

V i t a s t a

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Vol. XLVIII (2024-2025)



THEME

Lost Kashmiri Festivals and Rituals
Reminiscing Memories, Significance and Processes





Lost Kashmiri Festivals and Rituals

Reminiscing Memories, Significance and Processes

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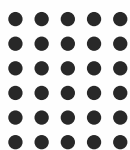
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Calendar

Samvat 5101 (FY 2025-26)

Date of Celebration of Important Kashmiri Pandit Festival / Function at Kashmir Bhawan Kolkata

S.No.	Month	Year	Date	Day	Festival
1	March	2025	30	Sunday	Navreh & Zangtra
2	April	2025	25	Friday	Swami Laxman Joo Jayanti
3	June	2025	3	Tuesday	Zeshtha Ashtami
4	July	2025	4	Friday	Haar Navmi / Sharika Jayanti
5	July	2025	7	Monday	Bhagwan Gopi Nath Jayanti
6	August	2025	15	Friday	Janamashtami
7	August	2025	27	Wednesday	Ganesh Chaturthi
8	August	2025	31	Sunday	Lalleshwari Jayanti
9	September	2025	11	Thursday	Swami Laxman Joo Nirwan Diwas
10	October	2025	2	Thursday	Dussehra
11	January	2026	24 & 25	Saturday / Sunday	Annual Hawan
12	February	2026	1	Sunday	Kushal Homam
13	February	2026	22	Sunday	Herath / Salaam
14	March	2026	22	Sunday	Navreh & Zangtra

From the President's Desk



Dear Biradari Members,

As we step into a new year (Saptrishi Samvat 5101), I take this opportunity to wish every one of you a Happy Navreh. Have a joyous and prosperous year ahead.

I take this moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to each & every member of the Editorial Team of the 48th issue of Vitasta for the highly commendable job to bring out the issue which beautifully captures the essence of various traditions & festivals celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits.

The issue holds special significance for our community, which has faced forced migration from the valley and even today, continue to live away from our motherland. As a result, many of our traditions and customs have been impacted, and it's essential we preserve them for future generations.

This issue shall play a vital role in achieving this goal by not only highlighting our rich cultural heritage but also showcasing our

festivals and traditions to the younger generation. I'm confident that this issue will not only educate but also inspire our youth to connect with their roots and take pride in their cultural identity.

Thank you once again for this outstanding work.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all those members who came forward with meaningful financial contributions, supporting our community initiatives. Your generosity is a testament to the spirit of giving and caring that defines our community. Hope your generosity rubs on all other members.

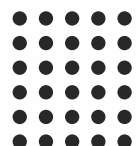
However, I would be remiss if I didn't express my concern about the dwindling membership and low participation of enrolled members. Our community's strength lies in its collective efforts, and it's essential we work together to address the challenges we face.

I urge each of you to take an active role in our community's activities and encourage others to do the same. Together, we can build a more vibrant, supportive, and inclusive community.

Thank you for your continued support.

Warm regards,

Suneel K Kaul





Secretary's Report



Dear Members,

As we bid adieu to the past year, Saptrishi Samvat 5100, I am delighted to share with you the highlights of our community's activities. It has been a year marked by resilience and a deep commitment to our shared values.

Key Highlights:

Cultural events & Pooja etc including Annual Hawan, Navreh, Zangtrai, Jeshtha Ashtami, Sharika Jayanti, Janamashtami etc were successfully organised which showcased our rich heritage and brought our community together.

Funds were successfully raised for the continuation of the Community service projects viz. Educational Scholarship & Old Age Financial Support which demonstrated our collective spirit of giving and compassion.

Camps for Blood Donation Drive were organised in the Bhawan in partnership With Bhumi Foundation.

Annual number Vitasta, which has become an essential platform for not only sharing our stories, experiences, and achievements but also preserving our language, customs, and traditions for future generations, was successfully published.

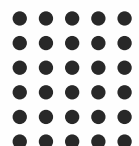
Activities for Upgradation of the Bhawan were started. The open terrace roof has been converted into a covered area by fixing roof sheets & windows. Work on improving the kitchen area on the Ground Floor is also planned and will be taken up shortly. We will need generous financial contributions from one and all to successfully finish all the upgradation work. I request you all to please do contribute by generously donating to "Kashmir Sabha Trust".

While we have made significant progress, we are aware of the challenges that lie ahead. These include increasing community engagement and addressing the pressing issues that affect our community's well-being.

As we embark on a new year, I invite each of you to join us in shaping our community's future. Let us work together to build a stronger & more vibrant community.

Thank you for your continued support and participation.

Rajesh Tikoo





Celebrating festivals is always fun. We have big festivals, small festivals, global festivals, regional festivals, local festivals, religious festivals, community festivals, and many more. Some of them are famous and some are not so famous. Some of them are our favourite ones and some are not. There are even some that have become **forgotten festivals**. Festivals that we have never celebrated but have heard about them from our parents and grandparents. Some festivals that we celebrated when we were kids but are no longer celebrated now-a-days. What can be the reasons that these festivals are no more celebrated? I think it's because they lost their significance due to changing times. And some of them are not celebrated because we migrated to different climatic or socio-cultural places.

I can remember some such fun festivals that we used to celebrate as kids when we were living in Kashmir. As winter in Kashmir was cold and long, there were two festivals that I can remember, one-*Phrov*

Zalun was celebrated before the advent of winter to welcome, or more appropriately, to signal that we need to get ready to face winter, and the other one-*Shishur Khakher* was celebrated after the winter to say bye-bye to the lethargy of winter and welcome spring.

Phrov Zalun is believed was celebrated to commemorate the day of frightening away the demons from Kashmir Valley. According to tradition, in ancient times the inhabitants of Kashmir would every winter leave the country for six months. Before departing, they set their houses on fire to make them un-usable by the so-called demons who were none but the aborigines of the land.

How we in our childhood celebrated it: This celebration was actually performed by children. Elders would just assist and monitor the event. Straw bales would be tied to thick & strong sticks and made like *mashaal*/torch. After sunset these torches were lit and all the kids carrying one of his/her own *mashaal* would march/run from their respective homes towards the Temple compound or spring of the village called *Nagbal* and sing *Frov aav, Frov aav*. At *Nagbal* all the *mashaals* would be laid down in a pyre of fire. All the kids would then dance around the pyre and keep singing *Frov aav, Frov aav*

Shishur Khakher, I could not trace the origin and the reason behind this celebration but let me share how we in our childhood celebrated it. It was celebrated on the eve of *Sounth*. All the discarded items of house like broken *kangiris*, old footwear, old broom, used earthen pots (*dagul, lej, nout*) etc. were tied with a long rope made with rice straw. These things



were then dragged away, mostly by kids again from their respective houses to a large ground or meadow away from homes and hamlets and thrown away there. On return kids would bring home tufts of freshly sprouted Turf Grass of spring. Then a walnut was put inside this tuft of grass and tied like a vase, which was called as **Sounth Chret**. This was kept hidden somewhere at home till night and at night was kept on **Sounth Thal** along with the other items of the **Thal**. Next morning, on the day of **Sounth** after all the family members had taken darshan of the Thal, the **Sounth Chret** was sown in courtyard or in an orchard.

There are many more such forgotten festivals that are no longer celebrated. One more is **Nov Bhati** that was celebrated on the day of cooking the new rice of the season for the first time. On this day some walnuts were steamed along with the rice cooked for lunch or dinner. We loved to eat these steamed walnut kernels along with the other special delicious dishes of the day.

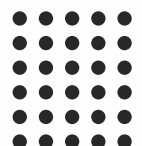
This issue of Vitasta is specially highlighting our rich cultural heritage by showcasing our festivals and traditions to the younger generation. Hope our readers will like reading this special issue of Vitasta dedicated to our festivals and rituals, some of which are unfortunately forgotten.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all the authors who have taken time off their busy schedule and contributed by penning down their thoughts on this topic.

I would also like to thank all the advertisers for their continuous support.

Warm Regards,

Suman Raina





In loving memory and remembrance



“..Will you mother hold my hand for a little while:No need to carry my pain, but will you sit here for a while with me?Whilst my tears stream..”

With utmost grief, we share the news of the sad demise of our beloved mother, Smt. Sheela Munshi, wife of late Shri Poshker Nath Munshi, resident of Sanat Nagar Srinagar, Kashmir (formerly from Munshi Mohalla Bulbul Lankar), on 21st December 2024.

She left for her heavenly abode peacefully from her home at Kolkata. She lived her life in a simple and pious way and was always helpful and kind by nature. She **will** be always remembered for her kindness and the helping hand she rendered to all who needed it. Remembering her in reverence and gratitude,

Anju and Sunil Munshi (+91 9830019050)

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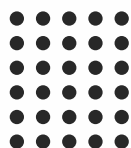


SECTION I

XLVIII

RELIVING MEMORIES / THEME BASED ARTICLES

2024 - 2025



Impact of Exodus on Kashmiri Rituals and Celebrations

Sanjeev Munshi

The Seventh Exodus from Kashmir (1990) has profoundly impacted Kashmiri Pandit society in many diverse ways – one of the major losses is the way we used to observe our rituals, festivals, and socio-religious events. Due to the exodus, we lost more than our habitat – we lost our way of life, the way KPs would live in Kashmir! Our culture, rituals and festivals had evolved around the typical geography of Kashmir, its seasons, its lakes and rivers, its mountains, and shrines! As our community of over 5L souls moved southwards from Kashmir, we lost that connection to processes that had evolved over the last 5000 odd years! In the process of resettling and reclaiming our lives, families got scattered – people travelled to places where opportunities for jobs and education beckoned – after all, our survival was at stake. Some of us found solace in the fact that having survived the radical arm of Islam, we could relax in the vast sea of India where our faith would not face a challenge every day! Soon after, though, nostalgia struck – we started missing the way we celebrated our *Herath* and *Pann*, our *Jyeth Aatham* and *Shravne Punim*, our *Vohorvod* and other *baeyd doh*. The first thing we started missing was the extended family (including neighbours) that used to be an integral part of every celebration! Kids started missing their Matamal because distances made frequent commute impossible! We started missing our *Kul-Guru* – the revered Brahmin who used to be an integral part of our socio-religious celebrations. Unfortunately, the breed is near extinct now and one must make do with either the local *panditjis* or some gentlemen who appear to have adopted the Logakshi Paddhati vidhis of Kashmiri Brahmins! Another difficulty that people started

experiencing was the disposal of *pooja/havan/shraadh* material due to absence of fresh water bodies. My mother passed away in 2003 at Vadodara and for disposing the ritual material into a fresh water body/river after *puza*, I had to travel 40 odd kilometers. Likewise, people in Jammu now visit the Muthi Ghat or Akhnoor Ghat, people around Delhi NCR travel to different locations in UP (Muradnagar, Hapur, Ghar Mukteshwar-Ganga etc) for performing 10th day rituals, post demise of a family member. The society my son lives in at Hyderabad has banned keeping any eatables for birds, even on the terrace – now, there is no place to keep the offering of '*teher*' that our family has been offering to birds every Tuesday and Saturday! At Vadodara, Municipal authorities have banned disposal of *pooja* material into most of the municipal ponds being maintained by the civic authorities – creating issues about disposal of flowers and other material post every *puza*! In Canada, we found that our offerings on *Gadd Batte* and *Kyetche Maavas* remained buried in snow for months, untouched, and there was little we could do about it!

Thus, while our community continued to celebrate festivals and perform rituals associated with our culture, there has been a qualitative change, often necessitated by the hurdles one faces – from availability of material to availability of pandit ji, limited understanding, and knowledge of the concept of the ritual, finding adequate space and time for performing the ritual and finally, disposal of material! However, the knowledge of how things were before our Exodus is our '*virasat*'! Our younger generations have a right to know what their

ancestors thought about various rituals and how things used to be, before the Exodus. With this in mind, I shall be giving details of one of the most awaited and looked forward to celebrations in our homes – our *Vohorvod* (birthday)! I shall be describing the logic of celebration and how it used to be celebrated in Kashmir, for sake of record! Who knows, this might attract the attention of our GenNext and they shall get to know the glory and grandeur of our celebrations!

Celebrating Janamotsav (Vohorvod) – Birthday as per Lunisolar Calendar

Birthday marks the day on which one comes into this world as per the prevalent calendar! Most of us are aware only of the date and day as per the modern Gregorian (Western) calendar. This date-year becomes a part of our life-records - from our municipal Birth Certificate to School Leaving records to the official 'sarkari' documents like Aadhar Card, PAN Card, Voter card, bank records, job records, and our passport! Birthdays are occasions that are greatly looked forward to by the young and the old, in every culture across the globe!

In *Sanatan sanskriti*, the occasion has traditionally been celebrated as *Janamotsav* (Sanskrit) or *Janamdivas* (Hindi) or *Vohorvod* (Kashmiri) as per the Lunar Tithi with great joy. Primarily, we have three types of Calendars - the Solar Calendar (based on movement of the Sun across the Zodiac, like the Gregorian), the Lunar Calendar, based on the movement of the Moon (Islamic Hijri Calendar), and the Luni-solar Calendar (based on both, the movement of the Moon and the Sun). Amongst the western Solar Calendars (Gregorian or Java), 'midnight' marks the beginning of a new day/date. In Luni-solar Calendars (*Vikrami* etc) a new Day/ date starts from Sunrise (called *tithi* in *Vikrami*, *Shaka* and *Saptrishi* calendars). Indian Luni-solar calendars also keep track of the

movement of the Sun across various signs of the Zodiac – the day Sun crosses over to a new Zodiac sign is called 'Sankranti' in Sanskrit and Hindi. Several important festivals like Makar Sankranti (January 14, the day the Sun enters Capricorn) are celebrated all over India under different names. Sankranti is considered auspicious; some people observe a fast and take a bath in nearby rivers or *sarovars* (lakes)!

While most of the Christian world follows the Gregorian calendar, the Islamic world follows a Lunar Calendar called *Hijri*. Hindus traditionally follow the Luni-solar Calendars (*Vikrami* etc), while Kashmiri Pandits follow the *Saptrishi Samvat*, again a Luni-solar calendar and one of the oldest in India. Currently, as per *Saptrishi Samvat*, we are in the year 5100 (2024-25) while as per *Vikrami* it is the year 2081, and as per *Shaka*, it is the year 1946.

Traditional Way of Recording the Birth Date

Traditionally, in India, our birthdays (or any other important day, for that matter) are recorded as per the local calendar (*Panchang*) and marked as per the *Tithi*, that is the day of the lunar fortnight called Paksh – dark (*Krishna Paksh*) or bright (*Shukl Paksh*), noting the location of the Moon (*Rashi*) and Constellation (*Nakshatra*). *Tithi*, in the Luni-solar calendar, is decided by the difference between the Sun and the Moon – every 12 degrees constitutes a Tithi ($12 \times 15 = 180$ degrees, constituting one half of the moon's monthly cycle or a *Paksh*). These technical details would be recorded by the Family Priest (Kul guru) and registered in a document called *Janam Patrika* (*Zatukh* in Kashmiri). This document, with many astronomical and astrological calculations, would be preserved by the family, lifelong. It would serve as an authentic proof of birth details of a person, well before Municipalities started issuing Birth

Certificates in India! *Zatukh* would also record the *Gotra* and family tree of the person! It is helpful at the time of 'matching of horoscopes' for purpose of marriage! Thus, in India, we can observe two birthdays – one as per the date recorded in our birth certificate, as per the Gregorian calendar and the second, as per the Lunar Tithi recorded in our *Janam Patrika* or *Zatukh*!

Why celebrate Vohorvod

Janmotsav celebration is a part of *sanatan sanskriti* across India. It is also called *Vardhapan Samskara* (among many other names) and procedures for celebrating may vary across regions and cultures. Essentially, it is an occasion to acknowledge life as a blessing from God. Celebration is an ode to life! Life is a precious gift from God and we must value it, cherish it and use it positively. The Sanskrit word is *Janam-utsav*, a celebration of life. We must be grateful to God for giving us this life! In *sanatan sanskriti*, it is said that a person is born as a human being (*yonis*) after passing through hundreds of births in different life forms (plants to insects to animals)! Hence, this human-*yonis* birth needs to be utilized for earning *punya* (doing pious deeds), so that, someday it can lead to *moksha* (liberation or nirvana of the soul). Though not technically a *Samskara*, *Vohorvod* of every person, male or female, adult or child, was celebrated in Kashmir every year.

Preparing for the event

Preparations for celebrating *Vohorvod* would start overnight with material (mutton, cottage cheese or *tchaman* and other vegetables) being procured. Morning saw the *Kul-Guru*, having all birth records in his master record *pothi* (a diary of sorts), arrive early to perform *Janamotsav Puza* (*pooja*). This would not disturb the office/ shop/ school going schedule of the person; besides, the person whose birthday was to

be celebrated had to observe a fast till the *pooja* was over (sipping of *tea* or milk was allowed in-between) – and explains, the early arrival of *Kulguru Ji*, so as not to test the hunger pangs! Household would be up early, arranging *puza-samgri* (*pooja* material – flowers, incense, *dhoop*, *ratandeep*, *tchong*, milk, curd, uncooked rice with a bit of salt, and some *dakshina* in a *thali* for *zang*; a set of utensils needed for the *puza* was kept ready before the *Kulguru's* arrival. A proper sitting arrangement would be made for the *Kulguru* and the 'birthday boy/girl'. The 'birthday-boy/girl' would sit facing east. Household ladies would be busy preparing *Teher* and other special dishes for the feast!

Janmotsav Pooja would be an elaborate affair with two distinct parts:

- *Janamotsav Devta Pooja*: The *Pooja* follows a given template, invoking *Bhagwan Vishnu (Narayan)* as the Lord of the Universe who conserves life and the Seven Immortal beings, as per *Sanatan* mythology – *Ashwathama*, *Maha Bali*, *Maharishi Vyas*, *Bhagwan Hanuman*, *Kripacharya*, *Rishi Markandeya*, and *Bhagwan Parshuram*. The ceremony starts with the lighting of a lamp (in contrast, in modern cake cutting ceremonies, candles are extinguished). A fresh *Yagneopavit* (*Yoni* in Kashmiri) is put on (in case the person has had his *Upanayana Samskar* by then). The invocation to God is: "Where my parents or family are not around to guide, where I am unable to find any light or know day from night, may the light from within me guide me!" The Sun God is invoked as it ensures life and growth on Earth. A *Nadi Bandh* (*narivan*) with 7 knots representing the 7 immortals is first 'charged' through *pooja* and then tied to the right wrist of the person whose birthday is being celebrated (in case of a

female, the *narivan* is tied on the left wrist after marriage). All family members receive a *tilak* and *Nadi Bandhan (narivan)* from the *Kulguru* as part of *pooja*. For obvious reasons, the event is extra special for the wife and she is a part of the *pooja*!

- **Preypyun:** Literally, *Preypyun* means an offering to the Supreme, *Para Shakti*. This part governs the *pooja* of offerings made to the Gods (called *Amrit*)! Primarily, freshly cooked food is offered to God as *Naivedya*. *Teher* is the primary offering on *Vohorvod*.

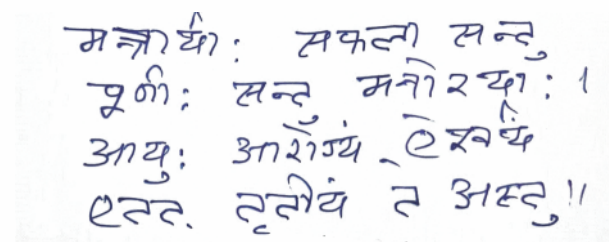


Teher: In Kashmir, we have a very typical offering called '*Teher*' - rice cooked with a bit of turmeric and mixed with salt and mustard oil. *Teher* has traditionally been the principal offering on every *pooja*, celebration, thanksgiving, or any other religious procedure in Kashmiri Pandit *sanskriti*. *Teher* has tantric origins - Kashmir has been a fountainhead of *tantra* and *Shiv-Shakti upasana* and *Teher* has been a part of our religio-cultural traditions since ages. Hence, it is wise not to tamper with *Teher* by replacing it with *pulao* or any other rice preparation. We need to realize that our ancestors have devised a highly scientific and logical system - that we have lost the keys to some of those secrets does not make our traditions and practices tamper worthy! Incidentally, preparing and distributing *teher* is also prevalent amongst Kashmiri Muslims - the only

difference is that amongst KPs, the preparation is at individual household level (and distributed amongst neighbours and guests) while in Muslims, it is more of a group activity. I recall that during my childhood, Muslim groups would offer *teher* to every passerby outside mosques and even on crossroads.

The *teher* offerings would be kept in three *thalis* - one for main *puza*, one for the *Kuldevi* and the third, called *Tsot+ Kshetrapal* was offered to deities *Yogini, Raudra, Saumya, Ghortara-para, Khechri, Bhuchari* and *Rama* besides remembering the local *Bhairav*. Offerings are made to *Kshetrapals* and *Sanivaris* (two metallic vessels kept in every household wherein food was offered daily before consuming). The *pooja* concluded by seeking permission from the Lord to consume the *Naivedya* as *Amrit*. The offering made to the *Kuldevi* would be kept for birds as would the *Tsot+ Khetrapal* offering. The main part of *teher* would be consumed by the family as *Naivedya*. The tradition in Kashmir was that the *Kulguru* would make three small morsels (*myet* in Kashmiri) of *teher*, mix those with curd and a bit of *nabad* (crystalline sugar) and then offer it to the person celebrating his/her birthday. The *prasad* of *teher* is eagerly awaited by the gathering and is considered a delicacy! My late father was a great fan of *teher* and it was used to be prepared on every Tuesday & Saturday!

The concluding part of the *pooja* would be in the form of the following blessing:



May the *Mantras* (prayers) chanted herein bear fruit (*safal*); may all your desires

(*manorath*) be fulfilled; may you be blessed with *deergh aayu* (long life), *aarogya* (healthy life) and *Aishwarya* (comforts in life).

Teher as Naivaidya offered to *Janamotsav* devta along with traditional vegetarian delicacies

I recall, during my childhood, birthdays of all family elders would be major family celebrations with an elaborate menu, which could be vegetarian or non-vegetarian. My late father was born on an *Ekadashi*; therefore, the *vohorvod* feast used to be organized on the next day (*Dwadashi*) so that non-veg dishes could be relished. Friends, close relatives, and neighbours would be invited to lunch after the *Puja*. *Naivaidya (teher)* would be sent to neighbours along with small portions of the cooked delicacies. Wearing new clothes on the occasion was mandatory for the 'birthday boy/girl'. I remember, even when I turned 60, my late father went out to buy a new garment for me – such was the tradition. Wife of the person whose birthday was being celebrated would receive gifts, a new *saree*, plus a new *Athoru* (the dangling ear ornament). A gentleman, however, would not get any gift on his wife's birthday! Talk of discrimination!

For obvious reasons, the birthday of a child would be celebrated with tremendous glee and pomp. On the first birthday, from the child's *Matamal* (mother's house) would be received new clothes, a new bedding for the baby, a set of new utensils (*thali*, spoon, *katori*, and tumbler, at times made of silver). As a kid growing up in Kashmir, I would receive a set of new clothes plus gifts from family and close relatives.

As KPs moved southward from Kashmir, particularly post Exodus, one of the main cultural losses was the institution of *Kulguru*. The families of *Yajmans* got scattered, people were in dire straits (after

Exodus), living in difficult conditions; their own younger generations refused to follow family traditions. In my family, my father would perform the *Vohorvod Pooja* in absence of a *Pandit Ji*, after him, I have taken up the duty. The entire process and mantras are mentioned in the *Vijayeshwar Panchangs* being brought out by the family of Pt Prem Nath Shashtri. Anyone who knows Hindi/Sanskrit/Urdu can easily recite the mantras for this pooja. Our community needs to be thankful to the extended family that brings out the *Vijayeshwar Panchang* – these are full of details about our socio-religious events and rituals!



My late father performing the Vohorvod Puza of my daughter as my son and Mom look on!

Over the years, particularly since 1990, the traditions associated with *Vohorvod Pooja* have taken a backseat. Families were scattered all over the country. Excuses like lack of facilities, tight work schedules, a busy life etc. made their presence felt. People found it 'difficult' to keep track of *Tithi Vohorvod* – consulting a panchang became difficult! Our convenience-oriented people found it more convenient to go with the flow and observe the Calendar birthday alone. Kids, not understanding the rationale of Koshur Tithi Vohorvod (parents probably were unable to explain) found it less confusing to go by the date mentioned on their birth certificates or school records! The modern celebration has more razmataz involved with decoration, balloons, music, exchange of gifts (including return gifts) and finally, cake cutting with the playing of the ubiquitous 'Happy Birthday to You' song! The trend of

midnight greetings has now taken root with people calling at the stroke of midnight, as the date changes, to offer greetings. Social media has further facilitated the communication cycle with GIFs, virtual messages and the like flooding our phones! People, typically like to post their pictures on social media platforms.

Fortunately, the last five years have seen a sort of cultural revival, a renaissance, amongst KPs. People have started regretting the loss of cultural heritage. People in their 40s and 50s have started talking about memories of their childhood. It is a kind of revival of nostalgia. More and more youngsters in their 30s are trying to revive old practices. Recently, there was a demand for penning a meaningful Kashmiri Song that could be used on *Koshur Tithi Vohorvod* to attract the younger generation. Luckily, Team Kosam, engaged in rebirth and teaching of Spoken Koshur language has come out with beautiful lyrics, tunefully sung by Ms Neerja Pandit, the well-known Kashmiri singer. The song has generated a wonderful response!

The Lyrics are here:

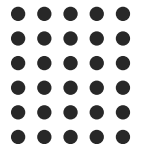
मुबारख छुय, मुबारख छुय,
ज़ा दोह चोन, मुबारख छुय
चै ओरजुव तु, बेयि, आय हुरिनय
चै थोद तु, बेयि, बोड पाय आस्यनय
चै स्वख तु, बेयि, संपदा पूशिनय,
यि दोह चै, ह्योत, तु फ्रूच नीर्यनय
मुबारख छुय मुबारख छुय
चोहरवोद हथ हथ मुबारख छुय।।

The purpose of this write up is not to deride anyone – people do what they find convenient. In our case, the circumstances

were tough! My generation and, probably the one senior to us are guilty of neglecting our traditions by not 'exposing' our children to the intricacies of our *dharma* and rituals. Now that we are seeing a sort of 'back to the roots' movement in our community, it is time for us to revisit our rituals and practices. It should not happen that someday, our children shall use the most chilling dialogues of The Kerala Story for us:

"पापा गलती तो
आपकी ही है कि
आपने हमें बहुत
कुछ बताया परन्तु
धर्म क्या है इस
विषय में कभी
कुछ नहीं बताया"
—द केरल स्टोरी

Sanatan sanskriti is not a culture where rules are etched in stone! Flexibility has been one of *Sanatan's* greatest attributes which enabled it to survive some of the most brutal challenges over the past thirteen centuries! Our great scholars, way back, had created a mechanism, granting us permission to modify our rituals as per देश, काल & परिस्थिति (place/ country, time and era and the conditions prevailing locally); in simple terms this can be interpreted as permission to use common sense to decide how the rituals are to be carried out, given the place (country/area), time and situation and even availability of material. In Kashmir, we use walnuts (*akhrot or doony*) during *puza* while as in many other parts of the country, coconuts are used! This is intellectual flexibility personified! Our purpose is to rekindle the spark and introduce our younger generation to our cultural roots and practices. The GenNext needs documentation. Our sincere hope is that we shall be able to pull at a few heart strings amongst GenNext.



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Pann 'Festival' of Kashmir and its Background

Sanjeev Munshi

The bright half (*Shuklapaksh*) of Hindu month *Bhadrapada* (*Bhaderpyeth* in Kashmiri) is well known for the celebration of the Ganesh festival across India. Starting on the fourth day of the bright half, (*Vinayak Chaturthi*, also known as *Vinayaka Chavithi*, *Pillayar Chaturthi* and *Vinayagar Chaturthi* in different parts of the country), this festival lasts for about ten to eleven days. In the Kashmiri Pandit community, coinciding with the Ganesh festival days, a very interesting socio-religious celebration takes place, known as Pann Puza! Colloquially, in Kashmiri, Pann means 'a thread' so, translated literally, Pann Puza can mean 'worshipping the thread'! In the current context, Pann involves making of *roth*, a sweet and thick flat bread that is deep fried (or baked) and offered as *prasad* to the deity! However, there is a difference of opinion among scholars (and the public at large) about its connection to the Ganesh Puja! In absence of authentic texts as sources of reference, there is a definite confusion about the origin of this festival, its deity, and its processes! Over the years, several variants of the story associated with Pann have evolved, generating confusion!

Soon after Vinayak Chaturthi this year, a doctor whom I hold in great esteem, asked me to explore and examine the various prevalent aspects of this festival – and draft something which can appear logical to our younger generation! The doctor, a non-KP but married into a reputed KP family, wanted me to write about the Pann festival so that she can handover the document to her two NRI daughters. The idea was so appealing that I set right away to explore various sources of information available, including senior family members and the internet, including different social media platforms! So, here goes my journey of exploration!

Pann in Kashmir – Exploring its

background

I realized that almost half a dozen different versions of the Pann *Katha* are available and at least three scholars have tried to explore the origins of this festival.

- Dr SS Toshkhani, the renowned KP scholar and author has associated Pann with a thanksgiving *pooja* to two agricultural deities known as Vibha and Garbha. Over the years, the two names got corrupted as Beebgarbh Maej (mother Beebgarbh) who is considered the main deity of Pann Puza. This appears very logical since agriculture was the primary occupation of people and thanking deities for bountiful crops makes sense. Cotton cultivation, though not very widespread, was known in Kashmir, which explains the tradition of spinning of a thread from raw cotton and the name Pann! The festival season is close to the harvesting season in Kashmir (called *Harud*). This also strengthens the agriculture angle theory.
- Kashmiri Pandit Scholar and commentator Sanjay Raina Ji associates the festival/puza with the worship of Matrika Devi, a deity who resides within our house. In support of his theory, he cites a parallel with the Gad-Batte *pooja* associated with *Ghar-devta* or *Dayat raaze* – the deity who is invisible yet is always present in the house, to protect its inhabitants! He also identifies the name 'Beeb Garb Maej' as a corrupted form of Matrika Devi!
- Youtuber Ujjawal Handu, whose videos about KP events, rituals and festivals have become very popular (and even reference points), also has associated the *pooja* with the two agricultural deities.
- Traditionally, in Kashmir, *Chaturdashi* (*Gane Chodah*) was associated with Ganesh *Pooja*, not Vinayak *Tchoram*!

About 40 years back, my wife was asked by our *Kul Guru*, a very *vidwan* Brahmin, to keep a fast on every *Chodah* (*Chaturdashi*) and to offer *Ladoos* (made from *atta*, Kashmiri style) to Ganesh Ji. Vinayak Tchoram, it appears, is a recent introduction to the Kashmiri pantheon! Hence, though some people nowadays associate Pann with Ganesh Puza, it is actually related to offering worship to BeebGarbh Maej, a traditional Kashmiri deity!

Peculiarities that make Pann Festival unique:

- The *pooja* can be conducted on 4-5 different days within the *Shuklapaksh* of *Bhadrapada* - these *muhurtas* (*Pann Saath*) are mentioned in *KP Panchang* (*Jantri*).
- Since the festival is not restricted to a fixed date, *it* rules out its association with a fixed day event like a deity's birthday (*Jyethe-Aatham* or *Haar-e-Navam* etc).
- The lady of the house/clan conducts the *pooja*, not the *Kul Guru*. The fact that the Lady of the House handles this event makes it unique!
- That a young girl (*kumari*) is invited to weave a thread from a freshly harvested cotton flower pod (*phamb* in Kashmiri) points to a link to agricultural produce. It is the cotton thread (*Pann*) that gives the festival its name! The girl would have to weave two threads - one for the *Kalash* and the other for the Lady of the house who must wear it in her left side athoru while preparing the Roth; she would receive some money in lieu! Also, tradition has it that the first Roth that gets fried is, after the *pooja*, offered to this very *Kanya* (hence the name Kanyeke Roth)! Was this an attempt to train young girls in the fine art of weaving and knitting? Kashmiri women were known to handle the *charkha* (*Yender* in Kashmiri) for weaving wool (called *yaer*) and even pashmina thread! I have seen a *Yender* in my ancestral home in Alikadal, probably an heirloom, used by my great grandmother! This tradition of weaving *Pann* for Pann Puja would have been a way of empowering girls to learn a skill/craft that could help in life later!
- That Roth, the main prasad for this event, is distributed amongst all neighbours and relatives speaks of the social connect of this festival. The only parallel we can find is the Kashmiri tradition of distributing walnuts (*doony* in Kashmiri) amongst all friends, relatives, and neighbours after Herath (Shivratri) pooja!
- In case a family has seen some death (or any other negative happening) in the preceding year, Pann Puza would still be offered but only on the last *saath* (*muhurat*) - *Anant Chodah*. Such families would reduce the volume of their offering as Roth would either not be distributed or distributed only to close relatives.
- That *pooja* '*samgri*' for Pann includes barley and green grass (scutch grass?) called *dramun* in Kashmiri, is significant considering the story associated with the *pooja*. Tradition has it that only the tender tendon of the *dramun* grass called *seaman kanj* or *Habilkanj* is to be used for the *puja*. The person who performs the *pooja* in the story is described as a very poor person, barely able to sustain herself. Only such a person can make an offering of *dramun* and barley to the deity! This also signifies that for the success of a *pooja* it is the '*bhav*' (devotion, faith) that matters - not the cost/quality of ingredients. Incidentally, green grass is also associated with Ganesh Pooja across India.
- Pann Pooja requires utmost and rigid adherence to rules of cleanliness and 'purity' (*tsrooch* in Kashmiri). In earlier days, the entire kitchen would get a fresh coat of lipan (*livun* in Kashmiri) including the cooking surface (*daan*). All utensils needed for Pann prasad preparation were washed/cleaned on the previous night. Only freshly collected water is used - Kashmir valley had plenty of streams,

lakes and rivers but only flowing water was used, not stagnant water from ponds and lakes, for preparing Pann Naveed. In Srinagar city, taps would provide running water 24x7 but before tap water became available, people would go to the Vitasta (now called Jehlum) river to fill their water pitchers. The material purchased for Pann Puza would not be used for any other purpose till the puza was over! Water designated for Pann Pooja was not to be used for any other purpose – even for preparing a cup of tea till the Puza was over! Even burning coals from the *daan* (earthen fire stove prevalent in Kashmir for centuries) were not to be used for any other purpose. The kitchen would be used exclusively for Pann preparation. Any cooking other than *Pooja* related would have to be done outside the kitchen. The lady of the house would observe an *upvas* (fast) till the *Puza* was done! This could be a reason why most families preferred starting the Pann related activity early in the morning (by 3am?) before the children and menfolk woke up and started asking to be fed! This also ensured that the lady of the house did not have to fast all day long!

- Usually, Pann Pooja is performed in the kitchen. Menfolk have a limited role to play, other than buying Pooja/Pann material on a good *muhurat*, participating in *pooja* and delivering the prasad to neighbours and relatives post *puza*. Traditionally, not all families had the '*reeth*' (tradition) of Pann Pooja, which means that it was not mandatory for all. There were several families in our KP *Samaj* that did not observe Pann at all. Certain clanswomen of Mata Rup Bhawani, from the Sahibi Dhar Clan would not perform Pann pooja in their homes or participate in Pann Pooja elsewhere – reasons not clear!
- There was a tradition in Kashmir of the eldest son (or the one living with parents) 'inheriting' the responsibility for performing the *reeth* of *poojas* like Herath and Pann – remaining brothers would participate in that pooja but not

install *Vatukh* or *Pann Kalash* in their individual homes. In our family, till we were living under one roof in Srinagar, Vatukh and Pann were installed at our ancestral home only! It was only after my father constructed a house in Jammu that we decided to start Pann & Herath Pooja, formally! Till then, *pooja* in our name too was done at Srinagar and we would receive the *prasad* through post (doonye after Herath and Roth after Pann!

Preparing Pann Prasad and performing the Pooja:

- For preparing Pann Prasad (*roth*) the basic ingredients needed are: Freshly ground *atta* (wheat flour), *shakkar* (raw sugar), *desi ghee*, *khaskhas* (poppy seeds), *moti ellaichi* (black cardamom), a bit of fresh curd, some diced dry fruits (almonds, coconut, dry dates) etc.
- Another dish that was traditionally prepared in some families was called 'Buzz Wangun' – brinjals (*wangun*) roasted on fire, mashed and then mixed with curd, some green chillies and salt to taste! In Kashmir, we used to have very typical long, light pink coloured brinjals that would have minimal seeds and mostly were insect free!
- Some families would prepare a typical *roti* called *du-wore phulka* in Kashmiri. These were offered to the deity as part of *prasad* and later also distributed along with *roth* amongst neighbours, relatives, and friends. Again, this would be part of family *reeth* (tradition) and could vary from family to family. Some families would prepare *aata poori* (instead of *duwore phulka*). Dough for these 'phulkas' was prepared separately!
- All these raw items are procured fresh – specifically for pooja. The quantities for ingredients depend on the volume/ quantity/ number of *roths* to be prepared. The rule of the thumb is *that the first 5 pav* are for *Devi* (measuring used to be done using a *khos* – a traditional bronze cup used for drinking tea but also used for

measuring *atta* or rice). This would amount to approximately 1.25 ser (1 kg?) of *atta*. Offering must be 1.25 pav and its multiples. Plus, one measure per family member, present or otherwise! Families would even add additional measures for families of married daughters! So, the quantity of *atta* needed would go up to 5-7 kg, depending on family strength!

- Amongst the utensils needed are: a big *parat* (platter vessel) for kneading *atta*, again, size depending on volume of *atta* to be kneaded. For deep frying *roth*, a big flat ladle with big *kadhāi* is needed. The dough is prepared by adding ghee, sugar, *moti-ellaichi* seeds and water (or milk) to *atta*. Well kneaded dough is given some time to rest before using a rolling pin-rolling board combo, thick flat breads are rolled out, mostly round but some with designs as well – some families embellish their *roths* with dry fruit (almonds, diced coconut, dry dates etc)! As per tradition, there are two kinds of *roths*– one is called *Krayi pak roth* (fried in *ghee*) and other is called *Sava Seer roth* which used to be baked traditionally in coal fired *tandoors*. These days baking on *tawa* or electric oven is the norm!
- *Roths* are deep fried/ baked and then stacked; *khaskhas* is sprinkled on the hot *roths* to give those a nice look! Some families make special *roth* (for a married daughter's family, for example) by baking those on a *tawa* and decorating those with dry fruits and silver *warq* (thin food grade silver foil, used for decorating sweets too).
- **Preparing Roth:** Before starting, the lady of the house would tie a longish wick like '*pann*' spun out of raw cotton by a young girl, in her left *Athoru* (fresh one used for the festival). In earlier days, the lady would wear a new *sari* as well – such was the importance of *Pann*. For the younger lot, it used to be a fun activity – all boys and girls, womenfolk of the household and some neighbours/ relatives would join, participating joyfully in rolling out *roth*

breads from the dough.

- Only seasoned players were allowed to fry the *roth* – if the *roth* breaks or develops cracks, it is not offered for *puja*. Ladies would exchange duties to reduce job-fatigue! I recall that after my marriage, my wife would invite her two younger sisters for help. Likewise, once our own *Pann* was done, my mom and wife would visit my Massi's house for helping her out.
- Quite often, families would decide the date of *Pann* in consultation with each other – so that they can be available to help each other on *Pann Day*!
- Every lady would have her own recipe and technique for preparing the dough for *roth*, based mostly on her own experiences or what she had learnt from her mother (nowadays, from You Tube!). Some ladies add a bit of *maida* (refined wheat flour) to the *atta* to make the *Roth* look 'fairer' and a shade crisper! The proportions for sugar, ghee and *atta-maida* combo vary from family to family!
- The vegetables to be cooked on the day of the *Pann* (for lunch) would also follow the family '*reeth*' (tradition). In our family, my mom would prepare a *sabzi* of *paneer* and capsicum. Another family would cook *Dum Oolu* and *Bumchoonth wangan*!



- **Pann Puza:** Once the *Pann Roth* were ready, along with the *Du-vare Phulka* and *Buzz Wangan*, preparation for *puza* would start. *Puza* would mostly be conducted in the kitchen by the senior

most lady of the house! For *Kalash*, a *gadvi* or jug is decorated with a *tilak*, the *swastik mark* or Om Sign, a small garland of marigold flowers and a woven cotton thread (*Pann*). Other material needed for *puza* would be: freshly plucked grass (*dramun* in Kashmiri), cleaned and washed barley (*wushke*), a bit of washed rice (*argya*), flower petals, one coin per head to be used for offering to the *kalash*. The other requirements would be *dhoop-deep* (*ratana deep* and *dhoop*), a bit of water for *preppyun* (*puza*).

- *Kalash* being at the centre of this *pooja*, all family members gather around the *kalash*. For *pooja*, *ratana deep* and *dhoop* are placed to the right of *kalash* (half filled with water) and *thalis* full of *roth* are kept in front of the *kalash*. Three *roths* are kept on the *kalash* along with *du-vaer phulka* and a bit of *Buzz Wangun* as offering to the deity. The first *roth* called *Kanyke Roth* (or *Kanykewor*) is kept along with other *roths* but reserved for the *kanya* who spun the *Pann* thread! *Tilak* and *Raksha sutra* (*Narivan*) are offered to each member (obviously, those must be prepared in advance!). Each member is handed over a fistful of the mixture of *dramun*, barley, rice, flower petals and a coin (called *athyiphol*). For *prasad*, some fruits, particularly green pears (*Naakh Tang* in Kashmiri) or peeled apples are kept separately. After *puza*, the contents of the *kalash* are very reverentially immersed into a river or water body, including the offerings made to *BeebGarbh Maej*!
- **Who is the deity:** Traditionally, *BeebGarbh Maej* is said to be the deity to whom worship is offered (origin of the term *Beebgarbh Maej* has been discussed above). Sh Sanjay Raina calls *BeebGarbh Maej* as another form or name of *Matrika Devi*. However, since the days on which this *puza* is conducted are associated with *Ganapati Pooja*, nowadays, *Bhagwan Ganapati* too is considered its deity.
- **Katha:** The story of the *Pann* is told by the lady of the house; before narrating, she has to remove the 'Pann' she is wearing in her left *athoru* and keep it with her share of *dramun*+ floral petals etc. The story revolves around a King (or a rich merchant)) whose wife would offer *puza* to *BeebGarbh Maej* every year on *Vinayak Tchoram*-the story starts as, "*ryethavn manz ryetha te badyirpyatha, Vinayak Tchoram te aathvar*,". One day, the King (or merchant), out of anger, desecrates the *pooja* process by violating its purity (*shuddhata*). He leaves the house in anger, gets trapped in a conspiracy by his enemies and is imprisoned. In desperation, the queen runs away to a jungle with her young daughter and starts living incognito. She can barely make two ends meet and is forced to work in other households. In due time, her daughter, too, grows up and starts helping her mother by working as a domestic help. One *Vinayaka Tchoram*, she gets delayed – the household where she was working were offering *Pann* and they asked her to wait till the process was over so that she could carry *roth prasad* to her home. On reaching home, she hands over the *roth* to her mother – which brings tears of despair and sorrow to her eyes, in memory of days gone by. The mother explains to her daughter that every year, their household, too, used to offer *roth* to *BeebGarbh Maej* and due to the desecration of *pooja*, they had fallen on bad days! The young girl suggests to her mother that they can offer the *roth* to *BeebGarbh Maej* again – but being too poor, they probably cannot afford it! Not discouraged, the girl and mother set about collecting material. From the King's stables, they collect horse dung daily and after washing it, are able to gather undigested grains of barley and wheat. Over the next few weeks, they wash the barley-wheat grains, dry them, and finally grind them to make flour sufficient for 2-3 *roths*. They beg and borrow for the rest of materials, including *ghee* and *shakkar* (some innovations too are introduced due to financial constraints);

the result of their efforts yields two and a half *roths*. For *pooja* they use dramun grass. With great devotion and faith, they offer the *roths* to BeebGarb Maej, seeking pardon for deficiencies in their offerings! Mother breaks one of the *roths* into half and asks her daughter to drop it in the drywell (*chhah* in Kashmiri) where her father had been kept by his enemies. As the daughter returns from the drywell, the mother-daughter are shocked to find that their *roths* had turned into gold! In yet another unexpected twist, the forces loyal to the deposed king are able to overthrow the current king and restore the glory of the erstwhile king! The story ends with a prayer – the way fortunes of the deposed king had changed, may everyone in the world enjoy such an upturn in circumstances! The festival of Pann is associated with 'prosperity' and 'harmony' of the house. It is all about wellbeing and wealth and hence it is to be performed with utmost cleanliness of heart and soul, honest and noble intentions so that Beeb Gharab Maej showers her blessings and keeps the house always prosperous.

- Traditionally, it is mandated that if a lady participates in Pann Katha at some other household, offering the Dramun-Pushp-Barley-Coin athyephhol to the *kalash*, she is expected to offer Pann at her own house next year onwards. Maybe, this is the reason why some ladies nowadays hesitate in offering Dramun-Pushp-Barley-Coin to the *kalash*.
- As the story ends, the entire family, one by one, offers the Dramun grass plus floral petals and coins into the *kalash*, bowing their heads before the *kalash*. Before offering her own dramun to the *kalash*, the lady of the house takes off her own Pann (cotton thread she was wearing in her left *athoru*) and offers the same to *kalash*. Then, the lady of the house does the basic *preppyun pooja*, as marked in our *Jantri (Panchang) – Amritesh Mudraya*...and finally, seeks permission to consume the *Naivedya – Agya may deeyatam nath, Naivedya...*!

प्रेप्युन

अमृतेश-मुद्रया-अमृतीकृत्य अमृतम्-अस्तु
अमृतायतां नैवेद्यम्। सावित्राणि सावित्रस्य
देवस्यत्वा सवितुः प्रसवेऽश्विनो-बाहुभ्यां-
पूष्णो हस्ताभ्याम्-आददे। महागणपतये
कुमाराय श्रियै सरस्वत्यै लक्ष्म्यै विश्वकर्मणे
द्वाद्वेताभ्यः प्रजापतये ब्रह्मणे कलश-
देवताभ्यः ब्रह्मविष्णु महेश्वर-देवताभ्यः
चतुर्वेदेश्वराय सान्चराय ऋतु-पतये
आज्ञा मे दीयतां नाथ नैवेद्यस्यास्य भक्षणे।
शरीर यात्रा सिद्धयर्थं भगवन् क्षन्तुम्
अर्हसि॥

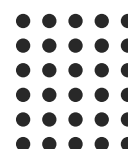
- This concludes the Pann Puza plus *katha! Naivedya* in the form of fruit (diced pears or apples) is offered to all family members! As the gathering sits to have lunch, a portion of *roth*, a part of *du-vaer phulka* and *Buzz Wangun* is first served as *Pann Naivadya*! Later, *roth* and *phulka* are shared with all neighbours and sent to relatives across the city (some families do not make or distribute *du-vaer phulka* – again, the household *reeth*!). Nowadays, with relatives living in different locations, *pann roth* is carefully wrapped and couriered across various locations along with some dry sindoor as *tilak* and *raksha sutra (narivan)* for the family members. I recall my sisters in-laws lived in Pune and till they were alive, my wife would prepare special *roth* for them – the old gentleman, though a diabetic, would wait for the *prasad* and always acknowledge receipt, very gracefully! Even today, my dear MIL sends *roth*, *tilak*, and *narivan* for my family, 42 years after our marriage! Such are the traditions!
- Discussion: Since the entire episode is based mainly on oral, word of mouth evidence, over the centuries, a number of clones or variations of the story have evolved, often affected by contemporary circumstances. However, the crux and the

lessons of the story remain unchanged! Faith and devotion can overcome mountains; it is important, in the words of Tennyson, to 'meet the adoration of my household gods!' Anger, arrogance, hubris are poor masters and often lead to disaster! Material offerings do not matter – it is the intent of the devotee that matters! As Subhadra Kumari Chauhan has said:

धूप-दीप-नैवेद्य नहीं है झांकी का शृंगार नहीं। हाय! गले में पहनाने को फूलों का भी हार नहीं॥

- **Need of the hour:** Our community has a need for documentation for various rituals and practices that are undocumented or based on 'word of mouth' traditions. Our scholars need to find common ground to clear the confusion that afflicts several of our practices. Our younger generation is already facing challenges induced by exodus and its manifestations. They need clarity. Mr Sanjay Raina ji is requested to publish his theory, with evidence, so that it can be debated, agreed upon and then widely circulated! This is my plea to the various *mathadeeshes* of our community – those who occupy high sounding positions that hardly have any relevance or effect! Let them organize conferences, requesting scholars and religious leaders, including *panchang kartas*, not just to put forth their views but also, to reach conclusions! Let procedures be simplified. Let a new book be brought out, giving final, authenticated versions of how and why of our rituals and procedures. Even the *panchang kartas* must include these practices in their *Jantris* that guide KPs living the world over!

- That our rituals and religious practices have survived our seven exoduses from Kashmir, have survived seven centuries of tyranny, speaks of the robustness of our traditions and faith. Our culture has been strong enough to survive these challenges. Introspection and a periodic reassessment are cleansing processes that remove the impurities that tend to come in with time; it is like a de-weeding process that helps strengthen the plant. The elasticity and resilience that our community has shown is probably unmatched in the annals of social history of communities that have faced persecution and exile several times over! At the current juncture, our younger generation probably needs a bit of handholding and guidance! It is the responsibility of our generation to cut the clutter and remove the cobwebs of confusion!



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Braand Fash Dyun

Besmearing the Front of the Main Door

Chander M Bhat

In traditional Kashmiri Pandit households, the early morning routine used to hold significant cultural and spiritual importance, particularly for the women of the house. Whether she was a daughter, daughter-in-law or the mistress of the household, the lady of the house embraced a daily ritual that was deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the community.

Each morning, she would rise before dawn, a time considered sacred and conducive to spiritual practices. The first task she undertook was to clean the front or main door of the house locally called ***Braand*** as well as the courtyard. This act was not merely a chore but a symbolic gesture of welcoming positivity, purity and prosperity into the home.

After cleaning, she would prepare a special mixture of red clay (***Goori Myatch***) and water in an earthen container known as ***Livan Dul*** which used to be kept in one of the corners of the house. After mixing it properly, she would besmear the freshly cleaned areas, a practice known as ***Braand Fash*** in Kashmiri, believed to purify the space and protect it from negative energies. The ***Braand Fash*** had a dual significance; it was not just a physical cleansing but also a spiritual one, reinforcing the sanctity of the household.

This daily ritual was often accompanied by the recitation of prayers or folk songs that reflected the cultural values and beliefs of the Kashmiri Pandit community. One such folk song, passed down through generations, encapsulates the morning routine and the underlying principles:

***Baga phol huvaan roz nawan,
Seth cha labhuv nawa lagan,
Ghar var yeli chhaya rozan,***

Chhoi mohn liven soori layi.

Translated, these lines celebrate the daily renewal of the household, likening it to a blossoming garden. The "***baga phol***" (blossoming garden) represents the home, which is rejuvenated each day through the efforts of the lady of the house. The "***seth***" (front door) is given new life, and the "***nawa lagan***" (fresh start) is symbolized by the act of smearing the clay and water mixture, ensuring the house is ready to face the day ahead with renewed energy and positivity.

This tradition, deeply rooted in the Kashmiri Pandit culture, emphasizes the role of women as the custodians of the household's spiritual and physical wellbeing. Their morning ritual was a way of connecting with the divine, expressing gratitude and seeking blessings for the day. It also reinforced the importance of cleanliness, not just in the physical sense, but as a reflection of purity in thought and action.

In essence, this practice was more than just a routine - it was a daily reaffirmation of the values that the Kashmiri Pandit community held dear: purity, devotion and the sanctity of the home.

बटह कोरि हुन्द सुलि वोथुन
सुलि वथित ब्रांड फश दिउन
तथ छी वथान नेन्द्री मांदिन्यन
बटह कूरी शरमदार बन

A Kashmiri Pandit lady, rise with the dawn
Greet the morning light, before it's gone
Besmear the courtyard, pure and bright
Honor the rituals, in the first light

But alas, you wake when the sun is high
Midday slumber, under the open sky
Oh Kashmiri Pandit lady, where is your
pride

Let shame be your guide, let tradition
abide

In the bygone days, the homes of Kashmiri Pandits were humble yet profoundly meaningful structures, crafted primarily from mud with thatched roofs. These dwellings, though simple in design, carried a unique charm, harmoniously blending with the natural surroundings and reflecting the deep cultural roots of the time. Unlike the modern, more segmented living spaces, these homes were intricately tied to the rhythms of nature and the community's way of life. In front of these homes was the courtyard, a space that held immense significance in the daily lives of the residents. The courtyard, often a simple expanse of earth, served as a dynamic and versatile area, where a multitude of activities unfolded throughout the day. It was here that the family would gather in the mornings, basking in the early sunlight, sharing stories, and engaging in daily chores. This open space was not just a functional part of the home; it was the very heart of family life, where bonds were nurtured and strengthened.

Flanking the main entrance of the house were small, carefully maintained areas that served as the initial point of contact with the outside world. These spaces were more than mere thresholds; they were the welcoming arms of the home, where guests and visitors were received with warmth and hospitality. The act of sitting in these spaces, whether for casual conversation or during formal visits, was a common practice that fostered a sense of community and belonging. It was here that the rich traditions of Kashmiri hospitality were most evident, as every visitor was treated with respect and generosity, regardless of the time or circumstance.

The architecture of these homes, though modest, was a true reflection of the values and lifestyle of the Kashmiri Pandits. The simplicity of the structures belied the depth of the culture that thrived within them. Each home, with its earthen walls and

thatched roof, was a sanctuary of tradition, where every element had a purpose and a connection to the larger world. The natural materials used in construction were not only practical but also symbolized the community's reverence for the earth and their commitment to living in harmony with nature.

In these homes, the line between indoor and outdoor living was beautifully blurred. The courtyard and the spaces around the entrance were extensions of the interior, seamlessly integrating the home with the environment. This design encouraged a lifestyle that was deeply rooted in the outdoors, where the changing seasons and the cycles of nature were an integral part of daily life.

The communal aspects of these homes were further enhanced by the absence of rigid boundaries between private and public spaces. The courtyard, open to the sky, was a place where children played, elders rested, and guests were entertained. It was a space of shared experiences, where the joys and sorrows of life were collectively experienced and where the essence of Kashmiri Pandit culture was lived out daily.

In essence, the homes of Kashmiri Pandits were more than just shelters; they were living entities, breathing with the rhythms of the people who inhabited them. They stood as a testament to a way of life that was deeply intertwined with nature, community and tradition ... a way of life that, while simple, was rich in meaning and purpose.

The practice of besmearing the courtyard and entrance areas, known as "*Braand Fash*," transcended the realm of mere household chores, embodying a ritual steeped in symbolism and cultural significance. This careful application of fresh clay mixed with a small amount of cow dung, blended with water, was not just about maintaining cleanliness; it was a sacred act of purification that imbued the space with a sense of renewed vitality and spiritual sanctity. More than just a marker of

physical cleanliness, *Braand Fash* served as a visible testament to the well being and harmony of the family, signalling to all who visited that the household was thriving in health and spirit. Particularly significant when receiving guests, this ritual demonstrated the Kashmiri Pandits' deep-rooted tradition of hospitality, a quality that has been the bedrock of their cultural identity for generations. Through this simple yet profound act, the household proclaimed its readiness to welcome others, reflecting a community where warmth, respect, and the nurturing of relationships were paramount and where every visitor was regarded as a blessing to be honored with the utmost care and reverence.

In those times of scarcity, when resources were limited, the care taken to maintain a clean and welcoming space for guests demonstrated the community's values. It was a silent yet powerful message that despite the modesty of their means, the people of Kashmir held a great reverence for their guests. Hospitality was not just a duty but a cherished tradition, woven into the fabric of their daily lives.

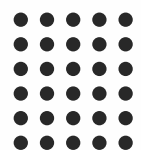
As we reflect on these practices today, they might seem like mere acts of cleaning to the untrained eye. However, a deeper contemplation reveals their socio-cultural significance. The homes of our forefathers were small, often just one or two rooms, yet they were filled with warmth and love. These simple huts were not just shelters but the centers of a rich cultural and spiritual life. The besmearing ritual, in its essence,

was a way to connect with the earth, maintain cleanliness, and honor the presence of guests, which was considered a blessing.

A notable exception to this practice (*Braand Fash*) was on the occasion of the birthday of any family member, when the besmearing was deliberately skipped. This custom added a layer of meaning, indicating that the day was set apart from the ordinary, a special time to celebrate life within the family.

Today, with the advent of modern concrete homes, these rituals are gradually fading away. The traditional Braand Fash, a vital part of the old Kashmiri Pandit household, has all but disappeared, taking with it the customs that were once integral to daily life. What remains are the memories of these bygone days, preserved in the stories and hearts of the elder generations.

As these rituals wane, it becomes increasingly important to remember and honour them. They are more than just cultural artifacts; they are a testament to the resilience, hospitality, and spiritual depth of the Kashmiri Pandit community. In an age of rapid change, holding on to these memories allows us to stay connected to our roots and ensures that the essence of our rich cultural heritage is not lost to time.



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Zyun Tchatun

Chopping of Fire Wood

Chander M Bhat

Zyun Tchatun, the traditional chopping of firewood, was once a deeply cherished communal activity that wove together the social fabric of the past. This practice was far more than a practical necessity; it was an event that brought families and neighbours together in a spirit of collective effort. Firewood, vital for *Yagna* rituals and used for cooking in the community kitchen (*Vooribal* in Kashmir), was gathered with a sense of purpose and unity. Days before the event, neighbours would collaborate to construct the community kitchen, setting the stage for the communal gathering. The rhythmic sound of axes striking wood, the earthy scent of fresh timber, and the shared laughter and conversations created an atmosphere of warmth and connection. These moments, filled with the essence of togetherness and tradition, are now cherished memories of a bygone era, reflecting a time when community bonds were strengthened through shared labour and mutual support.

In the days before the forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley, a unique and deeply communal tradition flourished within the Kashmiri Pandit community, especially in urban areas. This tradition centred around the collective effort of chopping firewood. Firewood was not just fuel; it was a crucial element in the numerous rituals and ceremonies that defined their culture and religious observances. The act of chopping wood was a communal affair, where neighbours and families would come together, forging bonds through shared labour and mutual support. This collective effort was more than a practical necessity; it was a manifestation of the strong sense of community that characterized the Kashmiri Pandit way of life. The rhythmic chopping of wood, the exchange of stories and laughter, and the

sense of unity it fostered were integral to their cultural identity, representing a time when the community thrived on cooperation, tradition, and a deep connection to their heritage.

A specific auspicious day was carefully selected for this activity, and the chosen date was communicated well in advance to neighbours and fellow villagers. This day was more than just an occasion to meet the practical need for firewood; it was a significant social event that embodied the spirit of community cooperation and mutual support. As the designated day approached, anticipation grew within the neighbourhood, with everyone looking forward to the gathering. On the day itself, young men from the village would come together, each carrying a large axe, locally known as a "*Maketch*" in Kashmiri. The sight of these men, tools in hand, symbolized the collective strength and unity of the community. The event was marked by a sense of shared purpose, as the rhythmic chopping of wood echoed through the village, accompanied by the camaraderie and laughter that naturally arose in such gatherings. This day of firewood preparation was as much about reinforcing social bonds as it was about ensuring the community's practical needs were met, making it a cherished tradition that brought people together in both work and celebration.

The day would commence with a gathering at the home of the individual who was soon to host an important ceremony, such as a wedding or *Yagnopavit* (the sacred thread ceremony). This gathering marked the beginning of a tradition steeped in cultural significance and community spirit. The focal point of the day's activities was the chosen tree, typically a large willow, a tree deeply rooted in Kashmiri culture and revered for its

symbolic value. The willow, often standing tall on the property of the host family, was more than just a source of firewood; it represented the family's preparedness and commitment to upholding the rituals and traditions that were central to their way of life. As the community gathered around, the selection of this tree underscored the importance of the upcoming ceremony, with the tree's very presence symbolizing the continuity of cultural practices. The act of chopping the willow was imbued with a sense of reverence and purpose, as the community collectively contributed to the preparations, reinforcing bonds of kinship and solidarity. This tradition, rich in symbolism, not only ensured the practical needs for the ceremony were met but also served as a powerful reminder of the shared heritage and collective identity of the Kashmiri Pandit community.

Before setting out to the spot where the willow tree was to be chopped, the young men gathered were warmly treated to tea and refreshments, a gesture of hospitality that highlighted the communal spirit of the occasion. This small yet meaningful feast was more than just a break for sustenance; it was a moment that allowed the participants to connect, share stories and strengthen the bonds of friendship and community. The gathering over tea served as a prelude to the day's labour, infusing the event with a sense of unity and mutual respect. It was during these moments of shared conversation and laughter that the young men not only prepared themselves for the physical task ahead but also reinforced the deep sense of belonging that characterized their community. The hospitality extended by the host family was a reflection of the gratitude and appreciation for the collective effort that was about to unfold, making the entire event a harmonious blend of tradition, cooperation and social connection. These young men gathered were welcomed by "*Izband Zaalun*", a Kashmiri tradition of burning a dry herbal seed of Rue (*Malvaceae*) called *Isband*, which when burnt in a fire produces an aroma to avert the evil eye. It is

observed on auspicious occasions.

These seeds are held in the right hand thumb and index finger and then applied to the forehead of the person, who is being blessed, along with her prayer for his/her prosperity and good health and then put in the fire pot (usually *Kangri*, known as *Isband Kangir*). Elderly ladies would recite the following '*wanvun wachun*'.

इसबन्द जालनस जंग कुस आव्यय
मंगला देवी त नंदकिशोर!

Once refreshed, the group would proceed to the location of the chosen willow tree. The wood from the willow would later play a vital role in the various ceremonies, serving as fuel for the sacred fire or as material for preparing different dishes in the temporary community kitchen (*Vooribal*). As the young men swung their axes in unison, their collective effort was seen as a meaningful contribution to the social fabric of the community, it was a profound expression of the community's collective responsibility to uphold and nurture their cultural and religious traditions, ensuring that the spiritual essence of their heritage was passed down through the generations. In essence, this tradition represented a harmonious fusion of practicality, spirituality, and social cohesion, embodying the core values that had bound the Kashmiri Pandit community together for generations. Each swing of the axe resonated with the commitment to preserve cultural heritage, while the communal gathering reinforced the bonds of kinship and mutual support. This tradition encapsulated the interconnectedness of daily life and spiritual practice, where the practical need for firewood was seamlessly woven with the spiritual significance of the ceremonies it would fuel. Through this ritual, the Kashmiri Pandit community reaffirmed their values of unity, cooperation, and reverence for tradition, ensuring that these principles continued to guide and sustain them through the generations.

A significant portion of the chopped wood was carefully stored on an auspicious day, chosen according to astrological considerations or community customs. The timing was crucial, as it allowed the wood to dry properly in the open air, ensuring it would be ready for use on the scheduled day of the ceremony. This preparation was not merely a matter of practicality but also carried symbolic weight, as the drying process was seen as purifying the wood, making it fit for sacred purposes.

The gathering itself was a blend of work and social interaction. As the wood was stacked and arranged in an orderly manner, conversations flowed, relationships were strengthened, and the sense of belonging to a larger community was reinforced. For the host, this collective effort was a blessing, as the laborious task of handling large quantities of wood became more manageable with the help of many hands. But beyond the practical assistance, there was an underlying sense of joy and fulfilment in seeing the community come together in this way. It was a day when the bonds of friendship and kinship were visibly strengthened through shared effort.

The successful completion of this task was celebrated with a sense of accomplishment and gratitude. The host family would express their appreciation, often with a small meal or refreshments, acknowledging the support of their community.

On this significant day, nearly all the aunts from both the paternal and maternal sides of the family, along with their husbands and children, would gather at the host's home. This gathering of extended family members turned what could have been a laborious task into a communal celebration, marked by collaboration, laughter and shared purpose.

A central element of this day was the preparation and serving of '*Vaer*,' a traditional salty rice dish that held great cultural significance. This flavourful dish, rich in spices and often including walnut

kernels, meat and other ingredients, was a cherished part of Kashmiri Pandit culinary heritage. Alongside '*Vaer*,' loaves of rice flour bread were also prepared. These foods were served to all who had gathered - relatives, neighbors and friends alike - transforming the event into a feast that was as much about nourishment as it was about togetherness. The serving of '*Vaer*' and rice flour bread was a way of informing everyone present that the date for the upcoming function had been set. This act of sharing food served as a symbolic announcement, signalling to the community that preparations were underway and that the ceremony would soon take place. It was a subtle yet effective way to communicate the importance of the occasion to all those who had a role to play.

At the heart of this culinary and communal effort was the host's sister, known affectionately as '*Pufi*.' She was typically entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the preparation of '*Vaer*' and the other traditional dishes. Her role was crucial, as she ensured that everything was prepared to perfection, reflecting the family's pride and commitment to upholding their customs. In recognition of her efforts, '*Pufi*' was often given a special token of appreciation known as '*Zang*.' This gratification was a way of acknowledging the hard work and dedication she brought to the task. It was more than just a reward; it was a gesture of love and respect, underscoring the important role she played in both the family and the larger community.

The elderly ladies would sing the following couplets when the logs of wood were brought into the house of the host.

सोन सिंजि मकचे रोप सुन्द दन छुई
वन खअति चंदन चटअने!!

The golden axe, adorned with a silver handle, is in hand as the people venture into the forest to chop down sandalwood.

सोन सिंजि मरानकचे दन दुब दार छुई
बब सुबदार छुई सन्न करान!!

The golden axe, with its strong handle and sharp edge, is ready as the head of the family makes preparations.

ज्युन चोट कारनदव बेयि तबरदारव!
अज्जी खबर गयि बान्धवन!!

The wood was chopped by labourers and woodcutters, and soon the news spread among the relatives.

वासदीव राजनेन तबरदारन!
कृष्ण जीनेन बान्धवन!!

The woodcutters of Vasudev (Sri Krishna) completed their task, and the news swiftly spread among the relatives of Sri Krishna.

Evenings on such occasions were filled with joy and anticipation, creating a vibrant atmosphere that resonated throughout the household. After completing the day's feasting or dinner, the entire family would gather, eager to partake in the evening's festivities. The ladies of the house, in particular, would come together in a large room, bringing with them the traditional musical instruments that were central to the evening's entertainment. Among these instruments was the '*Tumbakhnaer*,' a tubular earthen drum similar to the Indian '*Tabla*,' featuring a long neck and a side covered with goat skin. This instrument produced a rhythmic beat that set the tone for the evening. Alongside the *Tumbakhnaer*, an earthen or metal pitcher and a set of bronze cups known as '*Khos*' were used as makeshift instruments, each adding its unique sound to the ensemble. As the music began, the room would come alive with the sounds of singing and dancing, a joyful expression of the community's cultural heritage. The women would sing traditional folk songs, many of which were passed down through generations, each one holding a special place in the hearts of those gathered. These songs, rich in emotion and history, were often attributed to the specific function being celebrated.

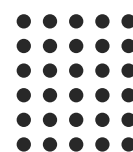
One of the most common and beloved songs would soon fill the air, its familiar melody bringing smiles to the faces of all present.

अज हाई करि वरि तय अज हाई गिणदिवाय!
बोउबुजिनि गरी गिंदवाय!!

We've prepared the 'Vaer' just today,
Let's gather now, come what may,
In the house of 'Boobji,' so bright,
Let's dance and play through the night.

The music, combined with the rhythmic beats of the *Tumbakhnaer* and the clinking of the *Khos*, created an enchanting atmosphere, transporting everyone to a place where tradition and celebration intertwined. The evening's festivities were not just about entertainment; they were a reaffirmation of the cultural bonds that united the family and the community, making such occasions truly memorable.

In today's world, where modern conveniences such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) gas stoves have become ubiquitous, the necessity for communal activities like *Zyun Tchatun* has largely disappeared. The firewood once essential is now readily available in urban markets, making the traditional gathering of neighbours to chop wood an unnecessary endeavour. This shift toward modern efficiency has led to the gradual fading of a tradition that once held profound social significance. The act of *Zyun Tchatun*, once a powerful symbol of unity, cooperation, and community spirit, has been supplanted by the conveniences of modern technology. As a result, what was once a vibrant and meaningful practice is now a distant memory, leaving behind only the sweet and nostalgic echoes of a time when the simple task of chopping firewood brought people together in shared purpose and connection.



Darbha Amavasya

Chander M Bhat

Darbha Mavas falls on **beuuderpeth mavas** (the 15th day of the dark fortnight of beuuderpeth) every year. This day is dedicated to Darbha or Kusha Grass (*Desmotachya bipinnata*/Salt-reed grass), the holy grass that is used in **puja**, during **karma kanda** and other religious ceremonies. This grass is also worn as a ring (**pavitar**) on the ring finger by the person who is performing the rituals. Darbha grass is not cultivated but it grows wild in damp marshy and low lying lands like paddy fields etc. It grows up to 2 feet and appears pointed at the top. It is extremely rough and if rubbed the wrong way may cut through skin.

According to ancient scriptures this grass came into existence after **Samudra Manthan** (the churning of the cosmic ocean). To churn the cosmic ocean of milk, when there was no one to support the base of Mandava Mountain, Lord Vishnu took the form of a tortoise and gave support. During the churning, a hair of the tortoise fell loose and was washed away to the shore where it turned into Darbha grass. When the nectar was finally procured, due to improper handling a few drops of it fell on the grass, which sanctified the grass giving it healing properties.

On **Drabha amavasya** day in Kashmir, elderly person of the family would go to paddy fields in the wee hours to get darbha and would knot this **Darbi Toojei** at the hasp (**haankal**) on the main entrance of the house to ward off evil spirits. Darbha has the highest value in conducting the phonetic vibrations through its tip and that is why priests dip the tip of darbha into water and sprinkle it all over to purify the place. My respected father Pandit Dina Nath Bhat used to collect maximum chunk of Darbha for distribution among the **purohits** in

Srinagar, especially to Pandit Vishamber Nath Bradu of Kani Kadal, our **Kul Brahman**. During **hawan**, darbha is placed on all four sides of the **hawan kund** to block all negative radiations.

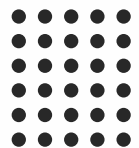
According to Rig Veda, this grass is used in sacred ceremonies and also to prepare a seat for priests and Gods. It is believed that wearing a ring (**paviter**) made of darbha blocks energy generated during meditation from being discharged through our body. During eclipses, darbha is placed on vessels containing water and food, so that the negative effect of rays from eclipse does not spoil eatables.

In Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says in Chapter 6.11: "To practice **Dhyan** yoga, one should go to a sheltered place and for the seat should lay Darbha/Kusha grass on the ground and then cover it with deerskin and a soft cloth."

A single leafed darbha ring (**paviter**) is used for the ceremonies related to death; a ring made of double leaf is used for auspicious occasions and daily routine **puja**; a three leaf ring is used for inauspicious occasions (death related functions) like **amavasya tarpan, pitr shraad** etc., and a four-leaf darbha ring is used for the prayers in the temple.

It is believed that Buddha meditated on a Darbha mat and got enlightened under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. Darbha is plucked or harvested on **Amavasya** day [last day of dark fortnight] only.

Darbha is also used as medicine to treat dysentery, menorrhagia and diuretics.



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Nouv Sheen

The first snowfall

Chander M Bhat

Winter in Kashmir was nothing short of a magical experience, where the landscape transformed into a serene white wonderland. As the first snowflakes began from the azure sky, a hushed silence would blanket the valley as if nature herself paused to witness the beauty of the moment. The snowflakes, delicate and pure, danced gracefully in the air, each one unique as it twirled downwards, creating a mesmerizing ballet of white against the deep blue of the heavens.

Kashmiris, wrapped in their warm *Pherans* (a long woollen gown), used to sit by the windows and balconies (*Dub* in Kashmiri), cradling a *Kangri* close to their bodies for warmth. The gentle heat from the *Kangri*, a traditional earthen pot filled with smoldering embers, provided a comforting contrast to the crisp, cold air that seeped in from the outside. From their cozy perches, they would watch in quiet delight as the snowflakes descended, slowly covering the world in a soft, white blanket. The ground, once brown and barren, would glisten under the growing layer of snow, each flake landing with a soft, almost musical crackle. The rooftops of the houses and the branches of the Chinar trees bowed under the weight of the snow, creating a scene that looked as if of a postcard. The entire landscape, from the mountains to the meadows, was draped in white, reflecting the soft light of the winter sun and giving the world an ethereal glow.

Children, bundled in layers, would rush outside to play, their laughter ringing through the air as they made snowmen and threw snowballs, their red cheeks flushed with cold and joy. The elderly would sit quietly, sipping on cups of hot *Kahwa*, as they reminisced about winters past. There

was a sense of timelessness in the air, as if the snow had the power to suspend the rush of life, allowing everyone to simply be in the moment. As the snow continued to fall, the night slowly descended, and the world became even more magical. The snow covered landscape glowed under the pale light of the moon and the only sounds were the occasional distant bark of a dog or the creaking of snow laden branches. The beauty of winter in Kashmir lay not just in the scenery, but in the way it brought people together, huddled in warmth and companionship, finding joy in the simplest of pleasures - the silent fall of snow, the warmth of a *Kangri*, and the shared stories of winter days long gone.

In the Kashmir Valley, where winter stretched over a full six months, the season was not merely a time of cold and snow but a period deeply intertwined with cherished rituals and traditions. These rituals, passed down through generations, were not only a means of coping with the long, harsh winter but also a way to bring families closer together, creating a sense of warmth and belonging.

During the harsh winters of Kashmir, one of the most beloved rituals was *Gaad Bateh*, a traditional feast where fish and rice were offered to the *Ghar Devta*. Families would gather around the warmth of the hearth (*Daan* in Kashmiri), the aroma of freshly cooked dishes filling the home, creating a comforting contrast to the biting cold outside. This meal was more than just sustenance; it was a time of togetherness, where stories were shared, and laughter filled the air, reinforcing the bonds that held the family close. Another significant winter ritual was *Khetsi Mavas*, a day dedicated to remembering and honouring the Yaksha,

known locally as Yetchh. Alongside these rituals, festivals such as Shivratri, *Teel Authham*, *Makar Sankranti*, and *Gour Tray* were celebrated with great enthusiasm, each adding to the rich tapestry of traditions that marked the winter season. These rituals, steeped in cultural significance, brought warmth and unity to the long, cold months, and were cherished moments of joy and reflection in the lives of the Kashmiri Pandit community.

Among these winter rituals, one that held special significance in the house of a newly wedded son was *Nouv Sheen*. This ritual, unique to the Kashmiri Pandit tradition, was a beautiful celebration of the couple's first winter together. *Nouv Sheen*, meaning "new snow," was symbolic of purity, new beginnings and the deep bond between the newlyweds.

In the home where a son's marriage had recently taken place, the arrival of winter brought with it a unique sense of anticipation. As the harsh cold settled over the Kashmir Valley, the family eagerly awaited the first snowfall of the season, a moment steeped in tradition. Each morning, as the chill of winter wrapped itself around the valley, the family members, wrapped in their warm *Pherans*, would rise early and quietly make their way to the windows. With a mixture of excitement and hope, they would peer through the frosty panes, searching for any sign that snow had begun to fall or had fallen during the night. There was a quiet thrill in these moments of waiting.

The first snowfall was not just a natural occurrence; it was a cherished event, especially for the family celebrating their son's new marriage. The snow, with its soft, pure whiteness, symbolized a fresh start for the newlyweds ... a clean slate upon which they would write the story of their life together. The family knew that the first snow would bring with it the special ritual of *Nouv Sheen*, a celebration of the couple's first winter together, and so the anticipation

was laced with the warmth of love and tradition.

As they peered out into the stillness of the early morning, the family members would exchange knowing glances, their breath fogging the glass as they looked for the first flakes gently descending from the sky. The quiet serenity of the moment was filled with hope, as they imagined the joy that would fill the home once the snow began to fall in earnest. The sound of the first snowflake hitting the ground, barely audible but full of promise, was like a gentle whisper of blessings, heralding the beginning of a new chapter in the family's life.

And when at last the snow fell, there was a collective sense of joy and relief. The family would gather, united by the shared excitement of the season's first snowfall, ready to celebrate the age-old tradition that had been passed down through generations. The snow outside became a canvas for new memories, marking the first winter of the newlyweds with a sense of magic and wonder that would linger long after the last flake had fallen.

When the first snow of the season fell, whether in the stillness of the night or during the early morning hours, a family member would quietly rise, filled with a sense of tradition and playfulness. Stepping outside, they would gently gather a small handful of the fresh, pristine snow, handling it with care as if it were something precious. They carefully wrapped the snow in a piece of paper, shaping it into a neat little parcel that looked as though it held something delicate and valuable. Once satisfied that the small bundle appeared just like a well-protected gift, they would tiptoe into the room where the bride slept peacefully, and with a quiet smile, place the snowy parcel near her bed. It was a silent gesture, a playful surprise that embodied the warmth and love of the family, intertwining the magic of the first snowfall with the joy of welcoming a new member into their lives.

As the soft light of morning filtered into the

room, the bride would stir from her sleep, unaware of the surprise that awaited her. Still wrapped in the warmth of her dreams, she would notice a small parcel placed gently beside her bed. Curious and unsuspecting, she would reach out and unwrap it, her fingers carefully unfolding the paper. The moment she realized that it was a bundle of fresh snow, a sudden, delighted gasp would escape her lips.

In that instant, a chorus of joyous voices would erupt from just outside her door. The young members of the family, who had been quietly peeking through the slightly ajar door, unable to contain their excitement, would burst into the room, clapping their hands and crying out in unison, "**Nouv Sheen! Nouv Sheen!**" - the joyful proclamation of "new snow, new snow!" Their faces would be alight with glee as they celebrated this playful and heart-warming tradition, their laughter filling the room.

The bride, now fully awake and beaming with delight, would join in the merriment, her heart warmed by the affection and the shared joy of this moment. The ritual of **Nouv Sheen**, marking the first snowfall of her married life, would become a cherished memory, symbolizing the new beginnings and the bond she now shared with her new family. The snow, once cold and fleeting, would melt away, but the warmth of this moment would linger, wrapping the household in a blanket of love and togetherness that would be remembered for years to come.

The room would fill with laughter and joy as the family celebrated the playful tradition of **Nouv Sheen**, with everyone, including the bride, joining in the merriment. Her smile would be bright, reflecting the warmth and love that surrounded her in this moment. Yet, amid the light-heartedness, the bride would be reminded of her next task, a cherished custom that carried both significance and expectation. According to tradition, she would now have to arrange for

a hunted wild duck, known as "**Shikaar**" in Kashmiri, to be brought as a gift from her parents to her in-laws. This gesture, symbolic of respect and the strengthening of familial bonds, was an important part of the winter ritual. The bride would embrace this responsibility with grace, understanding that it was not just a gift but a meaningful offering that honoured the connection between her two families. As she prepared to fulfil this tradition, the echoes of joy from the **Nouv Sheen** celebration would linger, blending seamlessly with the deeper, enduring ties of love and unity that this season of snow brought to the heart of the family.

The tradition could also take an amusing turn when the daughter-in-law, if witty enough, decided to reverse the roles and apply the same playful trick on an unsuspecting elderly member of her husband's family. In such cases, she would carefully prepare the snow parcel, just as it had been done for her, and place it near the elder's bed with a mischievous smile. The family, always eager for a bit of fun, would wait in anticipation as the elder discovered the cleverly wrapped snow. When the elder finally unwrapped the parcel, realizing they had been caught in the same playful ruse, the room would fill with laughter and cheers. According to tradition, the person who fell victim to this light-hearted prank would then be responsible for arranging a wild duck, or "**Shikaar**", for a grand family feast. This reversal not only deepened the bond between the daughter-in-law and her new family but also added an extra layer of joy and camaraderie to the winter celebrations, turning the tradition into a shared moment of laughter and unity that everyone cherished.

This cherished ritual of **Nouv Sheen**, once a joyful and integral part of Kashmiri Pandit culture, faded into the past following the forced exodus of the community from the valley in 1990. The displacement took them to the plains, far from the snow covered landscapes that had been their home for

generations. In these new, warmer environments, the snow that had once symbolized new beginnings and family bonds was no longer a part of their daily lives. The playful traditions that revolved around the first snowfall, such as the *Nouv Sheen* ritual, became distant memories, carried in the hearts of those who had lived them. These memories, however, remained vivid, evoking a sense of nostalgia and a deep connection to the homeland they were forced to leave behind. Although the snow no longer fell on their rooftops, the legacy of these traditions endured, a testament to the resilience of their culture and the enduring spirit of the Kashmiri Pandit community.



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The book *How to Collect Stamps* published by the Deptt. of Posts, has earned him genuine accolades. He worked on the project of tracing the roots of his co-villagers and of the village Murran, resulting into the culmination of a widely acclaimed book *Murran...My Village*. A man with depth, Chander M. Bhat also has another book, *Ocean by Drops* (a collection of poems) in his vase having colorful poems. His book *Ancient History of Jammu and Kashmir*, confirms his researching capability.

Various research papers like The Splendor that is Amarnath and Vitasta The Sacred River of Kashmir are valuable additions to his works that have proved very fruitful and a guiding force in the exile period of Kashmiri Pandits community of which the author is also a member.

Mr. Bhat has authored eighteen books and has recently released a book on the *Shrines and Temples of Kashmir, Volume 1*. This book will come up with 4 volumes covering about four hundred shrines and temples of Kashmir. He has documented all the 661 Shrines and Temples of Kashmir spread over all the ten districts of Kashmir.

Mr. Bhat is recipient of two Gold Medals for his exhibits on Jammu and Kashmir (in Philately), first recipient Tika Lal Taploo Award for contribution to the Culture of Kashmir, Padam Sri Shri Moti Lal Saqi Gaurav Samman 2015, Kirti Samman 2016, Sri Sharda Stabadi Samman 2022, and many more.

Mr. Bhat has designed 138 Special Cover, Special Cancellations and other Philatelic material for the Department of Posts, India.

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Lost Kashmiri Festivals and Rituals: Reminiscing Memories, Significance and Processes

Arun Kaul

The rich tapestry of Kashmiri Pandit culture, woven with threads of history, spirituality, and tradition, has faced an existential threat in recent decades. The exodus and migration of Kashmiri Pandits have not only displaced communities but have also led to the gradual erosion of cultural practices. Many festivals and rituals, once vibrant and integral to daily life, are now teetering on the brink of extinction. This article endeavors to delve into the lost festivals and rituals of Kashmiri Pandits, exploring their significance, the memories they evoke, and the processes involved in their celebration.

Kashmiri Pandit festivals are deeply rooted in the region's ancient history and Hindu traditions. They reflect a profound connection with nature, spirituality, and community bonding. Each festival is a tapestry of rituals, music, dance, and culinary delights, celebrating the harmony between humans and the divine.

We are all familiar with the renowned festivals of Herath (Shivratri) and Zyeth Atham. Herath, the most significant festival for Kashmiri Pandits, is dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. Meanwhile, Zyeth Atham celebrates the birth of Lord Zyesht, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. However, there is one festival that holds a special place in the Kashmiri Pandit tradition as it symbolizes gratitude and reverence towards the household deity. The festival is a way to seek blessings for prosperity and protection. The festival of Gada Batta is a unique and culturally significant celebration for the Kashmiri Pandit community. Here's an exploration of its history and relevance:

Meaning and Origin:

The term *Gada Batta* translates to "Fish and

Rice" in Kashmiri. The festival's exact historical origins are not precisely documented, but it has been celebrated for generations as a way to honor the household deities and seek their blessings. This festival is traditionally celebrated on any Tuesday or Saturday during the dark fortnight of the lunar month of *Pausha*. It involves the preparation and offering of fish to the *Ghar Devta* or household deity.

Kashmir, with its abundant water bodies, has a long-standing tradition of fish being an integral part of its cuisine. Fish is considered a symbol of abundance and fertility, and its inclusion in the festival highlights its cultural importance. On the other hand, rice represents sustenance and nourishment; together, they are offered to the deity as a prayer for a bountiful life.

Preparations:

The festival requires meticulous preparation. We can vividly recall the excitement which used to be associated with "Gaad Batte" in Kashmir. We have grown up hearing stories of "*Dayatraaz*", the holy Deity who wears *ghungroo* (a musical anklet made of metallic bells) and is responsible for safeguarding our Home.

Culinary Preparations

1. **Selection of Fish:** The selection of fish is a vital aspect of the Gaad Batta festival, as it serves as the centerpiece of the ritual offerings. Choosing the right fish requires both attention to detail and an understanding of quality, making it a task that is often guided by tradition and experience.

Before purchasing the fish, it is customary to conduct a thorough

examination to ensure its freshness and suitability for the festival. One of the key indicators of freshness, as passed down by our elders, is the color of the fish's gills. Elders would impart their wisdom, emphasizing the importance of this detail: "Always look at the redness of the gills before buying a fish. The more vibrant and red the gills, the fresher the fish."

This advice reflects the practical knowledge honed over generations, rooted in the understanding that the gills' color is a reliable sign of the fish's freshness. A deep red hue indicates that the fish is fresh and has been recently caught, ensuring that it will have the best flavor and texture when prepared for the festival.

In addition to examining the gills, other aspects such as the clarity of the eyes and the firmness of the flesh may also be considered to assess the fish's quality. This careful selection process not only ensures the culinary success of the festival dish but also honors the tradition's emphasis on presenting the best offerings to the household deity.

2. **Cooking:** The preparation of fish for the Gaad Batta festival is a culinary endeavor steeped in tradition, showcasing the rich flavors and techniques of Kashmiri cuisine. This process involves not only the careful selection of ingredients but also a deep understanding of the cooking methods passed down through generations.

Once the freshest fish is chosen, the culinary journey begins with gathering a variety of specific spices and ingredients that are quintessential to Kashmiri cooking. These spices, known for their aromatic and robust qualities, include turmeric, fennel, ginger, and a pinch of Kashmiri red chili, which imparts a distinctive flavor and vibrant color to the dish.

The fish is often paired with radish, a

traditional accompaniment that adds both texture and a subtle sweetness. In some variations, other seasonal vegetables might be included, each contributing its own unique character to the dish. The radish, sliced into thin pieces, is cooked alongside the fish, allowing the flavors to meld harmoniously.

The cooking process is a delicate balance of timing and technique. The fish is gently simmered, ensuring it absorbs the rich blend of spices and becomes tender without losing its form. This method highlights the natural flavors of the fish while infusing it with the aromatic spice blend.

Throughout the preparation, the cook must pay close attention to the heat and timing, ensuring that the spices are perfectly roasted to release their full aroma and flavor without overpowering the dish. This careful orchestration of ingredients and technique results in a dish that is both a culinary delight and a fitting tribute to the traditions of Gaad Batta.

The final dish, with its fragrant and flavorful profile, is a testament to the culinary artistry of Kashmiri cuisine, offering a sensory experience that is both comforting and evocative of cultural heritage.

Ritual Preparations

The venue for the festival's rituals was the *kainie*, the topmost floor or parapet of the house, which held special significance as a sacred space. A specific portion of the Kainie was carefully selected for the ritual. This area was meticulously cleaned and then mopped with a traditional mixture of cow dung and special clay known as *gurut maecz* in Kashmiri. This practice not only purified the space but also symbolized a connection to the earth and the divine.

Once the floor was prepared, dried

yellow grass was spread evenly over the mopped portion, creating a natural and rustic setting for the offerings. A *thali*, or ceremonial plate, was then arranged with great care. It included rice and the specially cooked fish with radish, alongside a small raw fish marked with vermilion, signifying prosperity and protection.

In addition to the culinary offerings, a glass of water was placed on the *thali*, symbolizing purity and sustenance. A lamp, or *diya*, was also lit and positioned in front of the *thali*. The lamp's placement was done with caution to ensure it was away from the grass, thus avoiding any risk of fire. The glowing *diya* represented the light of knowledge and the presence of the divine.

This carefully orchestrated setup on the *kainie* was not just a ritual; it was a deeply spiritual act that connected the family to their cultural roots and the blessings of the household deity. The preparations for Gaad Batta thus embodied a harmonious blend of tradition, devotion, and communal celebration.

No one was permitted to approach the sacred area on the *kainie* before dawn, as it was considered a revered space meant solely for the household deity and the mystical "Dayatraaz." To maintain the sanctity of the place, the *kainie* was typically locked until the following morning, ensuring that it remained untouched and undisturbed throughout the night.

As the first light of morning broke, the entire family would gather with eager anticipation. There was a palpable sense of excitement and reverence as they prepared to discover whether the Dayatraaz had visited and partaken in the offerings. The eldest member of the family, often regarded as the keeper of traditions, would take the lead in examining the area.

With careful and deliberate movements, the elder would approach the spot where the *thali* had been placed the previous night. The family watched intently as he scrutinized every detail, looking for signs of the divine visitor's presence. After several moments of thoughtful observation, the elder would turn to the family, his face beaming with a mix of pride and satisfaction.

"Look here," he would announce confidently, pointing to the subtle clues left behind. "See this scattered rice, and notice how the fish is tilted and partially eaten. This is unmistakably the work of the Dayatraaz. He has come and consumed a portion of the rice and fish."

This declaration was met with a sense of awe and gratitude, as it confirmed the blessings bestowed upon the household. The scattered grains of rice, now imbued with the divine presence, were carefully collected and distributed among the family members as *prasaad*. This sacred offering, believed to carry the blessings of the deity, was consumed with reverence and joy, reinforcing the spiritual connection and communal bond within the family.

The morning ritual of examining the *kainie* and sharing the *prasaad* was a cherished tradition that underscored the cultural and religious significance of Gaad Batta, weaving together faith, family, and the rich tapestry of Kashmiri heritage.

Gaad Batt is more than just a festival; it is a celebration of cultural heritage and family unity. Preserving and reviving this tradition is crucial for maintaining the cultural identity of Kashmiri Pandits. By understanding and participating in Gaad Batt, the community can keep its rich traditions alive and pass them on to future generations.

The Vanishing Traditions

With the migration of Kashmiri Pandits,

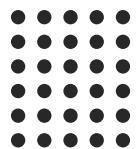
these festivals have seen diminished participation and fading memories. The younger generation, growing up away from their cultural roots, often lacks awareness of these traditions' significance and intricacies.

To revive these traditions, it is imperative to:

1. **Document and Share:** Create comprehensive documentation of festivals and rituals, including their history, significance, and processes. Sharing these through books, articles, and digital media can help educate the younger generation.
2. **Community Engagement:** Encourage community gatherings and celebrations, even in diaspora settings. This can foster a sense of belonging and continuity.
3. **Educational Initiatives:** Introduce cultural education programs in schools and community centers to teach the history and practices of Kashmiri Pandit festivals.
4. **Digital Platforms:** Utilize social media and online forums to connect dispersed communities, share memories, and organize virtual celebrations.

Conclusion

The festivals and rituals of Kashmiri Pandits are not mere events; they are the lifeblood of a community's identity. Preserving them is crucial for maintaining the cultural heritage and providing future generations with a sense of belonging. By reminiscing about these lost traditions and understanding their significance, we can work towards a cultural revival that ensures these cherished practices continue to enrich lives for generations to come. Reviving lost festivals is not just about preserving rituals; it's about reawakening the spirit of community, history, and spirituality that these festivals embody.



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Kashmiri Roots: A Journey Through Forgotten Traditions

Ridhima Kaul

Nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, Kashmir is more than just a region of breathtaking landscapes; it is a cradle of ancient civilizations, spiritual traditions and a timeless cultural heritage. Kashmiri culture is a vivid tapestry woven with threads of history, art, spirituality and a deep connection to nature. From the gentle lull of traditional folk music to the mesmerizing art of pashmina weaving, from the meditative Sufi poetry to the vibrant festivals that once echoed through the valleys, Kashmir has long been a beacon of cultural richness.

At the core of this cultural mosaic lies a harmonious blend of Hinduism and Islam, shaping a way of life that is both unique and syncretic. These festivals and rituals weren't merely events; they were essential expressions of Kashmiri identity, interwoven with the rhythms of nature, the prayers of the people and the wisdom of generations. However, as time has passed, many of these ancient festivals and customs have faded into memory, preserved only in the hearts of the elders and as nostalgic tales for the diaspora. With the advent of modernity and the turning point of the 1990 exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, a vital part of Kashmir's cultural fabric began to unravel. This migration, driven by political turmoil and violence, uprooted a once-thriving community, causing a significant rupture in the cultural continuity that had flourished for centuries. As these rituals and festivals faded from daily life, they were carried as memories by the diaspora, leaving a void in the cultural landscape of the valley.

This article seeks to shine a light on these forgotten festivals and rituals, paying homage to the rich cultural legacy that has shaped the Kashmiri identity for centuries.

By exploring these lost traditions, especially for the younger generations of Kashmiri Pandits who grew up away from their roots, we aim to rekindle a connection to the cultural and spiritual heritage that shaped their ancestors. These rituals, rooted in the rhythms of nature and agricultural cycles, hold profound meanings not only spiritually but also in terms of ecological awareness and sustainability. This article is an invitation to the younger generation to remember and preserve these cultural treasures, ensuring they endure as symbols of Kashmiri identity in an ever-evolving world.

Kashmir, often referred to as *Reshi Vaer* or the "Valley of Saints," is a region deeply interwoven with spirituality, wisdom and cultural symbiosis. The rich tapestry of ancient Kashmiri culture is a blend of indigenous practices, Vedic traditions and later influences from Buddhism, Shaivism and Sufism. This harmonious coexistence of spiritual paths gave rise to unique festivals and rituals reflecting not only religious devotion but also a profound connection to the natural world. Kashmiri festivals traditionally marked the cycles of nature, agricultural seasons and communal bonds. Spring and autumn harvests, solstices and sacred milestones were celebrated through rituals such as *Khetsimavas* and *Zang Trai*, honoring the bounty of the earth, while spiritual ceremonies like *Herath* (Shivratri) and *Navreh* (Kashmiri New Year) held deep cultural significance. The syncretic nature of Kashmiri traditions is reflected in how these festivals embodied teachings from both Hinduism and Islam, particularly Sufism.

A unique aspect of Kashmiri Pandit culture is the observance of 24 *sanskaras* (sacraments) throughout one's life, a

distinctive practice in comparison to the broader Hindu culture, which typically observes 12. These rites mark the key stages of an individual's spiritual, moral and social journey and showcase the deep-seated religious and cultural values of the community. Among these *sanskaras* are significant milestones, some of the prominent *sanskaras* include:

Gharbhadhaan, Smeenthonayan, Punsvan, Jaat Karma, Naan Karma, Nishkramann, Ann Prashann, Chuda Karan, Karanvedh Sanskar, Yagnopavit, Trevedic, Upakarma, Chatuhotrukam-Apvavarge Chatuhotrukam, Pravargya Varth Apvavarge Pravargya Varth, Arun Varth, Apvavarge Arunavarth, Upanishad Varth, Shree Kaam, Yashskam, Apvavarge Upanishad Varth, Godhaan, Apvavarge Trevidhkm, Vivah Sanskara, Antyeshti.

Each is imbued with symbolism and wisdom passed down through generations. While many are still practiced today, some have receded into the annals of history, existing only as cherished memories.

Among the cherished traditions of Kashmiri Pandit households is *Sanwaari Bharun* (the ritual of filling two sacred pots) and *Sandhya Chong* (lighting the evening lamp). These practices, though small, hold immense significance in the spiritual and daily lives of Kashmiri Pandit families. Almost every Kashmiri Pandit kitchen houses two small pots, *sanwaaris*, typically made from earthenware, copper, or bronze. Traditionally, the responsibility of caring for these sacred pots fell to the eldest woman in the household, who would bathe, enter the kitchen, and wash and fill them with fresh water each morning. In earlier times, water was drawn from the river, symbolizing purity, though today it's drawn from the home. These pots are seen as vessels for the divine, with one pot believed to house Goddess Rith, who, according to legend, sought refuge in the pot to protect herself from demons. The second pot is said to

embody the *Ghardevta*, the protective deity of the home, believed to guard against negative influences. These two pots are deeply revered, worshipped during major festivals like *Herath*, *Kahnetra* and *Yagnopavit*, and a small portion of each day's first-cooked food is offered to them as a mark of respect. This practice continues to symbolize the sanctity of the Kashmiri kitchen, blending reverence for tradition with daily life.

Equally significant is the *Sandhya Chong*, the lighting of the evening lamp, which marks the transition from day to night. As the sun dips below the horizon, the lady of the house lights a lamp filled with mustard oil, places it by a window facing the setting sun, and chants sacred mantras. This ritual, though simple, carries profound meaning, as it represents the dispersal of darkness and negativity from the household and an invocation for prosperity and knowledge. The soft glow of the evening lamp becomes a symbol of hope, wisdom and purity, illuminating Kashmiri Pandit homes as a reminder of the eternal power of light and positivity.

One enduring symbol of Kashmiri wedding customs is the *Dejhoor*, a hexagonal gold ornament worn by married women. The *Dejhoor*, sanctified during the *Devgon* ceremony, is threaded through the ear cartilage and symbolizes the union of Shiva and Shakti. It is tied with a red thread and blessed with Vedic and Tantric mantras, marking the bride's spiritual transformation. More than just jewellery, the *Dejhor* symbolizes *Dvija* (twice-born), akin to the *Yagnopavit* (sacred thread) of Brahmin men. It represents the bride's spiritual rebirth and is traditionally worn even after her husband's passing, symbolizing an eternal bond. Following marriage, the *Dejhoor* is paired with a small gold chain called *Ath from the husband's family*, creating the *Attahor*, a unique emblem of Kashmiri Pandit culture that

marries spiritual depth with identity. However, in contemporary times, many married Kashmiri women have moved away from wearing the Dejhoor.

While these festivals and rituals have survived the passage of time, the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 forced a transformative change in their celebration. Dispersed across various regions, families had to adapt their traditions to new environments, leading to modified or simplified practices. Though the essence of the festivals remains, the methods of observance have evolved as communities strive to preserve their heritage while embracing modern realities.

In remembering these cultural gems, we not only pay homage to our ancestors but also foster a connection for future generations, ensuring that Kashmir's traditions endure as a source of identity and pride. By reviving these memories, we rekindle the spirit of Kashmir, one that echoes with resilience, unity and a deep-seated connection to the past, a bridge to the future.

Many Kashmiri Pandit festivals are still observed, though often in modified forms. Herath, for instance, remains the most widely celebrated festival, symbolizing a connection to Shiva. Earlier, it was a days-long event where families performed intricate rituals with local resources. Today, while Herath is still celebrated with fervor, it has adapted to modern settings, often condensed into a single-day event to accommodate contemporary schedules.

Navreh, the Kashmiri New Year, continues to be a significant celebration, symbolizing a fresh start and linking families to their agrarian roots. Traditionally, it involved elaborate rituals to prepare for the upcoming year, such as decorating homes with fresh flowers and offering rice to deities. In contemporary celebrations, particularly for families who have migrated, Navreh focuses on family gatherings and

traditional meals, reminding the younger generation of its significance while fitting within their daily lives.

Makar Sankranti, another important festival, has also evolved significantly. Traditionally, it was a time for Kashmiri Pandits to honor their deceased ancestors, dedicating the day to remembrance and offerings. Families would prepare traditional delicacies and place them on the terrace or in the *brarkain* (the small courtyard often used for religious and cultural activities) as offerings to their ancestors. In this act of devotion, families would donate traditional kangris (earthen pots used to keep warm) and clothing items to the needy, reinforcing the spirit of generosity and gratitude. This practice served as a vital link to their cultural heritage, emphasizing respect for family lineage and ancestral ties. In contemporary times, while the festival is still celebrated, the focus may shift slightly due to urban living and lifestyle changes. Families often commemorate Makar Sankranti with smaller gatherings, sharing stories of their ancestors and preparing offerings in a more simplified manner. Yet, the essence of the festival remains, reminding the younger generation of their roots and the importance of honoring those who came before them.

Through these adaptations, Kashmiri Pandits continue to keep their cultural practices alive, ensuring that even in modern settings, the spirit of their traditions is preserved and cherished.

During the celebration of Herath, every family member, from the youngest child to the eldest elder, would immerse themselves in the festival's preparations. This three-day festival, often coinciding with frosty snowfall days, brought immense joy and warmth to Kashmiri Pandits. Families would gather, sharing laughter and stories, while kids and elderly members engaged in the game of *Haar*, a traditional pastime

using small shells. The sense of community and shared purpose created a vibrant atmosphere, reinforcing bonds that transcended generations.

Similarly, Khetchimavas, the harvest festival, carries its own rich memories. As families celebrated this occasion, they would express gratitude not just for the harvest but for the abundance of life itself. Traditionally, offerings were made to Yaksh, including Khetcher, the traditional *khichidi*, along with *Maunj Haak Anchaar* (knol-khol pickle). This offering of Khetcher is dedicated to Yaksh, who is believed to protect households from negativity and bad omens. The homes would be filled with the aroma of these delicacies, serving as a reminder of the connection between the land and its people, emphasizing gratitude and communal harmony.

In an age where cultural identities can easily fade amidst globalization, the responsibility of the younger generation of Kashmiri Pandits to know and preserve their heritage has never been more critical. Understanding our cultural roots is not merely about nostalgia; it is about recognizing the richness of our traditions and the stories that define who we are.

While many young Kashmiri Pandits are stepping forward to embrace their heritage, it's essential to acknowledge that not all engage actively. For some, the fast-paced modern world may overshadow the importance of cultural knowledge. However, fostering a deeper understanding of our traditions can empower them to carry forward the legacy of our ancestors. It is not just a privilege but a responsibility for the youth to delve into the teachings of their heritage, ensuring that the essence of our culture is passed down through generations.

With the rise of social media, many young individuals are harnessing platforms like Instagram and Facebook to document and share their heritage. These platforms have

become powerful tools for cultural revival, featuring pages dedicated to Kashmiri traditions, cuisine and festivals that engage their peers. Community organizations are stepping in to host events and workshops that teach the rituals, meanings, and practices behind these festivals, reminding the youth of their roots and encouraging them to reconnect.

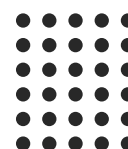
Moreover, youth-led initiatives are making strides to adapt these traditions to resonate with modern lifestyles. For instance, younger community members create videos demonstrating how to celebrate Herath in compact urban spaces, ensuring that anyone, anywhere, can observe these rituals. The Kashmiri Pandit diaspora further contributes by establishing cultural groups across major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Bangalore, Toronto and many other places. These organizations not only organize community gatherings but also educate members about their heritage, keeping the spirit of Kashmir alive through knowledge and active participation. By rekindling interest in their heritage, the youth instill hope that these traditions will not only survive but thrive, bridging the past with the future.

Conclusion

This journey through the lost festivals and rituals of Kashmir is not just about the past; it is a call to action. The Kashmiri Pandit community, resilient and determined, continues to safeguard its identity in the face of displacement. Each ritual performed and each festival celebrated is a testament to the indomitable spirit of Kashmir. By remembering and practicing these traditions, the community keeps alive the essence of Kashmir—a place of beauty, faith, and unity.

While this exploration highlights several significant aspects of our culture, it is essential to acknowledge that there may be more traditions, stories and customs that remain unmentioned. This article, much like

the customs it describes, aims to pass down the timeless legacy of Kashmir to future generations, fostering a connection that transcends borders and stands the test of time. Ultimately, this is just the beginning; a starting point to inspire curious minds to delve deeper into their heritage and continue the dialogue on preserving and celebrating our rich cultural identity.



I am currently pursuing Masters in Science with a major in Biotechnology, where my academic journey has provided me with a strong foundation in life sciences and medical research. Recently, I was honored with the Young Emerging Scientist Award - 2024 by GABELS ATDS and the Young Scientist - 2024 award by InSc, recognitions that underscore my commitment to scientific advancement. I am also a lifetime member of both ATDS and InSc, organizations dedicated to fostering growth in scientific research and development.



In addition to my scientific pursuits, I am an avid writer and blogger, having authored content under "Ridhima Writings" since 2021. Through my blog, I share insights, explore diverse topics, and bridge the worlds of science and culture. Being a Kashmiri Pandit, I have always held a deep interest in understanding and preserving my heritage, continually striving to learn more about the traditions that shape our identity.

My unique blend of scientific rigor and storytelling drives my passion for preserving cultural heritage and fostering interdisciplinary understanding. As I continue my studies and work toward a career in biotechnology, I am excited to contribute to endeavours that blend science with cultural insight, promoting meaningful dialogue and impactful change.

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Lost Kashmiri Festivals and Rituals

Reminiscing Memories, Significance and Processes

Sanjay Pandita

In the embrace of the mighty Himalayas, where snow-capped peaks gazed down at green valleys shimmering with the morning mist, Kashmir once lived as a symphony of traditions and rituals. Its air was heavy with chants, incense and the gentle rustling of Chinara leaves. Time, measured not by the ticking of clocks but by the blossoming of almond trees, the first winter snow and the quiet pilgrimage of the sun across the sky, was sacred. Each season was greeted not with indifference but with reverence, each moment woven into the very fabric of life through festivals and rituals that honored the cosmos, the earth and the soul's connection to the divine.

For centuries, the Kashmiri Pandits, descendants of sages and scholars, carried forth these rituals, not merely as ceremonies but as affirmations of their existence, the beating heart of their spiritual identity. Yet, like the first leaf that falls from a tree before autumn arrives, these sacred customs began to fade—first quietly, then rapidly, until they were all but whispers in the wind. With the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits, driven from their homeland by the fires of political and social turmoil, these traditions, once so deeply rooted in the soil of Kashmir, became untethered. They floated away, like clouds unable to find their way back to the mountains.

Pann: The First Offering, Now an Empty Plate. Among the earliest of Kashmiri festivals was Pann, the sacred offering of the first grain, a ritual as ancient as the land itself. In the days of old, when the fields swayed golden under the autumn sun, villagers would gather to offer the first sheaf of harvested wheat or rice to Bhumi, the earth goddess, and Kuber, the guardian of

wealth. It was a humble act, an acknowledgment that every grain, every kernel, was a gift, not earned but bestowed.

The ritual would begin at dawn, with the eldest member of the family placing the sacred grains upon a woven platter, adorned with marigolds and vermilion, offering prayers to the gods. It was more than a celebration of harvest—it was the soul's communion with the earth, a reminder that no matter how much human hands may toil, the land alone decides when to give. The community gathered not just to share food, but to share gratitude, to bow together before the mysteries of creation.

But now, in exile, the fields lie barren and the ancient hymns have fallen silent. The earth, which once cradled the feet of farmers, now feels the foreign tread of modern machinery. Pann is no longer celebrated; it lingers only in the memories of those who once offered the first grain in reverence. The ritual has been lost to the convenience of grocery stores, where food comes in packets rather than from the soil. What was once an act of devotion has become a forgotten gesture, swept away by the winds of time and displacement.

Navreh: The Navreh festival, celebrated as the Kashmiri New Year, was once a day of cosmic alignment, a moment when the universe itself seemed to pause, take a breath, and begin anew. Celebrated at the cusp of spring, Navreh marked the return of life, when the almond blossoms signalled the earth's awakening. For Kashmiri Pandits, this was a time of deep introspection, a time to renew not just the calendar but the spirit.

On the eve of Navreh, families would prepare the *thaal*, a ceremonial platter filled with

symbolic items: rice for abundance, yogurt for purity, a coin for wealth, and a mirror for self-reflection. As the first light of dawn filtered through the valley, the family gathered around this *thaal*, gazing into the mirror, asking not just what the year had in store, but what they had to offer to it. The ritual was a quiet reminder that life, like the seasons, is cyclical—forever renewing, forever offering another chance.

But now, far from the valley, Navreh is celebrated in fragments, its depth lost amid the scattered lives of the Pandits. The mirror, once a tool for introspection, now reflects faces no longer cradled by the Chinars of Kashmir. The almanac that once guided the community's steps through the cosmic order has been replaced by the impersonal calendars of modern life. In exile, the New Year arrives, but it brings with it a sense of displacement, of beginnings without roots.

Gaad Batta: Winter in Kashmir was harsh, but it was softened by the warmth of shared traditions, one of which was Gaad Batta, the sacred fish feast. With the coming of the cold months, when the rivers began to freeze and the earth became unyielding, the Kashmiri Pandits would gather to offer fish, a symbol of sustenance, to the gods. The fish, prepared with care and reverence, was cooked in a broth of spices that filled homes with the warmth of community and faith.

But Gaad Batta was more than just a meal. It was a collective act of resilience, a way to prepare for the isolation of winter by reinforcing bonds with neighbors and loved ones. Families who had plenty shared with those who had less, and in this exchange, the community itself became the offering—a reminder that survival was not a solitary endeavour but a shared one.

Now, in the far-flung cities and towns where the Pandits have made their new homes, Gaad Batta is scarcely remembered. The fish, once considered sacred, is now just another dish on the dinner table, its spiritual significance lost in the bustle of modern life. The communal sharing that once defined

the festival has been replaced by the isolation of urban living. The Pandits, scattered across the world, no longer gather as they once did, and the winter months, though still cold, feel colder without the warmth of shared traditions.

Har Navum: The festival of Har Navum, dedicated to the worship of Sharika Bhagwati, the goddess of power and protection, was once a day of profound devotion. Celebrated during the bright fortnight of Navratri, Har Navum was a time when the Pandits would ascend the sacred hill of Hari Parbat, offering flowers, rice, and prayers to the goddess who watched over the valley.

Sharika, the goddess of the valley, represented the feminine divine, the nurturing yet fierce protector of the land. Her presence was palpable, not just in the temple at the top of Hari Parbat, but in every corner of the valley. Devotees would climb the hill, their feet bare, their hearts full of devotion, knowing that the goddess walked with them, protecting them and the land they called home.

But today, the hill of Hari Parbat stands silent. The temple, once a beacon of faith, is now a relic of a time that has passed. The festival of Har Navum, once so central to the spiritual life of the Pandits, has been lost to the political and social upheavals that have swept through Kashmir. The goddess, once invoked with reverence, now waits in silence, her devotees scattered far from the land she once guarded.

Tirtha Snana: In the days of old, the Pandits believed in the purifying power of water, a belief that manifested in the ritual of *Tirtha Snana*, the sacred bath. Kashmir, with its abundance of springs and rivers, was seen as a land blessed by the gods and the waters of these springs were considered holy. The most famous of these springs was *Tulsiyan*, where devotees would bathe to cleanse not just their bodies but their souls.

The ritual of *Tirtha Snana* was a communal

one, a time when families would travel together to these sacred springs, offering flowers and prayers to the gods who dwelled in the waters. The act of bathing was both a physical and spiritual cleansing, a way to wash away the impurities of life and to reconnect with the divine.

But today, many of these springs have dried up, their waters polluted or forgotten. The pilgrimage to these sacred waters has ceased, and the ritual of *Tirtha Snana* has been lost. The connection between the Pandits and the sacred waters of their homeland has been severed, and in its place, there is only a sense of longing, a thirst that cannot be quenched.

Mahashivratri: If there was one festival that defined the spiritual life of the Kashmiri Pandits, it was Mahashivratri, the great night dedicated to Lord Shiva. Known in Kashmir as Herath, this festival was not just a day of devotion, but an entire fortnight of rituals, prayers, and offerings. It was a time when the Pandits would gather to honor Shiva, the great ascetic, the destroyer of illusions and the lord of transformation.

But today, Herath has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. In exile, far from the land that Shiva once walked, the Pandits struggle to keep the festival alive. The rituals of Herath, once passed down through generations like precious heirlooms, now exist only in the flickering minds of those who still hold the memory. It is no longer a living, breathing practice, but a ghost of what it once was, a reminder of how easily traditions slip through the fingers of time, leaving only shadows in their wake.

In the quiet of these moments, as families gather in their diaspora, the memories flood back—the sight of the snow-laden rooftops in Kashmir, the distant sound of temple bells echoing through the valley, the fragrance of incense mingling with the crisp winter air. These memories, cherished yet painful, serve as fragile threads that bind the community to a time and place that seems more dreamlike with each passing year. It is

as though the gods themselves have been exiled from their temples, wandering the earth, seeking their devotees, who, scattered like autumn leaves, can no longer find their way home.

Yet, in these memories lies a profound realization—the responsibility to keep these traditions alive rests squarely on the shoulders of the Kashmiri Pandits themselves. Like the ancient sages who safeguarded sacred texts during times of turmoil, they must become the custodians of their own heritage, refusing to let it wither away into oblivion. For it is said that when the memories of a tradition fade, so too does the soul of the people who carried them.

Reminiscing is not just about recounting the details of a celebration or recalling the order of rituals. It is about rekindling the emotional and spiritual essence that those rituals once evoked. To sit in quiet reflection and relive the grandeur of Mahashivratri is to invite Shiva himself back into the home. To remember the sounds of Pan being celebrated is to feel once again the earth's gratitude as the first grains were offered in humility. In memory, the rituals live, even if they have vanished from the physical world.

But memories must not be left to stagnate. If they are not nurtured, they too will fade into the recesses of the mind, becoming distant and abstract, like an old photograph left to gather dust. The responsibility lies in actively engaging with these memories, in passing them down with as much care and devotion as the Pandits once offered to their gods. For each memory is not just a story—it is a seed, and it must be planted in the hearts of future generations, so they too can carry forth the traditions of their ancestors.

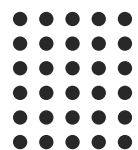
The question that haunts the community now is not whether they remember, but how long they will remember. How long can these festivals remain alive if they are only practiced sporadically, out of obligation rather than devotion? How long before the Thaal of Navreh becomes a mere relic of a forgotten past, its significance reduced to a

footnote in history? How long before the *watuk* of Herath becomes a symbol of a people who once were?

It is the moral and spiritual duty of every Kashmiri Pandit to ensure that this moment never arrives. To allow these festivals and rituals to die is to sever the thread that connects them not only to their past but to their identity. These customs are not just ceremonial—they are the very essence of what it means to be Kashmiri Pandit. They are the heartbeat of a culture, a culture that cannot afford to lose its rhythm.

If the Pandits do not take up this responsibility, these traditions will not simply fade—they will become history. And history, once written in books, is no longer living. It becomes a curiosity for scholars, a subject for study, rather than a practice for the soul. If the festivals are allowed to drift into history, the Kashmiri Pandits will be left not with rituals to celebrate, but with rituals to remember—rituals that belong to a past they can no longer reclaim.

In the end, the festivals and rituals of the Kashmiri Pandits are not just about the past—they are about the legacy that must be carried forward. They are the torch passed down from one generation to the next, a flame that must never be allowed to flicker out. This is not just the duty of the elders—it is the responsibility of every Pandit, young and old, to carry the flame, to keep it burning brightly.



Sanjay Pandita is retired from LIC OF INDIA and resides in Dehradun. Music and writing are his passion. He also loves playing flute and reading books. He has been writing poetry and stories and is a regular columnist for many papers and magazines like Rising Kashmir, Greater Kashmir, Kashmir Pen, Naad, Yugwani, Mountain Kashmir etc. His two books are currently under publication.

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Lost Kashmiri Festivals and Rituals: Reminiscing the Past, Reclaiming the Future

Rohit Tikoo

There was a time when the snow-covered evenings of Kashmir were filled with anticipation. We, as children, would eagerly wait for our Guru Ji, who moved from one house to another, guiding us through the sacred Mahashivratri Puja. Sometimes, as the night grew long, we would drift into sleep, only to be gently awakened by our elders with the words, "Utho... Guru Ji aa gaye," signalling the beginning of the night-long worship. The following morning was a time of excitement—Herath Kharach, the new notes, the delicious offerings made to the gods, and the joy of Salam, visiting homes to exchange greetings and indulging in the festive feasts. This was the essence of our community, woven into the fabric of our lives.

But now, in the wake of the exodus, those vibrant cultural celebrations are missing. The terror that drove us from our homeland has not just scattered our people but has also faded the rituals that once defined us. No longer do we wait for the Guru Ji on Mahashivratri; the streets are silent, the homes empty of the communal joy that once resonated through them. The holy songs and hymns that once filled the night air have been replaced by the cold, impersonal sound of recorded voices. Even the simple joy of decorating a Krishna *Jhoola* for Janmashtami, and carrying it to neighbouring villages for celebration, has been lost, substituted by the sterile glow of screens and the convenience of YouTube.

In this digital age, where technology has replaced tradition, the essence of our festivals is slipping away. What was once a living, breathing expression of our culture has become a shadow of its former self, reduced to formalities that lack the communal warmth and spiritual depth they once held. This erosion of tradition signifies

more than just a loss of cultural practices; it marks a deeper loss of identity and a severing of the ties that once bound us together as a community. As we drift further from our roots, it becomes imperative to ask: What have we lost? And what are we still losing?

Other festivals were celebrated well. Families often visit temples dedicated to various gods and goddesses, such as the revered *Kheer Bhawani* temple, to offer their prayers and seek blessings. The vibrant atmosphere of these meals, coupled with the collective participation in rituals and worship, strengthens community bonds and celebrates the rich culture of Kashmiri religious traditions.

The Kashmiri Pandits' forced departure from our homeland has deeply changed how we celebrate our festivals and traditions. The once lively and colourful celebrations are now quieter and less frequent. With the community spread across different places, it's harder to keep the old ways alive. Many of our festivals and rituals that were a big part of everyday life in Kashmir are now forgotten. The rich culture that flourished in the cold, beautiful Kashmir is slowly disappearing. What used to be joyful events that brought everyone together are now just memories for a small group of people. The strong connection to their past, which was once a big part of their lives, is now fading away.

Let's discuss these Fading roots

Our festivals and rituals were more than just celebrations; they were the very soul of our community, binding generations together with shared experiences and beliefs. Herath, for instance, was a sacred festival, a profound spiritual journey connecting us to our divine. For centuries, we Kashmiri

Pandits celebrated Herath with unwavering devotion, particularly during the snowy month of *Phalgun*. The pristine white blanket covering the valley was a silent witness to our deep-rooted faith in Lord Shiva. It was a time of communal harmony, where families and neighbours came together, sharing laughter, food, and stories.

The forced exodus shattered this peaceful existence. The snow-clad valley, once a sanctuary of peace and spirituality, became a distant memory. With our community dispersed across different lands, the shared experiences that defined our identity began to fade. The younger generation, unfamiliar with the customs and traditions, found it challenging to connect with their roots.

Navreh, another significant festival marking the Kashmiri New Year, was a celebration of new beginnings. The Navreh *thali*, prepared with meticulous care, symbolized hope and renewal. Each item placed on the *thali*—rice representing prosperity, a pen and inkpot symbolizing knowledge, salt, flowers, and the traditional *Panchang*—held deep cultural and spiritual significance. The ritual of waking up to see the Navreh *thali* first thing in the morning was a tradition passed down through generations, instilling a sense of continuity and connection with the past.

The ritual of **Zang Trai**, where Kashmiri Pandit women visited their parental homes and returned with *Noon*, *Tchutt*, and *Atagat*—salt, roti, and some cash—was a gesture filled with warmth and love. These simple acts were more than just customs; they were a way of strengthening familial bonds and preserving the community's unity.

Khetchi Mavas, a ritual performed to ward off evil spirits, reflected the community's deep belief in the interplay between the natural and supernatural worlds. The elaborate *pujas* during Herath were not merely acts of devotion; they were a celebration of family unity, a reaffirmation of the bonds that held the community

together. Festivals like Gadda Batta, Monjhar Taher, Kaw Punim, and Shishur were more than just dates on a calendar—they were living traditions that brought meaning and purpose to the lives of Kashmiri Pandits.

Monjhar Taher, with its offering of yellow rice, was a prayer for prosperity. The festival of Kaw Punim, where offerings were made to crows as a mark of love for birds, connected the community with the natural world. Shishur, a special day for newborns and newlywed brides, involved rituals to protect them from the evil eye. Each of these festivals, each ritual, was a thread in the intricate tapestry of Kashmiri Pandit culture, binding the community together and reinforcing their shared identity.

Gadda Batta: Gadda Batta translates to "fish and rice." This traditional offering takes place on any Tuesday or Saturday during the dark fortnight of the lunar month of *Pausha*. On these specific days, fish is specially prepared as an offering to the Ghar Devta, or the household deity. The ritual begins with preparing a sacred space in a room on the top floor of the house, where a plateful of rice and fish is placed as an offering. Some families choose to serve raw fish, adhering to traditional practices. This act of devotion is followed by a communal feast with family and friends, celebrating together and sharing the meal that honours the Ghar Devta. The event is not only a spiritual observance but also a time for strengthening familial bonds and cherishing moments with loved ones.

Jyeshtha Ashtami, also known as Zyeath-Atham, is a prominent Kashmiri festival dedicated to the goddess Ragnya Mata of the Kheer Bhawani temple in Tulmul, Ganderbal, Kashmir. This temple holds a significant place among Kashmiri Hindus. The festival, celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits and other local communities, features the Kheer Bhawani *Mela*. This event has evolved into a symbol of communal harmony and brotherhood in Kashmir, bringing together people of various backgrounds to honour

the deity and celebrate their shared cultural heritage.

Pann, which translates to "thread," is a festival linked to the spinning of freshly produced cotton and the worship of the twin agricultural goddesses, Vibha and Garbha. Celebrated on Ganesh Chaturthi, also known as Vinayak Tchoram in Kashmir, this festival involves offering *Roth*, or sweet bread cakes, to the goddesses. The Pan Puja includes narrating a story similar to the *Satyanarayana Katha*, highlighting a blend of ritual practices. The preparation and distribution of *Roths* have become a significant aspect of Kashmiri Pandit religious customs, symbolizing the quest for prosperity and auspiciousness.

Vyatha Truvah: Vyatha Truvah is a significant festival dedicated to the worship of the river Vitasta, an important river in Kashmiri Hindu tradition. Celebrated with devotion and reverence, this day involves performing *Puja* (ritual worship) at the sacred ghats of the Vitasta River. The rituals include offering a variety of sacred items such as water, milk, vermilion, raw rice, and flowers to the river. These offerings are believed to honour the river's divine essence and seek its blessings for prosperity and well-being.

The Gradual Erosion of Tradition

Our old ways of doing things are slowly disappearing. It's a big problem because these traditions are a very important part of who we are. They used to be a strong and beautiful part of our lives, but now they are getting weaker. It's not just about missing out on fun parties and celebrations. It's about losing a deep connection to our past and who we are as a people.

Our festivals and traditions are like the threads that hold our community together. They are filled with stories, beliefs, and ways of life that have been passed down from our grandparents to us. When these traditions disappear, it's like losing a piece of ourselves. We not only lose the fun parts of our culture

but also the things that make us feel like we belong to something bigger than ourselves.

This erosion is not an isolated phenomenon but a reflection of broader challenges facing the Kashmiri Pandit community. Displacement, migration, and the pressures of modern life have played significant roles in this decline. For many, particularly the younger generation growing up far from their ancestral homeland, the connection to these traditions has weakened. In environments detached from the cultural context of their forebears, there is often a lack of awareness or understanding of the significance of these rituals. This growing disconnect threatens to sever the link between our past and present, diminishing our collective memory and cultural richness.

The Broader Impact on Community and Identity

The fading of these traditions has profound implications for our community. Festivals and rituals are far more than mere cultural expressions; they are vital for fostering social cohesion and maintaining a strong sense of community. These observances provide shared experiences that bring people together, reinforcing interpersonal bonds and creating a collective identity. As traditions wane, there is a tangible risk of fragmentation within the community. The absence of these unifying practices can lead to weakened ties among individuals, reducing the sense of shared identity and purpose. Over time, this fragmentation can erode community cohesion and diminish our collective cultural identity.

Moreover, the loss of these traditions represents a significant disconnection from our historical roots. Our rituals and festivals are not only celebrations but also living links to our ancestors. They honour our forebears and preserve their legacy, embedding their memories in our cultural practices. When these traditions are allowed to fade, we lose that essential connection to our past, along with a crucial part of our historical narrative. This disconnection is not just a loss of

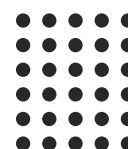
practices but a severance from the broader historical and cultural context that has defined us for generations.

Reclaiming Our Heritage: A Call to Action

The solution to this cultural crisis lies within our own hands. We must take active steps to revive and preserve our traditions. The challenge is to reignite the flame of our heritage, infuse new life into our festivals and rituals, and ensure their continued relevance and vitality.

Reclaiming our heritage begins with a deep and meaningful understanding of the traditions we seek to preserve. It is not sufficient to merely observe these practices; we must delve into their historical and cultural significance. This requires a concerted effort to educate ourselves and future generations about the importance of these rituals. By understanding their roots and meanings, we can foster a renewed

sense of pride and commitment to our cultural practices. Engaging actively in the preservation of these traditions, through participation and education, will help ensure that they are not only maintained but also thrive. This collective effort will be crucial in safeguarding our cultural legacy, reinforcing our sense of identity.



Rohit Tikoo is a versatile Indian author whose work spans history, fiction, non-fiction, and journalism, offering a deep dive into the human experience and social challenges. His writings are particularly notable for their exploration of the Kashmiri Pandit community, vividly captured in his key works, “Uprooted and Forlorn: The Tale of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile” and “Kashmiri Pandits: A Tale of Solitude & Survival”. Through these books, Rohit provides a heartfelt account of the community's exodus, highlighting their struggles and resilience.

With six published books to his name, Rohit brings together his corporate experience, technological insight, and rich cultural background to tackle philosophical, social, and contemporary issues. His thoughtful and nuanced writing encourages readers to engage deeply with the complexities of the human condition.

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Without Beginning Ever Existing

Rekha Tukra

At the crack of dawn awakened by sea gulls nudging me with their squawking from sea shore, it drove me 'sleepyhead' out of my bed, directly to the balcony to peek at the pristine turquoise sea full of waves henceforth led, seagulls out of inland to far water gradually they disappeared and sped, whilst chuckled gazing into those currents my mind effectively traversed ahead, the fog gate conjuring up another period of time, decades prior, suddenly all said, characters came alive, elsewhere what I saw parched, birds were slurping water held twig in their beaks, above water their head, frosty day icy wet grey clouds overhead.

Once the ferries, the sailing boats anchored on harbour suddenly got replaced by wooden boats and I saw house boats tied to its moorings instead of the coast. I found myself drifting afloat, in a river reaching to the edge of the riverbank of downtown Srinagar. Seagulls had taken the form of ducks and ducklings in a row, paddling wavy water, following the mother duck and drake with quack and troat.

"Lily and lotus flowers in the nearby moat, kaleidoscope hues of flowers was a sight to behold and dote. Over the river was an intricate carved wooden bridge on which passed horse, tonga and passersby in long coats"

On various small floating markets, boats were selling stocks of mainly fresh vegetables and green collards, where I overheard my grandmother and other ladies bargaining with the lady vendor to lower the price of big bundles of lotus stems. Clearly, I could hear the vendor loudly replying "these are Herath festival days, do you expect the demand of these vegetables is soaring and so is the price," with a grin. "I know Shivratri is around the corner but it is mere lotus stems not gold," said my grandma in a high note.

Furthermore, I caught sight of children, teens and women accompanied by relatives all filling their brass pitchers cleaning and

filling it with fresh river water then putting whole walnuts into it. Afterwards they also immersed a handful of flowers plus let tea light candles float in the river fully lit.

My Grandma yelling "come on, give me a hand and hurry up, it is pre celebration day of Herath" I admit we had to take a pitcher/pot akin to god shiva back home on the auspicious time to install it in its ambit.

"Best wedding of all eras, a big bash, splendour and opulence of Shiva the lord of Lords;

With Parvati Goddess of fertility, power, epitome of beauty, daughter of Himalaya's God."

Amid all the hullabaloo we followed our grandma like her entourage through busy narrow lanes then the alleyway to reach our front gate of our dwelling with exponentially high excitement and furore. On entering, I directly saw my Mommy and Aunt mopping the front veranda with special clay soil on the eve of Shivratri. We could smell the earthy scent of wet clay similar to petrichor when rain falls on dry soil. Special cleaning and adorning was underway, and additionally, with ground rice flour and turmeric powder a pattern specific design was drawn on the floor. Simultaneously a strict warning was issued not to step on the wet floor which all had to adhere not to be reprimanded later if anyone breached it.

"The Holy Trinity, Lord Brahma himself discharged the duties of the divine priest; while God Vishnu, undertook and coordinated preparations for 7star banquet feast."

Even though the temperature was subzero, the ladies of our big joint family were tirelessly all day along doing chores, preparations and arrangements for the mega festival of the year with tremendous fortitude and meticulousness.

Now today when I myself am at that juncture

being the lady of the household more so I am in the same shoes they were in and can assimilate what it encompasses to do that quantum of work that too painstakingly doing it.

It was not fantasy or nuance of illusion but real reel rolling and I was on the scene all in sequence. Thereupon we were given a rousing welcome with chants and Mantras on threshold to announce; with trumpet of conch signifying the beginning of the big fat epic wedding day celebrations of Lord Shiva & Parvati, all the floors of the house mainly living, reception, sitting rooms were fully plush carpeted readied to host all our large joint family members and guests. It was almost like a mini marriage gathering.

Whereas the kitchen stood on the second floor. It was fully well equipped with cooking clay hearths on the right corner and gas burner, hob stove on the other side. Crockery, silverware and brassware on the nearby shelves, firewood logs burning underneath the hearth and on it traditional big bronze utensils. Simmering in it different food sideways mom sautéing, stirring, frying in a brass woke. Honestly, we all were swooned over by a whiff of wind infused with aroma of luxurious regal delicacies coming in our direction, amplifying our insatiable appetite.

“Maha Shivratri being a lavish affair, families celebrated it with enormous zeal and zest; Shiva shakti were invoked, worshiped and installed like supreme deities, VIP guests.”

Meanwhile, to see over the arrangements, my Daddy's other entrusted job was to buy Shivratri Pooja material from potteries, groceries and ration etc. and also bring from Gulmarg Bilva triangular green leaves specially for offering to Shiva.

Whilst all the kids had a clique who were vivacious to take the responsibility for peeling off petals of flower bulbs, dry rose petals and winter roses; we girls made garlands.

“The ordained Guru ji conductor of veneration must admit was no less than a pope delivering Christmas mass sermon;

children then had no remote to press the fast forward button, instead controlling mounting impatience to avoid calling out morons.”

On the day of Shivratri, the waiting for the priest our family clan guru ji was the pivotal part of festivity and significantly compounded our restlessness by every minute; ultimately when he arrived it stoked the euphoric atmosphere, hiatus when he finally showed up hereafter plan was set to fruition. Elders and children alike bursting with happiness asked the priest to begin conducting veneration. Henceforth the priest persuasively made us chant hymns wholeheartedly.

The most intriguing and the best part of Shivratri festival was to visit the Shankaracharya Temple on “Hur Ashtami” the following day in the wee hours a rooster broke the dawn by its crowing. Likewise, one of our 'early bird' cousins volunteered to wake us up for trekking to the temple as it was a ritual, customary to pay visit. Due to enthusiasm and earnestness we were unable to sleep besides not to miss the new day adventure. Subsequently, we were woken from our slumber by shouts of “wake up time to get up and go.”

The Shankaracharya Temple nestles in a hill surrounded by stunning countryside, with fantastic views of Dal-Lake on the other side, and we were completely smitten. Marching enroute in twilight we witnessed a flock of birds flying away from withered trees to the far sky. Later on the road in thick fog few hawkers, milk maids and passers-by were cruising in the area to commence the mundane day.

After reaching the summit of the hill, we saw the sunrise with a rare phenomenon of sight projecting Lord Shiva, standing with his trident spear in hand on the snow clad Mount Kailash in background solar rays. The halo nimbus appeared like a disc and crown. We, in the temple poured pure water since God shiva is pleased with water and paid our obeisance.

“Receiving gifts and cash wrapped in envelopes (Herath Kharch) was like you

hitting the jackpot, giving tremendous joy and gratitude. We will never grow out of the way that Salam Herath day made us feel, it was fervour, fiesta event of a sort of carnival magnitude."

Distribution of rice chapati with soaked walnut kernels as a sacrament culminating in the completion of the epic festival. The generation of lineage moreover was all our prolific elders whose ardent faith was extremely paramount to keeping these customs and rituals continuing and paradigm of its essence.

It is difficult to envisage this day when our elders, forefathers who lived all their lives in their own homes in fact would have been reluctant to ever vacate or go anywhere were actually coerced, forced to renounce their flourished lives afterwards, fearfully as a last resort relinquished their inheritance. Apparently everything collapsed like a house of cards, and now our future remains murky.

It is surreal, I can't forget and will not forgive those axe wielded vile nemesis who slashed our big blossomed huge tree, caused turbulence, uprooted it from the soil, sliced its branches which oozed blood, destroyed numerous nests, trembling fallen birds whimpered like fish out of water underneath dead pile of leaves caught fire and burning embers of dry wilted leaves doused our hopes, hearth, and homes.

It troubled me to see deserted houses in dilapidated condition, emotions were running high because it was a telltale sign of darkness to infinity; now it seems an irreversible situation.

I yearn to venture out to hover over once

again on my homeland Kashmir, just to follow trails of my grandparents and matriarchs scrutinise my ancestral house for their marks in case from those window sills of Second floor "Kaeni." They usually set out their eyes in our wait, probably their spirits are still present there waiting for us to return.

Particularly I want to glance at shelves of our living rooms, supposing I can locate family photo frames, wall mount God shiva, which my family, because in chaos and tumult, couldn't gather or carry those souvenirs for keepsake.

"To shake a leg, playing games, rolling sea shells crowies (Haare) singing was fun, donning brand-new clothes was kinda mandatory; neither our towering personalities kith and kin to guide nor homeland hearth. Now barely any enjoyment, only tales, stories of Herath's glory."

At current, we all are scattered and spread all over the world. Personally, I feel without family priest, we can hardly perform veneration properly or accurately. Moreover the essential steps, nitty gritty of rituals are compromised and some discrepancies still remain.

Firstly, it is worth considering, we seriously require to be self-reliant and learn and then emphasize like a protagonist how to teach our children under tutelage of head of family and request them to necessarily attend these festivals so they can carry the legacy and our Kashmiri culture norms and unique customs to fore.

I am Rekha (khashu) Tukra, a British citizen, but first a proud Kashmiri Pandit, currently living in Dubai. I am MBA finance with varied experience. I initially worked with NHS professionals. Additionally, I also freelanced with NHS forensics Hospitals, Courts and Police as Translator and Interpreter in the UK. I am a proud mother of my only son, Dr. Samyakh Tukra. My husband, Mr. Sudhir Tukra, is a Site Director in a MNC in Dubai. I immensely enjoy writing with great passion and zeal what I exactly feel, particularly exhibit experiences plus memories, maximumly cherished recollections of those unforgettable days of Srinagar, Kashmir precisely. Similarly, nothing else matters to writer except that his /her writing sees the light of day.



The Winter Rituals of Kashmiri Pandits - The Legacies of Past

Upender Ambardar

The hallowed land of Kashmir is blessed with divinity in enormousness. The rituals, customs, traditions, and celebration of sacred days are cultural, social, and religious expressions of great cultural mosaic of Kashmir. Mysticism, mythology, spiritual thought, and socio-cultural history are formidable ingredients of our festivals, rituals and customs. The local shades and native identities inherent in them not only connect us with the past but also help in the socio-historical reconstruction of antiquity. They land hope, grace, zest, variety and grandeur both to an individual and the society. The prominent winter rituals of Kashmir are - Gada Bata, Majhor Tahar, Chari Oakdoh, Lavsi Chodah, Kichdi Amavasya, Makar Sankranti (Shishar Sankrat) and Shishur etc. They represent the community's religio-cultural pride as they give us social, psychological, religious, cultural, and emotional compactness. Moreover, their origin and roots can be traced to the progenitors and forebears of the community centuries back.

Our unbending faith in them reminds us not to forget the ancient land and rich civilisation of the past to which we belong.

Gada Batta: 'Gada Bata' stands out conspicuously as an imposing and time honoured winter ritual of Kashmiri Pandits. The ritual has survived even in our forced exile despite a brush of modernity. It is celebrated in the month of December during the dark fortnight of Posh, locally known as 'Poh Gutpach,' either on Tuesday or Saturday. As per a religious belief, every house has a presiding and governing deity, reverently remembered as 'Ghar Divta' or 'Dayat Raza' by Kashmiri Pandits. The house

is believed to remain under the benevolent and protective surveillance of 'Dayat Raza' all the time. A religiously pious house is thought to have auspicious and positive dividends. The believers share a firm conviction that positive and spiritual resonance generated due to the presence of the presiding deity of the house drives away bad omens, evil spirits, acrimonious feelings and negative retardants if existing in the house. His invisible presence also guarantees wellness, harmony and stability of kinship among the inmates of the house.

It also testifies a centuries old notion that elements of spiritualism and religiousness coexist along with materialism in a harmonious blend in the houses of Kashmiri Pandits. The ritual of 'Gada Bata' is an eagerly awaited occasion in every Kashmiri Pandit house even now. On any selected Tuesday or Saturday of Posh Krishna Paksh, the divine patron of the house called 'Ghar Divta' or 'Dayat Raza' is propitiated by an offering of fish dish and rice. On the designated day, the kitchen is cleansed and the needed utensils are thoroughly washed. The fish to be cooked are spotlessly cleaned and cut into whole girth pieces. The entire volume of used water along with the fish scales, fins, discarded fish inners are retained and thrown off only when the fish and rice offering is made to the 'Dayat Raza'. The fish are cooked in combination with nadru, reddish or Kadum (Knolkol) as per the family's ritual or '*reeth*'. It is followed by an invocational *pooja* of rice and fish dish. Afterwards, rice and cooked fish pieces in the sequential order of head, middle and tail portions are kept either in fresh earthen plates (*toke*) or on grass woven circular base (*Aer*) called 'chret' or in a *thali* as per the family *reeth*. They are now placed on the clay smeared floor of the upper storey room

of the house called '*Kani*' or '*pbraer-Kani*'. A washed uncooked and dressed fish is also kept on a separate grass woven ring called '*chret*' adjacent to the above offering. An oil lit earthen lamp (*choang*), a tumbler filled with water and a toothpick (optional) are also kept near the rice and fish offering. As per the family custom, the offering is either kept underneath a willow basket called '*Kranjul*' or left uncovered. The said room is then left undisturbed and unattended during the night. The following morning, the families in accordance with their '*reeth*' either put the rice and fish dish offering on the house roof to be fed upon by the birds or share the consecrated food-offering as '*naveed*' by the family members. As per belief, the scattering of rice grains and sight of fish bones kept aside is indicative of the acceptance of the offering by the 'Ghar Divta'.

Every care is taken by the family to ensure the religious purity during the celebration of this ritual as any deviation or flawed observance invites 'Ghar Divta's' annoyance and anger. The oral narratives and family lores are full of the wrath inviting incidents. Recounting a happening of such nature at her Habbakadal residence as heard from her elders, Smt Aneeta Tikoo revealed "Once a delay in performing the 'Gada Bata' ritual resulted in disquieting noise coming-out from the 'Thoker Kuth' for several nights. It was taken as displeasure and annoyance of the 'Ghar Divta'. Immediate celebration of the ritual astonishingly put an end to the mysterious noise."

Recollecting another incident of the yore, she elaborated "once an elderly lady Smt. Visheredd received a mysterious bash from an invisible force in the house. It was taken as an indication of some wrongdoing during the observing of ritual. Afterwards, the ritualistic offering made once again put the things right." Narrating one more unusual happening of the 1970s, wherein a lady in the neighbourhood fried the inner parts of fish before the customary offering was

made to the presiding deity of the house. It resulted in the hurt caused to the said lady by unexpected collapsing of the kitchen wall during the course of cooking, which was an indication of 'Ghar Divta's' anger and ire".

Sharing a personal experience in the existence of 'Ghar Divta', Sh Susheel Hakim, an erstwhile resident of Karan Nagar, Srinagar, also recounted "for several days in the year 1980, I would feel enormous and mysterious heaviness pounding my body in my bed during night in wakeful state following the opening of my room door on its own. Astonishingly, the mysterious feeling of pounding vanished after the well-known mystic of Karan Nagar Kashi Bub, fondly known as Kashi mout, who used to frequent our home advised me to make an offering of rice and fish to 'Ghar Divta'. Narrating one more related incident of the same year, Sh. Susheel Hakim divulged "one of our tenants Sh. Anil Kachroo, a student, on those days would observe the unoccupied bed in his room getting weighed down by a mysterious and invisible force during night, which would precede the automatic opening of the room door. The bed would regain its original form after a brief spell, indicating that a divine figure had rested for a while on the bed".

Sh. Roshan Lal Zadoo, presently at Bhagwati Nagar, Jammu, also shared a similar incident that his father late Sh. Dina Nath Zadoo had noticed a divine figure in white robes descending the staircase of his home at Nowgam Kuthar, Anantnag.

Manjhor Tahar: One more important winter ritual is that of '*Majhor Tahar*', which is celebrated on Magh Purnima, locally known as Manjhor Punim. The ritual comes in the months of November-December. It is a thanks giving ritual towards the all-pervading Almighty God, who is the source of our sustenance and subsistence. It is symbolic of His generosity and benevolence bestowed upon us in the form of bountiful

cultivated crops. On the day of Magh Purnima, yellow coloured rice (*Tahar*) and potatoes and '*Kadum*' (*Knolkol*) spiced with red chillies are cooked during the night.

After the customary pooja, the offering - the '*Tahar*' and the cooked vegetable dish known as '*chout*' is kept on the roof top during the night itself. Afterwards, the remaining portion of the food is taken as '*prasad*' by all the family members. In certain places, the ritual is regarded to signify the fertility of the soil. The believers offer the oblation of '*Tahar*' and cooked vegetable dishes to the deity of crops in their crop fields. The ritual of '*Manjhor Tahar*' is celebrated to invoke the deity of crops and soil fertility for ensuring all-round welfare and prosperity in the form of bountiful crops. The ritual is also supposed to ward off the damaging influences, which may affect the crop production. The ritual also enforces the intimate and fruitful relationship between man and the forces of nature, which are believed to shower grace, mercy and blessings in the form of different varieties of crops cultivated by us. The food or crop represents the physical matter, which guarantees sustenance, nourishment, and household protection.

The yellow colour of *tahar* is a mystical interpretation of auspiciousness, spirituality, and positiveness. Yellow is regarded as a royal colour and is symbolic of the flow of sacred energy, which is believed to activate and stimulate the surroundings. The yellow colour of *tahar* also denotes warmth, glow and bloom in every action connected with our life.

Chari Oakdoh: '*Manjhor Tahar*' is followed by another ritual known as '*Chari Oakdoh*', which is celebrated on *Posh Krishna Paksh Pratipadha*, locally known as '*Poh Gutpach Oakdoh*'. The ritual involves the cooking of rice and *moong dal*. About seven or nine small rectangular stones collected

from the river or streams are seated on grass woven rings called *arie*. These are symbolic of the 'Mother Cult' or *Shakti Pooja* and represent *Matrakas* or little Divine Mothers. *Matrakas* are known by the names of *Brahmni*, *Mahesvari*, *Kumari*, *Vaishnavi*, *Varahi*, *Narasimhi* and *Aindri* or *Indrani*.

They are the *shakti* of Brahma, Isvara, Kumar or *Skanda*, *Visnu*, *Varaha*, *Narasimha* and *Indra*. According to *Tantarshastra*, *Brahmini* represents the primordial nada, which is the unmanifest sound denoting the origin of all the creations. It resembles the divine energy as represented by the *pranav* or *om*. In the ritualistic invocation of the '*Matrakas*', offerings of rice and *dal* mixed together are placed before the seven or nine '*Matrakas*' represented by small rectangular stones. It also involves the applying of *tilak* to all the idealised images of '*Matrakas*'. Afterwards, the family members take the '*naveed*'. The '*Chari Oakdoh*' is also known as the ritual of '*Matraka Pooja*'.

Lavsie Chodah: One day ahead of '*Kitchdi Amavasya*' comes the little known ritual of '*Lavsie Chodah*'. It is celebrated on *Posh Krishna Paksh Chaturdashi*. In this ritual, apart from rice, *moong dal* in combination with radish is cooked. After the traditional *pooja*, the offering of rice and the cuisine of *dal* and radish is kept on the rooftop. The consecrated portion is taken as '*naveed*' by the house inmates. The ritual of '*Lavsie Chodah*' has presently lost much of the original ritualistic fervour and has receded in significance. It needs to be brought back to its pristine glory.

All the community rituals need to be celebrated with unquestioned faith, as besides spreading cheer and mirth, they have an impacting role in shaping our lives.

Khaechimavas or Khichdi Amavasya: is an ancient winter ritual of Kashmiri Pandits.



A Kashmiri Pandit family observing the ritual of Khaechimavas

It is celebrated on Posh Krishna **Paksh Amvasaya (Poh Ghata Pach Mavas)** with unshakeable faith by Kashmiri Pandits. Khaechimavas, besides being an integral part of our religio-cultural life also encompasses the mythologized history of Kashmir.

Further, it authenticates and affirms the historicity of **Yakshas**, the ancient aboriginal tribe of Kashmir, who dwelled in the upper mountainous region of the Himalayan ranges extending from the present day Uttranchal, Himachal Pradesh to Kashmir. The Hindu scriptures have elevated Yakshas to the status of demigods along with **Gandharvas** (the celestial musicians), **Kinnaras** (the divine choristers), **Kiraats** and **Rakshas**. The influence of Shaivism on the ritual of Khichdi Amavasya is clearly visible. **Yakshas** were also ardent worshippers of Lord Shiva, the most adored and revered God of Kashmiri Pandits.

The **Yakshapati** Lord **Kubera** is regarded as an intimate friend of Lord Shiva. Lord Kubera, known as the Lord of wealth, is said to be the son of sage **Visravas** and grandson of the sage Pulastya, besides being the half-brother of the demon king, Ravana. As per Hindu mythology, Lord Kubera resides in the mythological city of Alkapuri, which is said to be situated on one of the spurs of the Mount Meru in the exalted Himalayas. Incidentally, Mount Meru, which is believed to be densely forested with the divine '**Kalpavraksha**' trees is said to be the abode of Lord Shiva also. Alkapuri is also known by the names of **Vasudhara**, **Vasusathli** and

Prabha. As per the Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabharat, Lord Kuber had his sway in the city of Lanka before he was ousted from there by his half-brother, the demon king Ravana. He was also the proud owner of the celestial aerial chariot '**Pushpak Viman**,' which was later-on snatched away from him by the demon king Ravana. The city of Lanka is believed to have been built of gold by the divine architect **Vishwakarma** for the residence of Lord Kubera.

Yakshi also known by the alternative names of **Charvi** and **Kauveri**, the spouse of Lord Kubera is said to be the daughter of Danav Mura. She is believed to serve Goddess Durga as one of the attendants. Manigriva (also known as Varnkavi) and **Nalkubera** (also called as **Mayuraja**), are Lord Kubera's sons, while Menakshi is his daughter. Lord Kubera, the King of **Yakshas** is also known as Dhanpati (the lord of wealth), **Nar-raja** (the King of men), **Rajrāja** (the King of Kings), **Ichchhavas** (one who gets immense wealth at his own wish and will), **Ratangarbha** (one who possesses plenty of jewels and diamonds) and also as **Rakshasendra** (the chief of demons). He is also known as the presiding deity of the northern side of the universe and the house. Hindu mythology describes Kuber to have a white complexion, a deformed body with three legs and only eight teeth. Further, he is regarded not only as the lord of gold but also of silver, jewels, diamonds, and all other kinds of precious stones. He is also known as the protector of the business class of the society.

In the mythological depictions, Lord Kuber is shown as seated on the shoulders of a man or riding a carriage pulled by men. Sometimes an elephant or a ram (an uncastrated male sheep) are also shown as his mounts. The subjects and devotees of Lord Kuber are called as **Yaksh** and they are believed to possess supernatural powers. They can change their shape and form at

will. They are regarded to be full of kindness, compassion and benevolence.

According to *Kalhan's* Raj Tarangni, *Yakshas* resided on the mighty mountain ranges of Kashmir. They would descend to the plains during the winter season, where the *Naga* inhabitants would extend hospitality to them by offering the delectable cuisine of *khichdi*. The Yakshas are believed to be historical reality down the ages as innumerable villages and temples have been dedicated to them. They exist in vast stretches of land right from the present day states of Uttranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. In the capital city of Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, there is a famous Hanuman temple on the adjacent Jakhu hill. It is believed that thousands of years back Yaksha sage performed austerities and penance there. Lord Hanuman is said to have made a brief stopover at the Jakhu hill during his search for '*Sanjeevani Bhooti*' for Lakshman. The sage Yaksha latter-on built a temple on the hill in honour of Lord Hanuman. In Rohru and Arki tehsil of Shimla district, two villages dedicated to *Yakshas* are known by the names of Jakhu and *Jakhol*. The word Jakhol in the local dialect means '*Yakshalai*' or the abode of Yaksha.

In the central part of Himachal Pradesh, there are many temples dedicated to Yakshas and *Yakshanis*, who are worshipped as the village deities of the natives. They are also regarded as the deities of domestic cattle. In order to ward off the evil spell and to guarantee plentiful milk, *Yakshas* are propitiated by burning '*dhoop*' and incense sticks in the cowsheds. Dr. M.S. Randhawa, a noted researcher writes in his book "*Farmers of India*" that *Pischas*, *Yakshas* and *Naga* tribes inhabited Kashmir in ancient times. Prof. DD Sharma, a well-known historian and researcher has identified numerous villages dedicated to *Yakshas* in the hilly regions of the Himalayas in his book "*Himalayan*

Sanskriti Kae Muladar". There is a strong belief among the people in the hilly areas that affluence and fortune will come one's way if the Yaksha King Lord Kuber is propitiated and pleased. The said belief also exists in the folklore of Kashmir. According to Prof. D.D. Sharma, the villages of *Jakh*, *Jakhet* in *Karanprayag*, *Jakhola* in *Joshimath*, *Jakhni* and *Jakhoal* in *Chamoli*, *Jakhand*, *Jakhanyali*, *Jakhvadi*, *Jakholi*, *Jakhni* and *Jakhi* in *Devprayag*, *Jakh* and *Jakhol* in *Tehri Garhwal*, *Jakh*, *Jakhni*, *Jakhola* and *Jakhmoli* in *Pauri Garwal* and *Jakhu* on *Dehradun-Rajpora* road not only had strong association with Yakshas but also speak volumes about their possible high concentration in these places in the ancient times. In addition to it, the entire area of *Alaknanda* right from *Joshimath* to *Karanprayag* is known as '*Jakh*' or the area which was once occupied and dominated by Yakshas.

According to Dr. Jagdish Prasad Samval, a celebrated researcher, a temple known as '*Yakshraj*' exists on a mountain top about one km away from *Narayankote* on the road leading to *Kedarnath*. *Yakshraj*, Lord Kuber is the local deity of the surrounding eleven villages of the area. Likewise, there is a *Yakshraj* temple in *Pithoragarh* also, where meat offerings are made to the deity. *Yakshraj* is also the guardian deity of the adjacent villages. *Almora* also has a famous temple known as *Jakhani Devi* temple.

According to Prof. D.D. Sharma, *Almora* area has *Jakhnola*, *Jakhnoli*, *Jakhani*, *Jakh* villages, whereas *Ranikhet* has *Jakhni*, *Jakh* and *Nainital* has the village by the name of *Jakh*. In *Jammu* province also there are two villages-*Jakhni* (65 kms from *Jammu* city on the way to *Udhampur*) and *Jakhbhar* (4-5 kms from *Kathua* on *Nagari* road).

In *Kashmir* also, the *Yakshas* have left their impressions behind. These have survived in the form of village names even up to the present times. The villages of *Ichikote*,

Ichigam, Ichihama, Ichigoz and Rairyach situated in the central district of Budgam (Kashmir) might have been Yaksha settlements at certain stages of time. I have also been able to locate one more village by the name of *Yachihoum*, which is nestled in the foothills of forested mountain on Srinagar - Sonamarg road in Ganderbal district in Kashmir. One more village known by the name of Yachinar is situated in the southern district of Anantnag in Kashmir. According to Late Prof. Laxmidhar Kalla, a noted Sanskrit scholar of India and HoD Sanskrit, Delhi University, a village by the name of Alkapuri exists near the village Manigam in Ganderbal (Kashmir). Some scholars state that a tribe by the name of Yakshun lives in the Dardistan area, which is located in north of Kashmir. They assert that the name Yakshun is a derivative from Yakshkun meaning *Yakshas*. A township to the west of the present day new airport near Humhama village in Budgam village, locally known as Damodar Wudar is said to have been built by an ancient King of Kashmir, Damodar. Yakshas, who were adept in the construction skills are believed to have contributed help and expertise.

Yakshas have also left their imperishable imprints on the social fabric of Kashmir. They are in the form of Surnames of 'Yaksha', 'Yach' and 'Rakshas' retained by Kashmiri Pandits. Lord Kuber is said to be the chief of both *Yakshas* and *Rakshas*. Late Sh. Dina Nath Yaksh, a noted Sanskrit scholar of Kashmir was a resident of Bulbullankar, Alikdal Srinagar up to the year 1990. About five to six Pandit families having the surname 'Yach' were residents of Rainawari (Karapora Khushki) area in Srinagar up to their migration from there in 1990. A few Pandit families with the surname 'Yach' were also residents of Karfalli-Mohalla, Srinagar and Sopore township of Baramulla district. According to a few Hindu scriptures, 'Rakshshas' are not demons but on the contrary benefactors and defenders.

According to Kashmiri folklore, Yaksh is

believed to make two and half sounds of '*Waaf*' (two high pitched and one low volume sounds). The same folklore says that Yaksh dons a red cap made of gold, which is studded with jewels and diamonds. This cap known as '*Phous*' is said to bestow enormous supernatural powers to Yaksh.

As per prevalent lore in Kashmir, anyone who succeeds in snatching the cap and then hides it under a mortar or a hand mill stone or a pitcher filled with water or an earthen pot full of fermented kitchen leftover vegetables called '*Saderkanz*' is believed to tame Yaksh. The snatcher is given unlimited wealth if the cap is given back to Yaksh.

According to family lore of Ambardars, one of their ancestors is believed to have seized the cap of Yaksh. After the cap was returned to Yaksh, the Ambardar families were exempted from offering the oblation of *Khitchdi* to Yaksh on the ritual of *Khitchdiamavasya*. The same family lore states that once one of their ancestors, who in violation of this exemption dared to observe the ritual of *Khitchdiamavasya* had his house engulfed by fire. Since that time the Ambardar families of Kashmir continue to abstain from observing the said ritual.

Observance of the Ritual:

On the evening of Khichdi Amavasya (Khaechimavas), rice mixed with turmeric powder and un-grinded *moong dal* is cooked. Khichdi is also prepared with meat or cheese as per the individual family's tradition. Khichdi cooked with sanctimonious purity is kept either on a fresh earthen plate (*toke*) seated on a hand woven circular grass base called '*aer*' or in a '*thali*'. Adjacent to it, a pestle (*Kajvut*) is also seated on a round grass base (*aer*) in an upright state.

During the ritualistic *pooja*, *tilak* is applied to the pestle. The pestle is a symbolic representation of Lord Kuber, the King of Yakshas. After the completion of

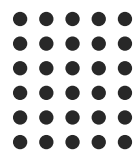
navigational *pooja*, the offering of *khichdi* kept in the earthen plate and seated on the grass base (*aer*) is placed on the courtyard wall of the house. Afterwards, the consecrated portion of Khichdi is taken by the family members as *prasad*, either with uncooked radish or Knolkhol pickle.

In some rural areas of Kashmir, *khichdi* of 'mash *dal*' called '*Maha Khaechar*' or *khichdi* of black beans or '*Varimuth*' is also cooked. It is prepared for domestic cattle. This kind of *khichdi* along with a bit of honey is kept in the cowsheds, paddy storage room (*daan-kuth*) and on cow dung heaps. In the morning it is fed to the cows. As per belief, it not only increases the milk giving capacity of the cows but also protects them from the various ailments as the Lord Kuber is also the Lord of domestic cattle. It bears close resemblance with a practice followed in certain rural pockets of Uttranchal and Himachal, where *pooja* is performed in the cowsheds. The pestle kept during the ritual of Khichdi Amvasaya is symbolic representation of our steadfastness and unwavering faith for the said ritual. It is also a metaphoric representation of the hilly regions where Yakshas lived in the past.

The pestle denotes the absolute formlessness of the all-powerful God. On the evening of Khichdi Amavasya, a few Pandit families of Sopore township of Baramulla district make a bonfire of wood on the riverbank (*Yarbal*) and burn crackers. It is believed to bestow health as fire is supposed to consume all kinds of human ailments since Yakshapati, Lord Kuber is also regarded as the deity of health.

Sharing a ritual related incident of the year 1981, Sh. PN Tikoo, a retired engineer of Vijayanagar, Talab Tillo Jammu, recalled, "The residents of the newly constructed government quarters of Khannabal, Anantnag (Kashmir) were baffled by the unusual sounds of 'waaf', heard continuously during wintery nights. All the measures undertaken by the residents neither stopped the unusual sounds nor led us to the origin of sound. Astonishingly, the sounds of 'waaf' stopped the moment I made a ceremonial offering of *khichdi* to Yaksh".

All the rituals need to be celebrated with fervour and faith as they give spiritual resonance to our lives.



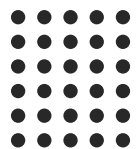
Upender Ambardar is writer cum Researcher, Broadcaster, Having passion for writing on socio cultural-religious aspects, folk and oral history of Kashmir and community diaspora.



They Who Are Blessed

Kadambari Kaul

 Their eyes speak no lies
 Nor do their tongues deceive
 They express clearly
 And honestly
 The inner workings of the mind
 Of thoughts, both good and bad,
 They are only human, after all
 Seeking guidance
 Along the Path
Towards abiding peace and happiness,
 Praying for forgiveness
 For trespasses committed
 That they may be shown
 The Light of Truth
 And may not err again,
 Unpretentious
Without artifice and burning ambition
 To scale great heights, anyhow,
 They pray for nothing more
 Than their daily bread
 And a restful night's sleep
 That they may quietly
Cross the river to the other shore
 And dwell forever more
 In peace and tranquillity,
And it is they, the simple-hearted
 Whose prayers are heard
 And answered, always.

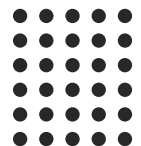


An Unending Journey

Kadambari Kaul

Like the cool, autumnal breeze
That blew and carried away
Those fallen leaves, of shades of gold,
Death came, silent and swift
And carried those souls
Slumbering sweetly below
Through the burning fires of purification
Those holy fires that consumed
Their decaying nests of pain and
attachment,
Wherein once dwelt, pride and pretence
And the vanity of worldly existence,
Reduced to ashes by Fire Divine
The Universal Energy and Equalizer,
As the departed then emerged
Radiant and purified,
The final sacrificial offering over and done
with,
The last life left behind and consumed by
time,

Each one moving along his unseen path
Towards that longed for bliss and eternal
peace
The Everlasting
The realm of perpetual Light,
That is the very Death of death, the very Life
of life.



Kadambari Kaul is a poet and author of three books on Indian philosophy, namely Brihadaraanyaka, the Great Upanishad, Verses from the Dhammapada and Gautama Buddha - A Noble Life. Her aforementioned books have received positive reviews in the National Press and have been well distributed in libraries in India and abroad.

However, writing poetry is an integral part of Kadambari's spiritual journey. This year her poem 'The Homecoming' was selected for the Cullercoats Festival, UK and subsequently published in the UP Magazine. The Homecoming was originally published by the Red Penguin Books, New York in their Anthology 'Ocean Waves' in 2021. Recently, Kadambari was felicitated as Sahitya Ratna by the Seni Sangeet Sabha at the Heritage Baishnabdas Mullick Bari, Kolkata, for her contribution to the field of English Literature. The Seni Sangeet Sabha was established by Acharya Birendrakishore Roychowdhury in 1970.



SECTION II

XLVIII

BACK TO ROOTS

2024 - 2025



The Overshadowed Sun

Aahee Sapru

आदित्यो वै तेज ओजो बलं यशश्चक्षुः श्रोत्रमात्मा मनो मन्युर्मनुर्मृत्युः
सत्यो मित्रो वायुराकाशः प्राणो लोकपालः कः किं कं तत्सत्यमत्रममृतो
जीवो विश्वः कतमः स्वयम्भु ब्रह्मतदमृत एष पुरुष एष
भूतानामधिपतिर्ब्रह्मणः सायुज्यं सलोकतामाप्नोत्येतासांमेव
देवतानां सायुज्यं सार्ष्टितां समानलोकतामाप्नोति य एवं
वेदैत्युपनिषत्

Aditya is very much all of these — energy, splendor, strength, renown, sight, hearing, body, mind, anger, Seer, Dēvas, the deities of Death, Satya, Mitra, Vāyu, Ākaśa (space), Praṇa (life energies), the ruler of the worlds, the Indeterminable one, happiness that transcends the senses, truth, food, life span, Immortality (established in Brahma), Jīva (the individual soul), the Universe, bliss and the self-born Brahma. This Puruṣa (Sūrya) is eternal. He is Lord of all creatures. He who meditates upon him attains Brahma and lives in the same region of enjoyment with him. He attains union, co-residence and enjoyment with the Dēvas in their worlds. The secret knowledge is thus imparted.

- Kṛṣṇa Yajur Vēda, Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, 10.15

As a community recognised for its adherence to Śaivism, it is natural for the current generation to primarily revere the Śankar Parivār and feel less connected to other deities. However, this perspective overlooks important aspects of our tradition. For those born and raised outside our ancestral homeland, the land settled by śi Kashyap, there is often a lack of awareness about our culture and sacred sites beyond the major pilgrimage centres.

The significance of Sūrya worship is emphasised across various texts, including the Chatur-Vēda, its supplementary writings, Purāṇas and Kaśmiri literature including the *Nilmata Purāṇa* and the works of Abhinavgupta as well as independent scriptures dedicated to Sūrya. Sūrya, one of the most prominent Vēdic Deities, who is the primary source of life for all life forms and manifests as the eight major Ādityās¹, is perceived as a powerful and highly respected divinity, who presides and effectively governs all the Nakśatras and is often equated with *Brahman* (the final form of god) in Vēdas.

According to the *Mārtanḍ Mahātmya*, Mārtanḍ refers to the eighth son of Aditi (an Āditya), who

was born in a deathly state. The term Mārtanḍ means “dead-egg” or “*Mṛta-Anḍa*” and was initially shunned by his mother. The renowned Mārtanḍ temple in Mattan pays homage to this aspect of Sūrya.

King Lalitāditya Mukhtāpīda, the fifth monarch of the Karkota Dynasty and son of King Tārāpīda, was credited with the construction of this magnificent Mārtanḍ temple in 9th Century C.E.:

“The munificent king built the marvellous temple of Martand with massive stone walls inside encircling ramparts and a township rejoiced in grape-vines”.

-Kalhan, *Rajatarangini*, 4.192, trans. by RS Pandit

Interestingly, Kalhan mentions the term Mārtanḍ before the reign of Lalitāditya in his historical account by referring to King Rānāditya, also known as Tunjina III, the younger brother of King Narendrāditya II, of the restored Gonanda Dynasty:

“In the village of Simharotsika, he founded Martand, whose fame has spread everywhere under the name of Ranapuravamin”.

-Kalhan, *Rajatarangini*, 3.462

It remains unclear whether these references denote multiple Mārtanḍ temples or an initial smaller temple by Rānāditya and a later, more grandiose structure by Lalitāditya, whose ruins still exist today. Nonetheless, these passages underscore the significant role of Sun worship in Kashmir, a region historically dominated by Buddhism or Shaivism.

Fortunately, Kaśmiri Pandits have largely preserved our major festivals, holidays, and rituals. However, our cultural and religious memory has diminished to the extent that many Kaśmiris, including Pandits, now refer to the ancient Mārtanḍ temple as *Pandav Laeyr*² and confuse Mattan—an *apa-bhramsha* of Mārtanḍ—with a modern cluster of temples with the same name, forgetting the rich tradition of Sūrya worship in our culture.³

Our scriptures advocate visiting the Sūrya Tīrth at Mārtanḍ during significant times such as *Sankrāntis*, Solar and Lunar eclipses, *Vijaya*

Saptami, Dwādashi, and throughout the month of *Bhānumās* for *Bāh*. Notably, our scriptures identify four major *Sūrya* temples as ideal for *Sūrya Tirth*:

- Mulasthan, Multan
- Mārtanḍ, Kashmir
- Modhera, Gujarat
- Konark, Orissa

Today, that glorious temple stands desecrated with defaced sculptures, broken pillars, destroyed roofs and minor cases of vandalism, hoping to witness a future of reconstruction by the ASI and GoI, bringing hope to Kaśmiri Pandits and Hindus in general. I urge all KPs planning to visit their homeland to witness the massive oxymoron of Martand Temple by any

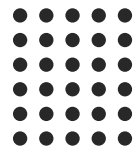
means necessary. The sense of historical wrong and grandeur of once an architectural marvel intermingling together leaves a bittersweet aftertaste. This mandatory medicine makes you realise how for granted we've taken our culture.

- ¹ Later extended into 12 Adityas
- ² This moniker is currently used for Avantiswamin Temple (a Panchyatan style of temple) in Avantipoor and Krimchi remains in Udhampur as well.
- ³ This amnesia refers to the construction of a cluster of equally important shrines in the modern temple premise as compared to the ancient tradition of constructing one primary shrine flanked by multiple secondary shrines, as also found in the ancient ruins.

Images of the temple constructed by Lalitāditya



The new Mārtanḍ Complex



Aahee is a Masters student of Archaeology with her research interests lying in Historical Archaeology, Kashmiri History and Indic Religion and Culture. She is trained in Sharda and Brahmi and is currently sharpening her skills in Sanskrit. Her current research focuses on the Martand Sun Temple and its Spatial Analysis.

Significance of Bhairava Śiva in the Śaiva Tradition of Kashmir

Advaitavadini Kaul

The vast literature of the Śaiva Tantras is traditionally classified according to deity, doctrine, and the number of Tantras. The main division is the classification of the Tantras in ten Śaivāgamas, eighteen Rudrāgamas, and sixty-four Bhairavāgamas. These are further divided into groups and subgroups. The *Śrikanṭhī Saṃhitā* describes the sixty-four as monistic Bhairavāgamas. The *Svacchanda Tantra*, associated with the worship of Svachchanda Bhairava Śiva, is the principal *tantra* in the group of Bhairava Śaiva Tantras. This group of eight Bhairava Tantras is described as an expansion of Svachchanda Bhairava. In yet another classification, the Śaiva Tantras are divided into various streams (*srotas*) of scriptural revelations emanating from the faces of Śiva through his various forms. The *Brahmayāmala* (Ch.19) describes the three streams as *Dakṣiṇa*, *Vāma*, and *Madhya*. It also mentions the Bhairava *srotas*. The *Svacchanda Tantra* is referred to as belonging to the *Dakṣiṇa* stream of *tantras*. Further, by ranking these streams they are referred to as *Śaiva* (Śaiva Siddhānta), *Vāma*, *Dakṣiṇa*, and *Kaula*. In his commentary on the *Netratantra* (Chs.11-12), Kṣemarāja names the presiding deity of each stream as Sadāśiva for the *Śaiva Siddhanta*, Tumburu for the *Vāma*, Bhairava for the *Dakṣiṇa*, and again Bhairava for the *Kaula*. In one more succeeding classification, the *tantras* are divided into four *pīṭhas* (seat/base/throne), viz. *vidyā*, *mantra*, *mandala* and *mudrā*. The *vidyāpīṭha* has eight *Bhairavas* and eight *Yāmalas*. The list of the eight *Bhairavas* is led by *Svacchanda* and followed by the other seven: *Kroddha*, *Unmatta*, *Ugra*, *Kāpālīka*, *Jhaṅkāra*, *Śekhara* and *Vijaya*. The eight *Yāmalas* are named as *Rudrayāmala*, *Skandayāmala*, *Brahmayāmala*, *Viṣṇuyāmala*, *Yamayāmala*, *Vāyuyāmala*, *Kuberayāmala*, and *Indrayāmala*. The *Yoginīhrdaya*, *Mantramālinī*, *Aghoreśī*, *Lākinīkalpa* and others are the *tantras* belonging to the *vidyā pīṭha*.

The *Svacchanda Tantra*, also known as *Lalita Svachchanda Tantra*, is introduced (v. 1.5) as a

compendium (*Saṃhitā*) with four *pīṭhas* (*catuṣpīṭhamahātānta*), meaning supports, and as the source of knowledge in four folds (*catuṣṭayaphalodayam*). The four *pīṭhas* have been explained as *vidyā*, *mantra*, *maṇḍala* and *mudrā*.

Vidyā is explained as the matrix of supreme reality, vibrating in the form of Svachchanda Śiva. Mantras are explained as *catuṣkala*, which means that the mantras have four *kalās* (levels/degrees/parts), understandable also in relation to the four levels of speech. In gross form *Om* is known as *catuṣkala*. The letters *a*, *u*, *m*, representing *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Rudra* respectively, are also considered as mantras. *Maṇḍalas* represent innumerable spheres that make up the universe, described in chapter ten of the *Svacchanda Tantra*. *Mudrā* means gesture and chapter fourteen of the *Tantra* precisely describes eighteen poses used during the interior worship of Svachchanda Bhairava. In this process, *mudrās* are acted to imitate the attributes displayed by the eighteen arms of the deity. The *Tantra* at many other places also prescribes various *mudrās* during the discussion on different ritual practices. To explain 'the source of knowledge in four folds,' Kṣemarāja says there are four individuals occupying four different positions in the ritual of *Śaiva dīkṣā*. They are: *śamayī* (initiate), *putraka* (spiritual son), *sādhaka* (adept), and *ācārya* (spiritual master). All these four are bestowed with fruition in the form of worldly enjoyment and liberation through the practice of this *Tantra*. The *Svacchanda Tantra*, with its predominantly ritualistic and meditational content, explains the queries relating to the practice of religious rites, ceremonies, and the traditional oblation rites. The main objective of the *Tantra* is the recognition of the identification of the individual self with Svachchanda Bhairava, also known as Aghoreśa or Bahurūpa, through the practice of the secret mantra known as the Aghoreśa mantra or Bhairava *mahāmantra*. It contains the seeds of most of the rituals particularly practiced by the Śaivas of Kashmir. The printed editions of the *Svacchanda Tantra*

are based on manuscripts in Śāradā script and contain a commentary called 'Udyota' by Kṣemarāja, a disciple of Abhinavagupta.

Visualized in the form of the self (*ātmarūpa*), Svachchanda is explained by Kṣemarāja as one who, out of his own (*sva-*) free will (*-chanda*), creates this universe. Thus, Svachchanda Bhairava, through his spontaneous free will, performs the five-fold act of creation, sustenance, dissolution, covering and bestowing grace. This activity is his *krīḍā* (play), and therefore everything is bliss only, in the real sense. As such, this universe is the blissful spontaneous will of Śiva. There is no difference between Svachchanda Bhairava and his acts. It is also for this reason that both the deity and the Tantra are known by the same name, states Kṣemarāja. Śiva reveals the knowledge of the Tantra in order to bestow his grace upon humanity, which is bound by limitations. His grace consists of both worldly enjoyment and (final) liberation. The revelation involves the performance of the rituals and practices at various levels in order to identify oneself with the supreme self. Beginning with the discussion of the manifestation of the *māṭṛakās* (Sanskrit phonemes), the text teaches that one is to realise that all sound originates from the vibration of unstruck *nāda* and undifferentiated *bindu*, the state of *paramānanda*, supreme bliss. Bhairava becomes manifest in the form of sixteen *svaras* (vowels) and Bhairavī is known as the *yonī* (place of origin) of the phonemes, representing the thirty-four *vyañjanas* (consonants). Thus, the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are the *māṭṛakās* (mothers) of all mantras and Tantras (scriptures). As the support of all the *māṭṛakās*, Bhairava is the ultimate reality. He consists of three letters: *bha* for *bharaṇa* (bearing), *ra* for *ravaṇa* (resonating), and *va* for *vamana* (emitting). Known as Niṣkala Bhaṭṭāraka, he should be worshipped with the sixteen (vowels), and Niṣkala Bhaṭṭārikā, identical with him, should be worshipped with the thirty-four (consonants). Emitting the light of Bhairavī in seven directions are the seven mothers (*māṭṛakās*) with their specific names. Manifest in the form of seven groups of letters, these seven *māṭṛakās* are associated with the worship of Svachchanda Bhairava. This worship can be performed at two levels, *para* (subtle) and *apara* (gross), according to the Tantra.

The *mantras* become manifest on the basis of the *māṭṛakās*. Worship with *māṭṛakās* incorporates the use of various types of mantras, e.g., *bīja* mantras, *āsana* mantras, *mūrti* mantras, *dhyāna* mantras, etc. All *mantras* have an associated deity to be meditated upon by the *sādhaka*. The *māṭṛakās* are supported by *maṇḍalas* (diagrams) in order to explain their subtle meaning and *mantras* are supported by *mudrās* (gestures) to make an act of the gross forms during the ritual performance. This knowledge is for both internal as well as external growth and both culminate finally in supreme Śiva, known as Svachchanda Bhairava, who is the supreme deity of the Tantra.

In Kashmir, there evolved a strong tradition of Śakti worship along with the worship of Śiva. This seems to have become more intense with the passage of time. In the present context we have the evidence of miniature paintings in which this development can be observed. Devī in the *Svacchanda Tantra* is visualized in the lap of Svachchanda, and this is also found in some depictions. But Svachchanda Bhairava and Bhairavī are also depicted in some paintings separately but in the same form and with the same attributes. We also observe Bhairavī emerging as a full-fledged goddess known as Śārikā in Kaśmir. Śārikā Pīṭha, situated on a hill at the centre of Śrinagar city, is also known as Cakreśvara or Cakreśvarī. There is evidence of a long line of *sādhakas* who have achieved spiritual attainments through their regular meditational practice around this spiritually powerful abode. A beautiful image of Śārikā Bhagavati was developed in Kashmiri calendar art recently. With great reverence to the goddess, this image adorns each Kashmiri home even after their exile from Kashmir. Not only that, a replica of the Śārikā shrine has been created near Delhi in Faridabad, which is evidence of this deeply rooted tradition. One is also reminded of the practice of the strong Bhairava tradition back home in Kashmir where eight Bhairavas/Lokapālas guard the city. There may be change in the nomenclature but one can definitely observe by this that the mental practice was complemented by physical models in Kashmir and they stand as reminders of this great tradition.

Śivarātri is one of the foremost festivals observed by the Kashmiri community. This

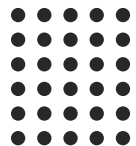
festival is observed as Bhairavotsava, in which *bhairava yāga* is performed with elaborate ritual worship of Bhairava-Bhairavī along with *devī putras* Vaṭuka (Vaṭuka Bhairava) and Ramaṇa (Rāma gôd as called in Kashmiri), symbolically represented by vessels during Śivarātri Pūjā . There is a story according to which once while in ānanda mudrā Lord Śiva was in a playful mood. All his *gaṇas* appeared in his service. While thinking of Pārvatī (Supreme Śakti), Śiva saw her in a garden in the Himalaya along with many other goddesses (her own creations) who were busy preparing various food items. Some goddesses were making containers of different shapes and so on. Seeing all this in his *samādhi*, Mahādeva Śiva took the form of Svachchanda Bhairava and appeared before them. The goddesses got frightened by this form. Mahāmāyā, also getting disturbed by this, looked into a water container. When she did this, Vaṭuka Bhairava appeared there, along with his attributes. Finding Vaṭuka (young boy) incapable of facing Svachchanda Bhairava, she looked again inside another water container and there appeared Ramaṇa (a handsome boy) along with *āyudhas* (shield). In this way Mahāmāyā created many *gaṇas* in order to combat the fearful form of Śiva. At this point the form of Śiva disappeared and all came to Parā Śakti for refuge. Offering delicious food, she blessed them all. This day was the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Phaguna. To grace his devotees, Śiva also appeared (on this day) at the time of the sunset in the form of Jvālā Liṅga dispersing heat, and this heat calmed down by midnight. The symbolic representation of this Jvālā Liṅga

is the Śūnya Putula (locally called Soṇya Potul), the prime deity worshipped during Śivarātri pūjā as *niṣkala* Svachchanda Bhairava.

The ritual worship of Śivarātri concludes with the ritual of Vaiśva Deva (Vaiśadiv in Kashmiri), in which oblations are made to each entity through the conceptualization of the entire universe as one divine entity (Viśva Deva). This is a great reminder of our obligation towards preserving and nourishing each and every creation of blissful and compassionate Svachchanda Bhairava and Bhairavī.



Svachchanda Bhairava Śiva



Dr. Advaitavadini Kaul is scholar on Kashmir and various aspects of its cultural heritage, intellectual traditions and historiography. She is also an expert on Inter disciplinary study of Indian traditions. Her research papers form part of many important volumes published in India and abroad. Many of her published papers are originally based on her presentations made at various conferences in India and abroad. *Buddhist Savants of Kashmir and their contributions abroad (1987)* is her well received book. She has edited a number of volumes. *Asian Aesthetic Theories and Art Forms* edited by her was published in 2021. Her latest book: लल्लेश्वरी के वाङ्मय published by Sahitya Academi, New Delhi has come out early this year (Feb.2024).

Dr Kaul has served in IGNCA, New Delhi for about thirty years till March 2020 in various capacities as Chief Editor, Head of Kalakośa Research & Publication Division.



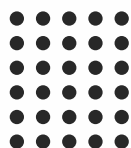


SECTION III

XLVIII

TRIBUTES

2024 - 2025



The untold story of Sarvanand Kaul Premi

Rohit Tikoo

**Jo shakhs ho zinda to phir kya khaak
marta hai
Hunar ke saath insaan amar ho jaata hai**

These words by Josh Malihabadi resonate profoundly with the life and legacy of Sarvanand Kaul Premi, a luminary whose diverse talents and unwavering spirit continue to inspire long after his untimely demise alongside his younger son, Virender Kaul, at the hands of radical jihadis.

Birth and Early life

Sarvanand Kaul Premi was born on November 2, 1924, during the holy month of Kartik, on Krishna Paksha Navami in Soaf Shali near Kokernag in Anantnag District. He was the second of five siblings born to Gopinath Kaul. His forefathers had lived in Rainawari, Srinagar, before migrating to Butagund, a village near Bijbehara, and finally settling in Soaf Shali, Kokernag. Sarvanand Kaul's mother passed away when he was only four years old, after which he was cared for by his aunt Gunwati.

Family Background and Spiritual Influences

Sarvanand Kaul Premi's father, Gopi Nath, was a deeply religious man who dedicated much of his time to devotional practices, including worshipping and studying sacred Hindu scriptures. The family home was frequently visited by sadhus (holy men), creating an atmosphere steeped in spirituality and learning. This environment had a profound impact on young Sarvanand.

As the saying goes, "Jaisa Sang, Waisa Rang" (one is influenced by the company one keeps), and Sarvanand was no exception. He was deeply influenced by the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere of his childhood home. Sarvanand came to regard his father, Gopi Nath, not only as a parent but also as a mentor and spiritual guide. From his father,

he inherited a deep appreciation for religious texts and spiritual knowledge, which would shape his own path as a scholar and writer.

This early exposure to religious studies and spiritual seekers laid the foundation for Sarvanand's future as a multifaceted individual, combining spirituality with scholarship and social engagement.

The Freedom Struggle: Premi's Involvement in India's Independence Movement

After completing his graduation, Sarvanand Kaul Premi joined Khader Bhandar (Gandhi Ashram) for a job. Khadi was adopted in 1920 as a political weapon in the Swadeshi movement by Mahatma Gandhi. It was here that he encountered other freedom fighters and had the privilege of meeting Mahatma Gandhi himself, who was deeply impressed by the young man's dedication and commitment to the cause of independence. Inspired by Gandhi's principles of non-violence and civil disobedience, Sarvanand Kaul Premi became actively involved in organizing local protests.

His involvement with Khader Bhandar not only strengthened his resolve but also expanded his network within the freedom struggle movement. Sarvanand Kaul Premi's efforts were instrumental in mobilizing support from various sections of society, including students and workers, towards the goal of Indian independence. As his reputation grew, Sarvanand Kaul Premi became a target of British repression. Undeterred, he continued to lead protests and faced arrest on multiple occasions.

Encounter with Mahjoor and the Birth of a Poet

Sarvanand Kaul Premi wrote a lot during this time, but he was unsure about his poetry and kept it hidden. Someone close to him

convinced him to share his work with the well-known poet Mahjoor. Mahjoor, whose full name was Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor, was a renowned Kashmiri poet known for his contributions to Kashmiri literature. The meeting between Premi and Mahjoor proved to be pivotal in Sarvanand Kaul's Premi's career.

This meeting initiated what is known as the Guru Shishya Parampara, a traditional Indian concept of mentorship where knowledge, skills, and wisdom are passed from a guru (teacher) to a Shishya (disciple). Mahjoor's experience and insight allowed him to recognize Premi's talent immediately. He encouraged Premi to continue writing. This encouragement led to Premi's famous poem, "Roodha Jehri." (Rain spell).

Social Activism and Communal Harmony

Sarvanand Kaul Premi's commitment to social reform manifested in various ways, including his efforts to support the marriage of orphaned Muslim girls, demonstrating his cross-community engagement. His work unfolded against a backdrop of escalating political instability in Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1986, a significant political transition occurred when Ghulam Mohammad Shah supplanted Farooq Abdullah in what was essentially a coup. This shift led to increased volatility in the region's governance. In an attempt to solidify his position, Shah's administration sought legitimacy through alignment with Islamist factions, inadvertently amplifying their political influence.

A pivotal moment arose when Shah proposed the construction of a mosque within the confines of an ancient Hindu temple in Jammu's New Civil Secretariat area, ostensibly to provide Muslim employees a space for prayer. This decision catalyzed widespread protests among Jammu's Hindu population, ultimately resulting in inter-communal clashes.

Upon returning to the Kashmir Valley, Shah

employed inflammatory rhetoric, suggesting that Islam was under threat. This narrative exacerbated tensions, culminating in the 1986 Kashmir riots. During this period, Kashmiri Hindus became targets of violence, with numerous temples desecrated or destroyed, particularly in Anantnag. The unrest led to the looting of Kashmiri Hindu properties, instigating a wave of panic among the minority community and precipitating their exodus from the region.

The inter religious tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities manifested in mutual economic boycotts during significant religious observances such as Maha- Shivratri. While Hindus abstained from purchasing meat, Muslims reciprocated by withholding essential commodities from Hindu consumers. In this context of communal discord, Sarvanand Kaul Ji emerged as a mediator, attempting to bridge the divide between the antagonistic groups and promote interfaith harmony.

He appealed to members of both communities to cease hostilities, emphasizing the historical fraternal bonds between local Muslims and Hindus. Initially, his efforts towards fostering communal amity yielded some positive outcomes. However, the tragic irony of his endeavors became evident in 1990 when he fell victim to the very sectarian violence he had strived to mitigate. This unfortunate event underscored the intricate and volatile nature of the region's communal dynamics, highlighting the challenges inherent in maintaining peaceful coexistence in areas of deep-rooted religious tensions.

The Tragic End: The Brutal Killing of Sarvanand Kaul Premi and His Son

On April 28, 1990, a group of armed extremists perpetrated a heinous act against the family of Sarvanand Kaul Premi in Kashmir. The assailants strategically disabled the local power supply before infiltrating Premi's residence, timing their intrusion to coincide with the family's post-

dinner retirement.

Under the pretense of seeking someone Ghulam Rasool address, the intruders gained entry. They systematically held the family members into a single room, proceeding to seize valuables including gold, jewellery, Pashmina Shawls, and their clothes, which they had purchased for the wedding of his close relatives. Their pillage extended to forcibly removing personal adornments from family members too. Nothing was left behind.

The adjacent library, Sarvanand Ji's adjacent house for reading and writing, was not spared. The assailants vandalized this space, absconding with significant literary works and manuscripts that Premi had been developing.

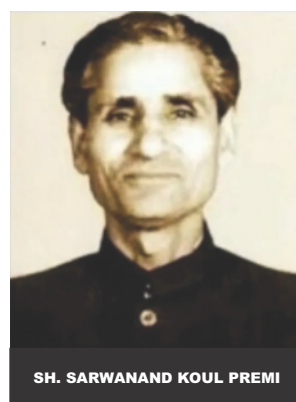
Following the comprehensive looting, the perpetrators employed deception, claiming a need to escort Sarvanand Kaul Premi to meet their Commander with assurances of his safe return. Virender Kaul, Premi's son, insisted on accompanying his father, sensing potential danger. The assailants' agreed to this request was an ominous portent.

In the aftermath, after days of their kidnapping, local law police officials approached the family with the ostensible intent of preparing them for the grim reality. The police first suggested that the family should eat something. This was their way of gently preparing the family for the terrible news they were about to hear. Then, the police told the family that they had found Sarvanand and Virender. Sadly, both had been killed. Their bodies were found hanging from a tree. They had been badly hurt – their arms and legs were broken, and their eyes had been damaged. This showed that the kidnappers had been extremely cruel before killing them.

The tragedy was further compounded by the domestic circumstances of Virender Kaul. His untimely demise left in its wake a young widow and an infant child, merely eighteen months of age. This familial fracture

exemplifies the far-reaching consequences of such acts of violence, extending beyond the immediate victims to impact subsequent generations.

Compounding the tragedy, Sarvanand Kaul's youngest son, Ravinder Kaul, was unable to attend his father's cremation due to the risks associated with his position at All India Radio's news section in New Delhi. During this period, employment with state-run media outlets like All India Radio or Doordarshan was viewed with extreme hostility by radical extremists. Such employees were often branded as agents of the Indian state, making them prime targets for violence. The gravity of this threat is exemplified by the fate of Lassa Kaul, who was murdered solely for his association with Doordarshan. This grim reality underscores the perilous circumstances faced by media professionals in the region, caught in the cross hairs of political and ideological strife. This was not the only case where bodies were mutilated before being killed. The same happened with Girija Tikoo, Sarla Bhat and many others.



SH. SARWANAND KOUL PREMI



SH. VERINDER KOUL VEER

Image of Sarvanand Kaul and Verinder Kaul. Image Courtesy: Kashmir Convener

Premi's Multifaceted Personality and Literary Contributions. Notable Works and Translations

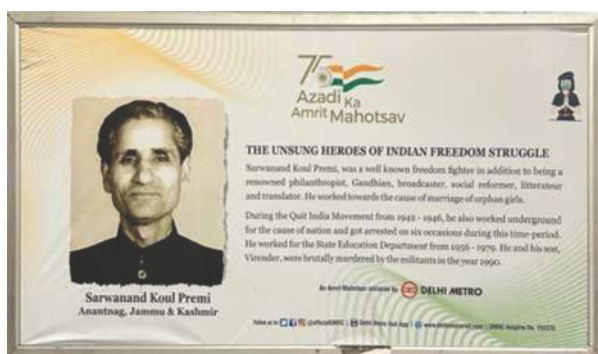
Sarvanand Kaul Premi, revered as Shaheed (martyr) in Kashmiri Pandit community, stands as a paragon of intellectual versatility and cultural synthesis in 20th century Kashmir. His multifaceted persona encompassed roles as diverse as they were

profound: poet, author, thinker, scholar, translator, socio-political activist, and journalist. Premi's scholarly acumen was particularly evident in his linguistic prowess. His command over multiple languages allowed him to bridge cultural divides and bring literary masterpieces to new audiences. Perhaps his most remarkable achievement in this realm was his translation of Rabindranath Tagore's "Gitanjali" into Kashmiri. This work not only demonstrated Premi's technical skill as a translator but also his deep understanding of both Bengali and Kashmiri cultural nuances, enabling him to convey both the literal meaning and the spiritual essence of Tagore's seminal work.

His other great works was the translation of Bhagvad Gita and Ramayana into Kashmiri and Urdu. The breadth of Sarvanand Kaul Premi's contributions to Kashmiri culture and literature is difficult to overstate. His life's work serves as a bridge between languages, cultures, and belief systems, exemplifying the rich, syncretic tradition of Kashmir. In his roles as writer, translator, and public intellectual, Premi not only preserved but also dynamically interpreted and expanded the cultural heritage of his homeland.

His notable works are *Kalami Premi*, *Bhakti Kusum*, *Biography of Mirza Kak*, works on Mathura Devi, Rupa Bhawani, Paanchader and many dozen books.

Awards and Recognition



Plaque of Sarvanand Kaul Premi installed at Barakhamba Metro Station

Delhi Metro has commemorated the legacy

of a celebrated Kashmiri poet and martyr by installing a plaque at Barakhamba Metro Station. This tribute acknowledges his significant contributions to social harmony, cultural preservation, and communal unity.

Throughout his life and posthumously, the poet received numerous accolades for his work:

- 1997: Posthumously honored with a gold medal by the Jammu & Kashmir Government
- 1997: Awarded a medal and memento by Delhi Pradesh BJP during India's 50th independence anniversary celebrations
- 2000: Bestowed with the Shree Bhatt Puruskar by J&K Vichar Manch, New Delhi
- 2001 (September 5): Presented with the Sarvanand Kaul Premi Gold Medal by the Jammu & Kashmir Government at Raj Bhawan, Srinagar
- 2006: Received the Sharda Puruskar Saman from Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra, Jammu
- 2017: Honoured with the inaugural Alakh Saman by Shri Alakh Sahiba Trust, Jammu

These awards recognize the lasting influence the poet has had on Kashmiri culture. His work also aimed to bring different communities together. In his hometown of Soaf Shali, a higher Secondary school was even named after him in his honour.



Higher secondary School Soaf. Image Courtesy Rajinder Kaul

Hue and Cry in Jammu Kashmir Controversy: Inclusion of Premi's Works in Educational Libraries

In 2018, a significant initiative was proposed in Jammu and Kashmir to incorporate religious texts, including translations of the Bhagavad Gita and the Kashmiri Ramayana by Sarvanand Kaul Premi, into various educational and cultural departments. This decision was initially approved in a meeting chaired by BB Vyas, an advisor to Governor Satpal Malik, on October 4, 2018 was taken back on 18th October, 2018 meeting the same fate as allocating land to Amarnath Shrine board.

The Fight for Justice: Rajinder Kaul's Ongoing Struggle

Faced with immense personal adversity, Rajinder Kaul, the elder son of Sarvanand Kaul has embarked on a mission to preserve and promote his father Sarvanand Kaul Premi's invaluable literary contributions. Surrounded by his father's manuscripts and personal belongings in Delhi, Rajinder tirelessly works to republish Premi's works. This includes translations of Russian folktales and the poetry collection 'Bhakti-Pushp' into other languages. However, he faces significant challenges like a diminishing readership for Kashmiri literature and a lack of recognition as well as support from governmental bodies and institutions.

National and State Human Rights Commissions

In 1994, shortly after the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) by the Government of India, Kaul took a significant step. He penned a four-page handwritten letter to the NHRC, detailing the atrocities, genocide, human rights violations, and ethnic cleansing experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community. This simple act of reaching out to the newly formed commission would set in motion a series of events that continue to resonate today.

The NHRC's response was swift and unprecedented. Taking suo moto cognizance of Kaul's petition, the commission granted him an audience with its full panel, including Justice Ranga Nath Mishra, Justice S.S. Kang, and Justice B.B. Fatima. This hearing, held in June 1994, focused on the denial, deprivation, and discrimination suffered by the exiled community. Kaul's appeal was not just for recognition of their suffering but also for preventive, punitive, and restorative measures.

As other organizations like All India Kashmiri Samaj and Panun Kashmir Movement joined the cause with their petitions, Kaul's efforts became part of a larger movement. The NHRC began hearing these petitions collectively, culminating in a verdict in 1999 that specifically appreciated Kaul's arguments on genocide.

The struggle for justice, however, was far from over. In 2008, the NHRC transferred Kaul's family case to the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) of Jammu and Kashmir, urging a speedy disposal of the case. This transfer came in light of the state government's failure to address the grievances of Kaul's family, described as "patriotic and front-line terrorism victims."

After four years of prolonged hearings, the SHRC delivered a landmark double bench verdict in 2012 – the first of its kind in a Kashmiri Pandit case. The judgment directed the state government to address the grievances "Sooner the Better." This verdict seemed to promise a turning point in the long-standing issue.

Despite this clear directive, the implementation of the SHRC's recommendations has been frustratingly slow. Multiple high-level meetings have been held, chaired by various senior officials including the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, the Financial Commissioner, the Chief Secretary, and even the Governor's advisor. Yet, as of Kaul's account, these meetings have not translated into concrete

action.

This continued inaction, in Kaul's view, represents not just a disregard for the SHRC's authority but also an insult to the sacrifices made by families like his who have suffered immensely at the hands of terrorists. The lack of progress stands in stark contrast to the urgency of the situation and the clear directives issued by various bodies over the years.

Rajinder Kaul's journey from writing a heartfelt letter to navigating the complex corridors of bureaucracy and human rights commissions illustrates the challenges faced by those seeking justice for displaced communities. His persistent advocacy, spanning nearly three decades, serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggles of the Kashmiri Pandit community and the often-arduous path to justice in cases of forced exile and human rights violations.

As this situation continues to evolve, Kaul's efforts remain a crucial part of the larger narrative of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus, highlighting the need for continued attention and action on this critical issue of human rights and social justice.

Conclusion: The Enduring Impact of Sarvanand Kaul Premi

As we reflect on Sarvanand Kaul Premi's life and contributions, we are reminded of the vital role that intellectuals, artists, and activists play in shaping society and fostering understanding across divides. His story serves as an inspiration for future generations to pursue knowledge, embrace diversity, and work tirelessly for the betterment of their communities. In an era where cultural tensions and social divisions continue to challenge our societies, the life and work of Sarvanand Kaul Premi offer valuable lessons in resilience, creativity, and

the pursuit of harmony. His legacy lives on not only in his written works but in the ongoing efforts to build a more inclusive and understanding world – a fitting tribute to a man who dedicated his life to bridging cultures and fostering peace.

To sum up

Chman mein jis ne khushboo ka dia tha nazarana,

Taasub ki aag ne us gul ko kar diya fana

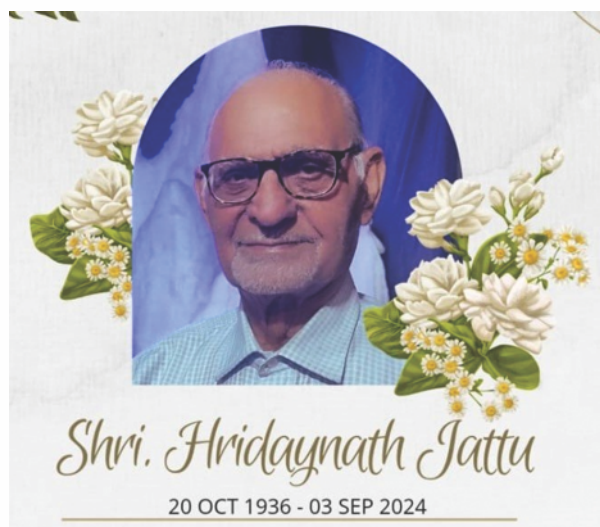
The violence in Kashmir is merely a glimpse into the larger tragedy. Intolerance has fuelled horrific attacks by extremists, tearing apart the social fabric of the valley and claiming lives from both Hindu and Muslim communities. If you have a first hand account of these events, I'm ready to share your story, uncensored. Please reach out to me at author@rohittikoo.com and let me amplify your voice.

For detailed information on the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits, read the book [Kashmiri Pandits: A tale of solitude and Survival](#)



Hirdey Nath Jattu – A tribute

Rajinder Premi



Some are born with God given extraordinary abilities, creative acumen and talent, who by virtue of such sublime qualities give the world a new direction. These people look and behave as ordinary citizens but their intellect and sensibilities make them towering. They carve out a niche for themselves and make an everlasting impact, thus leaving behind a great legacy.

Mr. H.N Jattu was one such legendary soul. Sri Jattu was a born Kashmiri Pandit leader, who lived a mixed life. He joined the Indian army for a brief stint. He was born on 20th October, 1936 at Ganpath- Yaar, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. He did his matriculation from local high school but later on established his own business in his locality. He was the president of a famous Ganesh Mandir committee (Ganpath Yaar). Mr. Jattu was the founder-president of All India Kashmiri pandit conference (AIKPC).

Jattu's leadership was marred by bold decisions. In 1989-90, when KPs lost their leaders to the militancy, Jattu was the only one who raised an alarm about the growing threats to KPs by the terrorists in a press conference in Srinagar. The valley was

already in the Tinder box and his warnings persistently were largely unheard. The General Secretary of the AIKPC, Sri Ashok Qazi was martyred by the terrorists in response/reaction to Mr. Jattu's question to these subversive elements. Soon after many such killings, Jattu was forced to leave Kashmir. When Jattu landed in Jammu, he gave a call for a second migration from Jammu to Delhi called "Delhi Chalo". This was due to the hostility towards migrant KPs in the Jammu region then. During this period when Jattu migrated from Jammu to Delhi, his trusted colleague Sri J.N. Saproo ousted him from the presidency of AIKPC.

In Delhi, during this period, Delhi administration was under the process of allotting the camps to Kashmiri migrants stationed in Delhi. Jattu took shelter in Aliganj (Lodhi road), NDMC camp. He started his business in ready-made garments in Yousuf-Sarai migrant-market, where many other migrants were also allotted *Tehbazaari*- sites by NDMC/MCD under Delhi administration then. Although he stayed in Delhi but was not cut-off from his cadres in Jammu.

Rt. Major General B.N. Dhar, his chief adviser and top admirer as well as his well-wisher, offered him to revive his own outfit and also persuaded him to come back to Jammu as they felt a vacuum in their leadership at Jammu. During his stay in Delhi, Jattu was given a due place in AIKS and was made vice-president by Sri J.N. Kaul and M.K. Kaw. He attended all AIKS meetings and regional conferences held at Jammu, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and other places where he advanced and advocated fiercely the cause of the displaced community. He would always be a member of any delegation that

met the central government for lessening the hardships of the exiled community. He was also a member of the AIKS delegation with us, which met the then prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Home minister- Shivraj Patil and other ministers under Sri M.K. Kaw's stewardship, besides all party joint delegation of All India KP Organisations meeting with the members of the parliamentary standing committee of Ministry of Home, on rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants. He also accompanied us in an AIKS delegation which had few regular meetings with the interlocutors, on Kashmir appointed by Gol and also the inter-ministerial committee constituted by the PM and headed by Ms Sushma Chaudhry, IAS, secretary planning commission.

I have known Jattu saheb since 1993, when we met in Jammu during a meeting in Janbulaochan Hall. This was my first meeting with him and other front-line leaders like late Smt Kaushalya Wali then-president KP Sabha, Jammu; Late Makhanlal Aima, the chief of the migrant-action committee (maha- Samelen); late Amarnath Vaishnavi, ASKPC, Pandit D.K. Babu of Devasthan Suraksha Samiti; late B.N. Bhan, Nisar- Delhvi; editor Kashyap Wani; late T.N. Khosa; P. N. Karnail; R.C.Shivpuri; H.L. Chatta; P.N. Tingloo and many more stalwarts. May peace be on all of them!

I had heard about Mr. H.N. Jattu first time in 1967, when he had taken a very active part during KP agitation in Parmeshwari case. I had then wished to see this great leader, as my illustrious father had then narrated the details of the agitation as he himself was a part of it and a live- witness. Jattu had to come back to Delhi on account of his health issues as he had suffered a heart-stroke in Jammu in 2009, he had built his own house in Gol-Gujral area of Jammu by then.

When AIKS under Sri M.K. Kaw finally decided to file a writ petition in the Supreme Court of India in 2006, on my persistent persuasion and after a marathon discussion after few meetings with some of our front line affiliates as to who could be the effective principal petitioners in the case, with prolonged deliberations, discussions and executive meetings the final authority was given to Mr. Kaw to pick the three petitioners. I had from the very beginning persuaded the former AIKS President Papaji, who was not interested in a legal fight for restoration of justice for the exile community. After seeing my prepared dummy petition by a few legal luminaries, they advised late Papaji to move with this petition. Shri Kaw, appreciating my active interest in judicial activism and active enthusiasm with this dream project, named me as petitioner no.1 and Mr. Jattu as petitioner no.2. I was tasked with bringing around Mr. Jattu as he was nominated in absentia. Somehow I persuaded Jattu saheb and finally he agreed to my arguments on this issue with the condition of including Mr. Kaw himself as a one of the petitioners. When I reported back to president Kaw on this issue, conveying Jattu's consent and the condition he immediately agreed with the proposal. The petition was filed and every apprehension of some of our esteemed friends were removed, when the honourable Supreme Court of India admitted our petition and issued notices to the union of India and the J&K government.

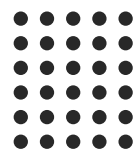
Jattu saheb passed away at his residence in Green- fields Colony, Faridabad on 3/9/2024 morning, after a brief illness. With his passing away an era came to an end. A leader who saddled the pre and post migration worlds of Kashmiri pandits, Jattu was no stranger to controversies. He sometimes faced opposition both within his own community and from outside also, but he remained steadfast in his convictions. He was well known for his

unwavering dedication and his fierce advocacy for the rights of the exiled community, thus leaving behind a legacy of resilience, activism, and compassion.

Jattu's contribution to the KP community can never be forgotten. A formidable leader, who played a significant and a key role in several significant moments, including the one historic Parmeshwari agitation of 1967. He was instrumental in advancing the cause of the exiled KP community and his relentless efforts also facilitated the establishment of business in and around Delhi, providing livelihood opportunities to countless members of this community. A firebrand leader Jattu led the community struggle in exile also from the front.

Although I participated with a couple of my friends in his *Shrandhanjali Sabha* at his residence organised by the family, where I volunteered to pay my homage, tributes and Shrandhanjali to my elder senior friend on 8th of September, 2024 yet I wanted to write a tribute in black and white as well.

Peace be upon you- Om shanti.



Rajinder Premi is the elder son of the legendary Sarwanand Kaul Premi. He retired as Zonal Education officer from J&K Govt. Post exodus, he joined Kashmiri Samiti Delhi in 1991, where he voluntarily worked till 1994 as secretary. He was the founder general secretary of Jammu Kashmir Sangam 94-97. He voluntarily worked with AIKS as secretary for thirteen long years and is still engaged in community services & other social activities. He lives in Delhi. He can be contacted at phone no. 9871034686 and can also be reached at premirajinder@gmail.com



SECTION IV

XLVIII

HINDI SECTION

2024 - 2025



खोए हुए कश्मीरी त्यौहार और रीति-रिवाज

अनिल कौल

कश्मीर क्षेत्र का इतिहास अब तक हम जितना खोज पाएं है वह उससे भी कहीं अधिक पुराना है। इसका अधिकांश भाग रहस्य में डूबा हुआ है और इसकी उत्पत्ति के बारे में कोई स्पष्टता नहीं है। हमने कुछ लोगों को यह कहते हुए सुना है कि इसका इतिहास ५००० वर्ष पुराना है, जबकि कश्मीर घाटी में पाए गए सबसे पुराने नवपाषाण स्थल लगभग ३००० ईसा पूर्व के हैं। इतिहासकार, प्रोफेसर वेदवीर आर्य ने अपनी पुस्तक, "द क्रोनोलॉजी ऑफ इंडिया: फ्रॉम मनु टू महाभारत" में लिखा है कि सतीसर ऋग्वैदिक काल के दौरान एक हिमाच्छादित झील थी और इसका निर्माण १२७०० - ११५०० ईसा पूर्व के आसपास मेल्टवाटर पल्स १ए की अवधि के दौरान हुआ होगा। और, वराहमुल्ला (बारामूला) दर्रा लगभग ११२०० ईसा पूर्व खुल गया होगा, जिससे सतीसर का पानी कश्मीर घाटी से बाहर निकल गया, जिससे मद्रा (भारतीय उपमहाद्वीप का उत्तर पश्चिम भाग; सियालकोट और जम्मू क्षेत्र), शैल्व (पश्चिमी पंजाब और आसपास के क्षेत्र), सिंध (पाकिस्तान), और गुजरात (पाकिस्तान) क्षेत्रों में बड़ी बाढ़ आई।। सतीसर के पानी के निकलने के बाद कई शताब्दियों के भीतर कश्मीर में भिन्न-भिन्न जन-जातियों ने प्रवेश कर इस क्षेत्र को अपना निवास स्थान बनाया होगा।

श्री कल्हण रचित "राजतरंगिणी" में कश्मीर के राजा गोनंद (प्रथम) के शासनकाल का वर्णन किया गया है, जो बलराम द्वारा मारा गया था, अतः इस से महाभारत काल के आसपास के समय का संकेत मिलता है। तात्पर्य ये है कि महाभारत काल में भी कश्मीर क्षेत्र एक संपूर्ण और परंपरागत क्षेत्र रहा होगा जिस से हम अनुमान लगा सकते हैं कि कश्मीर में महाभारत के पहले भी राज्य रहे होंगे और एक दृढ़ सामाजिक व्यवस्था बनी रही होगी जिसके फलस्वरूप कश्मीर क्षेत्र उन्नति की पराकाष्ठा पर रहा होगा। हालाँकि, नीलमत पुराण में उल्लेख है कि सतीसर के सूख जाने और राक्षस जलोद्भव के मारे जाने के बाद कश्मीर घाटी में नागों (सर्प जाति) का निवास हो गया था। इसके अतिरिक्त, पिशाच (अज्ञात जाति) और मानव भी रहते थे, जो नागों के पाताल लोक जाने से पहले क्रमशः सर्दी और गर्मी के मौसम में समय-समय पर रहने के लिए कश्मीर आते थे। पिशाचों और नागों के पूर्ण पलायन के बाद मानव स्थायी रूप से कश्मीर में रहने लगे। इन वर्णनात्मक आख्यानों का उपयोग करने का मेरा अभिप्राय यह था कि कश्मीर क्षेत्र और इसके आसपास की पहाड़ियों पर या घाटी में बसे हुए लोग प्राचीन

काल से ही किसी न किसी सामाजिक एवं सांस्कृतिक जीवन शैली के प्रभाव में रहें होंगे जो इतनी पीढ़ियों के बाद आज हमें उत्सवों की धरोहर के रूप में मिली है।

नीलमत पुराण इस बात पर भी प्रकाश डालता है कि कैसे मानवों (मनुष्य) ने नागों के साथ कश्मीर घाटी में बसने के लिए समझौता किया। पुराण आगे पैसठ (६५) विभिन्न कर्मकांडों और औपचारिक प्रथाओं के बारे में जानकारी देता है जो नाग कश्मीर में आयोजित करते थे। मानवों द्वारा उन त्योहारों, संस्कारों और समारोहों को जारी रखने की सहमती देने के बाद ही कश्मीर मानवों के लिए एक स्थायी निवास में बदल गया, जो अन्यथा केवल गर्मियों के मौसम में कश्मीर आते थे और सर्दियाँ शुरू होने के साथ ही चले जाते थे।

कश्मीरी पंडितों के त्यौहार			
१. हेरथ (शिवरात्रि)	२. तील अठम	३. सौंथ	४. नवरेह मावस
५. नवरेह	६. जघअ त्रेय	७. राम नवमी	८. गण चोदाह
९. ज्येठअ घटपछ पञ्चम	१०. ज्येठअ अठम	११. हारअ सत्तम	१२. हारअ अठम
१३. हारअ नवम	१४. हारअ चोदाह	१५. हारअ पुनिम	१६. वअहरात
१७. श्रावणअ अठम	१८. श्रावणअ बाह	१९. श्रावणअ पुनिम	२०. चन्दन शष्टि
२१. ज़रमअ सत्तम	२२. विनायक चोरम	२३. अन्तअ चोदाह	२४. गंगअ अठम
२५. काम्बुरि फाकअ	२६. नवरात्रा	२७. दुर्गा अष्टमी	२८. महानवमी
२९. दस्सहरा	३०. कार्तिक पुनिम	३१. मंजहोर तअहर	३२. घाडअ बत्तअ
३३. सुखसुप्तिका/ दीपावली	३४. खेचि मावस	३५. हरुद	३६. भीष्मअ अठम
३७. शिव चतुरदशी (३ दिन)	३८. भीम सैन काह	३९. काव पुनिम	४०. कलअ छलुन
४१. हुरि नवम	४२. ध्यारअ दअहम	४३. वाघुर बरुन (काह)	४४. सलाम (शिवरात्रि)
४५. डेमबिज्य मावस	४६. दूज्य ओक्दोह	४७. मकर सअंकरात	४८. व्यथ त्रुवाह
४९. सोमरि मावस	५०. मित्र पुनिम		

कश्मीरी पंडितों के अन्य पर्व और रीति रिवाज			
१. दअक्र बत्तअ	२. काहनेथर	३. सौन्दर	४. ज़रअकासय
५. शिशुर	६. दिवगौन	७. म्येखल	८. कौशलहोम
९. जूज	१०. गरनावय	११. खांदर - पोषअ पूजा तअ फिरथुर	
१२. घरअ अच्चुन	१३. दौद्ध	१४. छाय ज़ालअन्य	

आज हम सभी पैसठ (६५) त्योहारों और अनुष्ठानों के बारे में ज्यादा नहीं जानते हैं लेकिन मैंने हमारे त्योहारों और अनुष्ठानों को वर्गीकृत करने का प्रयास किया है जो १९९० के नरसंहार से पहले कश्मीरी पंडित समुदाय में प्रचलित थे।

कश्मीर से निर्वासित होने के पश्चात हमारे त्योहारों में बहुत बड़ा परिवर्तन आना प्रारम्भ हुआ। नई सभ्यताओं से जुड़ने के कारण हमारे पर्व या तो लुप्त होने लगे या फिर उनमें कुछ नयापन आने लगा जिससे वह केवल एक मुखोटा बन कर रह गए। नाम तो वही पुराना रहा परंतु उसकी विधि स्पष्ट रूप से

बदल गई। इन सब में प्रमुखता हमारी शिवरात्रि का त्यौहार है। ये लेख पढ़ने के बाद आप स्वयं की तुलना कर सकते हैं कि हमारे त्यौहारों और पर्वों में कितना परिवर्तन आया है।

हेरथ की तैयारी हुरि ओकदोह (फाल्गुन महीने का पहला दिन यानी फरवरी-मार्च) से शुरू होती थी। इस दिन से हुरि अअठम (फाल्गुन महीने का ८वां दिन) तक कश्मीरी पंडित आगामी त्यौहार के लिए साफ सुथरा दिखने के लिए अपने घरों की सफाई करते थे। हुरि अअठम आखिरी दिन था जब सफाई और धुलाई का समापन होता। शाम को माता जगदम्बा की पूजा-अर्चना की जाती थी। ९वें दिन को घाडअ नवम के नाम से भी जाना जाता था, जो मूल रूप से उन कश्मीरी पंडितों के लिए खुला रखा गया था जो वटुक पूजा के दिन मांस नहीं खाते, इसलिए फाल्गुन महीने के ९वें और १०वें दिन दोनों मांस खाने के लिए आरक्षित थे। हुरि ओकदोह से घाडअ-नवम के बीच विवाहित बेटियाँ किसी भी शुभ दिन अपने माता-पिता के घर जाकर उनसे मिलती थीं और वहां स्नान करती थीं। इस प्रथा को कलअ-छलून के नाम से जाना जाता था। फाल्गुन के १०वें दिन को मुख्य रूप से ध्यारअ-दअहम के रूप में नामित किया गया था क्योंकि इस दिन नई दुल्हनें अपने माता-पिता के घर से अपने घर लौटती थीं और रोटी (चोचि), दही (जामुत दौद्द), कपड़े (पलव) और वह धन जो माता-पिता अपनी बेटियों को उपहार में देते थे (अतगथ) साथ लाती थीं। फाल्गुन के ११वें दिन को वागुरि-काह के रूप में मनाया जाता था। इस दिन, ऋषि-प्याले नामक एक छोटे बर्तन में पानी और रोटी का टुकड़ा (चावल के आटे से बना) भरा जाता था। इस प्रक्रिया को वागुर-बरुन कहा जाता था। वटुक पूजा या हेराथ का वास्तविक दिन फाल्गुन महीने की १२ या १३ तारीख को पड़ता था जिसे अब फाल्गुन महीने की १३ तारीख (हेरचि-त्रुवाह) में निरस्त कर दिया गया है। १४वें दिन को सलाम के रूप में संबोधित किया जाता था जो हेराथ पूजा का अगला दिन था। इस दिन पड़ोसी, दोस्त और रिश्तेदार एक-दूसरे से मिलने जाते थे और पूजा करने वाले परिवार का अभिवादन करते थे। इस दिन बुजुर्ग युवाओं को कुछ रुपये (हेरतखर्च) देते थे। इन दिनों में प्रतिदिन शाम को उस स्थान पर जहां वटुक रखा गया था, भगवान शंकर और माता पार्वती की पूजा होती थी। १५वां दिन डेम्बिनी-मावस के रूप में मनाया जाता था इस रात भैरवों को मांस (मांस न खाने वाले उपासकों द्वारा शलजम) खिलाया जाता था। अगले दिन डुन्य-ओकदोह होता था। इस दिन वटुक में रखे अखरोट निकाले जाते थे और पार्थिवश्वर (मिट्टी से बनी भगवान शिव की मूर्ति), घड़े का पानी, फूल आदि (निर्माल्य) को विसर्जन के लिए पास की नदी/तालाब में ले जाया जाता था। प्रसाद के रूप में अखरोट दोस्तों, पड़ोसियों और रिश्तेदारों के बीच वितरित किया जाता था। हालाँकि, आज अधिकांश प्रथाओं को कम कर दिया गया है और प्रत्येक परिवार में अलग-अलग प्रथा पाई जा सकती है।

ऐसे कई अन्य त्यौहार हैं जो लुप्त हो गए हैं या एक नए रूप में

सामने आए हैं जो मूल से बहुत अलग हैं। आइए कुछ अन्य त्यौहारों पर थोड़ा प्रकाश डालते हैं जो लुप्त होने की कगार पर आ गए हैं या लुप्त हो गए हैं।

श्रावणअ पुनिम

इस दिन बाबा अमरनाथ की यात्रा समाप्त हो जाती थी और इसी दिन रक्षाबंधन भी मनाया जाता है। इस दिन कश्मीरी पंडित शंकराचार्य पहाड़ी से पवित्र मिट्टी इकट्ठा करते, उसमें पारा मिलाते और एक निजी पूजा के लिए आवश्यक संख्या में 'पार्थिवश्वर' बनाते थे। वह इस दिन उपवास रखते थे और शाम के समय पार्थिवश्वर को नदी के पानी में विसर्जित कर देते थे। कई अन्य स्थानों पर लोग मन्दिरों में जा कर पूजा अर्चना करते थे। अनंतनाग में बिजबिहारा स्थित थजीवारा में भव्य मेला आयोजित होता था और प्रसिद्ध शिव गुफा में पूजा एवं हवन होता था।

पन्न / विनायक चोरम

पन्न का शाब्दिक अर्थ है धागा। यह पर्व नव-उत्पादित कपास की कटाई और जुड़वां कृषि देवियों, विभा और गर्भा, की पूजा से जुड़ा था। देवी-देवताओं को नैविद्य के लिए रोठ (घी में तली हुई आटे और शकर की पूरियाँ) रखा जाता है। अब यह त्यौहार गणेश चतुर्थी (विनायक चोरम) पर मनाया जाता है। इन दोनों त्यौहारों के मिश्रण को लेकर कोई स्पष्टता नहीं है। विभा और गर्भा अब बीब गरभ मअज के नाम से प्रचलित है जिसको एक लोटा या एक पानी के बर्तन द्वारा दर्शाया जाता है जिसे उस स्थान के केंद्र में रखा जाता है जहां पूजा करनी होती है, उस लोटे की गर्दन पर एक सूती धागा बांधा जाता है और उसके अंदर मुट्ठी भर द्रमुन या धावक घास रखी जाती है। पूजा में एक कहानी सुनाई जाती है। पूजा के समापन पर परिवार के सभी सम्मिलित सदस्य श्रद्धा भाव से पुष्प और द्रमुन पानी से भरे हुए बर्तन में अर्पण करते हैं। तत्पश्चात कश्मीरी पंडित प्रसाद ग्रहण करते हैं और अपने आस पड़ोस में रोठ वितरण करते हैं। यह प्रथा भी सिमटती जा रही है और केवल कुछ परिवारों तक सीमित हो गई है। रोठ बनाने की जो पहले विधि थी वह भी लुप्त होने की कगार पर है क्योंकि अब लोगों के पास समय का अभाव है।

हार सतम

शुक्ल पक्ष के सातवें दिन जिसे हार-सतम कहा जाता है, वुज़ (गलियारा) में हार-मंडुल बनाकर मनाया जाता था। हार-मंडुल रंगों से भरा गोल डिज़ाइन होता था जो देवी के स्वागत के लिए बनाया जाता था जिनके आगमन से घर की शोभा बढ़ने की उम्मीद की जाती थी।

काव पुनिम

यह माघ मास की चंद्र पूर्णिमा के दिन मनाया जाता है। अनुष्ठान के अनुसार, दो छड़ियों को क्रॉस के रूप में बांधा जाता है और एक सपाट चम्मच बनाने के लिए घास के

तिनकों से बुना जाता था। उस सपाट चम्मच को काव-पतुल कहते थे। फिर पूजा के बाद कऔ को काव-पतुल पर पीले चावल या तेहर खिलाई जाती थी और निम्नलिखित पंक्तियों गाई जाती:

काव बटअ कावो
ख्यचरे कावो
गंगबल श्राना करिथअय
गुरित्य मेचि त्योका करिथअय
वलभाह सानि नवि लरे
कनअय दरे
वरि-भतअ साल हा छुय।

यह त्यौहार पक्षियों के प्रति प्रेम के प्रतीक के रूप में मनाया जाता था।

वास्तु पूजा

यह चैत्र मास की ग्यारहवीं उजली रात को मनाया था। गृहदेवता की पूजा की जाती थी और परिवार की सुरक्षा, समृद्धि और स्वास्थ्य के लिए उन्हें प्रसाद चढ़ाया जाता था। अब यह त्यौहार पौष मास की अंधेरी रात वाले मंगलवार या शनिवार को ही मनाया जाता था। पूजा करने के बाद घर के देवता को गाड़-भत्त (उबले चावल के साथ पकी हुई मछली) चढ़ाया जाता था। यह प्रथा भी शाकाहारी कारणों से कुछ ही परिवारों तक सीमित हो गई है।

मोंझहअ तहअ

मोंझहअ मार्ग शीर्ष के महीने का प्रतीक है। चावल में हलदी डालकर पकाया जाता था जिसे परोस कर उसमें सरसों का तेल और स्वाद अनुसार नमक मिलाते थे तो तहअ तैयार हो जाती थी। इस महीने की मंगलवार और शनिवार को तहअ पकाई जाती थी और देवता को भोग के रूप में चढ़ाए जाते थे। तहअ को दोस्तों, पड़ोसियों और रिश्तेदारों के बीच भी वितरित किया जाता था। हालाँकि महीने के पहले दिन चावल पकाया जाता है और घर देवता (घर के देवता) को चढ़ाया जाता था। कहा जाता है कि इसे मनाने से अक्सर मनोकामनाएँ पूरी होती थी।

व्यथ त्रुवाह

व्यथ त्रुवाह वितस्ता नदी (झेलम) के पवित्र घाटों पर पूजा करने का दिन है। कश्मीर में इस दिन वितस्ता नदी में जल, दूध का प्रसाद, सिन्दूर, कच्चे चावल और फूल चढ़ाकर पूजा की जाती थी। इस दिन लोग तीर्थयात्रा के रूप में वेरीनाग भी जाते थे क्योंकि उस स्थान को वितस्ता का स्रोत माना जाता है।

मित्र पुनिम

मित्र पुनिम हिंदू शरद ऋतु अश्विन महीने के शुक्ल पक्ष की पूर्णिमा को मनाया जाता था। अगली सुबह को मित्र प्रभात

(बमदाद-ए-मित्रा), या मित्र की सुबह कहा जाता था। कमल, गुलाब की पंखुड़ियाँ और गेंदे के फूल, वितस्ता (जिसे अब व्यथ या झेलम कहा जाता है), सरसती (सरस्वती), मदमती (मधुमती), और किशनगंगा (कुहुँ गंगा या कृष्णा गंगा) नदियों के पानी में या गंगा के पानी में धोए जाते थे। अखरोट, फल और दूध या दूध आधारित मिठाइयों के साथ, मित्र के सम्मान में एक सजी हुई थाली में रखा जाता था। यह त्यौहार १२वीं शताब्दी तक कश्मीर में मनाया जाता था।

सौंथ (कश्मीरी वसंत उत्सव)

सौंथ की पूर्व संध्या पर, एक रोटी के साथ बिना छिलके वाले चावल की एक थाली, एक कटोरी दही, थोड़ा नमक, थोड़ी सी मिश्री (नाबध), कुछ अखरोट या बादाम, एक चांदी का सिक्का अथवा रुपये, एक कलम, एक दर्पण, कुछ फूल (गुलाब, गेंदा, या चमेली), घास/द्रमुन, वाई (वाचा) और पुराना पंचांग रखा जाता था और सुबह उठते ही सबसे पहले देखा जाता था। मिट्टी और पानी को मिलाकर एक गोलाकार आकार दिया जाता था, जिसके अंदर एक अखरोट रखा जाता था और घास/द्रमुन को उसकी सतह पर लगाया जाता था। इसे सौंथ-न्नअट कहते थे जिसको पेड़ के तने के पास या चारदीवारी पर फिर रखा जाता था।

खेचिमावस या यक्ष-अमावस्या

खेचिमावस प्राचीन काल से चली आ रही है, जो पौष (दिसंबर-जनवरी) के कृष्ण-पक्ष के आखिरी दिन मनाया जाता है। इस दिन कुबेर को भोग के रूप में खिचड़ी (खेचर) चढ़ाई जाती है। रात्रि में मूसल (काजवठ) या किसी पत्थर को धोकर चंदन और सिन्दूर से उसका अभिषेक किया जाता है और फिर कुबेर के रूप में पूजा की जाती थी। पूजा समाप्त होने के बाद नवैद्य का एक भाग उपासक द्वारा अपने घर की बाहरी दीवार पर इस विश्वास के साथ रखा जाता है कि यक्ष इसे खाने के लिए आएगा और शेष भोजन परिवार के सदस्य प्रसाद के रूप में खाते हैं।

सुखसुप्तिका या दीपावली

सुखसुप्तिका का शाब्दिक अर्थ है प्रसन्नता के साथ सोना। कार्तिक अमावस्या के दिन बीमारों और बच्चों को छोड़कर सभी लोग व्रत रखते थे। शाम को धन की देवी लक्ष्मी की पूजा की जाती थी। दीपक मंदिरों में, सड़क के चौराहों पर, श्मशान घाटों, नदियों, झरनों और झीलों के किनारे, पहाड़ियों, घरों, पेड़ों के नीचे, गौशालाओं, आंगनों और दुकानों में रखे जाते थे। दुकानें आकर्षक ढंग से सजाई जाती थी। शाम को भोजन का आयोजन किया जाता था जिसमें मित्र रिश्तेदार, ब्राह्मण और सेवक भाग लेते थे। अगले दिन लोग नए कपड़े पहनकर हारअ (कौड़ी सीप) खेलते थे और गायन और वाद्य संगीत सुनते थे।

यह त्यौहार अब सुखसुप्तिका के रूप में नहीं बल्कि

दीपावली के रूप में मनाया जाता है। अब बिजली के बल्ब दीपकों के अलावा घरों, मंदिरों, दुकानों के आंगन और पेड़ों आदि को भी रोशन करते हैं। शाम के समय लक्ष्मी पूजन किया जाता है। मिठाइयाँ बाँटी जाती हैं, पटाखे फोड़े जाते हैं और आतिशबाजियाँ आसमान को रोशन करती हैं।

जूज

जूज एक लड़की की परिपक्वता के प्रारंभिक चरण के दौरान मनाया जाता था, अक्सर १३ या १४ वर्ष की आयु के आसपास। यह संस्कार उसके नारीत्व में परिवर्तन का प्रतीक था और इसमें अनुष्ठानों की एक श्रृंखला शामिल होती थी जो सांस्कृतिक मूल्यों, पारिवारिक बंधन और सामुदायिक भागीदारी को दर्शाती थी। यह रिवाज अब लुप्त हो गया है।

दौद्ध

दौद्ध, उस दिन के रूप में मनाया जाता है जब दुल्हन अपने ससुराल वालों को सूचित करती है कि वह पारिवारिक तरीके से है। परंपरा के अनुसार, लड़की अपनी माँ को यह खबर बताती है, और फिर वह अपने माता-पिता से दही के दो बर्तन लाती है और उन्हें अपने ससुराल वालों के सामने रखती है। इसे ससुराल वालों के लिए एक सूचना माना जाता है कि उन्हें अब लड़की के स्वास्थ्य, आराम और आहार का ध्यान रखना होगा।

निष्कर्ष

कश्मीरी पंडितों के त्योहार और रीति-रिवाज हमारे इतिहास

और संस्कृति के प्रतीक हैं। ये न केवल धार्मिक उत्सव हैं, बल्कि सामाजिक और सांस्कृतिक समृद्धि के प्रतीक भी हैं। इसलिए, यह आवश्यक है कि हम इन त्योहारों और रीति-रिवाजों को संजोए रखें और अगली पीढ़ियों को इनके बारे में जानकारी दें, ताकि हमारी सांस्कृतिक धरोहर जीवित रह सके। कश्मीर की संस्कृति, त्योहार और परंपराएँ हमें एकजुट करती हैं और हमें हमारी पहचान पर गर्व करने का अवसर देती हैं।

हमें अपने त्योहारों की पवित्रता को बनाए रखने के लिए हर संभव प्रयास करना चाहिए और उन्हें उसी तरह से फलने-फूलने देना चाहिए जैसे सदियों से हमारे पूर्वजों द्वारा हमें सौंपे गए हैं। हमारा भविष्य इस बात पर निर्भर करता है कि हम अपने गौरवशाली अतीत को कैसे प्रस्तुत करते हैं।



अनिल कौल जम्मू के एक लेखक हैं। उन्होंने जम्मू विश्वविद्यालय से स्नातक की डिग्री प्राप्त की है और पुणे विश्वविद्यालय से मानव संसाधन में एमबीए किया है। लेखन के प्रति उनकी गहरी रुचि है, और उनका काम कई पत्रिकाओं और समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित हो चुका है। हाल ही में, उन्होंने अपनी पहली कविता की पुस्तक "**Oscillating Fascinations**" प्रकाशित की है, जो अमेज़न और फ्लिपकार्ट पर उपलब्ध है। वे इस समय अपनी दूसरी कविता की पुस्तक पर काम कर रहे हैं।

अनिल कौल ने पिछले कुछ वर्षों से वितस्ता पत्रिका में लेख लिखे हैं। वे वर्तमान में अपने परिवार के साथ मोहाली में बस चुके हैं। अनिल कौल से संपर्क करने के लिए आप उन्हें jammu.strings@yahoo.in पर ई-मेल कर सकते हैं।



गाड़ बत्त: संस्मरण

रवि धर

कुछ यादें ऐसी होती हैं जिनको भुलाना बड़ा कठिन होता है। सर्वप्रथम कश्मीर की जो याद आती है वह है वहाँ का मौसम। भारत के कई शहरों में मैं रहा हूँ जो शायद कश्मीर से कई गुणा विकसित हैं परंतु कश्मीर की मिट्टी की सुगंध और पेड़-पौधों की हरियाली विशेषकर वहाँ का चिनार का पेड़ जिसको कश्मीरी भाषा में “बून्य” कहा जाता है, हमारे दिल-ओ-जिगर में बसा हुआ है। शीतल हवाओं की सरसराहट और कल-कल करती छिछरी नदियाँ जिनको “लदेंर” कहा जाता है मन को ही नहीं अपितु पूरे कश्मीर के ललाट से फिसलती पसीने की शीतल-अमृतमयी बूंदों की तरह बहती चली जाती है। वह लदर पर्वतों की पिघलती बर्फ से उत्पन्न होकर छिछरी नदी का आकार लेकर पूरे वातावरण को ठंडक पहुंचाती है।

दूसरी जो यादें मन को विचलित करता है वह है वहाँ का “चिलयकलॉ” (दिसम्बर – जनवरी का समय) बर्फ से ढके पर्वत ही नहीं अपितु पूरी घाटी को श्वेत चादर में लपेट कर कुछ महीनों तक समय जैसे थम सा जाता है। पूरा जीवन एक ठहराव की स्थिति में आ जाता है। बर्फीली हवाओं और भूमि पर बिछी सफेद परत पूरी घाटी जैसे नींद के आगोश में चली जाती है। हालाँकि घाटी में आने वाले पर्यटकों की बाढ़ रौनक तो बढ़ाती ही है परंतु हरयाली नदारद होती है। चहुँ ओर पत्तों रहित नंगे खड़े पेड़ जैसे पूरे वातावरण को बंजर बना देते हैं। परंतु वहीं हिमखण्ड भूमि पर बिछी सफेद परत महादेव का प्रतीक बन जाती है।

इसी बर्फीले ठिठुरते मौसम में कश्मीर का एक विशेष त्योहार आता है “गाड़ बत्त”। यँ तो कश्मीरी पंडितों के बहुत सारे त्योहार हैं परंतु “गाड़ बत्त” एक विशेष त्योहार के रूप में मनाया जाता है। कश्मीरी पंडितों में यह मान्यता है कि हर घर में एक देवता का वास होता है। और वर्ष में एक बार उनको प्रसन्न करने के लिए बली के रूप में उन्हें भोग लगाया जाता है। यह त्योहार अधिकतर दिसम्बर के अंतिम सप्ताह में आता है। इस दिन मछली और चावल बनाकर उसके साथ और भी सब्जियाँ आदि तैयार करके देवता को भोग लगाया जाता है।

इस दिन कुछ कश्मीरी परिवार वैष्णव रहकर अपने घर के देवता को खीर चढ़ाते हैं और कुछ स्वाधिष्ट मछली का भोग लगाकर



(जो बलि का प्रतीक है) अपने घर के देवता को प्रसन्न करने का प्रयास करते हैं।

इस पर एक रोचक किस्सा मुझे याद आ रहा है।

सफाकदल (श्रीनगर जनपद में एक जगह) का प्रसिद्ध धर परिवार “गाड़ बत्त” की जगह खीर का प्रयोग अपने घर के देवता को प्रसन्न करने के लिए करते हैं। गाड़ बत्त की जगह खीर इसलिए कि वह मानते हैं उनकी इष्ट देवी तुलमुल की माता त्रिओर सुन्दरी (राज्ञन्या भगवती) हैं। मेरी उम्र लगभग नौ या दस वर्ष की रही होगी। उस दिन मेरी माँ प्रातः काल से ही रसोईघर की साफ सफाई और शुद्धता करने में लगी थी। उन्होंने पूरे रसोई घर को पीली मिट्टी से लिपाई की थी। क्योंकि उस दिन घर के देवता को खीर का भोग लगाना था। सभी बच्चे बहुत खुश थे कि खीर खाने को मिलने वाली है। संयुक्त परिवार था, ताऊजी सब से बड़े थे। सायं काल में हमारे ताऊजी ने खीर की पूजा करके घर के देवता को भोग लगाने के लिए घर की सब से ऊपर की मंजिल, जिसको कश्मीरी में “कॅनी” कहते हैं, पर चले गए। मैं और मेरा छोटा भाई भी उनके पीछे-पीछे चले गए। उन्होंने थाली को एक विशेष स्थान पर रख दिया जहाँ पर पीली मिट्टी से मेरी माँ ने दिन में ही लिपाई की थी और साथ में एक जलता हुआ दीपक और एक

पानी का लोटा भी रख दिया और उन सब के ऊपर एक बड़ा सा टोकरा उल्ट कर रख दिया। ताकि कोई बिल्ली इसे अशुद्ध न कर दे। जब हम लोग वापस नीचे अपने स्थान पर आए तो मैंने अनायास पूछा कि यह करने से क्या होगा? तो मेरे ताऊजी ने उत्तर दिया कि हर घर में एक घर के देवता का वास होता है अतः उन्हें प्रसन्न करने के लिए भोग लगाया जाता है। मेरे यह पूछने पर कि क्या वह देवता इसे खाएंगे तो उन्होंने हाँ में उत्तर दिया। अब मेरी जिज्ञासा और बढ़ गई यह देखने के लिए कि देवता इस खीर को खाएगा या नहीं। काफी देर तक कभी ताऊजी से तो कभी हम भाई बहन आपस में इसी विषय पर चर्चा करते रहे कि क्या होगा। सभी बच्चों में इस बात का उत्साह था कि वह देवता कब खीर खाएंगे और हमें देखने को मिल जाएगा।

प्रातः हुई और भोर में ही हमारे ताऊजी उस थाली को लेने के लिए चले गए। भला हम बच्चों से कहाँ रहा जाता हम भी पीछे पीछे पहुँच गए देखने। जब टोकरी उठाई तो मैं अपनी आँखों पर विश्वास ही नहीं कर पा रहा था यह देखकर कि पूरी थाली में खीर बिखरा हुआ था। पानी का लोटा गिरा हुआ था। क्या यह चमत्कार था या कुछ और मेरी समझ में आज तक नहीं आया।

हम बच्चों में कई दिन तक इस की चर्चा होती रही और समय बीत जाने के साथ-साथ सब भूल गए।

मेरा ननिहाल (कश्मीरी में मातामाल) हमारे घर से करीब दो किलोमीटर दूर था जिसको छत्ताबल कहते हैं। वे लोग खीर की जगह "गाड़ बत्त" का भोग लगाते थे इसलिए हम सभी बच्चों को खाने पर बुला लिया था।

हम सभी बच्चे बहुत उत्साहित थे पर निराशा इस बात की थी कि वहाँ नानाजी भी थे। जिनका चेहरा बहुत रोबीला था। हम बच्चों को उनसे डर लगता था। वे बात बात पर टोकते थे यह नहीं करो वह नहीं करो। चुपचाप बैठ जाओ इत्यादि। उस दिन मेरी नानी ने मेरी माँ के सहयोग से स्वादिष्ट मछली बनाई थी। क्योंकि वह लोग "गाड़ बत्त" के दिन मछली का भोग लगाते थे। मछली को कश्मीरी में गाड़ कहते हैं और बत्त होता है चावल। इसलिए गाड़ बत्त का मतलब है मछली-चावल। पूरे घर में उसकी सुगंध फैल गई थी। मुझे मछली खाने का बड़ा शौक था इसलिए भूख कुछ अधिक ही प्रतीत हो रही थी। उस दिन सायं काल में नानाजी ने पूजा अर्चना करके अपने घर की कँनी में उसे रख दिया और उस पर टोकरा उलट दिया। मैं भी उत्सुक्तावश उसे देखने के लिए

पीछे-पीछे चला गया था यह देखने के लिए कि क्या इनका घर देवता भी इस भोग को स्वीकार करेगा और खाएगा?

खैर कँनी के किवाड़ बन्द हुए और हम नीचे लोट आए।

अब सब लोग रात का खाना खाने लगे। परंतु यह क्या खाने में मछली तो थी ही नहीं। कुछ और ही साग सब्जियाँ परोसी गईं। मुझे बड़ा दुःख हो रहा था।

"जब मछली नहीं खिलानी थी तो बुलाया ही क्यों था।" मैं मन ही मन सोच रहा था। (बाद में मुझे पता चला कि वे लोग दूसरे दिन मछली का सेवन करते थे। नानाजी का मानना था कि पहले देवता खाएंगे बाद में घर के दूसरे सदस्य) सारा स्वाद ही बिगड़ गया था। पर सतोष इस बात का था कि कल मछली खाने को मिल जाएगी। पर उस समय मैं तो चुप रहा क्योंकि नानाजी पास में बैठे थे। जैसे तैसे मैंने खाना खाया और चुपचाप बैठ गया। मन में आ रहा था कि अभी उठकर वापस अपने घर चला जाऊँ। पर क्या करता चुप्पी के बगैर मेरे पास कोई और उपाय नहीं था। मेरी माँ कदाचित मेरी व्यथा को समझ रही थी परंतु वह कुछ नहीं बोली।

रात्रिका पहला पहर बीत गया था। मैंने देखा सभी गहरी नींद सो रहे थे। नींद मेरी आँखों से कोसों दूर थी। मेरे मन में बस यही विचार आ रहा था कि क्या देवता ने खाया होगा? तभी मुझे लगा कि बगल में सो रहा मेरा छोटा भाई भी करवट बदल रहा था। उसे भी शायद नींद नहीं आ रही थी। मैंने धीरे से उसके कान में कहा, "नींद नहीं आ रही है क्या?" उसने धीरे से ना में सिर हिलाया। मैंने फिर कहा, "तो फिर चलो मेरे साथ, आवाज नहीं करना।" "कहाँ?" उसने पूछा। "तुम चलो तो सही।" यह कहते हुए मैंने उसका हाथ पकड़ा और उठते हुए धीरे से खींचा। हम बिना आवाज किए हुए किवाड़ तक पहुँचे और किवाड़ खोल दिया। मेरे पैर धीरे-धीरे कँनी की ओर जा रहे थे। मेरे भाई को डर लग रहा था क्योंकि वह मेरा हाथ जोर से पकड़े हुए था। न जाने कहाँ से मेरे में इतना साहस आ रहा था कि मैंने कँनी का भी किवाड़ खोल दिया। यह जानते हुए कि अगर पकड़े गए तो बहुत मार पड़ सकती है। परंतु वह कहते हैं ना "हिम्मत मरदाँ मददे खुदा"। इसका कोई ख्याल ही नहीं आ रहा था कि नाहक ही मेरे साथ-साथ छोटा भाई भी पिट जाएगा। पर जुनून था। मैंने किवाड़ की कुण्डी खोली और हम दोनों अंदर घुस गए। दीपक अभी भी टोकरी में से जलता हुआ दिखाई दे रहा था। मैंने टोकरी

हटाई तो मछली की सुगन्ध मेरे रोम रोम को आल्हादित करने लगी। मुझसे रहा नहीं गया। एक बड़ा सा टुकड़ा काटा और खा गया। मैंने ज्यों ही दूसरा टुकड़ा काटने के लिए हाथ बढ़ाया मेरा छोटा भाई धीरे से बोला, “भैया पाप लगेगा भगवान जी नाराज हो जाएंगे। ऐसा मत करो।” पर मैं कहाँ मानने वाला था दूसरा टुकड़ा भी मुँह में डाल दिया। मैंने देखा मेरा भाई मेरी ओर प्रश्न भरी नजरों से देख रहा था। मैंने फिर एक टुकड़ा काटा और भाई की तरफ बढ़ा दिया। मुझे आश्चर्य हुआ वह भी खा गया। उसी समय नीचे से नाना जी के खॉसने की आवाज आई मैं तुरंत भाई का हाथ पकड़कर बाहर भागा और धीरे से किवाड बंद किया और नीचे कमरे में फिर पहुँच गए। हम दोनों हॉफ रहे थे। काफी देर तक नींद नहीं आई और न जाने कब आँख लग गई और जब आँख खुली तो देखा दिन चढ़ गया था हम ही सोए हुए थे। नानाजी तो स्नान इत्यादि करके तैयार हो गए थे और नानी से कह रहे थे कि वह कँनी से थाली लाने जा रहे हैं। यह सुनकर मेरी धड़कन बढ़ने लगी। थोड़ी देर बाद नानाजी थाली लिए हुए नानी से प्रसन्नता से कह रहे थे आज घर के देवता ने प्रसाद चखा है। लो सब को प्रसाद दे दो। सब खुश होकर प्रसाद चख रहे थे और मैं बिना प्रसाद चखे ही मन ही मन मुस्कुरा रहा था।

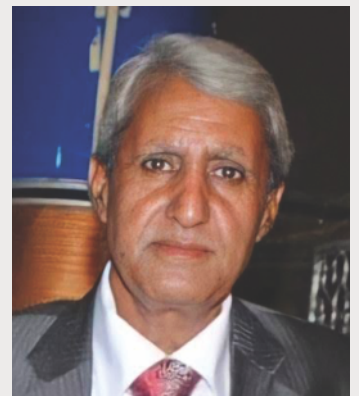


वर्ष 1958 में कश्मीर के श्रीनगर में एक सुशिक्षित परिवार में जन्म हुआ। प्रारंभिक शिक्षा श्रीनगर कश्मीर में हुई। चित्रकला में डिग्री कोर्स करने के लिए 1976 में कश्मीर विश्वविद्यालय में दाखिला लिया। ललित कला (चित्रकला) में स्नातक की डिग्री पूरी की और उसके बाद स्नातकोत्तर किया। राजस्थान विश्वविद्यालय से अंग्रेजी और हिंदी में भी स्नातकोत्तर की डिग्री प्राप्त की। राज्य और राष्ट्रीय कला प्रदर्शनियों में नियमित रूप से भाग लिया। वर्ष 1982 में जम्मू-कश्मीर राज्य पुरस्कार (कलाकार श्रेणी) प्राप्त किया। भारत के विभिन्न राज्यों में एकल प्रदर्शनियों और समूह प्रदर्शनियों के माध्यम से अपनी पेंटिंग प्रदर्शित की।

“पंखुडियाँ” नाम से एक लघु कहानी संग्रह प्रकाशित हुई।

बिड़ला संग्रहालय, पिलानी में चार साल तक कलाकार-डिजाइनर के रूप में काम किया। वर्ष 2018 में सेवानिवृत्ति होने तक 28 साल तक कला और शिल्प विभाग के प्रमुख के रूप में काम किया। सेवानिवृत्ति के बाद एक फ्रीलांसर के रूप में काम कर रहा हूँ।

रवि धर



सन्यवारि बरन्य

Ujval Handu

हिन्दु धर्म में घर के मुख्य प्रवेश द्वार को विशेष स्थान दिया गया है। ऐसी मान्यता है कि मुख्य प्रवेश द्वार में देवी देवताओं का वास होता है। इसी कारण इसे स्वच्छ रखने का विधान है। द्वार पर स्वास्तिक और ॐ के शुभ चिन्ह बनाए जाते हैं। गणेश जी की प्रतिमा या चित्र लगाए जाते हैं। फूल पतियों के तोरण लगाकर इसे आकर्षक बनाया जाता है। कुछ प्रान्तों में तो द्वार के सामने प्रतिदिन रंगोली भी बनाई जाती है। सभी अपने अपने तरीके से द्वार को स्वच्छ व आकर्षक बनाते हैं। मुख्य द्वार को सजाने के अतिरिक्त प्रतिदिन उस पर जल की छींटें डालने का भी विधान है। ऐसा माना जाता है कि इससे देवता प्रसन्न होते हैं। इससे घर में सुख शांति और समृद्धि आती है। नकारात्मक ऊर्जा दूर होती है और सकारात्मक ऊर्जा घर में प्रवेश करती है। केवल देवता ही नहीं हमारे पितृ भी हम पर प्रसन्न होते हैं। और यदि किसी प्रकार का पितृ दोष हो तो वह भी समाप्त हो जाता है।

कश्मीर का हिन्दु समाज भी अपने बृहत हिन्दु समाज की भाँति अपने मुख्य प्रवेश द्वार को विशेष महत्व देता रहा है। हजारों वर्षों से हमारी महिलाएं नित्य प्रति सुबह सवेरे नींद से उठकर अपने प्रवेश द्वार के सामने की जगह पर लिपाई करती आ रही हैं। आजकल घरों में सीमेंट का प्रयोग होने के कारण वह इस स्थान की धुलाई करती हैं या पोछा लगाती हैं। इसे कश्मीरी में ब्रॉन्द फश कहा जाता है। इसके बाद वह नहा धोकर दो छोटे कलशों में जल भरकर लाती हैं और संस्कृत का एक श्लोक पढ़ते हुए द्वार पर जल की छींटे देती हैं जिसे सज दित्र कहते हैं। इसके बाद वह घर में प्रवेश करती हैं।

इन दैनिक क्रियाओं के अलावा विवाह और यज्ञोपवीत जैसे संस्कारों में भी मुख्य प्रवेश द्वार पर फूलों और पत्तों की बेलें बनाकर उसे सजाया जाता है जिसे कि क्रूल खारुन कहते हैं। और भूमि पर रंगोली भी डाली जाती है

जिसे हम व्यूग त्रावुन कहते हैं। इतना ही नहीं, जब विवाह के दिन, वर पहली बार कन्या के घर पहुंचता है, तो वह भी द्वार की पूजा किये बिना प्रवेश नहीं कर सकता।

दर्भ मावस के दिन पूजा पाठ के लिए दर्भ काटी जाती है, जो कि पूरे साल प्रयोग करी जा सकती है। इस दिन कटी हुई दर्भ के १४ तृणों का गुच्छा बनाकर द्वार पर लटकाया जाता है। जिससे नकारात्मक शक्तियां घर में प्रवेश नहीं करती हैं। श्राद्ध पूजा के मध्य में भी घर की महिला मुख्य प्रवेश द्वार पर जल की छींटे देती हैं।

विस्थापन से पहले की अगर बात करें तो प्रत्येक कश्मीरी हिन्दू परिवार की रसोई में मिट्टी या तांबे के दो छोटे पात्र रखे जाते थे। इन्हें कश्मीरी में सन्यवारि कहा जाता है। यह सन्यवारि हेरकनाथ और वटुकनाथ नामक दो क्षेत्रपाल हैं जो कि हमारे घर की भीतरी और बाहरी सुरक्षा करते हैं। इन्हीं दोनों क्षेत्रपालों की पूजा हम अपनी सभी तरह की पूजा में भी करते हैं, चाहे कोई देव पूजा हो या पितृ पूजा। हेरथ की पूजा में भी हम इन्हें वटुक मण्डप की दाईं ओर दिये के पास स्थापित करते हैं। अब चूंकि क्षेत्रपाल उपदेवता होते हैं, इसलिए इन्हें जिस स्थान पर रखा जाता है उसकी शुद्धता का विशेष ध्यान रखा जाता है। घर की महिला ताजा भोजन बना कर सबसे पहले उन दो सन्यवारियों में डालती थी उसके बाद ही अपने परिवार को भोजन परोसती थी। अगले दिन सवेरे नींद से उठकर इन सन्यवारियों में रखा रात का भोजन किसी पेड़ के नीचे डालती थी। उसके बाद सन्यवारियों को अच्छे से साफ करके नदी से जल भर कर घर आती थी। घर के प्रवेश द्वार के सामने खड़े होकर उनमें से थोड़ा जल हाथ में लेकर दरवाजे के ऊपरी भाग में छिड़कती और यह श्लोक पढ़ती -

जले विष्णु थले विष्णु, विष्णु आकाश मण्डले

स्थाने स्थाने हरि विष्णु, विष्णु जगत मंडले।

जिसका सार है विष्णु भगवान सर्वत्र व्यापक है। जल में, थल में, आकाश में, हर स्थान पर और पूरे जगत में।

इसके बाद वह कश्मीरी में कहती है - सत्र दि थानस, आही पानस, श्री बगवानस नमस्कार।

इसका पहला वाक्यांश है - सत्र दि थानस। सत्र एक कश्मीरी शब्द है जिसका अर्थ है वास्तु स्नान यानि गृह देवता का स्नान या अभिषेक करना। थान कश्मीरी में उस पवित्र स्थान को कहते हैं जहाँ पर देवी देवता का निवास हो। यहाँ पर द्वार ही गृह देवता का निवास स्थान है। इसलिए द्वार को थान कहा है और वह द्वार को जल की छींटे डालने को कहती है।

दूसरा वाक्यांश है - आही पानस। यहाँ पर आही का अर्थ है आशीर्वाद और पानस का अर्थ है स्वयं को। इस प्रकार वह कहती है कि ऐसा करने से हमें ईश्वर का आशीर्वाद मिलता है।

तीसरा वाक्यांश है - श्री बगवानस नमस्कार। अर्थात् श्री भगवान को मेरा नमस्कार हो।

आजकल नदियों में स्नान नहीं किया जाता इसलिए हम अपने घर पर ही स्नान कर के रसोई घर के नल से इन सन्यवारियों को भरते हैं और बाहर जाकर अपने प्रवेश द्वार को सत्र देते हैं।

विस्थापन के कारण हमारे बहुत से व्रत, त्योहार और रीति रिवाज धीरे धीरे विलुप्त होते जा रहे हैं। यूँ तो आज भी कई परिवारों में सन्यवारि रखी जा रहीं हैं और द्वार पर सत्र भी दिये जा रहे हैं, पर इनकी संख्या धीरे धीरे कम होती जा रही है।

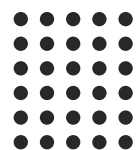
घर में सन्यवारि रखने में कोई अनुष्ठान नहीं करना पड़ता, अधिक समय भी नहीं लगता है। अगर प्याज़ टमाटर की सब्जी बनी हो तो उसके बदले पके चावल और दूध डाल सकते हैं। अगर वह भी न कर सकें तो कुछ कच्चे चावल धोकर भी डाले जा सकते हैं। कुछ परिवारों में नाश्ते में बनी रोटी भी सन्यवारियों में डालते हैं।

आजकल हम अपने रिवाजों को भुला कर अन्य रिवाजों को अपना रहे हैं। उसपर भगवान श्री कृष्ण ने गीता के तीसरे अध्याय के ३५वें श्लोक में कहा है -

श्रेयांस्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो सिद्धांतः ॥ ३५॥

जिसका अर्थ है - अच्छी प्रकार आचरण में लाये हुए दूसरे के धर्म से गुणरहित भी अपना धर्म अति उत्तम है। अपने धर्म में तो मरना भी कल्याणकारक है और दूसरे का धर्म भय को देने वाला है ।

इसलिए अपने धर्म का पालन करें। हमारी आने वाली पीढ़ियों को कुछ सिखाने की आवश्यकता नहीं है, जब वे बचपन से अपने अभिभावकों को यह करते हुए देखेंगे तो वे भी स्वतः इसे अपनाएंगे।



Myself, a Kashmiri pandit, born and brought up in Delhi. I was working in Archaeological Survey of India, and retired in 2023. My interest in knowing about my roots led to my YouTube channel - Kashmiri Pandit Culture in March 2019. I consider it my duty to pay back to my community by transferring what I have received from my elders. So my aim is to transmit our rich culture to the younger generation and make them understand its significance.



दिवाली

अमर शहीद सर्वानन्द कौल प्रेमी

आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ
अरमानो के उजाले हो
मुस्कानो के मतवाले हो
कन कन मे नवजोत जगाऐ
आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ ।
अंधियारा सब दूर करे हम
प्रेम सुधा के जाम भरे हम
आप पिये संसार पिलाऐ
आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ ।
दीप से दीप जलाऐ आ ओ
नव श्रंगार सजाऐ आ ओ
धरती से अंधकार मिटाऐ
आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ ।
जग मग जग मग ज्योति महके
फूल खिले और उपवन महके
प्यार का एक संसार बसाऐ
आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ ।
प्यार का हाथ पकड़ कर प्यारी
मिट जाऐगी वेदन सारी
नई विजय के गीत सुनाए
आ ओ प्रिये नो दीप जलाऐ ।

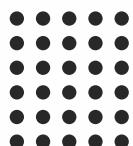


SECTION V

XLVIII

KASHMIRI SECTION

2024 - 2025



कुंज़ि रोस कुलुफ़

रमेश निराश

टेछर ज़ेवि हुंद करान दोतु दारि परदुन।
वदां बर नॉल ज्वजरयोमुत छु वरदन।।
कुलुफ कुंज़ि रोस करान फरियाद तौरिस
कलेमुच ज़ेव छि गजि अज़ दुहि नौरिस
कमर इकलस डोकयोमुत खय छ कबज़न
परेशान झीन ब्रादयोव कुस यि रहज़न ।
वछस प्यल ब्रांदुकेंनि डुबुडास वॅटसुय
तवय लोग सोरमु नटकुय लोलु हॉटसुय
बुछिथ वसियत यि ठोकुर कुठ छु दमफॅट
वदां ताखुच चोयव त्रॉव कून चॉट चॅट
खिंज़िथ तेहजन पतिज़ बेवा छि द्रामुच
छि वूंगां शाल कुछि तल हूंय्न प्यामुच
वखुल रतुदॅव नॅलचस हेज छि गर्दन
गोतन तिलुवॉर हिसस कस म्योन वर्दन
दिवां बुथि बुथि छ चंगुज हाल डीशिथ
गमिच दोद बाननुय ज़न ब्रॅर फीशिथ
गठस फ्रठ वठ छु वॉलिजि चिलमि तेंगलस
छटां नय दुह छु बासान नार जंगलस
कतिज नालान छि गानुचि टांगु बूजिथ
कोकुर बांगान मौरिस मंज़ चूरि रूज़िथ
सतुत दिगि कावु ठूलन त्रटबुजुन तुल
चमन दोदमुत छु मूलय क्या फलन गुल
छु सुंबलन नरगिसन अज़ बुथ अवेज़ान
बोंबुर छंबछारि लोगमुत बर गुलिस्तान
ऑनिस बासान लमस तल वुछ न कंसिय
वुछुन मा गाशिदारा कांह ति वंसिय
छु कुस गाटुल यि द्रामुत चंग ज़ॉलिथ
नगाढय ढोल वायान अंगजि गॉलिथ
यि छा मुमकिन निराशस नेरि अभिलाष
सियाह खानन अंदर ज़ाह बेयि फ्लाह गाश ।।।...



यी च्यूनम ती म्यूनम

रमेश निराश

मोचिथ प्योमुत नचिथ क्या द्राम अचिथ बागस न्यंदेर आयम
रछिथ क्या छुम तछिथ यूता कशिथ छोख न्येन वछिक द्रायम

वैसिथ सनिरस खसिथ बालन, फेक्यन कांगर पध्यन चालन
वविथ वसलुक पम्बछ डलसुय, खलस हिजरुक्य ल्येगल जायम

खटिथ वटवोट छु दर अंगोट, रटिथ हठ वथ चटिथ कति ब्यूठ
गंडिथ नलवोट श्रुकेव वाखव, मधुर मस यिनि सँदिर रायम

फरिथ कुस गव बरिथ कंजसुय, रलिथ कने गोम वलिथ शुपसुय
चंदव रोस जंदु दिवान बारव, रिंदन मंज बिंदु में मंदछाव्यम।

गरिथ चांग्यन बरिथ रथ पूर, परिथ पोथ्यन सोरिथ भरपूर
फिरिथ तसबी दोहस रातस, अतुर यिनु कॉल दतुर खायम

थकिथ चंद्रम छोकिथ आफताब, श्रोकिथ आलेन होखिथ चामुत
खसिथ अर्शस फर्श ख्वोरें चोल, फटिथ प्यल त्य प्यफर द्रायम

सनिथ सनु गोम अनिथ यूता, रनिथ न्यामचु बनिथ म्यच गय
तमिस छयपलस निराशुन वन, जुल्फ बरहम सु पॅराव्यम।।



Dr. Ramesh Kumar Bhat (Ramesh Nirash) born in Srinagar/Kashmir is an approved A Grade Music composer from Prasar Bharti and Doordarshan. He is a writer, poet, choreographer, social worker, actor, motivational speaker and sadak of occult sciences yoga Acharya.

He served as Music Director for 32 years at Navodaya Vidhyalaya Samiti, participated at National level for Navodaya Vidhyalaya for more than 43 times for Independence Day and Republic Day Parade celebrations at India Gate. He is awarded with as Teacher from Navodaya Vidhyalaya more than three times and also best Scout of North Region.

He has published more than 14 books of poetry.



म्यअनि व्यथा

अनिल कौल

च्य क्या बूजुथ म्य सअति क्या गोव
यि सपद्योव म्य सअति सु छुनअ नोव
येति न कोरि न ज़नानि यज़्जत
द्रौपदी तअ सीताय ति वुछुन प्योव॥

दपन, कूर ज़्यवअनि गअयाय लक्ष्मी हुन्द वास
मगर म्य गोव वन्य पुरअ विश्वास
यिम छि सिरिफ कथअ तअ कथन क्या वनव
म्यान्यन मुशिकलातन हुन्द छु नअ कअन्सि एहसास॥

हर हमेशअ क्याज़ि छस बअय यिवन वलनअ
गन्धअ खयालन हअन्दि क्रायि मंज़ क्याज़ि छस यिवन तलनअ
मेय प्यठ सितम, मेय प्यठ जुलम, क्याज़ि?
काढ्यन हुन्द मअकरेर मेय प्यठ क्याज़ि यिवन तलनअ॥

समाजस मंज़ द्युतुख अगर म्य बराबरुक अधिकार
तेलि क्याज़ि हरविज़ि यिम मर्द करन म्योनय बापार
क्याज़ि बनअवअख मअजि, बेन्य, कूर, कमज़ोर
येलि छिख कअऽढि डलन तेलि तेलि छस बअ गछन शिकार॥

दपन, पुण्य भूमि छि यि येति अवतार ह्येथ आमअति भगवान
येती मगर धर्मस फान करिथ बीहीथ छु इनसान
बेय सुय ज़ार, प्रथ दोह कौरव म्य च़टन पलव
छाह कुनि जायि कृष्ण कांह, युस तुलि पुरसान॥



अनिल कौल

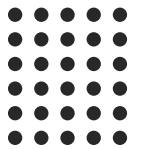
अनिल कौल से संपर्क करने के लिए आप उन्हें jammu.strings@yahoo.in पर ई-मेल कर सकते हैं।

मअज कशीर

(शीतल) जीतन्दर रैना

वोथ तुल कलम लेख तकदीर पनुन
यति अज़ छु लोगमुत ज़ूने गृहुन
यति कुस कस क्या वाति मत्यो
यति खअथ चेथ सअरी बोछिहेत छअय
यति चूरन ज़न रतचूर मत्यो
यति दोहस रातस फर्क ना केह
यति सुबहन सपदन श्याम मत्यो
यति चुठकुलयन डूयन पयवंद
यति अभृसि ज़ागान त्रअल मत्यो
यति नीम हकीमो कोर सौदा
यति हेकमत छन दरकार मत्यो
यति अथअ तुलिय तुलिय दिवान फरियाद
यति फरियादन अम्भार मत्यो
यति अल्लाह अक्बर कुसतानय छुय

यति मोत लगिथ व्यह खोव मत्यो
यति पोज़ अपुज़ केह ना छुय
यति अपजुय बस कारबार मत्यो
यति बुय छुस बय छुस बय कुस छुय
यति कुस वनि कमिसुन्द नाव मत्यो
यति अन्द्री अन्द्री सन्द्रान छुअय
यति नारस बृहन वसताव मत्यो
यति पीरन फकीरन हुअंद आलम
यति साधु गय सन्यअस मत्यो
यति मअज कशीर दिवान आलव
कर यिन वनि मअन जानान मत्यो
यति शीतल अन्द्री दमफअट गव
वननस ना यति हा वार मत्यो



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म्येअन मअज

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क्या वन्य अंदर्मिस नारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

वन्तम बीहिथ छख कथ शालमारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

यन बअ ओनथस योर ज़नमस
ज़ाहमाह होतथम यूत दूर
बीहिथ पान छख मंज़ गुलज़ारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

दव्द चयि चोवथस गलि गले
फेरनोवथस कोछि कव्छे
मंज़लिस मंज़ लालज़ारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

छुस न वातान हॉन्ज़ रादन
कअत कअत गछान आछुर
चैय वरअय वन कस यारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

शुरि- पानय दूर च़िहम
दर जवअनी वनअ कस
लवा मुत छुस आमतावस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

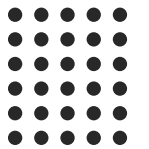
यी मेअ ओसुम दर हा ख्वाबस
ती हां ख्वाब रुद म्योन ख्वाब
ज़न ब फोटमुत मंज़ हा नारसन
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

कुस छि यति म्योन
कस वन्य चोन
सअरी गअमित बेज़ारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

यी चे वोनथम
ती बअ छुस करान
निश मअ रअटज़ेम आभशारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

छख च़अ शीतल
छुस बअ निशफल
निश मय रुज़ ज़ेम प्रेथ कारस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस

छख च़अ रानी
मअज हय मयअनी
सेदलवक्षमी छय च़ सातस
दीदारस प्राराण छुस



मुझसे संपर्क करने के लिए:

ईमेल – jeeturaina123@gmail.com

लुकभवण

(शीतल) जीतन्दर रैना

अख म्अर मन्द इज़हार
गुलज़ार लुकभवण
छुय लुकभवण शेहजार
सब्बज़ार लुकभवण

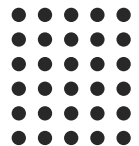
तति सयदपीठुक वास
सदलक्ष्मी हुन्द भास
शिव अंश भैरव द्वार
गुलज़ार लुकभवण

नागस अन्दर शिव जी
बागस अन्दर फअज ही
पांचादरी हुन्द रफ्तार
वेस्तार लुकभवण

अथ नखि छुअ नाराण नाग
यछि पछि हेमहोस ज़ाग
हारबाह अतिच शूभिदार
मिलच़ार लुकभवण

कअज मअज कावन सअत
भक्तिज़न छि प्राराण कअत
पअनिस खोरून फव्वआर
शुभिदार लुकभवण

छुय ज़ाग हेथ शीतल
प्राराण छुअ बरतल
छुस भक्ति हुन्द अंभार
मिछ़ार लुकभवण



नमस्कार,

मेरा नाम **जीतेन्द्र रैना (शीतल)** है। मेरे पिता स्वर्गीय श्री मोहन लाल रैना और माता स्वर्गीय श्रीमती रानी रैना हैं। मेरा मूल निवास ग्राम लोकभवन, अनंतनाग, कश्मीर है। हमारा घर एक आध्यात्मिक केंद्र जैसा था, जहाँ साधु-संतों का नियमित आना-जाना लगा रहता था। घर में सदा एक धार्मिक और शांतिपूर्ण वातावरण रहता था। मेरे पिता जी भजन-कीर्तन और लेखन में विशेष रुचि रखते थे। उन्हें सुनते और देखते हुए मेरे भीतर भी लिखने और आध्यात्मिक चिंतन की रुचि का बीज अंकुरित हुआ।

वर्तमान में मैं दुर्गा नगर, जम्मू में निवास कर रहा हूँ और लेखन के माध्यम से अपनी भावनाओं और विचारों को अभिव्यक्त करता हूँ। लेखन और आध्यात्मिकता में मेरी रुचि का श्रेय मेरे माता-पिता और हमारे घर के धार्मिक परिवेश को जाता है।

मुझसे संपर्क करने के लिए:

ईमेल – jeeturaina123@gmail.com



देवाँली

अमर शहीद सर्वानन्द कौल प्रेमी

असि येति काँत्याह घ्यवु च्चाँग्य ज़ॉली,
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।
अन्यमय अज़ योर लाल फँल्य सॉली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

मनुसुय थविमय बॅर्य बॅर्य प्याँली
लोलुक्य तु प्रेमुक्य अमरथ्थ खॉस्य ।
युस आम निशि हे कांह गव नु खाँली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

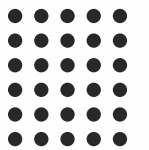
रामस लगुहा रटु हन नाँली,
करहस गतु ग्यूर पोंपुर ज़न ।
रोज़हस पादन तल बो सवाँली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

वनवास फीरिथ आव यँचकॉली,
सुता, लक्ष्मण च़रनन ध्यान ।
भगवान फ्यूर पानु बाँली बाँली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

प्रकाश फ्यूर येति च़ँज गटु ज़ॉली,
प्रज़ल्योव अज़ नोव असि येति बान ।
लोल बाँय जानस बो र माजि माँली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

प्रारान सॉरी कमि लोलु बाँली,
अज़ वाति वीरस सुत्य भगवान ।।
सारिनुय पूशितन नॅव देवाँली ।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।

'प्रेमी' प्रारान ह्यथ पोशि डाँली,
पादन अर्पण वन्दुहस प्राण ।
भक्ती कोसम त्रावस नाँली ।।
बेय आयि अज़ देवाँलीये ।।०।।



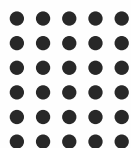


SECTION VI

XLVIII

MEDIA CLIPS

2024 - 2025



Omar Abdullah - Be like “Badshah”

Ashok Dhar



Resting on my writing desk in my flat in Kolkata where I reside, I pray the next government keeps emotional issues at an arm's length and works in cooperation with all stakeholders

People of Jammu and Kashmir UT have voted in numbers that can make any democracy proud. Results announced have given a clear mandate with even a more clearer message. People want to live in peace and the new government to address their pressing issues of livelihood, unemployment, drug menace, hefty electricity bills and sustainable economic growth. But, any bipartisan analyst cannot ignore the existence of an undercurrent of angst and emotional disconnect with the abrogation of Article 370, downgrading the status of state to UT post reorganisation, the alleged misuse of the Public Safety Act (PSA) in Kashmir valley that coalesced into a collective mood in favour of the strongest regional party.

Praise voters who voted without fear. Praise political parties with different ideologies who participated with full vigour, including those who tilt towards separatism. Praise security forces who helped in making incident free and fair elections possible, despite some apprehensions. Praise the

Election Commission of India (ECI) who lived up to its word of conducting a free and fair election. Congratulations are rightly due to the govt, ECI, media, candidates and voters for this historic and singular achievement.

Many analysts and political parties will surely take a deep dive into results to identify the story behind numbers. TV channels shall create scenarios based on views of panelists and their own anchors, or as influenced by the leanings of their owners. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh post signing of the instrument of accession by Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of J&K, on Oct 26, 1947 had later received special status state under Article 370 of the constitution. The honourable Supreme Court upheld the decision of the government of India to abrogate Article 370 in its judgement, delivered by its five bench judgement on December 11, 2023.

Given the political realities of our country at present, I guess it is most unlikely that we can reverse this decision during my life time or even beyond. Hence, addressing the genuine aspirations of the people should take precedence. Besides, one may recall that Sheikh Abdullah had signed 1975 Indira Gandhi accord after voicing demand over years for other options – plebiscite, self determination and independence.

One of the less frequently discussed issues post his accord is the review of post 1953 laws in the state as per Beg-Parthasarathy agreement during his tenure as the Chief Minister from 1975-82. The cabinet led by him had appointed two committees under the chairmanship of Afzal Beg, then Dy Chief Minister. Devi Das Thakur, Law Minister was member of both committees.

One committee was to conduct critical examination of the provisions of

constitution of India and laws extended to the state, post 1953 and the other was tasked to examine detention laws in the state. The committee for review of the post 1953 laws met a few times but there was a sharp division amongst the members on the desirability of the review or revocation of laws extended to state after 1953.

This had caused a stalemate. The committee existed even after Afzal Beg left the cabinet in 1979 with DD Thakur as the Chairman. Few meetings under his chairmanship too proved inconclusive. Sometime in 1980, Sheikh Sahib asked the committee to submit report without further delay. Ghulam Mohammad Shah and Ghulam Nabi Kochak complained to CM that meetings could not be held due to non availability of DD Thakur on account of his other engagements. It was at this stage that DD Thakur proposed to CM that he be allowed to submit his report and Shah and Kochak submit their reports separately. Both, Kochak and Shah submitted their report within a week of Thakur's submission of his report. The reports were at variance with each other.

Thakur opposed any further deliberation on the question in view of what had been committed by the accord on behalf of Sheikh Abdullah and Afzal Beg. He gave interesting rationale, emphasising on the need for a common basis to evolve, as any unilateral action would result in a reversal of constitutional developments since 1953. Such an action would also jeopardise the Accord of 1975.

This point seems to have been appreciated by Sheikh Abdullah, because of which the question of review was not raised in the cabinet thereafter, till his demise in 1982. Did Sheikh Sahib write words like say, "Not relevant now" or "No looking back" in his remarks on the file can best be known if the file is made public. The fact that he did not do much thereafter could also be his realisation that the Constitution of India is indeed fair to its citizens as it does not

discriminate people based on their religion, caste, region, gender or race. After all, he with three of his colleagues, were members of the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution and he would surely have known better.

Somehow, when discussing Kashmir, our reference point is contemporary in a historical context viz, the instrument of accession with India on October 26, 1947. I am born in Kashmir in 1954 AD and have spent my early growing years in the lap of paradise on earth. During my independent research for my book, "Kashmir As I see it – From within and afar" published by RUPA in May 2019, I realised that one needs to go beyond the instrument of accession to understand Kashmir and had hence coined an acronym, LeLaMOKSHI where Le stands for Legality, La for Land, M for Morality, O for Operationality, K for Kashmiriyat, S for Shaivism and Sufism, H for Historicity and I for Identity. These elements need to be understood individually with interdependencies as an iceberg, where the elements of legality and land being above water are visible to our eyes as issues involving three countries – India, Pakistan and China, while all other elements are under water that require a deep dive in the ocean of history.

Post 1990, people of all faiths have suffered in Kashmir. Thousands and thousands have been killed either by terrorists or by people in uniform and lakhs of peace loving, Kashmiri Pandits have been uprooted from their original place of abode for over 5000 years in a process described by the National Human Rights Commissioner (NHRC) as "akin to genocide". In the concluding pages of his judgement of December 11, 2023, Justice Kaul of the honourable SC penned an emotional epilogue recommending setting up of a "truth and reconciliation commission" just as in post-apartheid South Africa. Having visited South Africa and Rwanda, I have seen the benefits of such interventions, notwithstanding that context and causes that led to such

interventions being different in nature with reference to Kashmir. One can always learn from such best practices processes and adapt same to suit our circumstances to address the human dimensions for justice.

If we look at the history of Kashmir post 14th century, we unanimously recall the glorious rule of Zain-ul-Abidin of the Shah Mir dynasty. He took over as the Sultan of Kashmir in 1420 AD and restored the semblance of communal harmony. His reign from 1420 AD to 1470 AD was a remarkable phase of peace, prosperity and cooperation. Kashmiri Pandits who had left Kashmir due to excesses in time of his predecessor, Sultan Sikandar, decided to return during his rule. Zain-ul-Abidin is remembered as the “Great King” or “Badshah”, unlike Sultan Sikandar who is remembered as “iconoclast” at whose behest the decree ordering the Pandits to *raliv* (convert), *tchaliv* (opt for exile) or *galiv* (choose to die) was issued.

Hence, if we look at the rulers of Kashmir post 14th century, post the arrival of Islam, the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin from 1420 AD to 1470 AD stands out as a period when the Valley had obtained its own ‘Nash equilibrium’, a concept where the optimal outcome of a game is one where no player has the incentive to deviate from his chosen strategy after considering the choice of his opponent. Since then, we are historically in a state of transition!

I recall taking the liberty of changing the last lines of a Sufi Kalaam, *Baaz Wala Raazhanz* by Shamas Fakir in my concluding remarks on July 6, 2019 at the launch of my book on Kashmir in Srinagar by Khurshid Ganai, IAS, then Advisor to the Governor, J&K. The book had been released in Kolkata on May 12, 2019 and in New Delhi on June 4, 2019. The book release event in Srinagar was attended by leading intellectuals, journalists, former bureaucrats, industrialists, technocrats and the discussion was moderated by eminent columnist and journalist, Dr Manoj Joshi.

The last stanza that I shared summarises the enormity of our challenges and a wish for the new govt that should be taking oath soon.

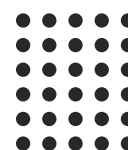
Sath samandar chi myani taale
Tath dariyavas kath tari naav
Anighati Shamso Tsong Yus ha Zaale
Assi gos tas Badshah tsund Deedar

Our challenges are indeed a heavy load to carry over the seven seas. We wish to have Deedar of a Badshah who will lead us from darkness to light. History has brought us to another interesting point of transition.

Resting on my writing desk in my flat in Kolkata where I reside, I pray the next government keeps emotional issues at an arm’s length and works in cooperation with all stakeholders, including the opposition BJP for meeting aspirations of our people and pray the centre grants statehood to the UT before even a resolution is introduced in the new assembly.

Let’s all begin a new journey with hope and promise to create an environment for Kashmiri Pandits to return with safety and dignity. Preserving ecology too is important and reserving jobs for locals is possible by legislation as done by other states, like Madhya Pradesh (70% for domiciles). We can make it 80% where talent is not a constraint or invest in massive skill upgradation, as required. Similarly, restricting allotment of land too can be handled with centre with tact, persuasion and mutual respect. Naveen Patnaik can be a better role model for CM of a state that wants the best for his people.

Omar Abdullah has to decide if he wants to be remembered as the next Badshah or if he wants to keep the political pot boiling, as in the past. Clearly, his choice.



A Dream Come True

Ashok Dhar

I never thought my dream of travelling to Kashmir by train would come true in my lifetime



August 1966 – I was amongst the group of students from Kashmir selected to study at Sainik School Ghorakhal, Nainital by the government of Jammu and Kashmir. We were joined by students selected from Jammu and Ladakh regions. I have vivid memory of our final interviews conducted by Late Wing Cdr Jaimal Singh, Principal of school, in the new Secretariat building in Srinagar and my first experience of 'going up and down' the lift multiple times. Most of us were admitted in class V or VI.

After a Sainik school was established in Nagrota, the state government of J&K stopped sending students to such schools outside of state but continued to support students who were sponsored for studying in Sainik school in Nainital and earlier to Bhubaneswar till completion of their studies upto class XI.

I recall our journey would start from Srinagar to Jammu in a bus charging about Rs 10 in 'B' class or Rs 12 in 'A' class from either Lal Chowk bus stop or Tourist Reception Centre, respectively. Even though a half-concession student ticket from Srinagar to Jammu by Indian Airlines was about Rs 23, we could not afford to travel by air as most of us were from families of very modest means. Initially, our parents would accompany us upto Pathankot but later few of them would volunteer to take charge of entire group.

After a few years, we were senior enough to travel alone without their oversight!

We would stay in Jammu for the night and travel next day in a bus from Jammu to Pathankot to take Sealdah express upto Bareilly. Having a bottle of Coca cola cold drink at Lakhimpur was a special treat. The bus from Jammu to Pathankot would stop at Samba and Lakhimpur. Our school bus would pick us from Bareilly railway station to school in a journey of about five hours. We had only winter vacations in school and hence we spent winters in Kashmir.

A school teacher, usually, Mr Joginder Singh, our English teacher was assigned to accompany us in our journey by train, from Pathankot to Bareilly and vice versa. We adored him as he was both, a violinist and a good singer, and made our journeys musical with a jovial environment. Sometimes, we were regaled with jokes by Late Mr P S Chikkara, our PT teacher who would accompany the group, especially from school to Bareilly. He had travelled globally as a sailor in Indian Navy earlier and would freely share his global experiences. He had learnt English on the job from his interactions at various international ports.

Most of our school mates in Nainital who came from other places in India would travel by train from Kathgodam railway station (very close to our school) to their homes directly or with a changeover at some station and vice versa. I too would dream of a day when we could travel from Srinagar to our school or return home by train. Often, I recall such discussions would take place when our bus got held up due to sudden landslides on road from Srinagar to Jammu. To be sure not to miss Sealdah express, sometimes we would travel a day earlier and use our time in Jammu to see a new film at a cinema hall. I recall seeing Mera Naam Joker, Ram aur Shyam, Daraar to name a few.

No new films were released in valley in winter and most halls screened old movies. Nevertheless, it was a blessing for me to see most movies of my favourite actor, Dilip Kumar in winter vacations!

Let me make an honest confession. I never thought my dream of travelling to Kashmir by train would come true in my lifetime. The project to connect Kashmir was known for missing cost and time deadlines multiple times and not taken with the seriousness it deserved, post its accession to India in October 1947. Jammu was connected by rail with Pathankot in December 1972. Thereafter, trains were started in valley between Banihal and Baramulla from 2008 to 2013 but linking Kashmir with Jammu posed too many technical challenges for construction of rail bridges and tunnels.

Train from Jammu was extended to Udhampur in 2005 but the extension of this link upto Katra, a track of about 15 miles, was not easy. It required about 7 tunnels and 38 bridges to link Katra with Udhampur. The construction of Chenab rail bridge in Reasi district which is the world's highest railway bridge was not easy. It is a marvel of Indian engineering, construction and project management expertise. Compliments to all in Indian Railways, the government and other stakeholders who have made it happen.

Understandably, the train to Kashmir will formally start on January 20, 2025. This date will hence be recorded as one of the most important dates in the modern history of Jammu and Kashmir with a transformational potential on social, economical and geo-political landscape of the region.

As a recap, the first plan to link Kashmir with train was conceived in 1886 during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh. It was proposed to extend the metre gauge railway line from Rawalpindi to Kashmir. Plan of laying a 175 mile long track with a maximum gradient of 1 in 50 and curves of 400 ft radius was prepared but raising Rs 3.07 crore as the

budgeted cost became a challenge!

Geographically, the only railway line that entered Jammu and Kashmir at the time of accession was a branch of the north-western railway that connected Sialkot, some twenty-five miles away in Pakistan, to the winter capital of J&K, Jammu city. J&K had few motorable roads; the main road, like railway links, connected the city of Jammu with Sialkot. Of the three roads to Srinagar, two entered J&K from areas that were to become part of Pakistan.

The first was the all-weather Jhelum Valley Road, which ran alongside the Jhelum river for 132 of its 196 miles. The road began in Rawalpindi, where there was a railhead, and then via Murree and Domel, near Muzaffarabad, to Srinagar.

A second road went from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) rail terminus of Havelian, seventy-one miles further north of Rawalpindi, via Abbottabad to Muzaffarabad, and then to Srinagar. A third, 'a more picturesque' road was an extension of the Sialkot-Jammu road. The route went for 203 miles from Jammu city to Srinagar via the Banihal Pass, which was often snowbound during winter from December to April and was 'notoriously liable to gulying and landslips'.

Economically speaking, most non timber exports went via the Jhelum Valley Road but timber was exported by floating it down the Jhelum and Chenab to points downstream in Pakistani Punjab rivers before accession. Post accession, the whole economic integration of Kashmir was only via Banihal road which till recently was of poor condition.

Luckily, the Radcliffe Commission awarded tehsils of Gurdaspur to India while demarcating the boundary between the two dominions and opened the feasibility of linking Jammu with mainland India.

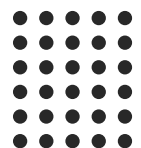
On July 28, 1947, the Maharaja had sanctioned a scheme of metalling the Kathua road. By September 25, 1947, the

government of J&K ordered the construction of a boat bridge over the river Ravi near Pathankot, thus connecting J&K to India. In parallel, work started on construction of a new road from Jammu city to Kathua on the Jammu state border touching Gurdaspur district. Had Radcliffe not awarded tehsils of Gurdaspur to India, linking Kashmir by train or road would have been operationally impossible.

Luckily, I have lived to see this day along with many of my school friends, like former Advisor to Governor, Khursheed Ganai, IAS; Dr Bashir Ganai, Dr J P Singh, Dr Saroj Kaul and others who live currently in Srinagar and Jammu who can recall those days of our travel from Srinagar to school in Nainital from 1966 to 1972. After we completed schooling, train reached Jammu in December 1972! I know all my school friends read, Greater Kashmir and hence using GK to give a shout out to them to plan a group journey on train from Kashmir. Regret, we will deeply miss our classmate, former Chief Secretary, Late Iqbal Khandey, IAS.

Train to Kashmir is bound to bring in more tourists, help develop human resources and boost trade from Kashmir by reducing supply chain cost. May it be the train of peace, progress and prosperity for Jammu and Kashmir.

Surely, one childhood dream has indeed come true!



Ashok Dhar FEI, author, "Kashmir As I see it : From within and afar"

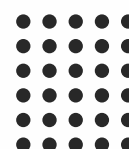


SECTION VII

XLVIII

Sabha Activities

2024 - 2025



HEARETH & SALAM CELEBRATION



NAVREH & ZANGTRAI



ZESHTHA ASHTAMI



SWAMI LAKSHMAN JOO JAYANTI





SHARIKA JAYANTI



BHAGWAN GOPINATH JAYANTI



JANAMASHTAMI



LALLESHWARI JAWANTI



STATE FOUNDATION DAY AT RAJBHAWAN KOLKATA



ANNUAL HAWAN



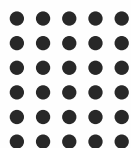


SECTION VIII

XLVIII

CONTACTS OF OUR PERMANENT MEMBERS
IN WEST BENGAL, REST OF INDIA AND ABROAD

2024 - 2025





Permanent Members Residing in West Bengal

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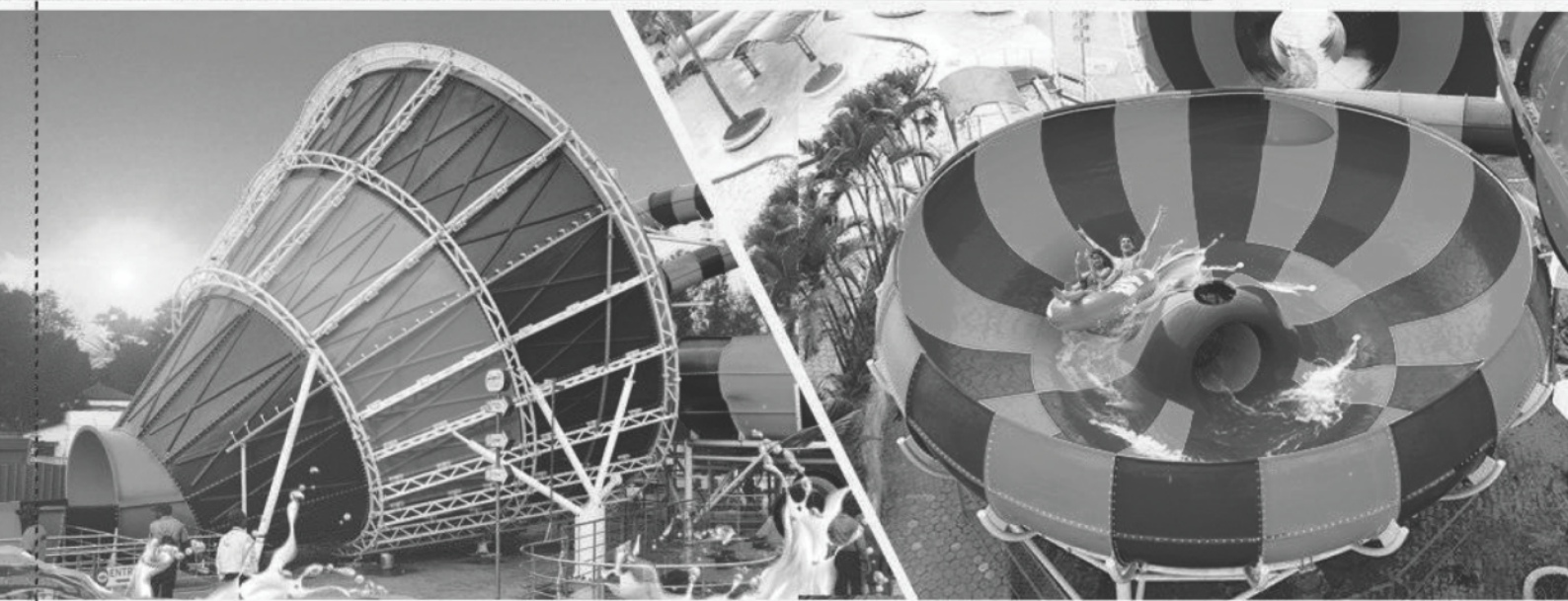
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