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Rituals & Ceremonies

Kashmiri Pandit Festivals

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1 Introduction

Kashmiri Rituals

The generalizations and conceptual frames of reference adopted by western scholars, which still form the broad basis of explanation of the historical past of Kashmir and the history of its people, deserve to be abandoned now. The Burzahom civilization has revealed a continuity in the past of Kashmir, which dates back to the later stone-age cultures. That the early man of the Aryan stock, whose descendants live in Haryana now, should have been found to have lived in the later stone-age or Neolithic settlements at Burzahom and other places in Kashmir, links the history of Kashmir to the proto-Vedic period of Aryan civilization and refutes the traditional concept of Aryan race movement across Kashmir into northern India. Perhaps, Kashmir was never a theater for the Aryan immigration the way it is believed to have occurred by Grierson and the other English scholars of Kashmir History.

The myth about migratory character of the inhabitants of Kashmir, in ancient times or the medieval times must be discarded. The arrival of Sanskrit Aryans from India into Kashmir, in the beginning of the Neelmat period, which commenced with the induction of the calcolithic tools or metals into Kashmir, most probably from the surrounding Sind Valley civilization, indicates a cultural change, which was not dictated by any race movement. The people living in Kashmir, from the time of the Neolithic age of Burzahom, have been of a single racial stock. The Nagas and Pisachas were also people of the proto-Aryan racial origin, and formed the local cultural denominations after Sanskrit Aryans arrived in Kashmir. There is hardly any anthropological evidence to prove that ancient people of Kashmir were racially of a different stock than the people inhabiting the Burzahom settlements. There is also little evidence to prove that early people of Kashmir, lived through the millennia, following the Burzahom civilization, in remoter regions of northern Kashmir and Baltistan, where western scholars believe the Pisachas, particularly, took refuge after Sanskrit Aryans extended their hold over the Kashmir Valley.

The Austroloid and the proto-Austroloid race movements across India had a marginal impact on Kashmir. No ethnographic evidence is available to show any proto-Austroloid elements in the people of Kashmir. The only other race movement, which could have affected the racial content of the people of Kashmir in ancient times, is that of the Alpanoids, who are believed to have descended from the European Steppes and moved south-east across India. Alpanoids, also known as western Brachycephalics, did not leave any trace on the people of Kashmir. Brachycephalics are broader-heads, measured in accordance with specific anthropometric methods in accordance with which various cephalic or cranial indexes are calculated. Kashmiri people are predominantly docile-cephalic, with specific cranial indexes, indicating longer heads and nasal indexes, similar to that of the Aryan people.

The Austroloid, proto-Austroloid and Alpanoid race remnants, which lingered on in remote regions, settling into endocrine social groups in India, and very often recognized as the aborigine tribes of India have a specific racial content and are not related to the early people of Kashmir. There were no aborigine people in Kashmir, and Nagas and Pisachas have no aboriginal history.

The ritual culture of the people of Kashmir grew from its Burzahom past and is, therefore, formed of several sediments; the basic sediments have their origin in the ritual structure of the Burzahom people and the people of Kashmir who lived through the Neelmat period. The Vedic Grah-Sutras and Kalpa-Sutras were adopted for the Battas of Kashmir, or the Kashmiri Pandits, by Laugaksha Muni, a great sage, sometime in the first millennium B.C. Before the adaptation of Sanskrit scriptures, Kashmiri Battas had already a highly evolved and intricate ritual structure, which symbolised their proto-Aryan origin. A part of the pre-Laugaksha ritual was integrated into the Laugaksha adaptation. The rest lingered on and survived and in due course of time became a part of the religious culture of the Battas. These rituals are still extant, and preserved and practised by the Kashmiri Pandits even now. A vast number of rituals followed by Kashmiri Pandits, in their birth, death and marriage rituals have a phenomenal identity and theological content. Besides there are numerous rituals, traditions and festivals of proto-Vedic origin which the Kashmiri Pandits follow.

Perhaps, the most interesting development of the Neelmat period was the evolution of Shakht religious system with its deep theological basis. Shakht ultimately formed the substructure of the Bhawani worship and Tantric Buddhism as well as Shaivism in Kashmir.

Rituals like Gada-Batta, Kaw Punim, Khachi Mavas, Herath, etc. have an ancient past and are symbolic of a theological philosophy, which predates the advent of the Sanskrit Aryans into Kashmir. These rituals have a proto-Aryan origin and should not be ascribed to any aboriginality in the ancient past of Kashmir. They have rich theological background and cannot be explained by simplistic explanations, based upon nineteenth century methodologies of history.

Mythology is a part of the cultural tradition of all people, and Hindu mythology is also a part of its cultural tradition. Hindu rituals cannot be explained by rationalisation and conjecture. Gada Batta is a ritual form which must be traced to the Butzahom period of Kashmir history and has a long theological tradition. Gada-Batta is a ritual associated with the family and the clan organisation of the early Hindus of Kashmir and is not in any way connected to superstition or the last long meal left for the aged who were unable to migrate in winter as suggested in an article published in the Hindi Section of the 'Koshur Samachar' (*Shivratri Special*: March 1994).

Dr. Santosh Kaul

Koshur Samachar

2 The Flavour of Kashmir

Festivals and Rituals

Anju Munshi

All festivals apart from their religious and communal connotations have one more thought behind them. That is to unite the people with a thread of oneness and bind the people morally and spiritually, in an attempt to transfer the ethos of a community from one generation to another. Another very important aspect of these festivals is to ensure a full presence at one's home, by way of some rituals that necessitate the members to take part in the activities, and thus celebrate the auspicious days with the entire family. The same holds true of the Kashmiri festivals, the spirit reigns high and the general mood is upbeat, there is gaiety and fervour that penetrates the sensibilities of young and old alike.

The most important festivals that are celebrated with a zeal are 'Maha-Shivratri', 'Janamashtami', 'Jyeshth Ashtami' and 'Navreh'. This is talking about a few ones that have stood the onslaught of time. These four festivals are a collection of various rituals and myths, reading and knowing of which becomes quite interesting. In its real essence, these festivals inculcate certain disciplines, that are instrumental in getting the whole family together and also paving the way for an opportunity for the youngsters to imbibe some important traits like comradeship, obedience and also a sense of tradition.

Shivratri

Generally most of the people in Kashmir take 'Herath' as the marriage day of Lord Shiva with 'Uma' while outside Kashmir it is taken as the day when Lord Shiva manifested in His human form on the earth to bless His devotees and redeem them. Shivratri in Kashmir is popularly known as 'Herath'. All through the ages people have given various meanings to 'Herath'. Some trace it back to the times of the Pathan occupation of the valley, when alien rulers forced the people to celebrate the festival in the summer month of 'Asada', instead of 'Phalguna'. The forced alteration in the timings of these celebrations brought a lot of misery upon the valley. There were inexplicable changes, snowfall in the summer months that resulted in crop failure and consequent famine. The Pathans called it 'Hairath', a Persian word for utter surprise. The word has ever since clung on to the memories of the Kashmiri people.

The main important festival. It starts from the first day of 'Phalgun', dark fortnight [Hur Okdoh] and ends on 'Tela ashtami', lunar fortnight of Phalgun, which as the common belief goes, the cold and wintry days are on way to bid goodbye and are heralding the approach of summers. From this day i.e. the first day, the entire house is cleaned and washed - the walls, the floors, linen, utensils, everything receives a face lift and is made to look wonderfully perfect. On 'Hur Ashtami' that comes in-between, on the eighth day people organise religious kirtans, jagran originally at 'Hari Parvat', 'Pokhribal' and 'Khirbhawani'. Fish is a very important item to be cooked on all these days of fun and merrymaking. On 'Dyara Daham' the day of the Laxmi, the new krides come wearing new clothes and bring with them 'Herath' Bhog' [Shivratri Kharcha] i.e. presents-in kind and cash for her inlaws. Besides the new brides, all ladies who come back from their parent's homes bring presents and 'Atagat', and also 'Kangri', symbolic of goodluck and prosperity. This small gesture pleasantly enough still carries on and is treated as a very good omen.

'Gad Kah' comes soon after on the eleventh day. This day fish is bought home and cleaned and fried for the main day, followed by 'Wager Bah', the day when new earthenware, specially prepared for the occasion is installed in the 'Puja room'. This marks the beginning of 'Herath'. Walnuts have a very important role to play in this festival. The shape represents the universe. They are filled in earthen pots covered with water up to the top. This water has to be changed every day. The 'Watur' consists of a big earthen pitcher, two small ones and two smaller ones, one elephant trunk shaped figure, seven bowls decorated with flowers and 'Sindoor'. They represent Shiva Parvati, Ram Brahmin, Seven Rishis, Ganesa and some other Rishis. These walnuts are washed and placed into the pitchers of and seven bowls. Then these are filled with water and some milk and Mishri is poured into each one of them. Pooja is started at 'Pradosh Kala' [dusk] and all the family members take part in it and the same carries on till late in the

night. The fast is broken and boiled rice with a variety of cooked vegetables is taken. The Shivratri comes to a close in the evening of 'Amavasya'. The walnuts in the pitchers are taken out and washed. Pooja is once again performed, signifying the culmination of the Festival. The 'Samgri' and the flowers used are immersed in the river. Walnuts are used as Prashad and distributed amongst the neighbours and friends.

Navreh (Navsamvatsara)

According to the lunar calendar, it is the first day of the New Year. It is also the beginning of Navratras. As per the custom, a thali is filled with rice, and some articles are placed on top of rice - like milk-pot, flowers, walnut, pen, coins or a currency note, Jantri [panchang of the new lunar calendar], boiled rice, sugar, salt, baked rice flour bread or any bread, and pictures of Vishnu and Parvati. This plate is filled on the eve of 'Navreh'. Early in the morning the grandnZother or any elderly lady or the mother gets up and brings this Thali for darshan to every member of the family. It is considered a good omen for the New Year. The rice of the Thali is cooked into 'tahar'. Navratras are celebrated with great devotion and faith. New clothes are worn on this day and people generally make merry. People in Kashmir used to go to 'Hari-Parbat' for a picnic, usually to the Mughal gardens.

Janamashtami

Lord Krishna's birthday is celebrated on the eighth day of Bhadrapada with great devotion and faith. Fast is kept and broken at the rise of the moon. This festival is important in case of a recent wedding at home. The new bride gets gifts in kind and cash for her in-laws. The gift hamper usually consists of seasonal fruits and sweetmeats. Because of the perishable nature of these goodies, the modern gifts have undergone a slight change in the sense that dry fruits have slowly replaced the tradition of fresh fruits. Temples are decorated and people in large numbers perform Pooja.

Jyesta Ashtami

The day of the goddess sees many people fasting and praying, and seeking her blessings. Back home, people visit the holy shrine at Khirbhawani. The entire day is spent in prayers and for the children it is a sort of a picnic. People coming to the holy place from long distance would come a day before, with an idea to grab the vantage places, well shaded by the mighty Chinar trees and close to the sacred spring. A scene of total devotion and a spirit of a gay abandon prevailed.

Mahanavmi

In olden days, arms and ammunition were I worshipped, along with Goddess Durga. Now the practice of worshipping arms and ammunitions is gone and only Goddess Durga is worshipped at 'Hari Parvat', 'Durganag' and 'Akingam'.

Chaitra Navmi

What is celebrated as Ramnavmi in Northern India is the ninth bright day of Chaitra, when Goddess Bhadrakali is worshipped. Navratras come to an end on this day and fast is also kept. Bhadra Kali is a famous temple on a hilltop in Kupwara district. There is a statue of Bhadra Kali which is worshipped on Chaitra Navmi.

Vasta Pooja

Another auspicious day in the month of Chaitra, when 'Graha-devta' [god of the house] is worshipped and offerings are made to him for the well-being and protection of the whole family. Today this festival is

celebrated only on Tuesdays or Saturdays, in the month of 'Pausha'. 'Gaddabatta', i.e. fish cooked with rice is offered to the house deity after performing Pooja.

Khich-Mawas

This falls on the fifteenth day of the moon's waning in Poh, and it is a day for the propitiation of evil spirits, who are conciliated by an offering of rice and pulses.

Apart from these main days of festivity, there are some rituals that have overtones of a festive spirit and cannot just be left out. Some rituals like 'Marghashirsha Poornima', a day when rice boiled with turmeric along with Pooja is offered to the house deity, 'Kah Nethar', 'Mekhal' or the thread ceremony, marriage rituals and as a grand finale to everything, 'Tile Dwadashi' - when Shradh of the dead is performed with oil and sesame seeds, 'Shradha Paksha' etc.

The observance of these rituals and festivals speaks of a highly civilised and cultured Kashmiri society. Nilmata Purana describes in detail which rituals and festivals are to be celebrated on a particular day of the year. Both men and women participated in them. They kept fasts and prayed to different Gods and Goddesses. In fact these festivals were started for the need to have an outlet by way of providing some days of fun and frolic and eventually lead to prosperity, health and happiness of the people. Mr. Walter R. Lawrence, the then settlement commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir in the British period has given a lucid detail of the rituals and ceremonies of Kashmiri Pandits in the state. In one of the references, he talks about the ritual cycle of a Kashmiri Pandit right from the day of his birth to his end moments and also the Shradh ceremonies.

A Journey of Life and death – Beginning to End

A Hindu child is ushered in to this world by noting down the exact time of the birth, a job done by the astrologer. The mother is known as a 'rosa' and if this is her first child, then she is called a 'sadh piai'. On the ninth day after the birth, called 'sunder' the mother and the child are bathed at an auspicious hour and after bathing, seven vessels either of clay or bronze are filled with food. These vessels represent seven deities, and as some are flesh eating deities and some vegetarian, the food chosen has to be selected with care. Seven women of the household must be present to represent the seven deities. After the food has been made holy, the midwife lights a torch of birch bark and waves it around the heads of the mother and child and finally flings it into an earthen bowl filled with water. When a child is a month old, the day is celebrated in the name of 'mas-nethar' and in the third year the ceremony of shaving the child's head takes place - 'zar-kasay', a very joyous occasion. The food on this occasion is known as 'wari' and for her services the paternal aunt receives congratulatory gifts - 'zany' of rice, salt and cash and all the relatives and friends feast heartily on the 'warts'. In the case of the girl, there is no shaving of the head and the hair of the boy is buried carefully under a tree. When the boy has attained the age of seven years as per the ancient Kashmiri belief, and before he reaches his thirteenth year, he must become a true Brahmin - the Yagneopavit ceremony. On the day, after the ritual of the sacred thread being put around the boy's neck, coins and shells are thrown over his head, and he is then carried in state down to the river to perform his first prayer ceremonies.

Then the next important thing in the life of the boy is his marriage. 'Mehendirat' and 'Devgon' are performed and decked out in the same brave fashion as the groom is another boy - 'the pot maharaja' or the best man. Before the bridegroom is allowed to enter his house, he must pay money to his maternal and paternal aunt or sister who bars the door. The gifts to the bride from her father are numerous but noteworthy are two - 'Dijhuru', and the 'Chandanhar'. The 'Dijhuru' are ear ornaments of pure gold, of a mystic shape and the 'Chandanhaar' is a gold ornament worn around the neck, and it is given to the bride by her father-in-law. Overall, marriage in a Kashmiri society is a joyous ceremony.

Death has its own ways, by way of rituals that are observed quite rigidly. When a person breathes his last, his body is laid on the straw bed, and a lamp is kept alight by his head, day and night. Near it is placed a

tray full of sesame seeds with a coin. The son of the deceased lights the funeral pyre, but the work of cremation is done by the Musalmans called Kawji. For ten days the house where the death has taken place is unclean and no one eats food cooked in there, and for ten days, while the soul of the deceased is on its journey, rites for the dead are performed on the river bank.

We are indebted to our ancestors for laying out the rules so clearly before us. There is more freedom when you know your limits, and to set the boundaries is a mammoth job which is already done.

Source: Vitasta

3 Local Tradition

It remains only to indicate briefly what help surviving tradition offers for the study of the ancient topography of Kashmir. The tradition with which we are here concerned, presents itself in two forms. One is the tradition of the 'learned', regarding the ancient sites of the country in general, kept up more or less in connection with written records. The other is that genuine local tradition which is strictly confined in its limits, but can be traced equally among literate and illiterate of particular places.

Among those who represent in Kashmir learned tradition of the above type, there must again be distinguished the few Pandit families of Srinagar in which the serious study of Sanskrit Sastras has been maintained, and the great host of Bachbattas. With the latter class we have already become partially acquainted. We have had occasion to note the conspicuous absence of genuine knowledge as regards the ancient topography of the country in those texts which forms the characteristic products of this class' literary activity in recent times.

The Purohitas' knowledge of Sanskrit is ordinarily of the scantiest kind, and their 'reading' confined to Mahatmyas and devotional texts learned by heart without proper comprehension. We can hence scarcely expect them to have preserved genuine traditions regarding those historically interesting localities which are mentioned only in the like which from, as it were, their own particular professional domains, that their testimony can claim special attention. Yet even in this limited field the Purohitas' traditions are, as we have seen, often of a very modern growth. Their statements, therefore, require under all circumstances to be tested with critical caution.

'Learned' tradition as represented by the Srinagar Pandits of modern times, is best gauged by an examination of what the late Pandit SAHIBRAM has specially recorded on the subject of ancient sites. P.Sahibram, who was undoubtedly the foremost among Kashmirian Sanskrit scholars of the last few generations, had been commissioned by Maharaja Ranbir Singh to prepare a descriptive survey of all ancient Tirthas of Kashmir. For this purpose a staff of Pandits was placed at his disposal, whose business it was to collect the necessary prepared on the basis of these materials, was never completed, and of the latter I was able to recover only small portions. But some time before his death Pandit Sahibram has drawn up abstracts of the information he had collected, under the title of Kasmiratirthasamgraha, and of these I have been able to obtain copies.

This title work give a list of numerous Tirthas with brief indications of their special features and position, arranged in the topographical order of Parganas. It is useful enough as a comprehensive synopsis of such sacred sites as were known at the time to local worship. But it proves at the same time how little help traditional learning in Kashmir can offer in our days for the serious study of the old topography of the Valley.

Pandit Sahibram's plan is to indicate each Tirtha's position by mentioning the territorial division in which it is situated, and the nearest village or other well known locality. It was, undoubtedly, the learned author's desire to give all local names in their old Sanskrit forms as far as they were known to him, and accordingly we find a number of localities correctly mentioned by their genuine old designations. But, unfortunately, the number of the latter is truly insignificant when compared with those local names which are plainly recognizable as new fabrications, as worthless as those already mentioned in connection with the topography of modern Mahatmyas.

In consideration of the fact that P.Sahibram deserves to be looked upon as the best representative of modern Kashmirian scholarship, it is only just to illustrate the above remarks by a few examples. I take them from among those local names, the genuine forms which can be easily ascertained. The lake of the Naga Susravas, the present Susram nag, is named Susramanaga in one recension, and Susumnanaga in the other. The old Parganas of Holada, Laulaha, Khuyasrama are turned on account of their modern names Vular, Lolau, Khuyhom, into the Rastras of Volara, Lalava, Khoyahama. Banhal, the old Banasala, figures as Bhanusala; Khruv, the ancient Khaduvi, known correctly even to as late a text as the Lokaprakasa, as Khrava. The name of the ancient village Jayavana, which fares badly too, as we have

seen, in the Mahatmyas, is metamorphosed into Jivana; Ranyil, the old Hiranyapura, is with a flight of historical fancy turned into a foundation of King Ranaditya.

After this, village names like Uskara, Ramasrama, Kicakasrama, as designations of the old Huskapura, Ramusa, Krtyasrama can scarcely surprise us. The number of districts, towns, villages, streams, lakes and other topographical features mentioned by Pandit Sahibram amounts to nearly three hundred. But scarcely two dozen of the names given for them are in accord with our old authorities.

P.Sahibram was one of the few modern Kashmirian scholars who have seriously occupied themselves with the Rajatarangini and the later Chronicles. Hence the indifferent knowledge of ancient topography as displayed in his Tirthasamgraha, must appear all the more striking. Yet in reality it is easily enough accounted for.

What knowledge learned tradition in Kashmir has retained of ancient sites as distinct from Tirthas and the like, is confined to a few prominent localities which for one reason or the other were of special interest for the Pandits. Thus the capital, Pravarapura-Srinagara, with several of its quarters, the towns of Vijayesvara, Suyyapura-Varahamula and some other places of importance in the valley, have continued to be known by their ancient names. These names probably never ceased to be employed in colophons of Sanskrit manuscripts, in horoscopes, and similar records. In the case of a few other localities again like Jayapura, Damodara's Udar, Cakradhara, there were well-known popular legends which. But for the great mass of ancient places there were no special reasons of this kind to assure a recollection of their old names. It is hence only natural that all genuine knowledge of their identity and earlier history has gradually disappeared from the Pandits' tradition.

Nothing but systematic inquiry on the lines of modern historical research could help towards a recovery of the knowledge thus lost.

Popular local tradition has fortunately in Kashmir proved far more tenacious than the tradition of the learned. I have often derived from it very valuable aid in my local search for particular sites. The experience gained on my antiquarian tours has convinced me that when collected with caution and critically sifted, such local traditions can safely be accepted as supplements to the topographical information of our written records. In illustration of this statement, I may refer to the evidence gathered from local tradition in reference to the sites of Lohara, Hastivanja Kramavarta, Jayapura, Skandabhavana, etc.

It cannot be doubted that this tenacity of local tradition in Kashmir is due largely to the country's seclusion. Mountain barriers and consequent isolation tend everywhere in alpine countries to develop and foster conservative habits of life and thought. We find these habits most strongly marked the population of the Valley, and can safely ascribe to them a great share in the preservation of local traditions.

Source: Kalhana's Rajatarangini

Taken from: SaffronValley.com

4 List of Festivals

1. Shiva Ratri or Herat

13th day of dark fortnight of Phagan

This festival commences from the 1st day of dark fortnight of Phagan. From the 5th to 9th day house cleaning is done by leeping and washing. On the 10th day money according to *tet* scale is sent to the daughters in their husband's houses. On the 11th fried fish and bread are sent to the daughters. On the 13th day the head of the family keeps fast and performs the *puja* of Shiva at night. The 14th day is the feast day. The elders are given small presents of sugar or fruits by the younger and cooked rice and meat are sent to the daughters. On the 15th day or the 1st day of the succeeding fortnight walnuts consecrated at the *puja* are distributed among relatives and friends.

2. Tila Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Phagan

3. Chetar Choudas

14th day of dark fortnight of Chet

4. Sont

1st Chet (Sankrat)

A basket of unhusked rice, with a bread, a rupee, a pen-case, a cup of curds, a few walnuts, a crumb of cooked rice and some flowers, are kept overnight and seen the first thing in the morning by the inmates of the house just on opening their eyes from sleep. Each picks up one or two walnuts which are dropped in the river after bathing.

5. Naureh Mavas

15th day of dark fortnight of Chet

A fair is held at Vichar Nag, a northern suburb of Srinagar.

6. Naw Warih

1st day of bright fortnight of Chet

The custom of unhusked rice, etc. being seen in the morning as on the *sont* is observed. The sons-in-law are invited and given a feast. On their return to their houses they are given money presents.

7. Baisakhi

1st Baisakhi (Sankrat)

A fair is held at Gupta Ganga near the Nishat Bagh.

8. Durga Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Chet

A fair is held at Khir Bhawani (Tula Mulah)

9. Ram Nawmi

9th day of bright fortnight of Chet

A fair is held at Hari Parbat and at Raghu Nath Temple.

10. Yag Ram Nawmi

10th day of bright fortnight of Chet

11. Shri Panchami

5th day of dark fortnight of Baisakh

This day is sacred to the goddess Saraswati (Minerva).

12. Shriiddha of Rishi Pir

6th day of dark fortnight of Baisakh

A fair is held at the shrine of Rishi Pir at Batayar.

13. Vetel Shashti

6th day of dark fortnight of Baisakh

A fair is held at the different shrines of Vetals in Srinagar.

14. Munda Dashmir

10th day of dark fortnight of Baisakh

A fair is held at the mound near the Dal Darwaza.

15. Achhen Trai

3rd day of bright fortnight of Baisakh

A fair is held at Kothar, a village in Tehsil Anantnag.

16. Ganesh Choudas

14th day of bright fortnight of Baisakh

A fair is held at the Ganesh Ghat in Srinagar.

17. Jeth Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Jeth

A fair is held at Khir Bhawani.

18. Nirjala Ikadashi

11th day of bright fortnight of Jeth

A fair is held at Dud Ganga.

19. Hara Saptami

7th day of bright fortnight of Har

Circles with lime and colours are made on the floor in the house in resemblance of the sun.

20. Hara Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Har

A fair is held at Khir Bhawani.

21. Hara Nawami

9th day of bright fortnight of Har

A fair is held at Hari Parbat.

22. Mela Jvala Bhagwati

14th day of bright fortnight of Har

A fair is held at Khrew.

23. Biyas Puja

15th day of bright fortnight of Har

24. Rakhri

Full moon day of Sawan

Shiva *puja* is done in every house by the head of the family and a fair is held at Amar Nath, Mahadeva, Harsheshwara and Shankracharya.

25. Chandan Shashti

6th day of dark fortnight of Bhadun

A fast is kept by women which is broken at the time the moon rises.

26. Janam Ashtami (birthday of Sri Krishna)

8th day of dark fortnight of Bhadun

A fast is kept which is broken at the time the moon rises by taking only fruits.

27. Vinayaka Chaturthi

4th day of bright fortnight of Bhadun

A fair is held at all the shrines of Ganesh.

28. Ganga Ashtami or Radha Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Bhadun

A fair is held at Harmukata Ganga where ashes of those who have died during the past twelve months are carried and thrown into the lake there after performing the *Shraddha*. Another fair is held at Ganga Jatan (Pratapsinghpora) where a bath is taken by the pilgrims in the water oozing out from a precipice there. In

leap years the fairs are not held at Harmukata Ganga and Ganga Jatan, but at Sharda and then it is called Sharada Ashtami.

29. Pan

Any auspicious day during the bright fortnight of Bhadun

Bread are prepared and distributed among the relatives and friends.

30. Indar Bah

12th day of bright fortnight of Bhadun

A fair is held at Kani-maji near Baramulla.

31. Vitha Truvah

13th day of bright fortnight of Bhadun

Birthday of river Jhelum.

32. Anant Choudas

14th day of bright fortnight of Bhadun

A new armband of gold or thread is worn - by a male on his right arm and by a female in her left ear.

33. Kanyagat or Kambari Pachh

Dark fortnight of Assuj

This fortnight is entirely devoted to the Shraddha or offerings to the names of the *pitris*. It is a series of offerings and feasts in honour of the dead. The day (Tithi) on which one dies is represented in this fortnight by one corresponding to it for the performance of his or her Shraddha.

34. Nava-Ratra

1st day of bright fortnight of Assuj

35. Durga Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Assuj and of Chet

A fair is held at Khir Bhawani.

36. Maha Nawami

9th day of bright fortnight of Assuj and of Chet

A fair is held at Hari Parbat.

37. Dasehra or Vizai Dashmi

10th day of bright fortnight of Assuj

This day is celebrated with great pomp. The weapons and instruments of war are hallowed and then a campaign is opened. Three immense figures, stuffed with gun-powder, are made to represent Ravana, Kumbakarna and Meghanada and these are placed at the proper time in the centre of a large open space without the city. To represent Rama, Sita and Lakhshman, three little boys are splendidly dressed and

carried in a palanquin to the same place. Crowds of people gather there and the Maharaja sends all the troops with the guns, etc. At a given signal one of the little boys, who is supposed to be Rama, steps forth from the palanquin attended by the two other little boys and fires a small arrow at the big figure representing Ravana, while the other boys discharge their arrows against the other two figures. Of course at this moment the three monsters, Ravana, Kumbakarna and Meghanada explode with a tremendous noise and then the guns rattle and the cannon roar and the people shout and eventually retire.

38. Devali

15th day of dark fortnight of Katak

Oil lamps are lighted in the evening in honour of goddess Lakhshmi.

39. Annakuta

1st day of bright fortnight of Katak

Rice is distributed among the poor and the officials are given sweetmeats by the State after *puja* is performed at the Basant Bagh.

40. Gopal Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Katak

41. Birthday of Kali

8th day of dark fortnight of Poh

A fair is held at Kali's shrine above Zaina Kadal.

42. Khetsri Mavas

15th day of dark fortnight of Poh

In the evening *Khichri* is cooked and a plateful is kept outside the house in the compound for the god Kuvera.

43. Shishira Sankranti

1st of Magh (Sankrat)

Kangris with live charcoals and also rice, ghee and salt and cash are given to the priests in the name of the dead.

44. Gauri Tritiya

3rd day of bright fortnight of Magh

This day is celebrated in honour of the goddess Saraswati. The priest writes hymns of the goddess on elaborately illumined paper which he gives to youngsters. He is given presents of money in return.

45. Shruka Tsoram

4th day of bright fortnight of Magh

On this day the priest writes down a *shloka* in Sanskrit which he gives to the young boys with his benedictions.

46. Bhishma Ashtami

8th day of bright fortnight of Magh

A fast is kept in honour of Bhishma Pitamaha, this day being the anniversary of his death.

47. Bhimsen Ekadashi

11th day of bright fortnight of Magh

A fast is kept this day.

48. Shiva Chaturdashi

14th day of bright fortnight of Magh

A fast is kept this day and Shiva's *puja* is performed.

49. Somavati

Monday on which Amavasya falls

It is observed as a fast. People bathe this day in the river at the Somyar Ghat on the right bank of the river, this spot in the Jhelum being sacred to the moon.

50. Zara-Kasai

This is the hair-cutting ceremony performed when the boy is about 4 or 5 years old. A *havan* is performed and the boy's head is shaved, leaving the *choti* at the highest point of the skull. After the *havan* the relatives and friends are treated to a feast.

51. Zuji

This is the ceremony of conjugal union. In the case of grown up couple it is performed on the occasion of the wedding, but in that of the couple being young it is deferred till they attain the age of puberty. On this occasion the head-dress of the girl is changed, thenceforth the cap being replaced by *kalposh*, *zuji*, *taranga* and *putsi* and she binds a girdle round her waist. Also her hair, instead of being braided elaborately in a web, is thenceforth plaited in tress tied with a tassel hanging down the back.

Source:

The Kashmiri Pandit

by Pandit Anand Koul

Thacker, Spink & Co.

Calcutta

5 Shivratri or Herath

5.1 The Secret of Shivaratri

T. N. Dhar 'Kundan'

Shiva is eternal existence and, therefore, the Supreme Truth. He is free of bondages, devoid of attributes, all pervading and yet above everything (Ati tishthat dashangulam). He is Conscience (Chit) and Bliss (Ananda). Everything emanates from Him and everything merges with Him. He answers the form of Brahma and with the attribute of Rajas (Rajoguna) creates the universe. He assumes the form of Rudra and with the attribute of Tamas (Tamoguna) destroys the creation. In between He assumes the form of Vishnu and with the attribute of Saiva (Satoguna) looks after and preserves the creation. He is free to desire, to manifest and to act but all this needs energy or power and that takes the form of Shakti which in essence is itself an aspect of Shiva. Sometimes Shiva propitiates Shakti and She enters Him to enable Him to perform five acts of knowing (Jnan), desiring (Iccha), implementing (Kriya), concealing or covering (Pidana) and showering His grace (Anugraha). While explaining the importance of Bhawani Sahasranama Shiva says to His favourite devotee, Nandi, "It is the grace of Bhawani that I have been able to create the entire universe, humans, animals, birds, devas, asuras, gandharvas, stars, planets, flora and fauna, et al."

Some other time the Bhawani herself meditates on Shiva, invokes Him, merges with Him whose inseparable aspect She is and becomes the cause of the birth of Kumara Kartikeya. This brings an end to the demon Tarkasur and saves the devatas from his wrath. This merger or marriage of Shiva with Shakti is what is celebrated as Shivaratri in Kashmir called Herath or Hara ratri, the night of Shiva. This festival has the same importance in our part of the country as Durga Puja in Bengal, Ganesh Puja in Maharashtra, Ayyapa festival in the south, Holi in Brajdam and Baisakhi in the Punjab. This is the only festival in India which lasts a full fortnight and has become a unique socio-religious celebration. It starts on the first day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna, with cleansing and renovation of the houses and concludes on the amavasya day with the distribution of prasada of walnuts after performing the-prescribed puja. Every married daughter is regarded as a Parvati and is sent by her parents to her Shiva's home along with new clothes, money and gifts.

Although the fact of one God is universally accepted, the relationship between Jeeva and Param Brahma, the individual soul and the universal soul is perhaps extensively discussed and explained only in our scriptures, both in Nigamas (Veda) and Agamas (Other Shastras.) There is a oft-quoted Vedic saying, "Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti", the Truth is one yet it is explained by the wise in different ways. This has given rise to different schools of philosophy propounding dualism and non dualism. The Shaiva school of philosophy espouses non- dualism, yet the Trika system of Kashmir or the Kashmir Shaiva Darshan stands for non dualism in its pristine purity. It advocates that the entire creation is the manifestation of Shiva and therefore it is real and not an illusion or Maya. We worship Shiva in both His aspects of Shiva and Shakti. Shakti for us is Rajna, Sharika, Jwala and many more forms of the energy aspect of Shiva. Worshipping Her gives us unflinching faith in Shiva, the source of all knowledge and the end destination of all (Eko gamyah. Mahimnastotra.) Shiva for us is the Supreme Truth. Worshipping Him leads us to un- wavering trust and belief in the Mother, the giver of protection, solace and divine grace.

The celebration of Shiva-ratri, therefore, is symbolic and this symbolic leads to the Real. Attainment of the Real coincides with Self- realisation and Self-realisation is the ultimate aim and goal of a true Shaiva Sadhaka. The faiths world over have believed that it is from the mundane that one advances to the spiritual and supra-mental. Even Sufis have proclaimed that from Ishqe Majazi, the worldly love, one

rises to Ishq Haqiqi, the true eternal love where one is able to realise (Ham o ast) I am He or (Man Khuda) I am the God. This undisputedly establishes the importance of idol and symbol worship in general and of Vatuk-puja in the context of Shivaratri. The various pots that constitute vatuk: Dul, Ryesh-dul, Sanivar, Machavar and No't etc. stand for various deities or the different aspects of the Divine. We propitiate them and pray for world peace and well being of the mankind. From here we march on to Self-realisation and for this what is needed is an inward journey.

In the words of the great Lal Ded:

***Go'ran dopnam kunuy vatsun,
Nyebra dopnam andar atsun.***

Source: Koshur Samachar

5.2 Mahashivaratri

Bansi Pandit



Shiv-Parvati with Ganesh

Mahashivaratri (the great night of Shiva) falls on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna (February- March), and is dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. This festival is purely religious in nature and universally observed by all Hindus. On this day devotees sing bhajans in honor of Shiva, recite Sanskrit shlokas (verses) from scriptures, offer prayers in the morning and evening, and some observe fasting throughout the day. People visit nearby temples of Shiva and offer prayers in large crowds. The prayers and worship continue late into the night when the devotees offer coconut, Bilva leaves, fruits, and specially prepared sacred food to Shiva and his divine consort Parvati. Offering Bilva leaves to Shiva on Shivaratri is considered very auspicious by his devotees.

The origin of Shivaratri is attributed to several stories in Hindu mythology. One very popular story traces the origin of this festival to the churning of the Ocean of Milk by devas (gods) and asuras (demons). It is said that when both gods and demons were churning the Ocean of Milk to obtain amrita (water of immortal life), they came across many unusual substances, including the deadly poison Kalakuta. As soon as they touched the poison, it exploded into poisonous fumes that threatened to envelope the entire universe by darkness. When the destruction of the universe seemed inevitable, the gods ran for assistance from Brahma and Vishnu, but neither was able to help. At last they ran to Lord Shiva, who raised his trident and condensed the fumes. In order to save the creation, Shiva swallowed the poison without spilling a single drop. The poison left a dark blue mark on Shiva's throat. The gods praised and worshipped Shiva for saving the universe.

The philosophical essence of the above myth is as follows: gods and demons symbolize all kinds of individuals (both good and bad) in the world. The Ocean of Milk represents the ideal world that is full of peace and happiness for all human beings. Churning the Ocean of Milk signifies the human activity in the world. The amrita symbolizes happiness and the poison represents human greed and selfishness. Shiva symbolizes the atman (self), the spiritual essence of an individual. Worship of Shiva denotes meditation and contemplation by an individual on his or her own self.

The above story is symbolic of the fact that individuals perform actions in the world in order to achieve happiness. In this process a person is usually overpowered by greed and selfishness, ruining his or her efforts for obtaining peace and happiness. Thus the only way to achieve peace and happiness is by worshipping Shiva at night, that is, by meditating on one's own self during the night when the individual is free from the distractions of the physical world. When the individual attains self-knowledge, he or she can live in the world without being affected by anger, greed, and selfishness, the three enemies of one's soul. Since Shivaratri symbolizes the worship of the atman within, this festival is celebrated as a purely religious festival by all Hindus, as stated earlier.

Another story in Hindu mythology also emphasizes the auspiciousness of Shivaratri: On the day of Shivaratri, a hunter, who had killed many birds in a forest, was chased by a hungry lion. The hunter climbed a Bilva tree to save himself from the lion's attack. The lion waited throughout the entire night at the bottom of the tree for its prey. In order to stay awake to avoid falling from the tree, the hunter kept plucking the leaves of the Bilva tree and dropping them below. The leaves fell on a Shiva Linga that happened to be located at the bottom of the tree. Shiva was pleased by the offering of the Bilva leaves by the hunter, although inadvertently, and saved the hunter in spite of all the sin the hunter had committed by killing the birds. This story emphasizes the auspiciousness of worshipping Shiva with Bilva leaves on Shivaratri.

5.3 Kashmiri Pandits' Version of Sivaratri

President, Sant Samagam Research Institute

Naad

All India Kashmiri Samaj

Sivatri (Kashmiris call it Herath) is an important festival of Hindus. Lord Siva and his spouse Parvati are worshipped with great devotion everywhere in the country. Even those Hindus living abroad cannot

forget observing and enjoying this king of festivals. Alongwith worshipping 'Siva' people observe both social and cultural meets on this festival. They rejoice and exchange greetings with friends and relatives, no matter how distant and near they are. India being a vast country, this festival too is observed in various ways according to place, time and taste. This day is observed on Phalgun Krishna Chaturdashi corresponding to February-March of each year.

Devotee people observe 'Sivratri' with great dignity and devotion and pray for peace and prosperity for humanity as a whole. They specially keep a fast, put on simple garments, washed or new, according to the custom of each area. They start preparations for observing this holy day a few days early. On this day specially, they clean their houses and surroundings. This time coincides with the advent of spring season. Naturally people have to change from their winter atmosphere to approaching spring moods. Therefore, this day instills in them new life, cheer and job.

'Sivratri' festival is most scrupulously observed by the Kashmiri Pandits, the ancient and original inhabitants of Kashmir. They make thorough preparations and collect eatables, fruits and sweets. The entertainment of the Sivratri festival extends to about three weeks in Kashmiri Pandit house-holds. Each day or a group of days has a special name and religious function which include social performances also. Some of the names are Akodah, Hurya Aatham, Dyara Daham, Vagarye Bah, Heracnia Truvah, Donya Mavas and Tila Aatham. On each day they have different functions.

During the first week they clean their homes. They begin the second week with different kinds of worship after collecting earthen utensils and articles of worship. On 13/14 night they have long worship of the articles which represent Siva-Sakti and a host of other deities. It is a happy time, time of joy, devotion and peace. Recitation from the Vedas and hymns pertaining to the deities and mantra chanting are made individually and collectively. An example:

***Namah Sambhavaya Cha,
Mayo Bhavaya Cha,
Namah Sankaraya Cha,
Mayas Karaya Cha,
Namah Sivaya Cha,
Sivtaraya Cha.***

The special thing with Kashmiri Pandits is their mode and way of celebrating Herath. Two earthen pitchers filled with nuts soaked in water and flowers represent Siva and Sakti. Then a definite number of small earthen pots containing a nut and water symbolise the Ghanas and other deities. These pitchers and pots, collectively are called Vatuk. There is a set form of worship in each or in a group of Kashmiri Pandits' homes. After the fast and worship, prasad is taken about mid-night. The next day also is observed as a day of worship and feast.

Dyara Daham is a day of special social function. On this day the married daughters go to their in-laws with auspicious cheer and presents. After the 14th day, prasad (nuts from the pitchers) is distributed among relatives and friends for about a week. The festival actually ends on the Phalgun Krishna Ashtami called Tila Aatham. On the evening of this day people wind up all the material of worship and assemble it by the river side to immerse the same. In the evening they play local fire works called 'Ja-tun-tun'. Both young and old, are in their playful mood during the days of the festival. Thus comes to an end the Kashmiri Pandit version of Herath, the Mahashivratri of India.

5.4 Shiv Ratri

**Ashok Raina
Beltsville, MD**

A number of festivals are celebrated by Hindus in India and all over the world. One of the most prominent of these festivals is Shiv-ratri. For Kashmiri Pandits, Shiv-ratri is the most important religious festival. Celebration of this festival has remained proverbial from ancient times. In Kashmiri, Shiv-ratri is also

known as Har-ratri and Herath. It is said that Lord Shiva called Devi Jagatamba by the name Hairte on this day which eventually got transformed into Herath. Shiv-ratri is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun. In Kashmir we have maintained the ritual of Vatak-puja, along with the worship of Shiva and Shakti on this day. A historical episode reflects the faith of Kashmiri Pandits in Shiv-ratri. It is said that Jabar Khan, the Pathan governor of Kashmir, forbade people to perform Vatak-puja in Phalgun and instead ordered them to celebrate it in July. Helplessly, people obeyed the order but to everyone's surprise (harath) it snowed on that day in July. Since then the people of Kashmir recite, "Jabar Janda-Haras awu Wandha" (Jabar the rag-man, winter came in July).

Lord Shiva is omnipotent and omnipresent, being beyond all emptiness, the primal source of all. He has five functions: evolution sustenance, involution, preservation and assimilation. Just as a seed evolves into a tree, and in due course of time involutes back to seed, likewise the universal divine Shakti, the energy aspect, has to return to the absolute transcendental rest (Parma Shiva state). An interpretation for the significance of Shiva-ratri may thus be the celebration of the union of Shiva and Shakti, also referred to as Shiva's marriage to Parvati. The 9th century Kashmiri saint-poet Utpaldeva describing Shiva-ratri wrote, "When the sun, the moon and all the other stars set at the same time, there arises the radiant night of Shiva spreading a splendor of its own."

The worship of Vatuka is dealt within several Tantric works. Vatuka, like Ganesha, has been described as a mind bom son of the Mother Goddess. He is the deity who saves his devotees from all sorts of misfortunes and calamities. When Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of the valley in the first half of the fifteenth century, a few families in the remote villages stayed back. It is speculated that these people may have started worship of Vatuka for their protection, the custom having been continued by others when they returned to the valley in the later part of that century.

Kashmiri Pandits used to celebrate Shiv-ratri festival over a period of 23 days. First six days (hurye okdoh to hurye shayam) were devoted to cleaning of the house and buying puja articles. Next 2-3 days were the days for devotional prayers. Dyara daham was designated for giving presents to married daughters and newly weds. Gadkah and Vager bah were special days for the worship of Bhairavas. Herath truvah is the day for Shiva worship. Herath Kharch (gift of money) is given by the eldest person to all members of the family on the following day. Herath truvah is the day for lord Shiva's worship. On Doon mavas, the prasad of walnuts and rice cakes (tomala-chuut) are distributed, in past, this often continued until Tila ashtami. The latter day also marks the end of winter, and is celebrated by burning kangris and singing the chorus of 'ja-tun-tn'. On the social side, there used to be great joy all around. People wore new and their nicest clothes, and families would sit together and enjoy the game with sea shells.

Since a number of us have migrated to far off places, all over the world, it is rather difficult to perform the Vatak-puja in the traditional way. However, we need to maintain the spirit of this, the most important festival of ours. Jotshi Prem Nath Shastriji has recently produced an audio tape for a relatively simple Vatak-puja together with a Mahimna Stotram. Offering and eating meat and fish on Shiv-ratri is strictly a Kashmiri Pandit ritual, probably to please 'Bhairavas'. However, there were people like Gurtus and Razdans, who observed strict vegetarianism during the Shiv-ratri festival. Most of us have given up the tradition of offering and eating meat on Shiv-ratri day.

One other practice was the celebration of salam on the day following Shiv-ratri. Muslim neighbors and friends used to visit us and wish happy Shivratri. People would also invite their relatives and friends for a sumptuous dinner. Since for us the significance of this day is gone, we can either do away with it or at least call it by a different name.

AUM NAMAH SHIVAYA

In writing this article, I have used information from articles written on this subject by Janki Nath Kaul Kamal, Balji Pandit, Sarwanand Kaul Premi, B.L. Khar and Swami Moti Lal.

5.5 Shivratri or Herath



Generally most of the people in Kashmir take 'Herath' as the marriage day of Lord Shiva with 'Uma' while outside Kashmir it is taken as the day when Lord Shiva manifested in His human form on the earth to bless His devotees and redeem them. Shivratri in Kashmir is popularly known as 'Herath'. All through the ages people have given various meanings to 'Herath'. Some trace it back to the times of the Pathan occupation of the valley, when alien rulers forced the people to celebrate the festival in the summer month of 'Asada', instead of 'Phalguna'. The forced alteration in the timings of these celebrations brought a lot of misery upon the valley. There were inexplicable changes, snowfall in the summer months that resulted in crop failure and consequent famine. The Pathans called it 'Hairath', a Persian word for utter surprise. The word has ever since clung on to the memories of the Kashmiri people.

The main important festival. It starts from the first day of 'Phalgun', dark fortnight [Hur Okdoh] and ends on 'Tela ashtami', lunar fortnight of Phalgun, which as the common belief goes, the cold and wintry days are on way to bid goodbye and are heralding the approach of summers. From this day i.e. the first day, the entire house is cleaned and washed - the walls, the floors, linen, utensils, everything receives a face lift and is made to look wonderfully perfect. On 'Hur Ashtami' that comes in-between, on the eighth day people organise religious kirtans, jagran originally at 'Hari Parvat', 'Pokhribal' and 'Khirbhawani'. Fish is a very important item to be cooked on all these days of fun and merrymaking. On 'Dyara Daham' the day of the Laxmi, the new krides come wearing new clothes and bring with them 'Herath' Bhog' [Shivratri Kharcha] i.e. presents-in kind and cash for her inlaws. Besides the new brides, all ladies who come back from their parent's homes bring presents and 'Atagat', and also 'Kangri', symbolic of goodluck and prosperity. This small gesture pleasantly enough still carries on and is treated as a very good omen.

'Gad Kah' comes soon after on the eleventh day. This day fish is bought home and cleaned and fried for the main day, followed by 'Wager Bah', the day when new earthenware, specially prepared for the occasion is installed in the 'Puja room'. This marks the beginning of 'Herath'. Walnuts have a very important role to play in this festival. The shape represents the universe. They are filled in earthen pots covered with water up to the top. This water has to be changed every day. The 'Watur' consists of a big earthen pitcher, two small ones and two smaller ones, one elephant trunk shaped figure, seven bowls decorated with flowers and 'Sindoor'. They represent Shiva Parvati, Ram Brahmin, Seven Rishis, Ganesa and some other Rishis. These walnuts are washed and placed into the pitchers of and seven bowls. Then these are filled with water and some milk and Mishri is poured into each one of them. Pooja is started at 'Pradosh Kala' [dusk] and all the family members take part in it and the same carries on till late in the night. The fast is broken and boiled rice with a variety of cooked vegetables is taken. The Shivratri comes to a close in the evening of 'Amavasya'. The walnuts in the pitchers are taken out and washed. Pooja is once again performed, signifying the culmination of the Festival. The 'Samgri' and the flowers used are immersed in the river. Walnuts are used as Prashad and distributed amongst the neighbours and friends.

Source: SaffronValley.com

6 Yagneopavit



Yugnopavit: A Cultural Nostalgia

6.1 Yugnopavit Its Significance

Pushkarnath Nehru (Pune), India

Yugnopavit or **Upanayana** is by far the most important event for a Kashmiri Pandit. There is no equivalent to it in the Western religions. KPI in an effort to educate its US born KP's is reproducing a paper that highlights the significance of this important samskar. The article was received through the courtesy of Moti Kaul, President of Kashmiri Pandit Association Bombay.

1. What is Upanayana? Upanayana is one of the most important Samaskaras (symbolic events) in the life of the child. In the ancient times a child was initiated into the pursuit of secular knowledge (like astronomy, mathematics, metaphysics, logic, medicine and other Vedic literature) as well as into the realm of spiritual development by putting him on the task of learning and practicing such disciplines by way of his parents handing him over to a Guru for the purpose of learning and practicing under his guidance. But eventually this institution became out of vogue due to socio-economic changes. The Upanayana ceremony is now restricted to and revolves around the investiture of the sacred thread or the "Yugnopavit" and the teaching of Gayatri Mantra to the child.

By virtue of the performance of the Upanayana ceremony, which connotes the taking of the charge of the student by the teacher, the student is supposed to have Second Birth (Dvija) in the world of knowledge through education. This is done after staging symbolically all the previous events (Samaskaras) right from his or her birth. In this Vedic birth of the student, symbolized by wearing the "Girdle" and the sacred thread, Savitri becomes the mother and Guru the father.

2. What is Yugnopavit (sacred thread) Ceremony? This initiation of a student by the teacher, entailed various functions, such as selection of Guru, auspicious time, preparation, wearing of garments, the girdle, the sacred thread ("Yugnopavit"), presenting of deer skin, the staff, Savitri Mantra, Sacred fire (agnihotra) and alms etc. Later on when the conception of Upanayana underwent a change in the course of time, the mere initiation of the child by the teacher became a sacred lore. The original idea of initiation for education got overshadowed by the mystic significance of Upanayana which led to the idea of second birth (Dvija) through the Gayatri Mantra. The initiation, which marked the taking over of the charge of the student by the Guru, revolved around the establishment of connection between the student and Savitri (through the Gayatri Mantra) performed by the Guru and his teaching of this Mantra.

The Upanayana in the present form is the investiture of the sacred thread ("Yugnopavit") on the child which involves the initiation and symbolically staging all the said Samaskaras. The most important part of this ceremony is the wearing of the sacred thread to the accompaniment of the recitation and teaching of the Gayatri (Savitri) Mantra which is one prayer that is the crux of the whole Vedic wisdom

The wearer of this thread is supposed to be constantly reminded of his commitment to the secular and spiritual goals which he has set upon himself on this solemn occasion; that this life may not pass away just in unconscious striving but become a means of the expansion of our "being"; that it may provide a view of one's self and the world without being in conflict with the action that comes by; that life, even at its worst, may still provide us a source of sharing the joyousness of our existence; this is the greatest art of life, which comes, not through wanton experimentation, but through prayer and humility alone and through that the divine grace.

Upanayana or Yugnopavit Gayatri Mantra (Also Called Savitri)

"The focal point of the whole Upanayana ceremony is the recitation of the Gayatri Mantra and teaching its essence to the initiated. The Mantra is considered to be the most sacred and according to Manu 'there is nothing more exalted than the Gayatri'.

***Om tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yonah prachodayat***

"This original 'Gayatri Mantra', which is also known as '~Savitri', is a Rigvedic hymn (RV III,62- 10) which usually is preceded by the recitation of the 'Om Bhur, Bhuvah Svah' which upon translation connotes:

***Om bhur bhuvah svah
tat savitur varenyam***

That splendid magnificence of Savitre, the Cosmic Sun permeating the three worlds, the Earth, the Space and the Heavens is assuredly Savitri; the inspirer, life giver, the stimulative force".

Bhargo devasya dhimahi

"May we meditate on the life giving divinity, Savitri assuredly is God, and therefore I meditate on his splendor".

dhiyo Yonah prachodayat

May He himself illumine our intelligence. May He himself breath it into us".

The Gayatri Mantra derives its name from the metre in which it is written, the Gayatri being a Vedic poetic metre of 24 syllables which, as per tradition, is authored by the sage Vishvamitra. The Mantra consists of three sections (PADS) having eight syllables each and has to be recited in a particular cadence. Therefore the Gayatri Mantra is not a magic formula nor is it merely a logical sentence. It connects in a very special way the objective and subjective aspects of Reality. It is neither a mere sound nor sheer magic. Words have not only sound but also meaning which is not apparent to all those who simply hear the sound. Such living words have a power that transcends the mental plane. To acquire this energy of the word one has to grasp not only its meaning but also its message, or its vibrations, as they are sometimes called in order. Therefore the phonetic quality of the Mantra demands that it be recited in a particular way. Faith, understanding and physical utterance as well as physical continuity (Since the Mantra is supposed to be handed down by a master) are the essential requisites. Every word links up with the source of all words. The ultimate character of the Word (Shabada Brahma) is a fundamental concept in spirituality.

Abhid (The Alms)

The alms giving (Abhid) is now a symbolic act reminiscent of ancient institution of obtaining voluntary contributions for the sustenance of the guru's ashram in which the initiated students used to study. Presently during the Yugnopavit ceremony the act of alms giving is symbolically staged and is known as Abhid. This has now taken the complexion of "dakshina" for the presiding guru.

Relevance of Yugnopavit in the Present Times

The Yugnopavit ceremony used to be one of the most exalted functions in the life of a Brahmin, particularly in respect of the Kashmiri Brahmins. But due to massive changes in the social and economic factors its importance in the course of time has significantly dwindled. In recent times it has lost its vitality and sublimity. It has unfortunately now been reduced to a social "Tamasha" without any attempt by us to restore its former sanctity. This sacrament used to be one of the most important instruments for inculcating and imparting discipline, values of life and the principles of right conduct.

Now, in the aftermath of our exodus from Kashmir it is doubly important to try and restore the intrinsic sanctity and usefulness of this samaskara so that we are able to give a worthy gift unto the young. Whereas modern education with its scientific spirit and vocational training is important for our children, but at the same time cultivation of matrices of right conduct, overall personality development with humane values of life so as to develop a vibrant ethos are the very essential credentials that would enable us to face the challenges of the present world. At present our children are facing a cultural cul-de-sac which suggests a drifting and a meaningless existence.

A sense of direction is needed more than ever before. The infusion of the spirit behind the "Yugnopavit" ceremony which also aims to promote compassion, love, benevolence, non-violence, fraternity, self-discipline and finer human relationship etc. in addition to the urge to meditate on the refulgence of the Supreme Consciousness can act as one of the most important instruments for achieving this goal.

The intrinsic message of the Gayatri Mantra engulfs a wide gamut of ideals such as what the Isha Upanishad says:

***Yastu sarvani bhutanyatmanayay vamu
pashyeti sarva bhuteshu ch atmanam tato na
vijugupsate yasiman sarvani
bhutanyatmyvbhdi janatah tatra ko moha kah
shokah eikatva manupashytaha***

"He who sees all creatures in himself, himself in all creatures, does not show abhorrence to any one; knowing all beings to be one's own-self and seeing the unity of man-kind, how can there be for him delusions, sufferings and sorrows".

6.2 Significance of the Yagneopavit Ceremony

Dr. Prem Nath Sathu

In the past, in Bharat Varsha (India), the 'yagneopavit' (thread ceremony) was performed by the people belonging to the three castes - Brahmins, i.e. teachers, professors, ministers and the learned people; Kshatriyas, i.e. people of martial class and rulers; and Vaishyas, i.e. people dealing with agriculture and commerce - for their children.

It involved performance of a great yagna, in which all the Degas were invited by suitable incantations to bless the children during the course of their initiation to the most sacred mantra - Gayatri mantra - by the Kula Guru (family priest). The Gayatri is symbolized by the three folds of the sacred thread of a fixed length, sanctified by proper incantation, which is worn by the boy on his initiation.

The sacred thread hits three strands knotted together symbolizing the combination of three entities, viz. Cit., the individual soul; Acit, the material body and Iswara, the Supreme Lord, who is the indwelling witness. The three strands also denote the three functions of thinking, speaking and acting only for spiritual purposes. The common knot for the three strands is called the Bramhagranthi (Bramha Ghand in Kashmiri), which protects the body from disease and evil vibrations. Normally, a Bramhachari wears one set of three strands the grahasti, two such sets, a Vanaparasthi, three such sets, and a Sanyasi, four such sets. If a Bramhachari takes to Sanyas directly, he wears a set of four strands, showing the fourth order of his life.

In Kashmiri Pandit biradari, six such strands (double of the three-fold sacred thread), with a common knot, is worn at the time of marriage, meaning, thereby, that the additional three folds of the sacred thread are on behalf of one's own life-partner. In certain other places, nine such folds are worn, based on one's station in life or hierarchy in the caste. The Gayatri Mantra is mentioned with full adoration in all the Vedas, specially the Atharva Veda.

Our discrimination of the humbug intellect falls under two categories - gross and subtle. Gross intellect pertains to the affairs of the terrestrial world but the subtle intellect enables us to distinguish the Transcendental Reality from the terrestrial world. For this purpose, when the boy has attained some understanding, it is endeavored to have his yagneopavit ceremony, in the initiation of the boy, to the sacred Gayatri Mantra and the wearing of the sacred thread.

By this initiation, the boy is considered to have attained the status of a Dwijah, which means twice-born - the first birth being when he emerged from the mother's womb and, the second, when he received the knowledge of the Supreme Reality through this sacred initiation by the Kula Guru.

Importance of Gayatri Mantra

According to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, 'sound vibrations which can elevate one from mental concoction is called 'Gayatri.' Gayatri is the sound incarnation of the Brahman, as is clear from the following verse of Srimad Bhagavad Geeta:

***Brhat-Saama talha samn am
Gayatri Chandasam aham.
Masanam marga-sirso 'ham
Ritunam Kusumakarah. {10.35}***

Here Lord Krislma says: "Of the hymns in the Sama Veda, I am the Braht-Sama, of the poetry I am the Guyatri, of the months, I am Marga-Sirsa {November-December}, and of the seasons, I am the flower-bearing spring." Gayatri Mantra is considered to be the sound incarnation of the Lord i.e. the Brahman.

Gaya implies to 'reveal' and 'tri' implies "the essence of the three Vedas". Thus, Gayatri is considered to be 'the mother of the Vedas'. Some call it as the Brahma Gayatri. It is called the Surya-Gayatri because it refers to Savitur - the Sun God, who is responsible for controlling the three planetary systems viz.: Bhur, Bhavah and Svah. Sun, being the visible manifestation of the Divine Power, has assumed the role of the Creator, the Maintainer and the Destroyer of this Universe. That is why the sun is also known as the Surya Narayan because Lord Narayan too has his abode on the sun planet.

In Kashmir, and some other parts of the country, Brahma Gayatri is also known as Gayatri Devi, the dynamic counterpart of the Lord. The devotee, while reciting the mantra, is supposed to be invoking the 'Devi' to come down from the sun-planet to settle down in the devotee's heart. In other words, Gayatri is the embodiment of the Lord's potency i.e. Shakti.

In Agni Puran, it is called Gayatri, because it sings (gayatri) or reveals the Vedic scriptures. It is called Savitri - the daughter of the sun, because it illuminates or enlightens one's intelligence. It is also called Saraswati, as it represents the essence of the Sun God.

The Gayatri Mantra may be stated as under:

**"Om Bhur Bhuvah Suvaha
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi
Dhiyo yo nah Prachodayat"**

To understand the Gayatri Mantra, it may be worthwhile to know the meaning and interpretation of each word:

"Om" or "Aum" - This one letter word (symbol) is called 'pranava'. It is the 'seed-word' which represents Brahman, the Supreme Reality, i.e. God. Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta also refers to the solitary letter "Aum" as the embodiment of the Brahman, i.e. the Supreme Lord (Geeta 8.13).

According to "Gayatri Higher Meditation": "In every breath, man utters and repeats it unintentionally and inevitably. Every vibration in the body, could in the universe, emerges from Om. A child cries 'Om! Om!' The ocean roars 'Om! Om!' The bees buzz 'Om! Om!' The musician hums 'Om! Om!'. Om! is the expression of the seer of truth. Om! is the wisdom of God. Om! is the Nada, i.e. the Sound of God. Ultimately, Om is the eternal, indestructible word."

The sound of Om is called Shabd Brahman, which is both articulate and inarticulate, i.e. it deals with the knowledge of both the head and the heart. It produces harmony, peace and bliss to one and all.

Secondly, Aum covers the full range of sounds: A - estimating from the base of the throat; U - produced by the impulse rolling forward in the mouth; M - the sound produced by closing the lips. Thus, the letter AUM represents the entire phenomenon of sound in all its ramifications.

Thirdly, the symbol Aum stands for the pure consciousness which pervades the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. Lastly, it is the real name of the Almighty. Aum occupies a prominent place in all languages and the words, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent are the names of the Great God. Christians say Amen after every invocation to God and Muslims Amin. Both these words have Aum as its origin.

Bhur Bhavah Suvaha - They are the Vyahrtis, which have come into existence from the dawn of the creation. They represent the entire planetary system, which constitutes 'Bhur' representing the earth or the physical plane; 'Buvah' representing the atmosphere or the astral plane; 'Suvah' representing the heaven or the mental plane. Apart from these three visible Vyahrtis, the other four invisible Vyahrtis are: Maharloka, the next higher plane; Janahloka, the still higher plane; Tapahloka, the mansion of the blessed - a much higher plane; and, ultimately, the 'Satyaloka' - the abode of the truth, the highest plane.

These 'Saptha-Vyahrtis' also represent the seven devotees, viz: Agni, Vayu, Aditya, Brahaspati, Varuna, Indra and Vishva Deva. We may also consider them as representing the seven most ancient sages, viz: Kashyapa, Atri, Bhardwaj, Vishwamitr, Gautam, Jamadagni and Vasisth, who are supposed to be ever living.

"Tat" - means "That", but implies Supreme Reality, viz. Tat Tvam Ast.

"Savitur" - refers to Sun God who gives us light and heat. The Sun also represents Brahman. Since Sun is the giver of energy, Savitur also implies Goddess Shakti, the Dynamic Principle of Nature (God), that is responsible for Creation, Preservation and Destruction.

Our earth is a part of the solar system, comprising in addition to Sun, other heavenly bodies, like, moon, stars, planets, asteroids, comets, etc. There are other planetary systems as well as different galaxies, but we belong to the solar system on account of our earth's location in the Universe. In the solar system, the sun plays a very important part. Since the sun is the main source of heat and light to the earth, the existence of human beings and other species on earth, depends, in a large measure, on the Sun - the provider of heat and light energy. In Sanskrit the sun is given 12 names. One of them is Savita or Savitur.

"Varenyum" - or the Supreme Lord, whose divine effulgence is the very source of all illumination in creation.

"Bhargo" - Effulgence or radiance or splendour. It implies the divine essence, the supreme light of the Brahman. Also, 'bha' implies brilliance; 'ra' is the name of "rati-consort of the God of Love (Kamdeva); Ad 'ga' implies full knowledge. So Bhargo is the Supreme Energy of the Lord.

"Devasya" - Divine or Godly, derived from "Devas". Anything godly is a matter of joy to human beings;

"Dheemahi" - "(We) meditate upon".

"Dhiyo" - Intellect or Buddhi;

"Yo" - who;

"Nah" - Our;

"Prachodayat" - unfolds, i.e. utilizes for good actions.

So the Mantra means: "I meditate upon That Supreme Being (or His Dynamic counterpart, Shakti), "Aum", Creator of the Three Worlds; who is effulgent as the Divine Sun; who is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe, with prayers that He may unfold my intellect (Buddhi) for all good actions."

Gayatri Mantra is both a mantra and a prayer. It is considered as the essence of the Vedas. Generally, a mantra may not have a clear meaning but the Gayatri Mantra has also a full meaning and is complete in every respect. Therefore, it is a mantra as well as a prayer. It is the most potent mantra and its efficacy is proven. While this mantra is an invocation to the Divine God, or Divine Sun or His Energy, it is also an appeal by the seeker to the Divine God, within the body, to emerge out of the "cloud of desires" and to shine forth its resplendent light. This mantra is recited at dawn, noon and dusk in the direction of the sun. Vishwamitra is associated with this Gayatri Mantra in accordance with the details given in the Puranic Texts.

During the morning or evening bath, the sacred thread is properly washed and while washing the 'yagneopavit', one should recite the Gayatri Mantra. Those who are interested in performing the Gayatri Japa can do so, with the help of a "Mala", having 108 beads, for counting purposes. One may ask, why 108 beads and why not 100 or 50 as used by the Christians or Muslims? The figure 108 has a divine (mystic) significance, which is given as under:

In the first place, the radius of the sun is 108 times the radius of the earth and for all of us, both the earth and the sun are of primary importance and they greatly count in our day to day lives; secondly, there are 12 prominent constellations (Rashis) and 9 heavenly Bodies (Navagrahas) that are nearby. They have a direct effect on human welfare, and $12 \times 9 = 108$; and thirdly, 1 plus zero plus 8 equal 9, which is the highest in the numerical scale. That is why our enlightened Swamis are referred to as Swami 108 or 1008.

There are also 108 techniques of meditation or 108 paths of reaching God. So, one should not be in a hurry to judge that other paths of reaching God are wrong. At the end of 108 counting beads of a mala, there is a large bead, symbolic of the Ultimate Divine. That is why, the seeker doing Japa does not cross the large bead again but reverses the counting systematically, till one reaches the large bead again, and so on, the process is repeated, making sure that one day, the seeker will certainly approach God, as a result of Gayatri Japa, or any other method of god realization.

It bestows bliss and destroys sins. Reciting it 10 times removes the sins committed from birth; 100 times, it destroys sins of previous life; 1000 times, it destroys sins of the past three lives (Yajurveda Samhita).

In Kali Yoga, the people are not interested in what is contained in our scriptures but lay stress purely on scientific reasoning. I have, therefore, thought it necessary to fully explain in my own humble way the interpretation of the Gayatri Mantra and the need of a Japa Mala, with 108 chanting beads, beginning and ending with the large bead, for the benefit of the people of the younger generation, who wish to go through this small 'write-up' and profit.

Source: Koshur Samachar

6.3 Yagneopavit Ceremony

Kashmiri Pandits attached much importance to the ceremonial wearing of the sacred thread "Yoneh" which is a major function of Yagneopavit accompanied with celebrations observed for a male child, usually in the early teens or even later. A major Yagnya is performed starting one day earlier on an auspicious date till the next day, making all the offerings all through night chanting holy Mantras from the Vedas with offering of ghee, dry fruit, etc. to the holy fire and the sacred thread is ceremoniously worn to the child by the parent (father or grandfather) of the same lineage. The ceremony has a special significance attached to it as it makes the child a legal heir to the person if he is in some way adopted to the family. The child is especially instructed by the guru at the ceremony and by the parents later this formal wearing of the sacred thread. Maa Gayatri is considered to be a protective deity accompanying the person all the time. It is to be worshipped in the morning daily with Gayatri Mantra recitations and washing the Janue with fresh water.

ओ३म्-भूर्भुवःस्वः, तत्-सवितुर्-वरेण्यं
भर्गो-देवस्य-धीमहि, धियो-यो- नः प्रचोदयात् ।



Source: SaffronValley.com

6.4 Additional Comments

The **upanayana** ceremony was conducted for both sexes in ancient India. Naturally there are similar ceremonies in other countries and cultures. The word for Christians is CONFIRMATION. This is one of the 'sacraments'. The sacrament is a deformed version of SAMASKARA. The jews tie a thread of several strands, others tie on their waist, etc. I saw a video of an upanayana ceremony conducted in Andhra by Swamini Sharadapriyananda for her students. She is trying to revive the ceremony for girls. Indeed all her female disciples get the holy thread. Gayetri mantra is found in Soorya Upanishad. Swamini Sharada loves teaching tht text. It is indeed very powerful. It is intersting to note that She has deidcated her life to serving the villagers of a remote area in Andhra where, in addition to her vedanta mission, she teaches villagers how to farm and how to interact with the beaurocrats of the state Govt. She used to be a lawyer in Hyderabad. In any case I believe we will be seeing more and more cultured hindus allow their female children to be initiated as well. It is a matter of balancing 'what is right' with 'family/society pressures'.

Ravi Kaw

Yagnopavit is symbolic of the initiation of a householder into performing his threefold duties to the household, to his devas, and to his pitras - hence the three strands with brahmagandh or divine knot and three ways of wearing it (over the right shoulder, over the left shoulder, and round the neck only) as a necessary ritual tool when performing these three duties. On his marriage a householder gets three more strands on behalf of his wife. Its use and significance is limited to ritualistic practices only that is why a sanyasi does not wear it and under very special circumstances the un-initiated is temporarily invested with it to perform certain rites only. Since males are usually called upon to perform rites or ritualistic practices as active participants, they alone are invested with the sacred thread. This does not, however, mean that women are barred from active participation in religious or ritualistic practices, they are only exempted for so many important reasons. Wearing or otherwise of yagnopavit has nothing to do with the incantation of Gayatri Mantra or for that matter with any other spiritual practice. Had it been so we wouldn't have such spiritual luminaries as Gargi, Maitri, Savitri, Lala-ded, Ropa-bhawani, or a later-day sadhvi like Mathra-devi.

Wearing the sacred thread did not make a householder in any way superior or better than his womenfolk; however, as a caste mark it gave him distinction among other men. That women without wearing the Yonya/ janayu have an active and important part in ritualistic practices, is understood from the fact that a Maikhla ceremony among KPs cannot be thought of without devichi-tabich, diviti-gool, vaari-dan, maasa-abhid etc. etc. The practice of initiating into wearing a girdle by both boys and girls is not exclusive to Parsis only. We have perhaps forgotten that 'aet-pun' was worn by both the sexes among KPs. A black cord of several strands is even now worn as a girdle by small children in many communities, including some adivasis, at an initiation ceremony.

Prof. B. L. Fotedar

A brief note on Yajnopavit, and the reason why we call it **Mekhal** in Kashmiri. In my younger days I posed this question to my family priest late Vasanand Zadoo, a saint scholar in his own right. Before I explain what his reply was let me first say that there are sixteen (Sanskaras) rituals to be performed from the pre-natal to the post death period. Their method, mantras and other details have been prescribed by Rishi Katyayana for the entire Hindu Community. In Kashmir, however, we follow these with some modifications as prescribed by Rishi Logaksha for us. The rituals begin with 'Punaswan' (please recall the ritual of *Sondar* after the birth of a child, when ladies utter the phrase, *Shokh ta ponasun.*) These culminate with Shraddha ceremony, and include kahanethar, yajnopavit, Vivah etc.

Yajnopavit is a ritual when three strings of the holy thread are put on the left shoulder and under the right arm of a child, usually at the age of 8 or so after due yajna or sacrificial fire ritual. This is the time when the child is initiated to the formal education in a Gurukula. The ceremony is called 'Upanayana' also, which means to bring near the teacher for initiation. We call it 'Mekhala', which is that rope which is tied round the waist of the child at the time of the ceremony and later takes the form of a thread worn round the waste called the 'Aatpan' (now almost in disuse). Mekhala means a circular shape or boundary reminding us of the limits within which to function and which are not to be transgressed. It also means contributing intellectually to the ether, which is the storehouse of thought. 'Me' means intellect; 'Kha' means the sky or ether and 'La' means putting into; in other words contributing one's intellect to the ether, which is supposed to store the entire thought of the mankind. The idea is that after the yajnopavit ceremony, the child will be in a position to start contributing his thoughts, perceptions and ideas to the world's treasure of philosophy. This is the reason that the last part of the 'Gayatri Maha Mantra' is a prayer in which we beg of the Lord to enlighten our intellect. We say 'Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat'.

Trilokinath Dhar

7 Navreh

7.1 Navreh

The New Year Day in Kashmir

P.N. Ganhar

Navreh is the lunar new year which is celebrated in Kashmir and many other parts of the country. This coincides with the first day of the Chaitra (spring) Navratras. It is the first day of 5074 of the Sapath Rishi Samvat which falls on March 29, 1998, this year and is the oldest new year. It is this calendar, according to which Hindus generally celebrate their birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and other religious functions. This day finds mention in Rajtarangini and Nilamat Purana of Kashmir and is regarded as sacred in Kashmir as the Shivratri. The celebrated Arab scholar Alberuni has written that Kashmiris celebrate the second of Navaratras to commemorate victory of their greatest and famous king - Lalitaditya - with great festivity, pomp and gaiety. The first was a festival as the New Year in its own right. Srivara, the famous poet- historian of mediaeval Kashmir, has also mentioned this Chaitra festival in his Rajtarangini. Late Pt. Zinda Koul, popularly known as Masterjee, has written a poem on Navreh and the message it brings.

It is observed as the New Year's day in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (as Ogadi), in Maharashtra and Goa as (Gaudi Parva), by Sindhis as Cheti-Chand and in the northern parts of India as Chaitra Shukla Di i.e. the first day of the lunar fortnight of Chaitra. In Delhi and northern parts of India, parohits in temples release before the assembled devotees the new almanac after morning prayers and dwell upon its highlight.

In Kashmir, the day is celebrated with great enthusiasm and sanctity. It is on the eve of Navreh that the Kulguru of a Pandit family gets a new almanac (nachipatra - Sanskrit: Nakshetra-patri) and an illustrated scroll (Kreel Pach) with a sacred picture of Ma Sharika on it and some sacred verses. Formerly the Nachipatri used to be in the form of a tolled scroll but now it has taken the form of a small booklet known as Jantari. Just one day before Navreh, Kashmiri Pandits in Srinagar visit a sacred spring Vichar Nag (downtown) and take a holy dip in its waters to cast off the wintery sloth and impurities. After returning home from Vichar Nag round pieces of Wye herb are taken along with homemade rice powder cakes as prasad before breakfast. In olden times, astrologers and astronomers would assemble here to discuss and prepare a new almanac. May be this is the reason why this place is known as Vichar Nag.

Late in the evening, the housewife gets a big Thali (metal-plate) and fills it up with rice or paddy. In villages, mostly paddy is used. After arranging it nicely, the new almanac and Kreel-pach are placed on the rice. Besides dry flowers, a few fresh flowers are also placed on the rice. Wye, a special weed which resembles arabi in shape and which grows in the marshes and is regarded to be very sacred and pure, is also kept on the thali. Among other things placed on the thali are newly sprouted grass, a little curd, walnuts in odd numbers and their kernels, a pen, inkpot and pen-holders and a pot containing a little salt are placed on the thali alongwith silver and gold coin and a lump of cooked rice in a small pot, a wheat cake and a small bread made of rice powder are also placed on this rice. All these things are arranged aesthetically on this small mound of rice. This Thali is then covered with another metal plate for the night. Formerly, the flowers and herb W'ye used to be provided by a florist who was known as Push after Pushap, i.e. the flower, and he used to be a Muslim. He was paid in cash and kind on the ensuing New Year day. Now all these things are procured from the market.

Early morning on the New Year day, a boy or a girl gets up at dawn and, after taking the lid off the thali, takes it to the head of the family and his wife and then to others in such a way that every member of the family gets a glimpse of the things kept in the plate and looks into the mirror as the first thing in the morning. This signifies as prayer for food, wealth and knowledge in the coming year. The bearer of the plate gets a rupee or more from every member of family.

Every member picks up a few walnuts kept in the thali and drops them in the river, where he goes to take a bath. This seems to be a thanks giving affair that the people have come out of the dreary wintry cold and its allied ordeals safe and sound as the Maharashtrians do when they drop coconuts into the sea on

Rakshabandhan day which is turbulent during the rainy season. After a bath and donning new clothes and a new sacred thread, Hindus in the city throng temples, especially the Hari Parbat which is Shakti shrine known as Chakreshwari. Later on, the head of the family offers turmeric coloured rice prepared in ghee known as Tahri to Ma Sharika, the principal deity of Chakreshwari which is afterwards distributed as Prasad among all the family members.

From this day, Nav Durga Puja commences in Kashmir. At the end of the Navratra days, big Havans are performed in various temples and especially at Durga Nag at the foot of Shankaracharya hill and at Baramulla in Shailputri Devis Mandir, which are beautiful springs. During these days, thousands of people visit Vaishno Devi and other Devi shrines in Jammu and Kashmir. Ma Durga is worshipped in the Hari Parbat fort in Srinagar and Bahu fort in Jammu. Nine days of spring Navartras are held very sacred in Kashmir as in the other parts of India. Vasanti Puja is performed in Bengal during these Navratras. Some people keep fast for nine days and sow barley and worship Durga and Dash Mahavidhya. During these days, Puja is offered to goddess Minakshi in Tamil Nadu etc.

On Navreh, sumptuous dishes are prepared and friends and relatives who come to offer greetings are also entertained. Newly wedded brides go to their homes donning new clothes, and carry a pot of curd, bread, sweets, etc as these are thought to be auspicious. New brides and youngsters are given some money by their elders.

After meals, the people would visit gardens for picnic with their utensils and tea pot called Samavar etc and prepare Kahwa tea there. Formerly, the urban people used to go the Hari Parbat to enjoy the almond blossoms in the gardens at the foothill. But, alas, these gardens have shrunk almost to obliteration due to development of new colonies. During these days, Lord Rama is also worshipped in the state. The Navmi or 9th day of Navratras is known as Ramnavmi.

Friends, relatives and Muslims come to greet the Hindus on this day with Navreh Mubarak (a happy new year). A few decades earlier, Kashmiri musicians and minstrels also used to come to regale their patrons and get bakshish. Due to dearness and rising costs now, Navreh festivities have lost some of the gaiety and colour but despite this the occasion is still very popular among Kashmiris living in or outside Kashmir.

Source: Koshur Samachar

7.2 Questions about Navreh Thaal

Contributed by:

Mrs. Prabhavati Raina, Mrs. Sushma Bhan, Mr. Surinder Kaul, U.S.A.



Navreh Thaal

Courtesy: Dalip Langoo

Q1. What is the significance of the early morning thaal, and all the items on it ?

It is for "jaang" for the new year. All the items that are laid on the thaal of tomul are:

- jantri
- posh (flower)
- doon & doon goj (shelled & unshelled walnut)
- madrear phol (sugar piece like nabad)
- meel and kalam (ink pot & pen ... was replaced by ink-pen)
- baath phol (cooked rice)
- chot (roti)
- rup rupeyae (silver rupee)
- jamu-dodh (yogurt)
- aenna (mirror)
- noon (salt)

All the items on the thaal are our daily use items, quite essential for the normal daily routine. By having them in the thaal, we are wishing to be provided with all these essential items for the coming year. Mirror is something we use everyday, too. Some would use daniya (unshelled rice) instead of tomul in the taal. Just as talwar was important for Rajputs, so was the pen for the KPs, rest (money & food) is commonly used in other cultures.

Q2. Is there any other reason behind the concept of wearing new clothes besides poverty?

On special occasions like Navreh, birthdays, shishur, etc., new clothes were worn because year round there was "gorbath". It was auspicious to wear new clothes on such special occasions

7.3 The Significance of Navreh

A Shakta Interpretation

Dr C. L. Raina

Kashmiri Pandits celebrate their New Year's Day, Navreh, on Chaitra Shukla Pratipada or the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. The word 'Navreh' is derived from Sanskrit 'Nava Varsha' meaning the New Year. On the eve of Navreh, which falls on Amavasya or the last night of the dark fortnight, they keep a thali filled with rice, a cup of curds, a bread, cooked rice, some walnuts, an inkpot and a pen, a silver coin and the Panchanga of the New Year, as the first thing to be seen at the Brahma Muhurta or the wee hours. The Panchanga popularly known as Nechi Patri (Nakshatra Patri) is an almanac giving important astrological configurations and auspicious tithis or dates and other useful religious information for the coming year. Keeping the Nechi Patri handy for consultation is a tradition followed in every Kashmiri Pandit household where religious and even social obligations are performed according to the tithis, mathematically calculated in it.

This Navreh, the Saptarishi era followed by the Kashmiri Pandits is entering its 5075th year (falling on 18th March of the Christian calendar). Imagine for a while the perfection with which such a span of time had been calculated by their ancestors to the minutest of minute unit of time pala, vipala etc. with the help of their knowledge of jyotishya and phalit shastra. The Navreh Mavas, or the concluding day of the year is to be succeeded by the Pratipada or the first Navaratra. In mathematics 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 are natural numbers. Then there is zero or shunya. Shunya is nothingness, but it is also the param bindu of the Nava Durga, meditated upon at the sandhi or conduction of Amavasya and Pratipada. Symbolically, the Nava Durgas are the nine fold projections of the supreme-self, which can be observed in the Shrichakra or Shri Yantram at the Sharika Parvat in Kashmir.

On the sacred Pratipada day the ishta devi is invoked with the dhyana mantra and the bija mantra while having the first look at the Nakshatra Patri or Panchanga. That is why the Kashmiri Pandits used to go the Sharika Parvat (Hari Parvat) and pay their obeisance at the Chakreshwara, reciting the Bhavani

Sahasranama, Indrakshi and other Devi Stotras and praying for prosperity for the new year in an auspiciousness suffused with karma, jnana and bhakti. That is what the primary triangle of the Chakreshwara stands for. The Primary triangle according to the Saptashati Hridayam denotes the interaction between the nada and the hindu. It is the eternal seed filled with the primal vibration of Aum or Aim. It sports, gets multiplied, assumes names and forms and sustains for kalpas or aeons together, then reverts back to the moola bindu or the original bindu, which is nirakara or formless.

This is what the yogis mystically experience on the sacred first day of the Navaratri, and is summed up in:

<verse>

It is a nine-fold Mantra, just as the Shri Chandi Mantra is, and is read as

<verse>

The Shakti worshipers of Kashmir see all the facets of Shri Chandi in Shri Sharika whose divine presence fills every syllable of the sixteen-syllabled bija mantra at Chakreshwara.

They find in it eternal vibrations of Shiva and Shakti presented by geometrical configuration. The dots, angle, triangle, straight line, intersection of curves forming petals and outer squares are but concepts denoting manifestation of Shakti in the external Universe. To realise Shakti within oneself, the Kashmiri Shaktas pray to the matrikas - the phonemes of the mantras -- to vibrate and re-vibrate from Pratipada to mahanavmi. The Navdurgas or the nine facets of Durga are visualised as Shailaputri Brahmakumari, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri and Siddhidhatri put in an ascending order. This order symbolises the journey through consciousness or chaitanya.

So when the first ray of the sun descends on the earth on Chaitra Shukla Pratipada, the Kashmiri Pandits celebrate the presence of Durga, the Supreme Mother among them as **Navreh**, the New Year's Day.

Source: **Ummesh**

8 Diwali Celebrations by Kashmiri Pandits

Piyaray Lal Raina

8.1 Origin

The origin of Diwali is very obscure. However, present day beliefs for this celebration are as under :

8.2 Sagar Manthan

Sage Kashyap was married to all the 13 daughters of Sage Daksha Prajapati and from the children born from his first wife ADIT were DEVAS whereas the children from his second wife DITI were DEMONS. DEMONS were physically more powerful and scarred DEVAS who approached Lord VISHNU for help. He suggested away out. That was to churn the ocean for getting nectar, by drinking which the Devas could become immortal and out of reach of Demons harm. Devas agreed to his proposal and got ready for the job. 14 objects emerged from the churning of the ocean. Nectar was 12th which was readily consumed by Devas and they became GODS. 13th object was KAL-KOOT (poison) which no body was prepared to have. In order to save mother Earth from the pollution of poison Lord Shiva came forward to take it. He took it and held it in His throat. By this act His throat turned blue due to the effect of poison and hence He is called by the name of NEELKUNTH as well. Last object to emerge from the churning of the ocean was Goddess LAXMI seated in a lotus, holding precious jewels, wearing garland of imperishable Parijita flowers, looking prettier than anything known till then. She was immediately taken by Lord VISHNU as His consort. Ever since Laxmi came to be associated with not only good fortune and material wealth but also embodiment of loveliness gracefulness and charm.

The churning process started on the 11th day of Kartik Krishan paksh and ended on Amavasya as per our Lunar calender.

8.3 Lord Rama's Return

Some believe Lord Ram (who is incarnation of Vishnu) returned home on this day after 14 years of exile along with his wife Sita (who is incarnation of Laxmi).

8.4 Celebrations

Hindus celebrate this day with great festivity. No other deity's worship requires as much massive cleaning except for Shivratri celebrations by our community. People decorate their houses much in advance in preparation of this festival. Some give a new paint to their homes while others clean their homes thoroughly. This is the occasion for buying new things - a new home, a new car, furniture, clothes, utensils etc. In some parts of India celebrations last for one week starting from Ekadashi and ending two days after Amavasya. Since Laxmi is associated with material aspect of life, it is the most auspicious and important celebration for people associated with any business/commercial activity. It is the beginning of the fiscal year for their accounts/books.

On the day of Diwali people get up early in the morning and then put on new clothes, go to temples, and purchase lots of sweets and dry fruit for distribution among friends, relatives and colleagues. They also purchase earthen lamps, candles, electric and electronic devices for illuminating their homes and business establishments. For children it is a day of merry making. They enjoy by playing with crackers especially at night time. They also receive cash as Diwali Gifts. All government and private establishments remain closed on this day. Business houses reward their employees with gifts of cash and kind. In some homes gambling and drinking is considered part of celebration process. Winning is considered a sign of good luck for the coming year.

8.5 Worship

The elders of family keep a fast until evening. Goddess LAXMI along with God GANESH is worshipped after sunset. Some people purchase new 'murties' made of clay or silver or even gold. Prayers are offered with or without a family priest. Sweets, dry and fresh fruits, cereals flowers etc. are offered with prayers.

8.6 Celebrations by Kashmiri Pundits

Deepawali is one of the oldest rituals for Kashmiri Pundits. We find a mention of its celebrations in Nilmat Puran. It was then celebrated as SUKHSUPTIKA which literally means sleep with happiness. The celebration would start from Ekadeshi and last on Amavasya. On Amavasya elders of family would keep a fast and worship goddess LAXMI after sunset. Earthen lamps were placed in temples, on the road crossings, cremation grounds, banks of rivers, streams and lakes, hills houses, at the foot of trees, cow sheds, court yards and shops. People would wear new clothes and listen to music.

With the passage of time some of these things have become obsolete but the tradition is still there. Since we were not used to eating Sweets in Kashmir, we substituted sweets with sweet puris and offered the same to Lord NARAYAN (incarnation of Lord Vishnu).

On the whole we do not celebrate Diwali with the same gusto as is done by our Hindu brethren outside Kashmir. This could be due to the fact that we are Lord SHIVA worshipers. Diwali is primarily a worship of Lord VISHNU who is very popular in the plains of India.

9 Navratra

9.1 Navratra Celebrations

Significance to our community

Piyaray Lal Raina

Navratras start from September 28th. Following my earlier notes about appraising the young minds of our community about the significance of various religious customs, below you will find note regarding the significance of NAVRATRAS for our community.

May Goddess Durga (Maharagyna) bless you and your family with abundant happiness!

Introduction

All over world Hindus celebrate Navratras with great devotion. Navratras literally means "nine nights". These nights are devoted to the worship of Goddess Durga. Navratras, are celebrated twice in a year. Once in the bright two-week period of Shukla Paksha of the lunar month of Ashwani (Asuj in Kashmiri) – corresponding to September/October) from the 1st to the 9th date of the two week period.

These days of Navratras are celebrated with great fervor especially in West Bengal where it is known as "Durga Puja". The Gujrati Hindus celebrate it with nine days of Garba dance. The second Navratras are celebrated during the first nine days of the bright two-week period of Shukla Paksha of the lunar month of Chaitra – corresponding to mid-March to mid-April.

The timing of the celebrations correspond to the autumnal and vernal equinox which is also the time when seasons change and we harvest crops which adds to the glory of these celebrations.

9.2 Religious Background

For the devout these days are the most sacred for it is during these days when Goddess Durga takes a stock of her devotees and grants all boons, removes sins and ensures trouble free life for her devotees.

During this period most of the Hindus go to Temples for prayers. At some places special pandals (platforms) are raised where clay idols of Goddess Durga are installed decorated with various weapons in Her eight arms, riding a lion, with demon Maheshasur lying dead at Her feet. These idols are worshipped for eight days (nine nights) and then immersed in river, lake or pond on the ninth day with great fanfare.

During this period recitation of sacred scriptures such as Durga Sapshudi from Markanday Puran, which narrates how Goddess Durga was blessed and provided with weapons by our Trinity of Gods for vanquishing the demon Maheshasur who had forced Devas to leave heaven and take refuge on earth. Saints and learned ones carry on Pravachans (discourses) and appraise devotees about the importance of these days. In Chatturpur Temple in South Delhi, over a million people visit during these days. Musical recitations by famous musicians are offered for the benefit of the Goddess and devotees. For those who offer Jap (repetition of mantras) as the way of meditation, this is the time for marathon Japas of their chosen mantra at least 125,000 (sava lakh) times. For tantrics, it is the time to enrich their tantric shakti by observing various rituals. The devout ones keep a fast until they spot the moon or by restricting their eating to one time only. Even those who do not fast, do not eat non-vegetarian food during these days.

On the ninth day after the immersion of the idol in the water the celebrations come to an end.

The Navratras celebration of March/April period are celebrated on a lessor scale but there is no short cut for devout ones.

9.3 Kashmiri Navratra Celebrations

There are 22 places all around India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari which are considered most scared to Goddess Durga. In Kashmir, Khirbawani at Tulamulla is among one such places where she is worshipped as Maharagnya. KP's are traditionally Shakti worshippers and worship Durga as Maharagnya, Sharika, Jawala, Kali, Tripura etc.

During Navratras people go to various shrines to offer prayers. We recite Bhawani Sahasranam instead of Durga Saptashudi. Bhawani Sahasranam (1000 names of Goddess Durga) is of Kashmiri Origin and is not known outside Kashmir. Lalita Sahasranam of South India, which has about 100 names common with our Bhawani Shastranam, has the closest resemblance to Bhawani Sahasranam .

Not all KP's observe all nine days as Navratras. Some people observe it from the 5th to the 8th day and some only the 8th day which is Ashtami and traditionally a sacred day for our community. Some KP's take non-vegetarian food for the first four days if they are not keeping a fast.

The ninth day - Nawmi - which is called Ram Nawmi, is a day of traditional celebrations for us. On this day, havans are performed especially at temples dedicated to Lord Rama. It is a day when most of KP's visit the places where havan is being performed. We do not have the tradition of making clay models and worshipping them followed by immersion in rivers. Instead some of us sow barley in a pot on 1st day of Navratra and keep it at a sacred place, they water it daily and offer prayers. The household keeps fast and taking meals one time only. On the ninth day, the barley plants are kept for display of the devotees as a symbolic darshan of Goddess Durga. These plants are later immersed in rivers. A good growth of plants symbolizes the acceptance of prayers by Goddess Durga and her happiness, which is sure to bring happiness and prosperity to those involved.

The Navratras of Chaitra (March-April) is of special importance to KP's as it is on the first day of this Navratras we celebrate our new year (Navreh).

After our last migration from Kashmir, our community has begun celebrating these days according to traditions followed by Hindus in their new neighborhoods. Some people go for Vaishnav Devi yaatra at Jammu which draws huge number of devotees during these periods and receive blessings of Goddess Vaisnav Devi.

9.4 Durga Prayers

Seven selected Shlokas of Durga Saptashudi are called Saptashaloki Durga and are recited by devotees daily. These sholakas have been included in Vijeshar Panchang and also in the KOA recent publication Poozai Poshe.

These seven shalokas, along with their translation, are as follows:

- (1) ***Gyaninam Api Chetaansi Devi Bhagvati Hi Saa
Balaat Aakrsihya Mohaaya Mahaamaya Prayachhati***

Meaning: Mother Goddess, the greatest pervader of the entire Universe, you are inducing even the mind of knowledgeable to your bondage.

- (2) ***Durgay Smritaa Harasi Bheetim Ashaisha Janto
Swasthai Smrita Matm Ateeva Shubhaam Dadaasi
Daaridra Dukh Bhaya Haarni Kaa Twadanya
Sarvopa Kaar Karnaya Sdaarda Chita***

Meaning: Mother Durga you are eradicating fright of all living beings who remember you. People who meditate on you, you bless them with wisdom that brings them relief from all directions. O! Mother Goddess, destroyer of poverty and misery, who is else than you whose mind always remains ready to help all.

- (3) ***Sarvamangala Mangalyai Shivaay Sarvartha Sadhikay
Sharanyai Trambikay Gauri Narayani Namastutay***

Meaning: O! Mother Goddess, you are giver of success in everything. O, Mother Goddess of Success, you are giver of all types of protections and peace as Shivi (Consort of Shiva). You are as well Gowri in fruition of endeavors of all those who surrender to you. In your capacity as Narayani (Consort of Narayana), you are remover of all types of troubles. I offer my salutations of you.

(4) **Sharnaagata Deenarta Paritraana Paraayanai
Sarva Syaarta Haray Devi Narayani Namostutay**

Meaning: O, Narayani, who is always engaged in helping her devotees involved in troubles as also remover of miseries of all, I offer my salutations to you.

(5) **Sarvaswaroopay Sarvaishay Sarva-Shakti-Samanvitay
Bhayi-Bhyaa Traadhi No Devi Durgay Devi Namostutay**

Meaning: Your manifestation is in every thing and you exist every where. You are possessed with all power and energy. O! Mother Goddess Durga, kindly protect us from all scare and fright. I offer my salutations to you.

(6) **Rogaan Ashaishaan Apahansi Tushtaa
Rushta Tu Kaamaan Sakalaan Abheeshtaan
Twaam Aashritaanaam Na Vipat Naraanaam
Twaam Aashritaay Hyaa Shrayataam Prayanti**

Meaning: O, Mother Goddess, on becoming happy you cast off all diseases and on being otherwise destroy all ambitions. All those who have already surrendered to you, distress never comes near them. All those devotees, of your whom you bless, become blessors of others.

(7) **Sravaa Baadhaa Prashamanam Trilokya Syaa
Akhilashwari Ayyam Ayva Twayaa
Karyam Asmay Vyri Vinaashanam**

Meaning: O; Mother Goddess, dweller of Universe, clear out hurdles in my way in all three worlds in the same manner as you suppressed Madukaritam and do keep on destroying my enemies.

(Translations of above shalokas have been rendered by Shri O.N. Kaul in the English edition of Vijyashvar Punchang 1998-99 (Janthri))

9.5 Navratras

Triloki Nath Dhar

The Navaratri begin on 28th Sept. These nine days are dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga. It is a well-known fact that in the 'Bhakti marga' or the devotional path of Hindus there are three main streams, those of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti. This by no means indicates dualism. Actually Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti are the two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the same Brahman. This concept of two facets of the Divine has variously been explained by the philosophies of the world. In China it is represented by Yin-Yang circle denoting a balanced synthesis. Whereas Yin stands for cold, passive feminine aspect, Yang is hot, active and masculine. The Upanishad identifies it as 'Prana' and 'Raji', The life essence and the vibrant moving force. Science calls these as matter and force, essence and substance or act and potency. In medical terms the dynamic mode of the passive pole is Natura and the static mode of the active pole is Materia. Buddhists have it differently as 'Prajna', wisdom and 'Upaya',

method. In the Islamic tradition also we come across two sets of such ideas. One is the Divine Command called 'al-Amra' and Universal Nature called 'al Tabiat al kulliya. The other is the Supreme Pen called 'al-Qalam' and Guarded Tablet called 'al-Lawh al mahfuz'. It is the Absolute Shiva who activates His own energy aspect, Shakti and thereby causes creation. Shakti worship, from time immemorial, has been linked with Tantra, Kundalini yoga and other forms of spiritual exercises. In the Vajrayana School of Buddhism of Tibet, Tantra forms the main spiritual activity. Shakta has been the principle forte of Kashmir spiritual philosophy. We have been worshipping Goddess in the form of Maharajna at Tulamula, Shri Sharika at Hari Parbat, Shri Jwala at Khrew and Maha Kali in the downtown Srinagar. As in the rest of the country, Kashmiris also worship Nava Durga on these nine days culminating on 7th October called Maha Navami. Our Bengali brethren perform special pooja on the last three days of saptami, ashtami and navami.

10 Punn Ceremony

10.1 Pun Deun

Sh. Amar Nath Bhan

The following is a popular history and a folk tale about the celebration of the famous festival of Yanayak chorom by the Kashmiri Pandit community which is also called **Pun Deun**.

This is a traditional celebration which almost all Kashmiri families celebrate in the month of Bhadron (August/September) by preparing very delicious Roths of wheat pan-cakes) which are fried in Ghee (Butter). Some people consider it as a celebration of Bhagwan Mahavir Hanuman day. People in south India celebrate this day as Ganesh Puja celebration.

I am writing this article to remind our people how our community used to maintain the social link with each other by distributing the Neveed (prasad) of this function in the form of Roth to all their neighbours, relatives and even strangers. This allowed them to keep in close touch with each other. This day is celebrated with devotion, to show respect to almighty god. The celebration also gives enjoyment in the form of a get together for the family, and especially among children. For this celebration the big family kitchen and all the brass utensils are cleaned thoroughly.

Although religious significance of this day may have numerous interpretations, it has the same importance as any of our other festivals such as Shiva Ratri (Herath), Janamashtami etc., and it was always on top of the list, especially for women folk. People were very keen to get this Neveed. As I remember, all our neighbours, relatives and friends were very keen to get this Neveed, and if by mistake or otherwise the Neveed was not delivered on time, the person would definitely lodge a serious complaint and one had to apologize. Even the relatives in far villages expected this Pun Neveed. In some cases the Neveed was delivered up to one month after the celebration. The Roth fried in ghee would stay fresh for a long time. I remember when my children were grown up and had been away from home for higher education, they always expected the Pun Roth when they returned home for vacation.

I remember in our home at Srinagar (Kashmir) my mother, and later her my wife used to perform and celebrate this festival with great devotion and faith. Some people also called Pun Deun as Beeb ghar maji hund doh. They would clean the clay floor and walls of the room(usually the Kani or top floor of the house) when the celebration was to be performed. Some people would use their kitchen. All brass utensils were cleaned with sand to shine them, then they were washed with clay to sanitize them. A special iron or brass Krai (Wok) was first cleaned and used to fry the Roth. This utensil was especially meant for this day and was not used for other purposes.

The following ingredients were collected several days in advance of this occasion: For Roth white flour, brown sugar, ghee (butter), salt, vegetable oil, yogurt (zambut dodh), Khashkhash seed, cardamom (Big alaiche seed). For puja flower, rice, barley, green grass (Dramun), some fruits, fresh walnut, silver foil (rophi warukh), Nariwan (coloured string) and Sindoor. In the city interior it was usually difficult to find Dramun which could be only found in the pastures outside the city or from the garden of a prosperous relative. In combined families the senior lady of the house, who usually performed this celebration, used to get some cotton thread hand spun by an unmarried girl and all kind of vegetables in season. About five paw (1 kg) of wheat flour was kept in a separate Thalli (brass plate) with 5 chatang (nearly 300 gram) of brown sugar. This was meant as offering to the god for whom this festival was to be celebrated. Separately, additional 250 grams of wheat flour per person in the family was weighed and used for cooking Roth. The proportion of brown sugar to flour was one chatang (65 grams) of sugar for 250 grams of flour.

My family prepared the Roth in the following manner. The required quantity of brown sugar, according to the quantity of wheat flour, was boiled in a bhogun (brass pot) with a small quantity of water and then it was strained through a thin cotton cloth. Big alaichi seed (Big Cardamom) was mixed with the wheat flour. Then the brown sugar water was mixed with flour. To make it into dough, some ghee was also mixed with the flour to make it soft and sweet. The dough was divided into small portions and each

portion was rolled flat using a chakla and belan(rolling pin). Then this bread was put on the flat of a Thali's(bronze plate) back side and made smooth .Some design were made on the flat end of bread using fingers or with the bottom of a Khos(bronze cup). Sufficient quantity of ghee was then placed in the krai (Wok)on a stove to fry the roth. Then yogurt was mixed with Khashkhash (sesame) seeds and pasted smoothly on the flat end of the Roth. Then the bread was then put in the hot ghee to fry.

Precaution was taken to see that the ghee is not too hot which may burn the bread, and a lifter known as (Kafgree) was used to turn the bread over. This kept the Roth soft and delicious.

My mother and my wife also used to make Namkeen, a salted bread which had the same ingredients as the roth, except brown sugar was replaced with a little salt. Namkeen bread was fried in the same ghee which had been used for Roth. After all fried Roths were prepared including the separately kept 5 paww of wheat flower for the offering in the name of God.The latter were put separately in a new or fresh Foth or Tooker(willow basket)or in a big Thal(bronze plate) and were covered with a new or washed cotton cloth.

In our house we also prepared mixed vegetables called Bhoojai with as many as ten or more varieties of vegetables . Some prepared Aloo (potatoes) or dry Bhoojai, and some prepared Wangan bhoojai (egg plant) depending on the tradition in the family. Then vegetables were cleaned out mixed. They were then boiled and fried in oil and masala (spices) were added to make the Bhoojai. It took a fairly long time to prepare the Bhoojai.

In the mean time my mother (and later my wife) used to get fresh water in a bronze Ghadwa (container) from the tap and would decorate it with a flower garland and Nairwan, Sendher teok and Rophwarukh (silver foil). Then she would put five Roth with Kanika Roth (Roth with saw tooth like edges all around) on the Gadwa. Then she would put some fruits and shelled walnuts on it as Naveed. Then she would call all members the family to the room. The Ghadwa with Roth were placed in front of her while she would be facing the east (sun rises from the east). After placing the Teok on the forehead and tying the Nairwan on the wrist of every one present, she would give to every one some rice with barley and Habel in their hands. The cotton thread which she had been keeping on her ear was then placed in her hand with some rice, barley and Habel. Then with full attention and devotion she would repeat the same story every year. She would start by saying that anyone who performed this ceremony with devotion faith and love would get everything in life, will be released from misery and trouble. She related the story with a lot of concentration in the sweet melodic Kashmire Language as follows:It was the month of Bhadron, Venayak Chorum te Athwar(fourth lunar day and sunday), a long time ago, in Kashmir there was a Hindu king ruling comfortably and his people lived in peace and harmony. His wife, the Queen, used to celebrate this festival of Vanayak chorum in the month of Bhadron with great devotion, faith, pomp and show. The royal family was very happy. One day while the queen was performing this ceremony, the king walked in (may be he was drunk) and said "what is thisall going on, I don't want this puja to be celebrated in my home", and without waiting for any reply from his wife he entered the puja room with his shoes on and scattered away all things. He was very furious. The Queen was very much depressed and angry with her husband, but could not and did not tell him any thing. Since the King did this, bad things began to appear and happen in their lives and in the Kingdom. After some time the kingdom was invaded by the enemy, the king was taken a prisoner and all his belonging were taken over and destroyed by the enemy. The queen with her daughter ran away for the safety of their lives and honour, towards the rural area without any personal possession. They had nothing, and were almost begging for their survival, and were in a miserable condition. Both the queen and her daughter were making hand to mouth living.

As the daughter grew older she became sensible. One day the daughter went to the town to beg for some food. Accidentally she came to a house where the Vynayak Chorum festival was being celebrated. The lady of the house asked the girl to come in, she told the girl that she was celebrating Vynayak Chorum puja. She told the girl to stay untill she finished the puja, she would then give her a good quantity of Neveed.The lady said you have to do one thing for me. I am giving you the cotton, would you spin it with your hand for me. The girl was pleased to be invited and being asked to spin the cotton and readily agreed. While watching the festival the girl noticed the celebration with devotion, cleanliness and all the

food. She told the lady of the house that she would do whatever was asked of her. She made cotton thread for the lady who was pleased, and celebrated the festival with devotion and faith. The girl carefully watched everything. When the puja was finished, the lady gave good number of Roths with Kanyakeh Roth to the girl. The girl was pleased, and she ran home to her mother, who was waiting and anxious. When she saw her (the daughter) she was cross with her, and asked her where she had been and why she was so late. She told her that now she had grown up and she should not be so late in the future. The girl narrated to her mother the whole story, what she had seen and why she was late only to get the Neveed. The girl pleaded that she had done nothing wrong, and that the lady of the house was a good and nice lady.

After hearing the story from her daughter the mother took a deep breath and was depressed and began to weep. Her daughter inquired from her mother why she was so depressed and why she wept. After a while the mother told her daughter that I too used to celebrate this day for many years with devotion. She told her how and every thing used to be replaced with new things, and whole house used to be cleaned, washed and decorated in this month of Bhadron. I used to make a good quantity of Roths, and do puja of Mahaveer with devotion and faith. What happened one day, that your father, the King, came while I was preparing the Roths to celebrate this day, rebuked me for what I was doing, and threw away all things, and forbade me from celebrating this day in the future. I was very depressed, but could not tell him anything. After that incident bad days began and every thing began to vanish. The kingdom was conquered by the enemy and everything was looted and plundered. Your father was taken prisoner. They (the enemy) were in search of us, but during the night I took you and ran away from the palace for safety and honour. Since then we are here in this bad condition and since then I don't know anything about your father. The girl asked her mother why they should not also celebrate the day again with faith and devotion, almighty god may again be pleased with us and give some relief. Her mother replied "daughter!", one requires money to purchase or get everything for the festival, where from will we get that. The girl listened to her mother with attention and told her mother, "I hope I can arrange how to get some money". After taking their supper they went to bed. The girl was thinking about how to get wheat flour, etc. An idea came to her mind and early next morning she went into a horse stable, and collected all horse manure. She took the manure to the river, where she washed it carefully to get undigested wheat seeds. By doing this she got a good quantity of undigested wheat seeds and she left the wheat seeds in the sun to dry. When it dried, she ground it by hand on a stone mill, so she got some wheat flower. She collected some rice, flowers and Habel, etc., and went home. She cleaned a small room and a few utensils, and washed herself and the clothing. This she did all with devotion and faith without the notice of her mother. She did all as she had seen the lady in the town do with devotion. She made five bread loaves from the wheat flour she had and then baked them very cautiously on a hot charcoal fire. When they were prepared, she did puja while offering some flowers, rice, and Habel which she had collected with great humility and faith. Then she put all breads in a clean basket and covered them with her washed saari, and went to sleep. Next morning when she woke up and went into the small room where she had performed the puja and had put the breads, what she saw to her surprise was that under her sari there was something. She lifted the saari, and what she saw was that all the breads had turned into gold, and were shining. She at once called her mother and told her what she had done, and now they had turned into gold by the grace of Shri Bagwati (Beebgharen maeg) god. They were excited. The mother was very pleased with the belief that performing and celebrating this day their bad days were over. Now they began to change their life style and could live happily. They had enough gold to spend. The Queen and her daughter began to live a better life.

After some time a Wazeer (Minister) of the king came to their house in their search, and said "the soldiers loyal to the king had re-conquered the kingdom from the enemy who was defeated. The king along with his loyal supporters had been freed from the enemy's prison, and your husband the king had regained his kingdom. He has sent me in your search to bring you back, so I have come; please accompany me to the kingdom. The queen and her daughter were very pleased and accompanied him.

They met the king and told him all of their past. The king was ashamed, but pleased to have found them, and they began to live very happily, and were performing this Vyanayak Chorum celebration every year, with faith and devotion. After telling the story my wife would repeat in Kashmiri, Yith paeth timan kassin zand te zalath, tithai paeth kassten assi ti greh peda(the way the queen and her family recovered from their misfortune and misery, the same way may god bless us with good fortune and good luck). Then she would put in the Gadwa the rice, Barley, Hable, one silver rupee and cotton thread etc., and asked all members present to do the same. After this puja and Aarthi was celebrated with neveed mantar, dhoop deep, etc.

In the mean time the vegetable Bhoojai was also cooking on slow heat, and Neveed was distributed. We tasted the Neveed roth and then salted Roth with Bhoojai. After completing the ceremony a good number of very thin dry breads were also prepared and the Neveed was distributed to the neighbours and relatives. The distribution work would carry on for several days.

That is the story and on a spiritual not I would like to make a few general remarks. The Hindu religion is a great religion and it has existed since many thousands of years. To know Hindus one must study scriptures such as Vedas and Upanishads. There are many Hindus who do not understand the real meaning of their religion. Hinduism is not a domineering or expansionist religion. Million of people follow this religion, and realize god from this..

About human soul (Atma) the Upanished say "He is the unseen seer, the unheard listener, the thoughtfull thinker, th understood understander, other than he there is no thinker, other than he there is no understander. He is the Atman (soul), the inner ruler, the Immortal". It also says about God whom it calls Purush (Person), "He is formless , he is without and within, unborn, breathless, mindless, pure,higher than the high and imperishable". Shirmad Bhagavat Gita says the following about God" thou art the father of the world of the moving and the unmoving, thou art the father of the object of its worship and its vanishable teacher". Sankaracharya defends god as the totality of taught knowledge and beauty. The more popular prayer is one of Hindu scriptures is "From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to immortality, after all thou is god". Idol worshippig has a very meaningful purpose in that, in search of Purush it is the easiest way of concentration.

We have reached a moment of decision in our history, and one has to make choice that will determine the course of events for centuries hence. Change is the law of life, we have to come to terms with nature and with ourselves. We cannot live and work without the hope that our future holds better prospects both on the physical as well as on the spiritual level. Our ills are not beyond redemption. If we have to live and exist as Hindus we must regain our path. We must not, therefore, forget our tradition, our customs, our religious functions and our rituals. We must keep the flame alight, so that our children inherit our rich culture. We must repeat the same Katha (Story). "The core of Hindu religion is regeneration of mankind, a spiritual mutation of human nature", Radhakrishnan said.

The story about the festival of Yanayak chorum demonstrates how the Hindu religion helped to maintain the social fabric within our society. We have yet to learn that performing puja and worshipping are not a passport to questionable values and inhuman practices much less to heaven, but once you perform puja with devotion and concentration like done by the Queen and her family, you will be on the path of attaining **Nirwana**.

- Om Hari Krishna Hare Rama -

10.2 Punn Ceremony

Our Cultural Heritage

Piyaray Lal Raina

This year the "Punn" ceremony falls on Saturday, September 2. It is a very auspicious day for the worship of Lord Ganesha. The following is a detailed account of this ceremony in Kashmir and its link to Hindus in Maharashtra. I hope it is beneficial for our younger generation.

Kashmiri Pandits have a special place for Lord Ganesha being the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. He has been blessed by no less than Lord Shiva Himself as "Siddhi Daata" (one whose worship guarantees success). Among the deities that we worship He is to be worshipped as the first deity "Ganadipati" (leader of all deities) and "Vigneshaya" (remover of all obstacles). According to Ganesh Purana, the fourth day of the bright half of every lunar month is called 'Siddhi Vinayak Chaturthi'. The fourth day of Bhadrapad Shukla (bright half) chaturthi is known as MahaSiddhi Vinayak Chaturthi (as it is on this day that Parvati, spouse of Lord Shiva, created Ganesha for her protection). When this chaturthi falls on Tuesday or Saturday it is termed as Varad Chaturthi or Shiva Chaturthi and its importance is enhanced.

We observe this great arrival of Lord Ganesha for 10 days from Chaturthi to Chaturdashi by preparing "Roth" (sweet thick pancakes fried in ghee) and "Laddoos" from wheat flour. On this day the ladies of the household get up early in the morning, take a bath and then get to the business of preparing roths at a specially cleaned up space. First of all, roth's made from 1¼ kg of wheat flour mixed with ¼ quantity of sugar are rolled and fried in boiling ghee. These are kept apart as Lord Ganesha's Prasad along with few Ladoo's prepared out of above material. Then additional roths are prepared for all family members, daughters' family, close relatives, and neighbors.

After the roth preparation is completed, a metallic pot (gadda) is placed at a specially cleaned up place as a symbol of Lord Ganesha. A mixture of green grass, barley, and flowers is prepared in a thali. A small quantity of above mixture is put in the pot. Then it is tied with mavli (narivan) round its neck and using sindur tika "Om" in hindi is painted on this pot. Some milk and a coin are also placed in this pot.

The ladies of the house put a small thread made from raw cotton (hence the name Punn) by an unmarried girl by the side of their 'athahore' or 'dejahore'.

All the family members assemble near this place of worship where the pot has been decorated. A sindur tika is applied on the forehead and the senior household lady places the mixture prepared in the thali in the hands of all the members and gives blessings for their welfare.

Everybody takes a seat and then senior lady of the house or somebody she chooses recites a story of Bib Dharam Maej which is as follows:

A long, long time ago there lived a king happily with his family somewhere in India. Once when he was on a hunting trip he happened to see a brahman with a sindur tilak on his forehead and Narivan on his right wrist. The brahman offered some 'prashad' to the king. The king got inquisitive and wanted to go to place of worship where the lady of the house, Bib Dharam Maej, applied some sindur tilak on the king's forehead and tied a narivan on his wrist for his welfare. When king returned home, his wife suspected him of marrying some other woman (Ghandar Vivah) and got angry with him. The king narrated to her what had happened but she wouldn't listen and removed the tika from his forehead and the nirvan from his wrist. Soon after neighboring king invaded their kingdom and the king was taken as a prisoner. His wife and daughter ran away in disguise and lived a life of misery in another kingdom. They worked in a horse stable in the king's palace. One year on the day of Siddhi Vinayak chaturthi, Lord Ganesha's pooja was being offered in the palace and this lady was also invited for the function. When she saw all this she came to realize that her husband was telling the truth and felt guilty for bringing all the misery to her husband and her family. She decided to perform this pooja for Lord Ganesha and ask for His forgiveness. But she had no resources to buy all the ingredients required for the pooja. She didn't lose heart. She was determined to seek forgiveness from Lord Ganesha. The mother and daughter collected some barley from

the stable by washing horse dung and after grinding it prepared some roth's by baking them in the hot desert sand. They offered sincere prayers to Lord Ganesha and soon the roth's turned into gold.

Afraid they might be charged for stealing gold, they presented these gold roth's to the king. The king asked them for their real identity. On hearing their story, the king felt it his duty to help them regain their kingdom and get the king released. He attacked their former kingdom and got back the king and his family together.

Ever since that year, the kings' family observed this Bib Dharam Maej's day and lived happily ever after.

(End of Story)

After this story is narrated and listened to by all the family members with full devotion, some prayers are offered to Lord Ganesha and then everybody puts the mixture of grass, barley, and flowers, that has been in their hands all along the narration, into the decorated pot (symbolizing Lord Ganesha). Roth's are now distributed to all the family members along with a cup of `Kahwa' tea. On the same or next day, roth's are distributed among daughters' family, relatives, and neighbors. This distribution has to take place before Chaturdashi.

Sometimes it is not possible to perform this pooja during the ten days period as stated earlier. In this case, the function is performed on chaturdashi called as `Annth Chaturdashi' (14th day of the lunar fortnight)

Coinciding with our Punn ceremony, Maharashtrian Hindus perform Ganesh pooja in a big way during these days. Ganesh idols made of clay are purchased by every household. These idols are worshipped for 36 hr up to a maximum of 10 days. The whole community celebrates this festival by erecting special pandals where a big Ganesh idol is installed and pooja is performed three times a day along with fanfare. On chaturdashi i.e. 10th day, processions are taken from all neighborhoods for immersion of the Ganesh idols in the rivers and other water bodies and that brings the ten-day festivities to an end. The state comes to a standstill during these 10 days and schools and establishments close to allow people to participate in this grand function.

The best artists of the state of Maharashtra prepare thousands of beautiful idols of Lord Ganesha. However, the idols prepared by the artisans of the village of 'Pen' near city of Pune are considered to be superior and more religious. This may indicate our strong links with Hindus from Maharashtra (who are also Saraswat Brahmins). The word "Punn" we use for the ceremony may have links with the idols of the village `Pen' that is special in Maharashtra. Another observation regarding this pooja is that Ganesh pooja is common to Kashmiri and Maharashtrian Hindus. It is also to be noted that unlike Maharashtra, Kashmir was never a cotton growing area. It could be that the `Punn' ceremony has come to Kashmir through Saraswat Brahmins of Maharashtra.

10.3 Roth Story

Satish Raina

It is a story that emphasises on belief and faith. It may not stand to any logic thus reaffirming that if you have strong faith in doing anything, miracles would happen defying any logic.

The Story:

There lived a poor Brahmin family comprising of Brahmin, his wife and beautiful young daughter. Brahmin used to support his family by pittance collections he used to get as Bhikshya. The daughter used to go to the forest for collection of firewood. One day during the month of Bhadoon Shakula Paksh on 4th day, when she was in the forest, she saw some Devis descending from Heaven. She hid herself behind a tree and was keen to watch them and to know why they have come to the forest. She saw Devis cardooning off an area and cleaning it thoroughly. They Devis started kneading wheat flour and mixed sugar and ghee and cardamom etc in it and then they baked it on hot plate. After finishing Devis looked

around to find a girl, as they could not perform Pooja without presence of a girl. They took the notice of Brahmin girl hiding behind the tree and called her over. They gave her a bath and a new dress to wear. After finishing pooja they gave her Roth prasad and some money as Dakshana. After this the Devis left for their abode. The Brahmin girl was dazed with what she witnessed and was happy to receive new clothes and some money. She went to her home where her parents scolded and thrashed her on her possessions. They thought that she has got it some ill means. The Brahmin girl narrated to them entire thing that she had witnessed but her parents did not trust her. Days passed by and the routine of their hardships followed.

Brahmin girl developed a desire within to do same thing what Devis had done on the same auspicious day next year. She started preparations for the same in advance. Having no money with her, she collected cow dung where from she separated wheat grain and collected them over for some days, dried them and converted them into flour. She could not afford sugar or ghee and thus made roth without these materials on the auspicious day after cleaning the area etc as Devis had done. This she was doing with absolute faith, which was being witnessed by Devis in their abode and they were happy with such dedicated faith of Brahmin girl. Devis decided to reward her. The Brahmin girl performed pooja of Roths, which she had kept under a cover. After pooja when she removed the cover she was astonished to see Roths converted into golden cakes. She could not believe her stars but knew it was a miracle possible only by blessing of Devis. Thus she thanked Devis and rushed to her home with prized possession. On seeing golden cakes, her parents locked her in a room and thrashed her to maximum thinking that this time she has done some bigger crime. The girl kept on pleading and pleading and told them everything she had done, but her parents did not believe her. During the night Devis came in the dream of her parents and told them about what girl had done and that she should be treated nicely. On listening to Devis, the parents blessed the girl with love and affection. Thus the status of Brahmin family improved and they kept on repeating this Roth puja every year. Devis kept on blessing them with prosperity and wealth.

Years passed by, and one day the King of the state was returning from hunting expedition when he took notice of Brahmin girl who was relaxing under a tree in her courtyard. Her youth and charm fascinated the king and he decided to marry her. He summoned her father to the court next day and asked for his daughter's hand. The marriage was solemnised with great pomp and show and the Brahmin girl became queen of the state.

When the Roth day was approaching, she asked the King to arrange the materials for the performance of Roth Pooja . King asked his minister to do the necessary arrangements. The Minister ill advised the King that it was just a fantasy of the queen and it was not necessary. He did not believe that she could have afforded the material that the queen had asked for while she was not married. He suggested that it was her greed that she is demanding such a huge amount of materials for doing some Puja of which he had not heard of. The king was convinced by Minister's logic and refused to give any material to the queen.

The queen was very upset and she pleaded with the king. She cried and begged of King without any luck. She went to Puja room and begged of Devis to pardon her for no fault of hers.

During the night King dreamt of Devis who warned him that he would lose his kingdom next day as he had not fulfilled the necessary arrangements requested by the queen. Very next day, neighbouring state king invaded his kingdom and he was dethroned and exiled. He realised his mistake and asked his wife to pardon him. His wife in turn asked him to seek pardon from Devis and to take a pledge not to do such things in future. He prayed and prayed and prayed. Finally Devis took mercy on him and blessed him since he vowed to perform this pooja irrespective of whatever condition he would be in. Next day the faithful soldiers of the King who got wind of where the king was hiding came to see him. They assembled in large numbers and worked out a plan to conquer back their kingdom. In next few days the King with the help of his soldiers regained his kingdom. Ever since the king and entire state performed the Roth Pooja every year.

Concluding prayer:

Now we pray Almighty to bless us in the same way as they blessed the Brahmin girl and to strive in us a true, dedicated & strong faith in the pooja.

11 Kah Naethar

Commentary

nethar in Kashmiri is nothing but **nakshatra** in Sanskrit. So **kah nethar** would be the ceremony celebrating the constellation (nakshatra) on the eleventh day.

Likewise, **nethar** for marriage is again an indirect word representing the corresponding astral sign, an auspicious beginning. The correct name for marriage is **vivaha**. The commonly used Hindi term **shadi** is totally incorrect because it is a Persian word that means **happiness** or **celebration**. Any celebration is **shadi**.

- Subhash Kak

Kah-naether is known as Jatakaram Samskar and is one of such vedic samskaras as Namkaran Samskar or Mundan Samskar. This samskara is held on the eleventh day or, as you have said, on the eleventh nakshatra from the nakshatra of a child's birth, hence the name kah-naether. It is akin to baptism - a ritualistic propitiation of deities and the acceptance of a new-born child into the family fold or gotra. It is considered to be a very important samskara because no hom, havan, yagnya, shradha or pind-dana can be performed by the family where a new-born child has not had this samskara. However, if this samskara cannot be held on the eleventh day of a child's birth it can be deferred and held on some other auspicious date but before any religious ceremony is performed by the family. In our times it has now only vestigial importance.

Peculiar to KP's is Shran-sonder, a ceremony held on the tenth day of a child's birth; only KP's combine the ceremonial medicinal bath with the vedic ritual of Pum-suam (a ritual now only observed in selective cases in the south of India, namely Kerala). And, kah-naether cannot be held if there has been no shran-sonder.

On the 3rd day of a child's birth, we have another ceremony, again peculiar to KPs, called Trui, when fried sesame seeds garnished with sugar candy and walnuts are distributed among friends and near relatives. Sesame seeds seem to have a tantric significance in all our ritual performances.

- Prof. B. L. Fotedar

According to **The Kashmiri Pandit** by Pandit Anand Koul:

Kahanethar is the purificatory ceremony after confinement. It is performed on the eleventh day after delivery when the mother leaves the confinement room. A havan is performed and the child is given a name. Prior to this, bath is given to both mother and baby on or after the sixth day of the delivery and it is called Shran Sunder. After the bath lighted pieces of birch bark are passed round the head of the child and of all the persons present. This is done by the midwife who, while doing so, repeats --Shokh tah punahsund (happiness and more children to you).

According to **Hindu Samaskaras** by Rajbali Pandey, the samaskaras of childhood are:

1. Jatakarma (birth Ceremony)
2. Namakarana (Name-Giving)
3. Nishkramana (First Outing)
4. Anna-Prashana (First Feeding)
5. Chuda Karana (Mundan or Tonsure)
6. Karnavedha (Boring the ears)

Jatakarma was performed before the severing of the navel chord. This can change because of other factors like death in the family etc.

Namkarna is performed on tenth or twelfth day after birth. There is again a wide option for the dates.

According to Pundit Prem Nath Shastri's Juntree, Jatakarma is Kahnethar. But it appears to me that the present day ceremony includes portions of both Jatakarma as well as Namakarna. Each Rashi contain two and a half Nakhshatras. That is why when you go to a South Indian Temple, the priest wants to know your name, Gotra, and Nakshatra. This is more precise than Name, Gotra, and Rashi. Most of us know our Rashis but have no clue about the Nakhshatra. Ask your priest. This side discussion apart, the naming has a lot to do with the nakhshatra (Nakhetur in koshur). As was pointed out by Subhash Ji, Kahnethar is but a deformation of the word that implies the naming ceremony done on the eleventh day after birth.

Finally, I must again point out that all samaskaras among all Hindus are performed according to GrehaSutras. The details of Homas (havan), naming convention for Namkarna etc, are standard. The details vary according to the local traditions. For example, Kashmiris use Tantric symbols that are absent in all of South India. Kashmiris chant vedas in Sama (singing) style, whereas South Indians chant in very crisp measured style. The stuff they chant is exactly the same. The Dhriivyas (items for worship) are also local stuff. Naturally we use things we are used to, like walnuts and almonds, and Nabad (nabaat of persians). South Indians use coconut, palm leaves, etc. So, if you want to do any of these ceremonies here, go find a knowledgeable South Indian priest, tell him a few things about your own customs, and enjoy a genuine function.

- Ravi Kaw

12 Kashmiri Pandit Wedding

12.1 Vivah

This ceremony begins like the *Yajnopavita* ceremony with *gara-navai* or house cleaning and then, in like manner, *henabandi* and *divagon* are performed. On the wedding day the bridegroom is dressed with gold-laced garments and over them is worn a bright coloured robe, and his turban is adorned with a bunch of herons' feathers. A procession is formed in the compound where the bridegroom stands on *Vyug* (a place decorated with lime and oolour). Then the eldest lady of the house comes and turns lighted lamps and a couple of pigeons round his neck and the relatives sing songs all the while and shower coins and sugar over him. Then he starts, riding on a horse preceded by other horses and palankin to the *ghat* and thence the party starts in a procession of boats (now cars) to the bride's parents' house. If the wedding party has to go to a village not approachable by boat, horses and vehicles are used. There the *Vyug* is kept ready for the bridegroom to stand upon. The bride is brought and made to stand on his left side on the *Vyug*, and the ceremony of turning lamps and pigeons round the heads of the couple is performed by the eldest lady of the house. A feast is given to the bridegroom and the party. The *lagan* or the nuptial ceremony is performed by the priests of the bridegroom assisted by other priests. After reciting various incantations the couple is given food which they partake in one and the same plate. Then they are made to walk together hand in hand on seven coins of silver round the fire lighted on the occasion. Then the priests are given cash presents. In the end the parents of the bride offer them flowers with many blessings in Sanskrit poetry which the Brahmins recite in one chorus (*Posh Pooza*).

After the *lagan* is over the bridegroom with his bride and party returns to his own house. Before starting he and the bride are made to stand again on the *Vyug* and the ceremony attached to it is repeated. The bride is then placed in the palankin and the bridegroom rides his horse and the procession returns to the bridegroom's house. There again the *Vyug* ceremony is performed and after that the couple enter their home, the ladies singing songs all the while.

Excerpts from:

The Kashmiri Pandit

by Pandit Anand Koul

Thacker, Spink & Co.

Calcutta

12.2 Kashmiri Pandit Marriages

Main Features

Pt. Moti Lal Pushkar

Brahamdeva

This word denotes 'The Pandit marriage system' by way of selection of a groom by a would be brides' parents in consultation with their daughter on the basis of a would be groom's academic achievement, moral character, personality, young age and health besides emotional attachment of a couple towards each other. An invitation is extended to the groom by his father-in-law to attend the marriage *Mona*. This letter of invitation mentions the day and date, exact auspicious hour (*Lagna*), number of participants in the marriage party and the number of Brahmans for recitation of the 'Vedas' on this occasion. Bride's hand is offered to her life partner while 'Agni Deva' shines bright. This invitation letter is known as the 'LAGANCHIRI'. Now-a-days the 'Kulguru' of the brides' parents discharges this fatherly responsibility. This system of marriage is prevalent in the Kashmiri Pandit society wherever they are.

The marriage is based on morality, parental responsibility, social organization, spiritualization of human behaviour and responsive attitude. It avoids vulgarity.

Kanya-daan

At the exact auspicious hour i.e. the hour of lagna, the bride and her father face the east and the groom faces the west. Relatives from both sides also witness the ceremony. The father of the bride addresses his would be son-in-law thus "Sir, I offer you my daughter in marriage." Thrice repeated.

The groom shows his inclination thus, "Sir, I accept this offer sincerely." He thrice repeats his acceptance. Both the parties express together the following statement:

"This our statement is true. We adhere to it with all sincerity."

The father of the bride again addresses his son-in-law thus:

"Sir, you have to share your Dharma (social contact, Artha, earnings, and Kaama) the pious act of keeping God's creation unhindered, with your lifepartner without fail."

This is agreed upon by the groom and the bride takes her seat now by the left side of her husband.

Both pray that Agni Deva be pleased to bless us both.

The mantras recited here mean that desires, thoughts and endeavour of ours to establish an ideal household be based on commonality of interests. Our minds, heart and conscious being the same and serene.

Sanskara

Offerings, are made to the Holy Fire with the recitation of the Vedic mantras. The essence of these mantras is given here:

God alone is the bestower of everything. He sustains this our mother earth and the space above. He is the giver and protector. He is the real father and creator.

The groom prays to God while addressing his better half thus:

"The unfavourable forces that are bent upon to cause widowhood to a woman may prove the agents of longevity for the husband.

The forces that try against having cattle and other wealth may help us to have all types of wealth.

The natural agents that cause barrenness to a woman may turn as the agents for fertility."

Husband Theory – Four Factors

The husband further states thus,

"My dear, it is the Moon god that entered thee first causing m.c.t. The Sun god came the next to develop fertility. The fire god came in its turn to generate heat in thee. I, the human agent, am the fourth factor to sow the human seed."

A Piece of Stone as a Seat

It is a symbolic offering of a seat to the bride by her husband to sit on. He prays that this marriage of two souls may prove as permanent as this rocky seat. He further prays that she be freed from parental bondage to live her future life with me.

In return the bride prays for the groom's long life and prosperity. The groom reciprocates with the same spirit for her longevity.

Saptapadi

The husband suggests to his bride to take seven symbolic steps towards her new home. She takes these seven steps while praying.

1. "I take this first step with my inner desire to become life-partner of my husband.
2. This second step I take to acquire energy to discharge my household duties.
3. Third I take to have health and fitness.
4. The fourth step I take to have fine sentiments in me.
5. Fifth I take to get ideal progeny.
6. This sixth I take to enjoy my future life happily during all the seasons of the year.
7. This seventh, to have longevity."

The husband repeats at every step thus, "May Almighty fulfil all thy wishes."

The Desire to Have Ideal Progeny

The Groom further asks: "Do you see full span of life."

Bride: "Yes I see." "Do you desire to have Dhruva and Arundhati like ideal children?" "Yes Sir."

Saraswati Vandana

The Saraswati hymn from the Vedas is recited by the couple. It reminds them that their original home had been the banks of the river Saraswati, hence the community came to be known as the Saraswati Brahman.

Their (the Saraswati Brahman's) life mission had been Saraswati i.e. learning of Arts, Crafts, Sciences and Scriptures. It is also to remind them that they had been devotees of Saraswati i.e. the Cosmic.

Recitation of Suryavarga

One more hymn from the Vedas known as the Suryavarga is recited. It reminds the couple of their new responsibilities that await them as householders. It says that this universe is like a chariot. The Sun and the Moon are its two wheels. It keeps functioning by mutual agreement, patience and psychological approach.

Offering of Prasaad

At the end of Vivahahoma prasaad is offered to the couple which they partake gladly. They offer a few morsels to each other. All the dishes offered to the guests are also offered to the bride and the groom in one plate. It is known in Kashmir as Daibat (Deiva Bhakta in Sanskrit) i.e. God's gift to the couple.

Poshpuja

Parents of the groom shower flowers on the couple. Other relatives also participate in this flower showering. The couple sit under the cover of a small canopy, symbolic of a bedroom. Actually, it is the preparation for Garbhadaan Sanskara i.e. the couple invites attention of each other to have ideal Progeny

The parents and relatives from both the sides remind them names of ideal children from the Vedic heritage. This recitation covers names of sages and seers, the incarnations, great warriors, heroic mothers, famous kings and queens of the whole Vedic lore.

With this ritual, the Pandit marriage celebrations come to an end.

This system is based on the Vedic Mantras and has been presented to the society by Rishi Lougaaksha of Kashmir.

12.3 A Kashmiri Wedding



A Kashmiri Pandit Bride

Kashmiri wedding apparel is a beautiful fusion of all the different traditions that have influenced Kashmir. The pheran, a garment somewhere between a coat and a cloak, is eminently way of life, being loose enough to admit the brazier of live coals (kangri) which is carried around in much the same way as a hot water bottle. Men's pherans are always made of tweed or coarse wool. Women's pherans, somewhat more stylised, are commonly made of raffer with splashes of ari or hook embroidery at the neck, cuffs and edges.

Kashmir, a potpourri of traditions, has some of the most unique wedding customs and rituals. The Hindu kashmiris rely on the matching of horoscope or teknis to find the perfectly suited spouse, as per the stars, for their sons and daughters. Analogous to other Hindu traditions, the background, status and moral character of the family into which their son or daughter will marry, also plays a part in the selection.

After the suitability of the union of the bride and groom has been ascertained by these traditional customs, a formal commitment or vaana of both the families to the wedding takes place in the form of the kasamdry.

During the kasamdry, a traditional ceremony takes place in a temple in front of an idol to bless the auspicious moment. Elderly persons from both the girl's and boy's families meet and exchange flowers in celebration of the new relationship to be formed. Traditional kashmiri food is served by the girl's family on this occasion.

Meanwhile, the ladies in the groom's family get together and the eldest aunt (bua or pof) prepares a special rice pudding called var which is distributed among the neighbours and relatives so that all can participate in the festivities. A similar ceremony is performed at the bride's house and the girl's family sends fruits, dry fruits, pot containing nabad and cash to the boy's family.



Bride and Groom

Next comes the engagement. The date of the engagement is decided by the family pandits or gors according to the Kashmiri calendar. Both the boy's and the girl's families invite relatives to their respective houses for lunch or evening tea. Once again, there is an exchange of presents. A member of the boy's family goes to the girl's house with a ring, a pheran, the traditional head gear called tarang, a multicoloured sacred thread called narivan and sindoor in a silver container. On the same day, either the sister-in-law or the brother-in-law of the girl visits the boy's house with presents for him and a ceremony almost identical to the bride's is carried out at the groom's house. In addition to these exchanges, both the families hold a wanvan or a music session in the evening, wherein enchanting Kashmiri marriage and folk songs called vachuns are sung.

Then comes the Maanzirat, the mahurat for which is fixed within seven days of the lagan saath. During this part of the wedding ceremony, which is essentially for the ladies, the pof of the boy and that of the girl decorate the doors of the bride's and the groom's houses in a ceremony called krool khanun. In the evening, the bride takes a bath that involves elaborate rituals and her masi (maternal aunt) washes her feet. The laides are invited to dinner, which is served in traditional kiln-baked pots. The food prepared by the waza (the cook) consist, of the delicious dumaalu, nadrooyakhni, chock wangun, mujchatni among other traditional Kashmiri delicacies. The ladies are then invited for the occasion to indulge in wanvan throughout the night.

Then follows the devgon ritual where a havan is performed by both the families in their respective homes, in which both the bride and the grooms offer prayers to god Shiva and goddess Parvati. The devgon ceremony is representative of the transition from brahmacharya ashram to grihasta ashram. The girl's devgon ceremony starts with the kanishran of the girl. In this ritual, a veil is held by young girls over the bride's head and a mixture of water, rice, milk, curd and flowers are showered by the relatives in what can become a rather messy affair, while the purohit renders the mantras. The bride is then presented with a new set of clothes by her maternal uncle(mama). This attire signifies that the girl has stepped into womanhood. During the boy's devgon, the groom is also given a kanishran.

The lagan (marriage) is fixed either during the daytime or the night time. All the invitees first assemble at the groom's house. The groom's eldest paternal uncle has to tie his turban (dastar). A plate of rice containing some money is touched to the left shoulder of the groom as a shagoon.

In the meantime, the bride is busy with her own attire. Over the kalpush, a long piece of snow-white cloth is wrapped at the level of the forehead in three or four layers. A white scarf is wrapped over the kalpush and it covers half the head from behind. This scarf is left hanging on the back of the head till it reaches just below the shoulders. It is made of fine cotton or silk on two sides and consists of a silk or cotton net in the middle. The edges are elegantly embroidered with gold and silk threads.

The marriage procession enters the bride's house amidst blows from the conch-shell. The bride's maternal uncle leads her to the vyug (a decorative pattern made of rice flour and different colours - type of rangoli) where the groom awaits his partner. Together with a purohit, they offer prayers at the door of the house before making their way to the lagan mandap.

The ceremony starts with the purohit chanting slokas in front of the sacred fire.



The bride and the groom are told about their duties towards each other and towards their close relatives. The bride and the groom cross their arms one over the other and hold hands under a piece of cloth in a ceremony called aathwas. A golden thread is now tied around both their foreheads. After this, the left feet of the both the bride and groom are placed on a grinding stone that is commonly used in Kashmiri kitchens. The first round of the seven pheras is made by stepping on seven one rupee coins of silver or rupee notes, whiel the other six are completed to the mystical chant of mantras. The bride and groom now feed each other food, thus signifying the end of the ceremony. They are now considered man and wife and are ready to begin a new life together.



Ultimately, it is time for the vidai. The newly weds are made to stand on the rangoli, as part of the seeing off ceremony. The eldest lady of the bride's family offers them misri (nabad) three times, and kisses their foreheads. The bride is then seated in a doli or car, which is beautifully decorated with flowers, and her relatives and friends bid her a tearful goodbye as she heads towards her sasural (groom's house).

At last, the bride arrives at the groom's house where she is confronted with the boy's sister who refuses to let the wedding procession or the newly weds enter the house until the groom promises her cash, shagoon or jewellery made of the arrival of the bride. The pof of the groom then leads the couple to the kitchen where they are made to sit on the mud stoves as the waza serves them food, which is led to them by the pof. This ceremony is called the dan zang. The pof is given some cash and ornaments as a token of love from the groom's parents. The bride then changes into clothes given to her by here parents-in-law who also give her gold ornaments.

There are a few post-wedding ceremonies, such as the satraat during which the bride has to go back to her maika the same evening as her wedding, accompanied by her husband and one or two children. As part of this ceremony, the couple is presented with new clothes by the bride's parents, which they have to wear before returning home. The groom is presented with a dusa (a six yard pashmina shawl) and the bride

receives some salt and cash. One a suitable day, the newly wed couple eat with the bride's family once again in a ritual called phirlath.

The last post-wedding ceremony is roth khabar. This is a ceremony during which the bride's family sends roth khabar to the groom's family. Roth is a 1/2 meter long, two and a half-meter wide bakery cake decorated with nuts (usually sent in odd numbers). The bride accompanies the carrier of the roth kabhar back to her parents house. The bride's in-laws have to send someone to her maika to bring her back. She is given some salt and cash as shagoon on her return to her in-laws place.

After all these ceremonies are over, the girl is free to visit her parent's house whenever she wants to, without having to wait for the right mahurat. Finally, the married couple is ready to drive down a new road of exploration in their newly formed relationship.

Source: SaffronValley.com

13 Zang tri

Smt. Krishen Kanta Kaw and Dr. Ravi Kaw

That Zang Tri is the third day of the New Year (Nowreh). According to mythology, Lord Shiva created the Universe on Nowreh. On the third day, His Consort (Parvati) paid a visit to Her parent's home. So, all Kashmiri married women go to their MALYUN for an hour or two, conveying good wishes for the new year, and then return to their homes. That is Zang Tri.

I would like to add that this story is pregnant with symbolic meaning. We find similar stories in Bhaagwat Maha-puran, and even Old Testament: that GOD created the Earth, Sun, and Moon, and then on the third day.... These seemingly strange (incomprehensible 'mumbo-jumbo' to some) was explained to me by my teacher as follows:-

That the fundamental event for all conscious beings is a thought. The first (or the basic) thought of all beings is the 'I- thought'. This I-thought is also called Ignorance/Maya/Moola-Maya, etc. It cannot be comprehended, but its properties can be 'seen' mixed up in everything. The distance between two events gives rise to the concept of TIME. Time also signifies 'change'. It is this element of time that projects the concept of SPACE as well. So, using the language of modern Physics, one can say that TIME/SPACE quantum is the projection of the thought that follows the 'I thought'. That is why, in English, the fundamental unit of time is 'second'. It is only after time/space has happened that the world of plurality can be observed. So, going back, the Supreme Consciousness (Para-Shiva, Brahman, Yahveh, or whatever name people use) having become conscious of itself (through Moola-Maya, Itchha Shakti, or whatever name one uses, personified as Parvati Devi), sets forth 'creation'.

A short digression on 'CONSCIOUSNESS'

When we ask the basic question 'who am I', prescribed for those with pure 'heart' (or calm disposition), this Vichar (thought process) leads to the realization that 'I am that supreme Brahman', also called by the many other names. Brahman of Vedanta is nothing but the Para-Shiva of Shaivism, Yahveh of the Jews, etc. It is this supreme substratum acting through the collective mind of all beings (Maya), that we call GOD or Eshwara.

So, you see a man of realization (Sthita-Pragnya of Ch-2 Gita) is God walking on two legs. This truth is what sets Hinduism apart from all the followers of Semitic religions: That we all have the capability of knowing our true nature, having known which we are ALL capable of saying 'Aham Brahmosmi' or 'Me and My Father-in Heaven are one'. That fundamental unity is hidden from us 'at this time' because of our ignorance (avidhya).

The various 'paths' in our religion differ in only the manner of removing this ignorance, based on the temperament of the student. The 'amiable one' likes Bhakti, the person-of-action likes Karma, the intellectual-types like Gyaana, those with none of these likings like Pranayama/Hatha-Yoga. When one learns to sever the ties between the Indriyas (sense organs) and the mind (a stage called Pratihara), all paths become one. Then on, it is all Guru-Kripa. It is like the space-ship that has gone against the Gravity, and is now in zero-gravity, light and silent.

So, when a person emerges out of Samadhi (oneness with one's true being OR Shiva), the first thought is I-thought and the mind is felt in a hushed state. When this mind starts projecting next thought (because of the unknowable properties of Maya), time/space is born. And this conscious mind (Parvati), can experience the world of plurality (Malyun) through the sense organs.

14 Pitr Rin

Remembering the departed souls of your family

Piyaray Lal Raina

Lunar month of Ashwan (Asuj) has started on September 14th. The first two weeks of this month (September 14 - 28 during this year) also known as **Krishn Paksh** is the period when we Pandits repay our *Pitr rin* to our ancestors who are no longer amongst us. I am writing this note so that you understand our traditions and endeavor to keep our traditions and customs alive for your progeny.

According to Shastras, a Hindu is born with three debts (rin) which he/she has to repay during his/her lifetime. These are:

1. *Dev rin*: Debts we owe to Gods for our smooth journey in this and next life.
2. *Pitr rin*: Debts we owe to our ancestors who have departed the earthly abode.
3. *Rishi rin*: Debts we owe to learned ones including our Guru who guides us in our day to day life.

Kashmiri Pandits pays the *Pitr rin* in the following manner:

1. The oldest living male descendant of the deceased soul offers water to his loved ones daily by performing "Tarpan" ritual in the morning before eating.
2. On the death anniversary (as per our lunar calendar) of the departed souls, Shrada Sankalpa is performed at home. The family Guruji (Gor) performs this ritual as per the prescribed text (Vidhi).
3. During *Pitr Paksh* (i.e. the dark two weeks (Krishn Paksh) of the lunar month of Ashwan (known as Asuj in Kashmiri) we perform another Shrada Sankalpa.
4. We also perform Shrada Sankalpa at various tirthas (holy places) such as Mattan in Kashmir, Gaya in Bihar, Hardawar in Uttar Pradesh, Triveni at Allahbad, Pushkar in Ajmer, and other holy places.

During these two weeks, we remember our loved ones on the day (tithi of the two weeks) each departed soul/s passed away. For example, if a loved one had passed away on the 5th day of any lunar month, then we remember him/her on the 5th day of the Krishn Paksh of Ashwan. However, sometimes this can be on the 4th day of the Krishn Paksh if our almanac (Janthri) has marked 5th as Devadev. Devadev means that the day has actually started before the sunrise. As per our customs, the day starts with sunrise. All Devadev days are marked clearly in the almanac.

There are two components of Shrada Sankalpa – one part consists mainly of ritualistic pooja and second part consists of offering of clothes, money, rice, salt, fruit, vegetables etc to Guruji who performs the ritual. In his absence, the offerings are made to the priests at the temple and in some cases to needy ones. Even if it is not possible to perform the Shrada (ritual part), the offerings are still made. We call it Mansawun in Kashmiri. If a Shrada Sankalpa of a loved one has been performed at Gaya, then there is no performance of Shrada (ritual part) at home.

On the day of *Shrada*, the family assemble at the oldest living son's home and all the children of departed soul keep a fast and break the fast together. On this day, choicest dishes are prepared including non-vegetarian dishes if the one who is being remembered was a non-vegetarian. All family members pray and offer flowers for the peace of the departed soul in front of the picture of the departed soul.

Mansawun Vidhi (Offering method)

Our almanac (janthri) describe the offering method. The mantras are simple and short. One has to know the "Gotra" of the family to recite these mantras. Gotra is an identification of all Hindus (similar to social security number in USA assuming there is one for each family instead). Even though outside Kashmir there are total of six Gotras, our community has complex gotra system of 199 gotras.

The process begins with keeping the offering in front of the picture of the departed soul. The males assembled for the ritual transfer the yagnopavit to the left arm. With some water and black sesame seed in the palm of their right hands the following mantra is recited:

**OM TAT SAT BRAHM TITHOU ADAY ASHWAN MASASY
KRISHN PAKSHAY <Tithay>1 <Day of Week>2 VASREY
<Relationship of departed soul> 3 <Name of the person> <Gotra>4
SHRADEY ANNAM VASTRAE FALMUL DAKSHINA SAHITAM
SANKALPIYAMI**

Notes for the mantra

1 Date of the event e.g. Prathmi for 1st day, Dutmi for the 2nd day and so on. Refer to your almanac (janthri) for the Tithay.

2 e.g. Somvar for Monday, Mangalvar for Tuesday and so on.

3 Pitray for Father, Matray for Mother, Pita Mahay for Grandfather, and Pita Mahey for Grand mother.

4 e.g. Datatrey, Kappishtal Manva, Swamin Madugulay

With this recitation sprinkle the water in the right hand on the offerings.