

# Cultural Conditions Of Kashmir During 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Khursheed Ahmad Bhat**

Department of History, Jiwaji University,  
Gwalior M.P

**Abstract:** Culture refers to that part of the total repertoire of human action which is socially as opposed to genetically transmitted. 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. Modern ideas of culture arose through the work of field anthropologists such as Franz Boas. Subsequently, it was argued the concept of culture can provide ways of explaining and understanding human behavior, belief systems, values and ideologies. In the present-day cultural anthropology, analysis of culture may proceed at three levels: first, learned patterns of behavior; second, aspects of culture that act below conscious levels; and, third, patterns of thought and perception which are also culturally determined. In this contest, culture is a term mostly used as adaptive rather than material.

**Keywords:** Rouf, Ladishah, Chakri, Band Jeshana, Dumhal, etc.

## I. INTRODUCTION

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 Kashmiris culture. This was done mainly through the folk sources. The alien rulers (Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and Dogras) were interested in Kashmir primarily because of the heavenly comforts available here. They were hardly interested in Kashmiris and their culture. At some time, they imposed their own culture and language on the local inhabitants. Though some local groups aligned with the alien rulers mainly because of economic interests, the masses preserved the Kashmiris culture and transmitted to their next generations. Some of the changes which took place during the period of our study areas.

## II. CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The socio-economic burden, under which the Kashmiri labored when Gulab Singh took over the valley, was hardly conducive to any cultural activity. However, what little contribution they made to literature and art during the 19<sup>th</sup>

century and after was an off-shoot of their splendid cultural past. With increasing trade between the valley and the Punjab, literature and art were marked with influence from the south rather than the north-east, Afghanistan and Persia. Persian continued to be the court language for half a century more and we find several Persian scholars and poets in Kashmir attaining distinction.

## III. LITERATURE

Ancient Kashmir is said to have been the seat of Sanskrit learning and from this small valley have issued master pieces of history, poetry, romance, fable and philosophy. Sanskrit literature produced in Kashmir during ancient times attracted the attention of several Indian and European scholars. The state government established a research department, were many Sanskrit texts were edited, collated and published. The pundits who labored on these included Mahamahopadyaya Mukand Ram Sastri, Pundit Hara Bhat Sastri, Pundit Jagadhar Zadu and Pundit Madhusudan Kaul. The later, a great research and comments Abhinavagupta's Tantralok and other texts,

which won him recognition and fame among Sanskrit scholars of the world.

With the coming of the Muslims, Islamic influence penetrated deep into the valley. The most popular poet in Persian during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Mirza Mahdi who besides being a learned scholar was also a poet of eminence. Out all the Kashmiri poets in Persian who lived in the rest of India, the name of Sir Mohammad Iqbal stands preeminent. His poetry is well known to require any comments. Other poets are Raj Kaul Arzbeigi Dairi, Sanker Ju Akhun Girami, Taba Ram Turki, Dairi and Diwan Kirpa Ram etc. Kashmiri, the vernacular of Kashmir, has descended from Sanskrit. Actually Kashmiri is a very old language. During Muslim rule it was enriched by Persian diction and later on, in the modern period, Urdu and Hindi have been influencing considerably. The entire post-1947 period experienced no systematic, purposeful and continuous promotion of and support to the Kashmiri language. The Kashmiri language could not become the official language nor could be introduced in the state as the medium of instruction.

Kashmiri literature of the modern period starting with the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in the early stage dominated by Persian influence, Persian being the court language and the medium of polite literature both with regard to meter and language, the Kashmiri writers followed the models set by Persian poets and literatures. This had its advantages as well as draw backs.

From 1819-1880 when Parmanand died, productions in Kashmir were both rich and prolific. To this period we owe the epics like Ramayana by Prakash ram, romances like Shirin Khusro by Mahmud Gami, Gulrez by Maqbool Shah Kralwari, tragedies like Aknandun and Himal ta nagray by walliulah and saf-ud-din. Parmanands rendering of puranic and epic episodes like Shiv-lagan and sudama chritra, and numerous ghazals and ballads also come in the same period. The tradition of mystical verses was maintained by Aziz Darversh, Wahab Khar, Mirza Kak and number of known and unknown poets. We also find in this period the emergence of rouf poems, to the rhythmic dance of the Kashmiri ladies.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found the Kashmiri literature in a state of stupor. The reason was not far to seek. The court language which had for centuries been Persian was suddenly changed to Urdu. There developed a keen desire among the middle classes to acquire knowledge of Urdu and of the newly introduced English language. Kashmiris which had till then received inspiration from Persian was thrust into the background. By 1925, the new trend in Kashmir language and literature was faintly visible it took two decades more to assume concrete shape and blossom forth into multi-faceted literature, poetry, prose and drama.

With the spread of modern education, the study of English language received a fillip and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we witness the emergence of Kashmiri authorities who wrote in English. Foremost among them was Pundit Anand Koul, who was one of the first few Kashmiri to learn English. He was associated early with Rev. Hinton Knowles in compiling the dictionary Kashmiri proverbs and Riddles. His interest in the history and literature of Kashmir never flagged and his books Jammu and Kashmir state, the Kashmiri Pandit, archaeological remains in Kashmiris and Lalla-yogeshwari are

standard works on the subject. He also contributed extensively to research papers and journals in India and abroad on Kashmir history, Folk-Lore and Literature. The interest that the publication of Lalleswharis sayings in 1920 aroused in Europe encouraged the young writers in Kashmir to devote more attention to their mother tongue. But times had now changed and the theme and form of the Kashmiris poetry required accordingly to be modified. That the new generation of Kashmir poets did not ignore the modern trends is amply shown in the works of Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor who ushered in a new era in the cultural history of Kashmir.

His profession as a patwari brought him in close touch with the village folk. Their hopes and fears, their simple life and the hard ships and miseries that they had to undergo in earning a meal for them and their children touched the chords of his sympathetic heart. Mahjoor and A.A. Azad are identified as proponents of Kashmiris nationalism which they propagated through their poetry. Another great contemporary, Kashmiri poet and writer, zinda koul, known as master ji. He is a mystic, and he writes in popular language. One of his verse compositions, "the samran" ("remembrance") has been awarded a Sahitya Academy prize from New Delhi in 1956. He has brought in new rime schemes and rhythm patterns in Kashmir and among his poems, "ferry-man lead thou me across" is a popular patriotic prayer. Among other innovators in Kashmir literature during this stage we may mention specially Nand Lal Koul poet and dramatist who wrote a number of dramas, adapting or translating from Hindi and Urdu.

The English writers among Kashmiri are Ramachandra Kak, Jia Lal Koul, Prem Nath Bazaz and Jai Lal Riana. There were some Kashmirian writers in Urdu who received recognition and fame. The foremost were Pandit Nand Lal Koul Talib and Pandit Dina Nath Chikan Mast. Many budding poets received inspiration from eminent Urdu writers like Choudry Khushi Mohammad Nazir. Among such poets in Urdu may be mentioned Kamal-ud- din-Shaida, Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Dina Nath Dilgir, Shahzor Kashmiris, Abdul Ahad Barq and Nur Mohammad Roshan. Abdul Ahad Azad and Rahman Rahi, Mir Kamil are also famous Kashmiri writers. The famous Kashmiri literature writers of post-independence are Rahman Rahi, Ghulam Nabi Firaq, Amin Kamil, Farooq Nazki and Ghulam Nabi Khayal etc. The intelligentsias among the Kashmiris are now alive to the fine qualities of their language and literature, and it can only be hoped that with the establishment of better conditions, with a truly secular democracy in Kashmir, further development of Kashmiri literature will be a matter of course.

## MUSIC AND DANCE

Besides language, the Kashmiri culture has been greatly influenced by Central Asian and Persian cultures for both communities. Cultural music and dance like Wanwun, Rouf, Kashur Sufiana, Chakri, Band Jeshana and Ladishah forms a very important part of Kashmiri identity. It is important to note that Kashmiri culture is predominantly only in the valley of Kashmir. The other regions of the larger Jammu and Kashmir state, such as Jammu and Ladakh are very different from Kashmir.

## SUFIANA

Sufiana kalam is said to be the classical music of Kashmir. It was during Muslim rule in Kashmir that Kashmir's music absorbed certain influences from Iran, Arabia, Samarkand and Tashqand. Muqams, musical modes equivalent to ragas, and rhythmic patterns like neemdoor and Turki zarb were introduced into Kashmiri music at this time. "Music and dancing the Sufis believed to be essential in bringing about the state of ecstasy which enabled men to see God face to face, thereby moulding Kashmiri and Persian styles into few syntheses". The very names, Sufiana kalam and hafiza dancing, point to the Sufi influence. In many travel accounts we find references to the troupe of professional nautch girls of Srinagar. Dancing was confined to them and no respectable person, Hindu or Muslim, would dream of allowing his women- folk to perform in public. The nautch girls sang Sufiana kalam and Kashmiri Ghazals to the accomplishment of hafiz naghma "a dance the purpose of which was to express visually the meaning of the song". As late as 1920 the hafizas of Srinagar were greatly in demand at Weddings, Mailas and outdoor parties. It was after 1920 that the hafiza art rapidly declined. The growing popularity of the film dance and Hindustani songs contributed in no small measure to its decline. It may appear paradoxical to observe the Sufiana kalam which was once sung by the trained dancers is now sung by men.

As earlier stated that Sufiana kalam is said to be the classical music of Kashmir, which uses its own ragas and is accompanied by a hundred-stringed instrument called the santoor, along with the kashmiri saaz, wasool, tabala, setar and harmonium. It became famous throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The famous Sufiana singers are, Ghulam Hassan Sufi, Tibal Bakaal, Abdul Rashid Hafiz, Ghulam Nabi Shakhshaz and Raj begum etc. The most notable Kashmiri santoor player from Kashmir is Pandit Bhajan Sopuri.

## CHAKRI

Chakri is one of the most popular type of folk music played in Kashmir. Chakri is played with musical instruments like the harmonium, the rabab, the sarangi and the nout (pitcher). Chakri was also used to tell stories like fairy tales or famous love stories such as Yusuf Zulaikha, Laila Majnun etc. Chakri ends with the Rouf, though rouf is a dance form but few ending notes of chakri which are played differently and on fast notes is called Rouf. It is a very important part of the henna night during wedding for Kashmiri Pandits and the Kashmiri Muslims. The famous chakri singers during 20th century are Ghulam Nabi Shakhshaz, Gulzar Ganie, Salam Khodwan and Manzoor Ahmad Shah etc.

## ROUF

Rouf is a traditional dance form performed by girls on certain important occasions like Eid, Marriage and other functions. Rouf includes dancing and singing simultaneously. No musical instrument is required for this. Girls arrange themselves in two or three rows; each row has four to six girls. Each row of girls then moves one step forward and then back

in swaying motion while singing the Rouf song or Wanwun. Wanwun is also traditional folk songs of Kashmir sung by women's on the wedding occasions.

## LADISHAH

It is one of the most important part of the Kashmiri music tradition. Ladishah is a sarcastic form of singing. The songs are sung resonating to the present social and political conditions and are utterly humorous. The singers move from village to village performing generally during the harvesting period. The songs are composed on the spot on issues relating to that village, be it cultural, social or political. The songs reflect the truth and that sometimes makes the song a bit hard to digest, but they are totally entertaining.

## FOLK-SONGS

Kashmiri folk-songs are current in almost every Kashmiri home, particularly in the rural areas. The songs present considerable variety in theme, content and form. The broad classification of the songs is: love songs (lol-gevun), rug dance songs, pastoral songs, boatmen, spring songs, harvest songs, cradle songs, nursery rhymes and dirges.

Ghazals and Naats were also sung; the most notable singers are Abdul Rashid Farash, Wahid Jeelani and Shameema Azad etc.

The Dumhal and Band Pather are also famous dances in the Kashmir valley, the Dumhal is performed by men of the Wattal region and the Band Pather is performed by Bands (Baghats) people of Kashmir. Before the 1950, Band Pather was a celebrated tradition in the villages. The bands were the only credible and critical source of information about local and political happening. They would enter a village in the dark, holding torches raised on long bamboo sticks, and within a minute or so the village would erupt with the sounds of jesters. But things changed after 1987, when a rigged state election resulted in the formation of militant wings and the beginning of mujahidin insurgency. Only a handful of Band groups have continued to perform since the conflict begins in the Kashmir valley.

However, the innovations like Radio and cinema revolutionized the whole concept of pastime. Apart from serving as useful media of entertainment and instruction, Radio and cinema both begin to occupy a prominent place in the changing social order. No doubt, with the spread of vulgar tastes owing to the advent of cinema as also with the increasing popularity of film dance and Indian film music, the Sufiana kalam, vocal-cum instrumental music, essentially mystic, had only the survival value.

## PRINTING

In the field of art, Kashmir is not lagging behind. The Amar Singh technical institute, established at Srinagar in 1910, was responsible for creating among a few Youngman a taste for painting. But it was after 1931 due to the political upsurge that we find a number of artists coming into prominence. Dina Nath Wali's landscapes have been

appreciated widely. Trilok Kaul and Ghulam Rasool Santosh have held exhibitions of their paintings in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta and have received a good reception at the hands of art critics. P.H. Kachru, S.N. Butt, Mohan Lal Raina and Bansi Parimoo are artists of note.

These days, youth they can be seen making varied art works in the fine art school of Kashmir. There are many painters and cartoonists. Masood Hussain is a famous painter, and Malik Sajad and Basher Ahmad Basher are well known cartoonists.

## ARCHITECTURE

In the field of architecture there is not much of note. Expert for the new temple architecture of the Dogras who built the several temples in Kashmir, most of the building activities were confined to the repairs and renovations of old monuments and Mughal gardens. Under the inspiration of the British tourists and officials, several bungalows of the English villa type were built. This introduced a new trend in the building art and we thus find a curious blend of the Muslim arch and the English steeple in some of the buildings in Srinagar. The impact of newer building technologies on the traditional architecture of Kashmir has been devastating. From the last three decades, the whole outlook was changed, the Srinagar is now fast – developing market place, with modern glass and concrete monoliths replacing old building at a frenetic pace. Lal Chowk, Karan Nagar, Raj Bagh, Hyderpora, Sopore and Anantnag are the best towns of Kashmir valley, because of town planning and architectural development.

With the establishment of popular government in 1947, there has been a palpable resurgence in the field of art and culture. The cultural academy is doing yeoman's service in reviving the cultural traditions and encouraging the growth and proliferation of new ideas and themes.

## IV. FAIR AND FESTIVALS

With their long and chequered history and rich cultural background, Kashmiris have been taking great pleasure in celebrating festivals with elaborate colorful ceremonies. Some of these festivals were celebrated in honour of the advent of spring and summer. For instance, they greeted the spring with exultation and went in flocks to Badamwari (Almond garden) and paid homage to the sweet lilacs. Lawrence very significantly remarks: "It is not mere love of beauty of colour that impels them, but a spirit of thanks-giving that the winter with its miseries of cold and its dreary monotony of white snow has passed, and that the earth has come to life again with all her bright flowers and promise of kindly fruits". The following saying in Kashmiri gives us a fair idea of how the Kashmiri looked forward to the spring.

Wanddac chali shin galli bayi yi bahar

If winter comes, can spring be far behind

The people of the city celebrated the Badamwari festival collectively without any consideration of class and creed. Out in the almond gardens, one generally found Hindus and Muslims sitting side by side, drinking tea from their streaming samavars. On this occasion the songs of spring were also sung.

The wandering Watalas celebrated a special festival once a year when they flocked to Lala Bab's shrine near the Dal Lake. It was called Watal Mela (fair of watalas) or 'the feast of roses'. On this occasion the watalas settled many matters affecting their tribe and marriage alliances were made.

One popular feature of the Watal Mela was the dance carried tall banners, the emblems of the Mela, to the shrine of Lala Beb. They travelled on foot and gave performances on the way.

The Kashmiri Pandits held customary ceremonies on many religious festivals. Most popular among their festivals were the Shivratri or Heart, Nawreh or Navratra, Har Navmi, Ram Navmi, or Maha Navmi, Janamashtami, Pun, Raksha Bandan and Baisakhi. Of these Shivratri was the most important. Fish was an important article of diet on this day. On the eve of Baisakhi, the Kashmiri Pandits assembled at Ishbari, a locality about half a kilometer from Nishat Bagh and bathed in the sacred water of Guptganga spring. Like the first Navratra, the Baisakhi festival was also celebrated during season and the devotees used the occasion for relaxing in the Nishat Bagh. Some of them engaged doongas a day ahead of the festival and after the performance of religious rituals at the spring, spent the whole day in recreation. With the influx of the Punjab Hindus, the Dusserah began to be celebrated in Srinagar with great éclat.

Fairs and festivals have played a very vital role in the life of the Kashmiri Muslims. Among their religious festivals may be mentioned Moharram, Id-ul-Fitr, Id-ul-Zuha, Milad-un-Nabi, Shab-i-Barat, Shab-i-Qadr and Shab-i- Miraj Nouroz was celebrated by the Shais only. The Sunnis did not take out processions on the occasion of Moharram but they distribute cooked rice (tahar) and Sharbat among the poor. On Id-ul-Zuha, the devotees sacrificed sheep.

Among other popular festivals of the Muslims of Kashmir must be mentioned Urs-i-Makhdoom Sahib, Urs-i-Pir Dastgir, Urs-i-shah-i-Hamadan, Urs-i-Batmaloo, Urs-i-Charar-i-Shariff, Urs-i-Naqshaband Sahib and Urs-i-Hazaratbal. The various Mohallas of Srinagar like Batmaloo, Khawaja Bazar, and Khanaqah etc. are named after different saints. After the migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1987-90 from Kashmir to different parts of India, because of militancy. The Hindu and some Muslim festivals begin to decline in Kashmir.

## V. SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Both the Hindus and the Muslims of Kashmir have an elaborate code of rituals and ceremonies with regard to birth, marriage and death. A careful study of the old customs and traditions reveals that they still continue to be practiced by a great majority of the people. Western impact has not been felt in regard to these rituals and except for few highly westernized sections of the people; the rest of the Kashmir population continues to perform the old ceremonies.

The Muslims differed from the Hindus in many of their customs with regard to birth, marriage and death, but they had resemblances in certain respects. Both were superstitious. For instance, when there was a cholera or smallpox epidemic in the city, its occurrence was attributed to the *ginis* and God or goddesses. While the Muslims consulted then mullahs, the



Pandits performed some regular ceremonies when smallpox attacked their children. These ceremonies, however, ceased to exist owing to the spread of modern education. Similarly, the old system of having a grass bed for the mother at the time of her confinement was gradually being discarded, thanks to the efforts of the medical missionaries and practitioners who brought home to the people the dangers of this insanitary practice.

Till very recently the Muslims of the valley observed a very curious custom on times of natural calamities. As Lawrence writes: "Musalman's from all parts of the valley flock to Charar Shariff, and when scarcity is imminent, gather there and sit silent on the hills around, confessing their sins and begging pardon". This impressive ceremony was called Noufal. This belief is still in the hearts of the people. The great place for the confession of sins in the city was the Idgah, and to which were carried an emblem and the holy relics by the Muslims of Kashmir in a procession. Special prayers were offered in congregations at the Idgah for protection against the ravages of several calamities. It is of the interest to note that during the period under review, Noufal processions in the city were often taken by the mullahs at the command of the rulers. This was due to the fact that Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh also believed in the efficacy of Noufal prayers. The Hindus too were required by the Maharaja's to invoke God's help at the time of distress. On such occasions they would visit Sharka Devi's hill.

Both among the Hindus and the Muslims offerings were made to the dead on prescribed occasions. While the Hindus performed the shraddha ceremonies, the Muslims organized khatam-i-shariff. This concern for the dead was an indication of the fact that they consider themselves to be in continued connection with those whom they could not see any more. With such a support, even if it was of an imaginary nature, life, perhaps, became somewhat easier to bear.

In certain respects, the rituals of the Hindus and the Muslims were similar. For example, for childless parents it was customary to visit shrines, call the aid of saints and dervishes and to keep fasts in order that they might be blessed with children. Though the majority of the population of the valley embraced Islam in the fourteen century, they did not seem to have given up their old customs, rituals and beliefs. Devotions to, reverence for, and implicit trust in the shrines and mullahs played a larger part in the religious life of the average Kashmiri Muslim. And although Prophet Muhammad

(S.A.W) was venerated by the people. For them it is the shrines which protected the believers from the disease and disaster. They looked to it for aid in any enterprise. A Muslim woman who had no issue went to a priest or a Dervish for a charm or visited a shrine, where she tied a piece of string (daesh) to the inner entrance, pledging thereby that if she bore a child, she would make suitable offerings at the shrine.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In this work an attempt has been made to trace the cultural life of the Kashmiri people from 1900-2000 A.D. during the period of our study. The people of Kashmir were passing through a transitional period and witness a considerable change in the cultural life on account of a introduction of modern education and socio- religious reform movements, which were launched by different organizations for the upliftment of the people.

The Kashmiri people especially youths, adopt the new languages, new dresses and new life styles. All these developments created a situation in which the Kashmiri culture faced new challenges and new problems in modern times which it had not faced so far. The Urdu replaced the Persian as court language in early of the 20th century followed by democratic government after independence, has given the death blow to Kashmiri language. The Sufiana Kalam, Kashmiri folk, Band Pather, Art, was ignored. However now government and youth realize the loss and steps were taken to save the cultural heritage of Kashmir. Cultural academy was established for this purpose.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bates, 'Gazetteer'
- [2] Khan, Mohammad Ishfaq, History of Srinagar, 1846-1947, a study in socio-cultural change.
- [3] Parvez, Ahmad, Economy and society of Kashmir, a study in change and continuity (1885-1925)
- [4] The Ranbir, "Daughters of the Vitasta", 1940:
- [5] George, Grierson, Linguistic survey of India, vol. VIII, part 2,
- [6] Khan, Ishfaq "Persian influences in Kashmir in the sultanate period" Islamic culture, 1977