. Census of India, 1961, Rural Craft Survey, (Himachal Pradesh) (Gold and Silver ornaments, Editor Ram Singh Chandra Pal, pp.3-4. The basic or main raw materials used for making ornaments were and continue to be gold, silver, stones, pearls and diamonds. Only rich people, however, could afford ornaments of gold and precious metals. In most of the cases, ornaments were make of silver and sometimes these were
known as ornaments. There is reference to gold and silver ornaments in the Vedas, the Ramayana, the epics dramas of ancient times.26

It was long ago, Kashmiri women used different types of ornaments, precious or semi-precious. During the ancient times, they used necklaces, wristlets, fillets, armlets, finger-rings, ear-rings and anklets. Thus we find reference in the Nilmata-purana about the use of these and various other types of ornaments among the Kashmiri women.27 Kalhana mentions several types of ornaments among Kashmiri women, introduced by King Harsha. His ladies wore golden kitaka teafed thras pendants over their foreheads and golden stringe for the end of locks of hair.28

In medieval period, necklaces ear-rings, nose-rings, bangles, bracelets and finger-rings were commonly used by the Muslim as well as the Hindu ladies. The rich and well-to-do people used gold and precious metal ornaments, while the poor people used silver ornaments.29

gilded. Even brass, copper, tin, and a fine kind of clay were also used for making of different types of ornaments. The ornaments of poor people were made of tin and silver.

26. Ibid.
In fact the ornaments of Kashmir were unique in their design. These ornamental designs were further enriched during the rule of the Sultans and Mughals. Fashion in ornaments underwent a change especially in the Mughal period. It is said that Empress Nur-Jahan introduced more delicate varieties of jewellery in the valley, and Kashmiris copied the ornaments of Mughal nobility. It is said that nose-rings came into being during this period. It was until recent times that some brides made use of nose-rings on their marriages. Kashmiri women were very fond of wearing ornaments. They were seen wearing, Kanwaji, Jhumka, Bale, Door, Tops, Dolammall, Halqabandi, Tikka, Deji-hor, etc. Poor women were equally fond of ornaments. They used silver, brase and other base metal ornaments for their wear. Thus ornaments were worn by the rich as well as poor women. In fact, ornaments were popular with all Kashmiri women.

Houses and Food

Houses generally made of mud, timber, bricks and stones. Due to abundance of timber, people made timber houses. The houses of rich families both Hindu and Muslims, were generally situated on the banks of the river Jhelum and the roofs of the houses were generally

30. Ibid.
P.N. Bazaz, Daughters of Vitasta, PP.7-8.
covered with sheets of birch-bark. The poor people thatched their huts with rich straw. But the thatched roofs were banned, because that caused dangerous fires, and these roofs were replaced by mud roofs.  

Rice was the staple food of Kashmiris during the medieval and Dogra period also. Various kinds of rice were produced as laar byel, babri, kathwar, gulmag, meshka, budj, etc. In qandi areas people used maize and wheat. Besides meat, fish, eggs, butter and vegetables were also included in Kashmiri diet. Wild vegetables like Kratch, Obi, Nunar, Hand, Wopul-Hak and Hader were also used and cultivated. Vegetables like turnips, palak, tomato, bringal, cabbage, raddish and many other varieties were also used. Among watery vegetables like Nadru, the stem of root of lotus was also eaten. It is a straw grey in colour, cylindrical in shape and about ten inches long and an inch and a half in diameter. When boiled and flavoured, it was considered to be highly nutritious. Even beans of the lotus were eaten un-ripe. It was also dried up for use during the chilly months of winter. Salt was also a principal article of food, as Kashmiri liked their food very salty. There were two kinds of salt, the better quality came from Punjab and was liked by people, and the

33. Nadru, Singharas and lotus beans are some of watery vegetables of Kashmir.
34. Lawrence, op. cit., P.254.
salt of inferior quality was brought from Ladakh. The fish was also eaten. The flesh of sheep and goats was eaten by Hindus and Muslims alike. The Hindu didn't touch poultry or eggs, garlic and onion, they would eat wild fowl and the eggs of lake birds. Beef was not procurable and the killing of cow was regarded as a crime, which involved capital punishment. The water nut or Singhara formed the chief article of diet of Hanjis, who lived on the banks of the Dal, Nagin and Anchar lakes.

Wazwan, the traditional meal of Kashmiris was served to guests and neighbours on occasions of marriage and on some other important occasions.

35. Ibid.
37. Ibid., Census of India, Lawrence, op.cit., p.254.
38. Ibid.
40. Unfortunately, Dogras imposed heavy tax on the Singaras and these nuts were gathered and sold to Hanjis at exorbitant rates. Robert Throp found the Hanjis in miserable condition.
41. Wazwan is a peculiarity of Kashmir. It is said that different varieties in Wazwan have originated here, only after the coming of Mughals. Despite the concern of social reformers for enormous expenditure spent on it. It is still considered to be one of the major components of their rich cultural heritage.
Domestic Goods

The economic condition of people during medieval and Dogra periods was not favourable enough to enable them to have items of pleasure and comfort. The household goods of the Kashmiris consisted of wooden boxes for keeping their clothes in, and the mat (Wagu), which was made in the villages of the valley. Villagers slept on mats and straw. A Kashmiri had, in the shape of household articles, a spinning wheel, and mortar and pestle for husking rice and a Grata (stone rotor) for grinding maize, corn and wheat, earthen pots like Leji for cooking food and vegetables. It was generally believed that vegetables could be cooked well only in earthen pots and not in copper ones. A large earthen pot/Nuth was used for storing grain.

Samavar and Degchi (Cauldron) were used for preparation of rice and tea respectively. Salt tea was taken by every Kashmiri morning and evening. Some respectable families would take Kahwa, (local coffee) first in the morning, and on Eid, marriages and at the arrival of guests with local bakery known as Bakirkhani and Kandi Kulcha.

42. It was made of grass, which was obtained from paddy plant.
43. Lawrence, op. cit., p.250.
44. Francis Young Husband, Kashmir, p.224.
45. This practice is prevalent event at present times, with the only improvement that it is served with modified babery, which we could get at present times, Such as pine-apple-walnut pastry etc.
The Kangari is very important in the life of Kashmir. It continues to be used during winter. It is a portable vessel, consisting of two parts: the inner earthen-ware no\textsuperscript{y} called kundal in which fire is placed and its encasement, which is made of willow. A little wooden or silver spoon called (tsalan) is tied to the handle and completes this oriental brazier. The kangri of another type consists of only one earthenware vessel, which is called manan.\textsuperscript{46} The kangri symbolises the social and cultural identity of Kashmir. It is an inseparable part of Kashmiri life. It is so dear to a Kashmiri that it has become customary to gift it to newly married girl.\textsuperscript{47} The best kangries are made in Anantnag, Shahabad, Sopore and Charar-i-Sharief, where Kashmiri's famous saint Sheikh Noor-ud-Din is entombed.\textsuperscript{48}

Fairs and Festivals

The observance of different festivals was a marked feature of traditional Kashmiri society. With their long and chequered history and cultural background Kashmiris of all faiths have been taking great pleasure in celebrating festivals and elaborate colourful

\begin{itemize}
  \item A common Kashmiri could not live without Kangari.
  \item Ibid., Sufi.
\end{itemize}
ceremonies was the spring festival known as Badamwari was celebrated to welcome spring that would erase the miseries and misfortunes suffered by Kashmiris due to hard and chilly days of winter.

Lawrence writes that it is not merely the love of beauty of colour that made them observe this festival, but a spirit of thanksgiving that the winter with its miseries of cold has passed and the earth had come to life again, with all her bright flowers.49 Vethi-Truvah (Jhelum festival) was another festival of secular nature, celebrated on the thirteenth day of the moon. It refers to the custom of illuminating lamps on both the banks of the river Jhelum.50 Besides these festivals of secular nature, other religious festivals like Har Truvah, Shivratri, Navreh and Ganakatra were celebrated with great pomp and show by Hindu people of Kashmir valley.51

Fairs and festivals have played a very vital role in the life of Kashmiri Muslims. Among them festivals

49. Lawrence, op.cit., p.28. The Badamwari festival was celebrated with great zeal and joy alike by Hindus and Muslims to welcome the spring or Sount. After suffering patiently the hardships of winter, People would come out of their houses and flock to Almouni garden around Hari Parbat hillrock to celebrate this festival.

50. Srivara has also given an artistic picture of this festival.

may be mentioned Moharram, Id-ul-Fitr, Id-ul-Azha, Milad-un-Nabi, Shab-i-Barat, Shab-i-Qadr and Shab-i-Miraj. Nouroz was celebrated by the Shias only in the valley. They took out processions on the occasion of Moharram and recited verses of heroic deeds of the hero of Kabala. The mourners beat their breasts, but with the spread of education, during the Dogra period, most of the Shias gave up this practice. The Sunnis of the valley did not take part in the mourning processions. They distributed yellow cooked rice and Sharbat among the poor on this occasion.

Urs-i-Shah-i-Hamadan, Urs-i-Batmallo, Urs-i-Gharar-i-Sharif, Urs-i-Hazratbal, Urs-i-Naqshaband, Urs-i-Pir Dastagir, and Urs-i-Makhdoom Sahib are also celebrated by the Kashmiris with their traditional devotion.

Social Customs

Both the Hindus and Muslims of the valley have an elaborate code of rituals and ceremonies with regard to birth, death and marriage. A careful study of the


53. Feasts were also arranged for the mourners on this very occasion.

social customs reveals that they are still practised by the majority of people of the valley, as they were practised in the periods before western impact had not been felt by these customs and rituals, except, for a few, sections of the urban population, during the Dogra period, rest of the population continued to perform the customs and rituals.55

The Muslims differed from the Hindus in many of their customs with regard to birth, death and marriage.56 But in certain cases, they depicted similarity, because both are superstitious. For example, if there was a cholera or small pox epidemic, it was attributed to the Jinns and gods or goddesses. Muslims also consulted a Pir in case some epidemic disease would occur in their families. For childless parents it was customary to visit shrines, call the aid of saints and darveshes and to keep fast in order that they might be blessed with children. Though the majority of population embraced Islam in the fourteenth century, they did not give up

55. Mr. Ernest Neve in his book, Beyond the Pir Panjal, remarks, "the Hindus whole life from the hour of his birth till the day, when he dies and his son sets light to his funeral pyre, is regulated by an elaborate code of religious rites ceremonies and customs. These involve daily worship with ablutions and offerings to idols of flowers and food frequent fasting and the observance of a very large number of holy days". P. 240, Lawrence, op. cit. PP. 257-71, Bisco, op. cit., PP. 153-168, A.K. Bamzai, PP. 21-27.

56. Ibid.
their old customs, rituals and beliefs. Devotion to, reverence for, and an implicit trust in the shrines and pirs played a larger part in religious life of the average Kashmiri Muslim than any special veneration for the Quran or its teachings did. And although Prophet Muhammad (S.A.S) was venerated by the people, their knowledge of his teachings was meagre. For them it was the shrine which protected the believers from disease and disaster. They looked to it for aid in any enterprise. A Muslim woman who had no issue went to a priest or a darvash for a charm or visited a shrine, where she tied a piece of string (Daesh) to the inner entrance, pledging thereby that if she bore a child, she would make suitable offerings at the shrine.  

During times of natural calamities such as drought, earthquakes, cholera as is confirmed by Lawrence, the people would go to Chariar-i-Sharief in thousands, to confess their sins and ask for pardon and protection from the impending misfortune.

The Idgah was and has continued to be an important place of congregation for Muslims, on the Eid days. It is a level grass plain, lying between the city and the Anchar.

57. Vide, M.I. Khan, P.107.

58. Lawrence, op.cit., P.288.
It was also a resort for Muslims, during times of disaster or natural calamities, when they would carry their holy relics and emblems, going there in procession. They would confess their sins and pray to God for expiation for their sins of omission and comission.

It will not be out of place to mention here that these Naful processions in the city, were often conducted by the Mulas under direction of the rulers. The Dogra Maharajas also believed in the efficacy of Naful prayers. They believed in the religious practices of both the communities.

The customs regarding marriage were also of vital importance in the traditional Kashmiri society. Wamuun a choric songs sung by women is very important so far as the marriage ceremonies of both the Hindus and Muslims are concerned, such songs give a lot of information about various customs observed on

59. Ibid.
61. Ibid., Vol.VIII, 1885, ff. 129 ab.
62. Ibid.
marriage functions. 63

Customs related with birth like Sonder and Zarakaseni (first hair cut) were also celebrated with great joy by both the communities. The Khatanhall (circumcision) among the Muslims and the thread ceremony (Maikhal) among the Hindus are the customs of religious nature. Customs relating to death, were also observed seriously, by both the Hindus and Muslims in accordance with their respective religious beliefs and practices.

63. Wamuun is actually, a sort of commentary, depicting various practices, being performed on the occasion of marriage. There are some other ceremonies related to the marriage. Such as Phir-Saal (Bridegrooms first visit to Brids house). Gulmyoth (presenting money or other gifts to the married) Saat-Gamun or Saat-Nama-Sozun (fixing the day for marriage) etc.