

CULTURAL LIFE OF WOMAN IN ANCIENT KASHMIR

Shazia Rashid* And Ranjana Sharma

Department of History, Govt. M.L. B. Girls. P.G. (Autonomous) College, Bhopal, India

Email: shaziarashid945@gmail.com

Abstract

Culture refers to the patterns of thought and behaviour of people. It includes values, beliefs, rules of conduct, and patterns of social, political and economic organisation. In social science, culture is all that in human society which is socially rather than biologically transmitted. Culture is a general term for the symbolic and learned aspects of human society. Social anthropological ideas of culture are based to a great extent on the definition in which it is referred to as "a learned complex of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and custom". This definition implies that culture and civilization are same. Kashmir is famous for its rich culture since time immemorial, as it has been the home of some greatest civilizations of the world. During Ancient Kashmir there were, Hindus, Buddhists and Jains who live with their marvelous cultures that evolved from hundreds of years but with the coming of muslim educationists and thinkers during medieval Kashmir particularly from central Asian and Persia a extensive change was brought in the society. These people have brought with them new cultures and new styles of life that has captivated the local people. From Hindu society to a muslim one, all the religious groups had influenced the culture of Kashmir by one way or the other. Each social group has its own characteristics based on its values and ethics. In the later year's merchants, soldiers, artisans, poets and scholars went outside Kashmir and stayed with some famous cultures of the world. Their arrival back in Kashmir had further enriched the local culture. There was an amalgamation of local and foreign cultures which gave birth to a new culture that was quite delicate, rich and unique. The two participated in each other's festivals and in this way made the society a composite one. There was an exchange of food habits, dress and ornaments, music, fairs and festivals etc. which further enriched the culture of Kashmir.

Keywords : Kashmir, culture, social customs, festivals, clothes, religious groups, hindu, Buddhist, music, central Asia, castes etc.

INTRODUCTION

The English word 'Culture' is derived from the Latin term 'cult or cultus' meaning tilling, or cultivating or refining and worship. In sum it means cultivating and refining a thing to such an extent that its end product evokes our admiration and respect. This is practically the same as 'Sanskriti' of the Sanskrit language. Culture is a way of life. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the language you speak in and the God you worship all are aspects of culture. In very simple terms, we can say that culture is the embodiment of the way in which we think and do things. It is also the things that we have inherited as members of society. All the achievements of human beings as members of social groups can be called culture. Art, music, literature, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, religion and science can be seen as aspects of culture. However, culture also includes the customs, traditions, festivals, ways of living and one's outlook on various issues of life. Kashmir has got a unique system of customs (Rewaj)¹ and practices. These customs don't resemble to any country of the world. From earliest times the population of Kashmir comprised of Hindu, Buddhist or Jains. Despite the alien rule in Kashmir for more than 200 years during the medieval and modern times, the Kashmiris masses maintained and asserted the local Kashmiri culture. This was done mainly through the folk sources. Some of the changes which took place during the period of our study areas Culture refers to the patterns of thought and behaviour of people. It includes values, beliefs, rules of conduct, and patterns of social, political and economic organisation. These are passed on from one generation to the next by formal as well as informal processes. Culture consists of the ways in which we think and act as members of a society. Thus, all the achievements of group life are collectively called culture. Culture is the product of such an organization and expresses itself through language and art, philosophy and religion. It also expresses itself

through social habits, customs, economic organisations and political institutions. According to Indologists, Indian culture stands not only for a traditional social code but also for a spiritual foundation of life. Indian culture is an invaluable possession of our society. Indian culture is the oldest of all the cultures of the world and belief. Culture varies from place to place and country to country. Its development is based on the historical process operating in a local, regional or national context. For example, we differ in our ways of greeting others, our clothing, food habits, social and religious customs and practices from the West. In other words, the people of any country are characterised by their distinctive cultural traditions.

CULTURAL LIFE OF WOMEN DURING ANCIENT PERIOD

Women in the traditional Kashmiri society have been characterized by dependency, inferior social status and suffering. They have faced systematic discrimination and institutional exploitation at the hands of the male members. In the past, at the personal plane women were victims of wide spread illiteracy, segregation, polygamy, marriage with improper match and complete denial of individuality. Economically, women were prey to economic dependence, heavy domestic work-load, absence of career and mobility and non-recognition of their economic contribution, and they were allocated degrading activities. Socially, women suffered from the denial of freedom in their own house and repression, unequal and inferior status. Thus women in the traditional Kashmiri society were recognized as weak and emotionally dependent on men. The studies clearly reveal that women were not considered equal to men at the social level and were not allowed to become active partners in the social life. In Kashmir, women participated to some extent in social and cultural fields and were economically active. They were private, denied important rights like decision-making and inheritance rights in the family.² "These currents and cross current actions and interactions ultimately resulted in the assimilation of diverse cultures and a new social setup emerged out. However, links with the past were not broken altogether; but a new social order had taken birth from the debris of the old indigenous tradition³

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The climate of a region gives rise to its dress code. Since the climate and geographic conditions of Kashmir had been different, so it has also a different wearing system³The dress of Kashmir has its historical importance. It has undergone several changes during its long history. Before Harsha (1089-1101) mentions Kalhana that there was not any dress for head. People let it loose. It is mentioned that Harsha introduced the use of turban and short court due to the influence of Mohammadans. Balaclava⁴ As regards the dress and ornaments of early inhabitants of Kashmir, we have literary as well as archaeological evidence. The dress of a woman was composed mainly of sari and jackets⁵. During the reign of Harsa, fashionable ladies dressed themselves in jackets which covered but half the length of their arms and wore long lower garments, the tail end of which touched the floor⁶Sometimes a veil was used to cover the face⁷ The women of early Kashmir were not wanting in their eternal fondness for ornaments. Among the various kinds of jewelleries worn by the ladies of his native land Kalhanamentionsanklets(nupura),necklaces(hara),Wristlets(kankana),armlets(keyura),bracelets(pariharya)and earring(kundala)⁸Ksemendra speaks of collars made of pearls. The ladies used camphor, sandal and saffron toilet and perfume the body⁹cented cheeks with leaves soaked in musk¹⁰reddened the feet and lips with lac¹¹and applied collyrium The Kashmiri women used collyrium (surma) in order to beautify their eyes¹²The married women decorated their foreheads with painted marks¹³sometimes these beauty-marks were made with camphor¹⁴The ways of dressing the hair were various. Coiffures were decoratedwithflowers.sometimesflowerswerealsoboundwithlocks¹⁵some idea regarding the costumes and ornaments of early Kashmir of a period prior to the one known from literary sources may be ad from a study of the sculptures and terracottas A woman without ornaments is like a field without water"(i . e . desolate) Just as a field without water appears desolate, similar is the case with a woman without ornaments. Their deficiency makes her devoid of much fascination Traditions and customs which had existed unchanged for centuries got crushed under the heels of the awakened and emboldened machine— minded individuals of the modern age. Jewellery was no exception to this new ruleOne of the brick tiles of Harwan depicts a lady carrying a flower vase .She wears transparent robe, a kind of close fitting turban and large ear-ring¹⁶Another tile shows female-dancer wearing loose robes and trousers while a third one gives the picture of a female musician who also dresses herself in

trousers¹⁷.Sculptural representations sometimes confirm the conclusions that we derive from a study of the literary sources regarding the dress and ornaments of ancient Kashmir.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS:

The people celebrated a number of festivals, chief among which was the Shivratri.Held on the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna (Feb-March), the festivities connected with it extended to several days. The king observed the festival with great éclat and 'flooded his people with presents ,just as Indra floods the earth with rain at the conjunction of planets ¹⁸Feasts were an important festival, still known in Kashmir, was the Indra-dvadasi, held on the 12th day of the bright half of Bhadra (September), which was the day of pilgrimage to the sacred sites of the Varahaksetra at BaramulaThis was naturally a festival of universal rejoicings, coincide as it did with the ripening and harvesting of the rice crop .It was an ancient festival and combined with the Nagayatra held on the fourth of the same fortnight ,was also a very popular one .An old and popular festival deriving its origin from the ancient tradition of people leaving the valley in winter.¹⁹A tile from Harwan represents a female musician playing on a drum and another depicts a danseuse in a dancing posture. We have mention of music and dancing in the Nilamatpurana too. The kings were great lovers of dancing and music. Kings Harsa, for instance, was not only a lover of music and dancing but an adept at these arts too. He composed songs and set them.²⁰And for dancing and theatrical shall, the poorer classes there were folk –songs ,folk-dramas and music .Modern Chhakri,the popular music played ²¹At to the accompaniment of brass and earthen vessels ,seems to have an ancient origin marriage feasts, sacrifices and other festivities the folk musicians were in great demand ²²

DANCE DRAMA AND MUSIC;

The cultivation of fine arts by the people of kashmir has an ancient background .some terracotta tiles of the fourth century A.D excavated at Harwan depict a danseuse in a dance pose and other tiles show a female musician playing a dholak we find several reference to dance drama and music in the pages of Rajatarangini .It was however ,in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D that these arts attained their full vigour.Infact no student of classical Indian Dance can ignore or by pass the commentaries on Bharata,s Natya-Sastra ,and original works on Dance ,like those of Udbhatta,Lollapaia,Sankuka,Bhatta ,Nayaka,and the last but greatest of them all,Abhinavagupta.The Tandava of Siva is described in *Harvijayakavya* by Rajanaka Ratnakara. In music, dance, and drama, we find a similar interchanges of ideas. Whereas Kashmiri musicians acquired proficiency in North Indian rages. We find at the same time that under Harsa masters from Karnataka were also invited to give lessons to musician of Kashmir.Harsa also introduced the Karnataka type of coins as well as south Indian fashions in dress and ornaments. In the numerous sculptures found in Kashmir, we notice the Indian dress-the choli and the dhoti²³. The finer tradition in music and dance have, however, been preserved in India by the hereditary professional artistes who passed them down from generation to generation .But unfortunately, the history of Kashmir after the 11th century AD is written in civil wars, invasions, repressions and bloodshed, intermittently filled with sad accounts of famines, fires and epidemics. No wonder the tradition in music and dance vanished and what has been left is only a poor specimen of their former glory. An elsewhere in India, classical dancing in Kashmir also had a religious background, the temple dancers have played a significant role in its development .The first reference to dancing in the Rajatarangini is about king jalauka, the son and successor of the emperor Asoka, who is credited with being an ardent worshipper of Siva and a lover of music and dance. While worshipping at the shrine of Siva, a hundrend among the ladies of the seraglio who had risen to dance, in honour of god, at the time fixed for dancing and singing, he gave out of joy to jyestharudra ²⁴Lalitaditya is recorded to have noticed two beautiful damsels dancing elegantly to the accompaniment of a drum and other musical instruments .On being questioned as to the purpose of their dancing in the jungle, they declared ;'we come from a family of professional dancers and we live in the village yonder. By the direction of our mothers who got their living here, we perform at this spot the dancing, which our descent makes incumbent. King Chakravarman married two professional dancing girls, sisters Hamsi and Nagalata and although they belonged to a lower caste, he made Hamsi his first queen who enjoyed among the king's wives the privilege of being fanned with the chowries ²⁵Another king Uccala, married a dancing girl named Jayamati who became later his chief queen²⁶ King Harsa personally taught dancing girls how to act and dance.A study of the sculptures and reliefs on the walls and columns of old temples reveals figures of dancers with ornaments and graceful styles of hair-dressing .It appears

that classical Indian dancing as systematised by Bharata was in vogue in Kashmir ,and was assiduously studied and practised by the artistes ,Jayapida for instance ,is known to have been “acquainted with this Sastra”and could therefore relish the dance performed of a Gauda(Bengal) artiste, named Kamla, who performed in the temple of Kartikeya²⁸Drama also seems to have flourished in ancient Kashmir along with dance.As already noted; kashmirian authors wrote a number of dramas ,which it seems were staged by professional artistes .References to theatrical performances the stage and strolling players are common in the Rajatarangini²⁷The stage was at an elevated position ,lighted up with multi-coloured lamps.The players would dress appropriately and used yellow orpiment and other emollients and colours for their make up ²⁸The comic parts were played with great effect ,and generally depicted the life of a rapacious Kayastha or a newly –rich Damara.Apart from earnings by their performances, the strolling players received customary gifts from the king and nobles on festivals and fairs Music was cultivated as a fine art by both the king and the commoner .The Rajatarangini supplies several clues to the development of music in Ancient Kashmir .we are ,for instance, told that music was played in Buddhist Viharas in the time of Jalauka ,son of Asoka .²⁹The king was himself a lover of music and maintained a troupe of dancing girls and musicians. At the Hindu sacred shrines and in temples, music was played to the accompaniment of big drums, cymbals etc. At several religious ceremonies, particularly connected with Tantric worship, music was must. From a critical study of the Rajatarangini we find that the premier musical instruments were the lute, flute and the drum³⁰.Classical music was played on these .Besides ,there is a mention of Hudukka which may be compared to a big-pipe ³¹In the temples music was accompanied by the big drum ,conch and cymbals ³²Side by side with classical music, a kind of folk music also existed in ancient Kashmir.Chhakri which is so popular these days ,can be traced to the time of Kalhana (12th century AD)and even earlier. We are told that Bhiksacara who occupied the throne for a few months indulged in “playing music on earthen pots ,brass vessels and other such instruments”.There would be dancing and singing with pantomimic movement of the head ,hands and feet.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude we can say that the Ancient culture in Kashmir from food habits up to the wearing of clothes is actually an agglomeration of cultures from different regions of the world mainly the Central Asian Countries. The culture developed and enriched due to the influx of foreigners who came from different areas of the world. They brought with them new ideas and new cultures which had enriched the culture of Kashmir and made it a composite culture. The rulers in Kashmir who came from outside left no stone unturned to enhance the culture of the valley and that is why the customs and traditions of Kashmir are unique as far as the whole sub-continent is concerned and resembles more or less to the Central Asian Countries.

REFERENCES:

1. *Custom in Kashmiri is known as Rewaj and there are slight variations in the Rawaj of different parts of the Valley*
2. *Shafi, Aneesa; Working women in Kashmir, (New Delhi, 2002, A.P. H. Publishing Corporation), P. 13.*
3. *Abdul Majid Matoo, Kashmir Under the Mughals 1586-1752, p. 133; see also P N K Bamzai, History of Kashmir, Political, Social, Cultural From Earliest Times to the Present Day, Metropolitan, (New Delhi,1973), pp. 511-515*
4. *Abdul Majid Matoo, Kashmir under the Mughals 1586-1752, p 135*
5. *Abdul Majid Matoo, Kashmir Under the Mughals 1586-1752, p. 135; see also P N K Bamzai, History of Kashmir, Political, Social, Cultural From Earliest Times to the Present Day, p. 516-519*
6. *R.T, I,294*
7. *R.T,VII,930*
8. *Desopadesa,III*
9. *R.T,I,247,V, 380,VIII,2835*
10. *Nilamata, 550;Kuttanimata Kavya*
11. *Samayamatrka,VII s*
12. *R.T;V, 357,VII,928931,9*
13. *R.C.Kak, Ancient Monuments of Kashmir ,PI,XXIV,fig.5*
14. *Ibid,PI,I,fig.a.*



15. *Raj,viii-70*
16. *Raj ,vii-59*
17. *Raj;vii,707,717,858*
18. *Raj;viii-891*
19. *Ibid,vii-515*
20. *Ancient Kashmir M.M.Khan*
21. *Raj;i-151*
22. *ibid,v-361-85*
23. *ibid;vii-1460-62*
24. *ibid,vii-1440-41*
25. *ibid,iv-422-23*
26. *ibid;vii-285;viii-1950,1970,2178*
27. *ibid;viii-2825*
28. *Raj;i-140*
29. *ibid;ii-126;vii 285,1601;viii-2398-99.*
30. *ibid,vii-1173*
31. *ibid,viii-901-2*