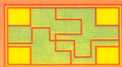
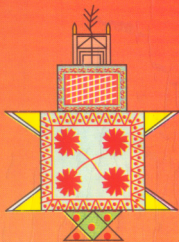


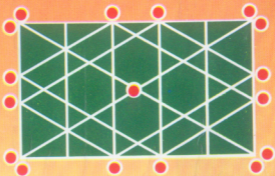
# KASHMIR HINDU SANSKARS

(Rituals, Rites and Customs)

A STUDY



S.N. Pandit



The present work is an attempt to reconstruct the earlier attempt made in 1982. Besides rendering it into the Roman script, it provides a close historical and cultural study of all those aspects of our rituals and customs coming under the purview of Sanskars as contained in our scriptures and are in vogue in the Kashmiri society since times immemorial. In addition to the socio-religious aspects of our Sanskars, the book presents a modern, scientific analysis and approaches in understanding our rituals, customs, faiths and beliefs prevalent in our society in a scattered form.

#### COVER

A replica of the 'Yagnya Sha:la' where the Sanskars are held. The abstracts show, the Kalsha, the sun and the moon, the Divl Mu:n, the ManDul, the Kshetraps, the earthen lamp, the Vedi: for holding a Kanya:da:n., the place of the Holy Fire, etc.,

#### BACK

Full abstract of the Kalsha etc., laid while performing the last rites.



Mr. S. N. Pandit, hails from Gairoo, (Noorpora), Kashmir, (J.& K). He joined Post-graduate Department of Kashmiri, Kashmir University, Srinagar as Research Assistant and during more than twenty eight years of his service cader as the Research Assistant in the said Deptt., he edited more than 20 books in Kashmiri which serve as the text-books for various courses of study in Kashmiri for the Under Graduate and Post-graduate levels. He also edited a number of issues of 'Anha:r' the famous Research Journal of the University in Kashmiri. Besides, M.A. in Sanskrit, he secured distinction in (Kamil), Hon. in Kashmiri. 'Humour and Satire in Kashmiri Language' the M. Phil thesis, presented by him, serves as a text for the students of the higher classes in the said field of learning. He also worked on the 'Elements of Nature in the Kashmiri Poetry', for the award of his Ph. D degree. Besides representing the University at a number of language/lexicon related Seminars in and out side the State, he is a member of the Editorial Board, Tri-lingual Dictionary Committee, published by the Ministry of Education, Govt., of India. Mr. Pandit is the author of the following prestigious publications of the University of Kashmir, Srinagar:-

1. Ro>pl Bhawa:ni:AkhSa:m,
2. KA:shiren BaTan HIndi RasIm  
TI Rewa:j.

.....Publisher

**KASHMIR HINDU SANSKARS**

*(Rituals, Rites and Customs )*

**A STUDY**

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**S. N. Pandit**

*M.A.Sans., M.Phil., Hons (Kash.)*

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## P R E F A C E

An attempt has been made in the '*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars*' (*Rituals, Rites and Customs*) – A Study, to refer and discuss almost all the *Sanskars*, rituals, customs and superstitious beliefs of the Hindus of the valley of Kashmir. Every care has been taken to include all the nomenclatures in the spoken Kashmiri language and the descriptions of all these beliefs including those contained in literary works on the subject published earlier from time to time.

This book will be useful as a reference manual for those anthropologists who are engaged in the deep study of the origin, physical and cultural developments, social customs and beliefs of mankind in general and the people of the valley of Kashmir in particular.

While keeping in mind the difficulties that a non speaker of the language may face in reading the Kashmiri language portions which have been incorporated in the text wherever necessary or the nomenclatures of some of the rituals and customs or culture-depending terms, the following phonemes have been incorporated in the book in addition to the ones that already exist while transliterating from other Modern Indian/Oriental language into the approved Roman Script: -

S.No: Particulars	High		Mid		Low	
	Short	Long	Short	long	Short	long
1. Central Vowels	I	I:	a	--	--	a:
	A	A	--	--	--	--
2. Front Vowels	i	i:	--	--	--	--
3. Mid Front	e	e:	e'	e'	--	--
4. Back Front	u	u:	--	--	--	--
5. Mid Back	o	o:	--	--	>	<
6. Un-aspirated voiceless palatal affricate					ts	tsh
7. Voiced dental fricative					z	--
8. Un-aspirated voiceless retroflex stop					T	Th
9. Voiced dental nasal					n	--

The phonemes have been approved and adopted by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Government of India and adopted by it in its publications while transliterating the Kashmiri language.

I must express my gratitude to Professor B. L. Fotedar who, in spite of his busy schedule, spared time to examine and re-arrange the text and make the work presentable. My thanks are due to Professor, Dr. B. L. Kaul, Ex. Head of the Department of Hindi, University of Kashmir, Srinagar who expressed himself by writing a Foreword after a through study of the research project. My thanks are also due to Dr. Shafi Shouq, Head of the Department of Kashmiri, University of Kashmir and Dr. R.L.Bhat, a well known columnist, critic and social worker, who gave me the moral support in completing the project. I express my gratitude to Sh. P.K. Shukla, Deputy Director Research, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, for his kind sympathy, steady encouragement and valuable suggestions during the course of completing the project. I give credit to the proprietors of M/S Gemini Computers, Janipur, Jammu, namely Mr. and Mrs. Dalip Pandita, my son and daughter-in-law who gave me their full assistance and co-operation during the process of preparing a computerized version of this work. Lastly, my thanks are due to Mr. Ashwani Dass for his technical help while taking up this job in hand.

This book is a humble presentation on my behalf to the scholars and students having love for the Kashmiri people, their language and their deep-rooted customs, rituals and social behaviors. Suggestions, if any, for its further improvement shall be a boon to the scholars of this language.

## FOREWORD

*Sanskars* is an act of purification or giving a shine to a surface after polishing or rubbing it. The essence of the word is purification of the mind, reformation, self-realization and knowledge of the Supreme Self. In general sense we can say that purification is an act that washes away ones sins and such ritualistic acts are called *Sanskars*. Actually the *Sanskars* are ritualistic obligations laid for the twice born which, according to *Manu* are twelve in number but the Kashmiri *Pandits* observe sixteen or twenty-four such ritualistic obligations.

The purposeful and thought provoking book, "*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars*, (Rituals, Rites and Customs) – A Study", by Sh. S.N. Pandit, besides presenting a clear picture of our wonderful civilizational and social life, also connects us with our glorious past. It is an essential tradition for us to have a suitable knowledge of our socio-religious customs and traditions as a Kashmiri *Pandit*. This understanding can protect and safe guard our racial identity.

The first attempt in this direction was made by Mr. Pandit in the year 1982 when the Post-graduate Department of Kashmiri, University of Kashmir published his research paper in a book form entitled, "*KA:shire'n Battan Hindi' Raslm TI Rewaj'*" in the Kashmiri Language. It was his first attempt in this direction. It is due to his continuous study and meaningful pondering for the last twenty-four years that the present composition of the book that extends over 461 pages, has come into existence.

Refinement is very essential to a progressive society. The basic principle of a Kashmiri *Pandit* is, "Live and let live". We can safely say that our civilization is a specially developed and a distinct branch of the great and famous Aryan civilization. A segregated clan of *Sarswat Brahmins* from the Aryan sect has been living in this mountainous region for the last several thousand years where the *Nagas*, the *Yakshas*, the *Pishachs* and also the *Aryans* lived collectively. Being away from the main stream of the *Bharta Varsha* and living in a particularly different geographical

region in the lap of a distinct natural habitat, new and different cultural elements and values found their way into the cultural life of the Kashmiri *Pandits*. That is why the Aryan civilization that developed in the Kashmir region is known as the 'Kashmiri *Pandit* Civilization.' I want to point out one more thing for my readers that culture, rituals, rites and orthodoxy are not synonymous. *Sanskars* denote purification; rites and rituals symbolize order, and continuity. Tradition is a continuous and never ending chain of customs and orthodoxy is a sign of unchanging and rigid traditions.

The writer has discussed the rites, rituals and customs of the Kashmiri *Pandits* in detail and with reason. The author has also tried to present the facts as contained in his treatise in a systematic manner and in their historical context and has divided the table of its contents into seventeen chapters. Keeping in view the religious background and the social considerations the author has discussed in appropriate details the pre-birth and post-birth *Sanskars*, the *Sanskars* pertaining to the adolescence in a scholarly manner. The '*Yagnyopavita*' *Sanskar*, its social, religious and philosophical importance, the meaning and significance of the '*Gayatri Mantra*', the three obligations of a man, marriage as a *Sanskar*, the rituals, rites customs and festive celebrations held on the eve of our marriages, our pre and post-marriage rituals, the three stages of an individual, the *Grahashth Ashram*, the *Vanprasth* and the *Sannyas* and above all the last rites which I consider as the most lucid and essential of all the *Sanskars*, have been discussed appropriately. Keeping in view all the facts the writer has discussed diligently all the auspicious days in a particular year and the reasons behind such considerations. The religious rites performed on such days, their social utility, the ritualistic performances connected with such beliefs have also been discussed in detail by the author. *Navreh*, *Zangl Tray*, *BhAdra KA:li Jayanti:*, *Shravanl Punim*, *Janam AshTami*, *Maha: Navam*, *Gadl Batl*, *Gorl Tray*, *He'rath*, *Sonth* and *Navreh Ma:vas*, all these festivals have a special significance in our social and cultural life and we celebrate all these days with religious fervor and with full

faith and devotion. The author has laid down his views about their relevance in a lucid manner.

Our community faced the realities of life boldly and with self-confidence fighting back the hardships of migration that continue till today. There are very few examples in the world history where the people have tried to keep themselves united and combined as a single group after having been ousted from their homes and hearths and compelled to lead the life of refugees and that too in their own country and State. But still the Kashmiri *Pandit* has kept alive his tradition of celebrating his festivals, rites and rituals. He has worshipped the '*VaTakh Nath Bhairva*' in his single-room tent and thus kept alive the tradition of celebrating his *Shiv Ratri*. Such devotion and self-confidence can rarely be seen among the refugee societies in the annals of the world history.

The author has discussed in the background of beliefs held by various sections of the society the auspicious and ominous horal moments, planets and position of stars and their consequent effects, superstitions concerning auspicious and inauspicious omens and the duties of a Kashmiri *Pandit* couple in the family and the rituals which they perform in their day to day life.

No doubt there are a number of rituals and festivals which have been given up either due to our slavery for centuries under foreign rule, or due to the tyrannical massacres at the hands of the fanatics from time to time and then as a result of the recent exodus from our motherland. Actually the writer has tried to assemble and unite in a systematic manner the scattered pearls of our past civilization for our present readers.

The characteristic aspects of the life of a Kashmiri *Pandit*, the depth of his thoughts and impulses in preservation of his *Sanskars* and how much he has remained associated with the cultural heritage of his forefathers - the present study makes a purposeful reference to all these important facts.

It is after a long time that a book based on Hindu ethos, which, besides being based on sound reasoning, is also thought provoking and educative. Earlier books published on the subject have lacked research and scholarship.

At the time of working on the *Sanskars*, one needs to take three facts into consideration. One is the religious importance of the *Sanskar* and its order of preference, the second is its civilizational aspect its utility, and its historical development in a society and lastly the acceptance accorded to the *Sanskar* by the general public. Now a days the scientific aspect of the *Sanskars* is being discussed widely. For instance we can take the *Yagnyopavita Samakar* after which the boy becomes a *Pandit*, a well-read person from the religious point of view. He becomes a '*Karma Kandi*', a twice-born *Brahmin* and thus he attains a second birth. From the civilizational point of view he gets attached with his group or the family traditions etc., and gets the social sanctions to fulfill his social obligations independently. The importance of celebrating '*Divgo>n*' at the time of the *Yagnyopavita* or the marriage in its religious or social context has also been discussed in detail. While the impurity on account of the birth of a male child in a Kashmiri Hindu family ends on the date of holding his *Jatkarn Sasnskar*, this impurity ends on the date of the *Divgo>n* in case of a girl. I think that the function of *Divgo>n* prior to the *Yagnyopavita* or the marriage is a kind of prayers offered to our gods and goddesses in our effort to invoke their blessings.

The *Amavasya* of preparing hotchpotch in honour of the *Yaksha*, commonly known as "*Khe 'tsi Mavas*" held on the dark fifteenth day of the month of *Pausha*, is a festival of brother-hood and peaceful co-existence This is a festival of affection, brother-hood and mutual co-existence among the *Nagas*, the *Pishas*, the *Yakshas* and the Aryans, who called themselves as the most advanced people. This festival was held to bind all of them firmly in one social string.

The auspicious occasions relating to our farming (from Spring up to Autumn) have found an ample space in the book. It is followed by a bibliography and an index spread over 27 pages. The author has tried to make the work of the readers easier in locating the place-names in the book, which is worth praise because such details involve much labour, and understanding.

I am confident that the book, '*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars* (Rituals, Rites and Customs) – A Study' will prove a useful reference book in understanding the history, religion, civilization and various other social aspects of the Kashmiri *Pandit* Society. Our community was actually in a great need of such a scholarly book since long and this need was felt by Mr. Pandit who has fulfilled this need by presenting a suitable book after working on it laboriously and continuously for more than twenty-four years. Future scholars and critics of anthropological studies will adjudge and admire how far the author has succeeded in achieving this goal successfully.

Dated: Jammu (J. & K.)  
Navreh  
March 30, 2006.

Dr. B.L. Koul,  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, the Pandits of Kashmir, are an old people. Our history goes back to more than five thousand years. When the valley was desiccated in historical times, human groups began their settlement on the land. In the process, because of historical and geographical imperatives, they had to intermingle. Thus was born the indigenous race of the forebears of the present Kashmiri people. This is what we can draw from the *Nilmata Purana*.

At the end of the day, and after great churning, all racial groups involved in the process of forging one uniform pattern, converged into the Aryan mainstream of *Vedic* orientation. This leads to the formation of somewhat uniform social and cultural ethos of the emergent race of ancient Kashmiris.

During the long period of our chequered history, the indigenous Kashmiris have weathered many cataclysms and braved many catastrophes. At times these were shocking and at occasions never breaking. Millennium after millennium they met with intense social turmoil and civilizational onslaughts. Yet the resolute people had to look for a new spirit released by these cataclysms.

But the social revolution of early 14<sup>th</sup> century had far reaching consequences for the entire Pandit community. It virtually demolished the millennia old social and cultural structure whose roots served as the fountainhead for the survival of the indigenous people. Thus the Pandits lost their history seven hundred years ago and are yet to rebuild it even by bits and slices.

The baffling question still remaining without a precise answer is how did this small and rather negligible remnant of the indigenous people hold on so tenaciously, and at great pains, to its antiquated social and cultural heritage and its symbols despite the hostile environs threatening its survival intermittently. Like all groups of indigenous people elsewhere, subjected to external physical and civilizational incursions, the Kashmiri Pandit also had to devise through intuition means and methods of their survival. Its commendable aspect is that in the great struggle for physical survival, the Pandits laboriously carried from generation

to generation the rather cumbersome baggage of the manifestations of their identification symbols.

Students of the history of indigenous people know in the event of pervading social revolution some of their local elements try to identify themselves with external civilizational entrepreneurs either out of self-aggrandizement, temptation or fear. This naturally makes the community more vulnerable to the threats of extinction. Pandits were no exception.

As has been hinted at the beginning, the Vedic civilization essentially remained the prime ingredient of ancient Kashmirian culture. From the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Samhitas* and other *Sutras*, the indigenous Pandits drew their philosophy, mythology and civilizational trapping. There is a plethora of evidence to show that the indigenous Kashmirian Pandit willingly identified himself with the religious and mythological mainstream of Bharata, the land of great epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. He adopted the deities with supernatural powers as his mythological mainstay. He created local replicas of the holy *tirthas*, The *Gangabal*, *Prayaga* and *Koti-tirtha*, besides those exclusive to his Kashmir *mandala*. He gave new contours and profile to gods and goddesses, *asuras* and *bhairavas*. This was his ingenuity. His rites, rituals and customs remain closely appended to the phenomenon.

To the ordinary Kashmiri Pandits, rites, rituals and customs pervading the entire spectrum of their social and cultural life, remained prime symbols of their identity. These were in full consonance with the nature, which never tolerated alienation. Thus the Vedic tradition remained deeply embedded in the ethos that snowballed with the passage of time. True, in the course of their long history of deep attachment to identification symbols, the Kashmiri Pandit might have unintentionally forgotten part of historical and mythological legitimacy of these manifestations. But their uninterrupted observance on a mass scale gave them valuable support.

There is no second word about the great antiquity of Pandit rites, rituals and customs. They are amusingly intricate and to some extent rather unwieldy. Some of the Pandits have moved away from their mythological moorings and may not be over-enthusiastic of their basics. History does not accept immobility.

But what is interesting is that despite the onslaught of speed and suspense of modern life, most of the Pandits, generally responsive to modernity, have tried to stick to these marks of identification and heritage. It is inspiring to note that the Pandits have found a delicate and yet colourful balancing exercise of responding scientific and technological advancement of modern times and to the antiquated traditions without allowing contradiction to cause frustration or aberration. It is a matter of blending myth and reality, material with spiritual, earthly with cosmic and natural with supernatural.

S. N. Pandit's work is a labour of love. He has compiled the Almanac of the Pandit Sanskars at a time when the entire community has entered the fifteenth year of its exile. In drastically changed circumstances forcing assimilation of the community into the vast Hindu milieu of India, only to get submerged and lost, the survival of Pandit identity seems almost uncertain. However, the record of how the Pandits were identifiable, produced by Soom Nath Pandit is a commendable exercise. I think that this work will remain a lasting anthropological evidence of a vanishing indigenous group of people on the sub-continent.

Jammu,  
25-2-2006.

Prof. Dr. K. N. Pandita  
Ex. Director,  
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## INTRODUCTION TO KASHMIR HINDU SANSKARS

It is generally accepted that Hinduism is not a religion but a 'Dharma' – a way of life, a code of human conduct and a belief in the principle, 'live and let live'. Some thinkers are of the view that this loose type of system is the main reason of its survival through the ages while others consider it to be the main cause of its restricted growth. It may be true that rigidity in beliefs is good for the survival of a religion, but that it leads to its stagnation, can hardly be denied. This is what our great *Rishis* have propagated among their disciples while imparting the codes of conduct and Dharma to them. "As you sow so shall you reap", is not a saying in our scriptures but is the essence of our religious performances and practices. Alas! we have misused our religious tolerance and religious freedom.

Actually the whole Indian sub-continent is a single block of a community called, the Hindus. Much earlier than the advent of caste system in the sub-continent, the *Naga* children of *Kashapa* from *Kadru*, due to the persecution of *Garuda*, the son of *Kashapa* from his second wife, '*Vanita*', were directed to live in the safe valley of Kashmir under the protection of *Nila*. The decedents of *Kashapa* were all considered to be the *Swaraswat* Brahmins. Besides, some scattered families of the *Pishachas* were also residing in the valley of Kashmir prior to the arrival of the *Nagas*. The peculiar geographical boundaries, the climate of the region and the local social relationship had, made the Kashmiri society so compact that the great storm of caste system, after swaying the whole sub-continent, lost its impact on reaching the valley of Kashmir. Thus the people of the valley retained in tact their Brahmnic order which they had imbibed from their fore-fathers. Therefore, all the scholars of great fame in various fields of learning which the valley has given to the world, were all Kashmiri Brahmins.

The *Puranas* and the *Smritis* contain that at the onset of the first *Manvantra*, *Brahma*, the creator of this universe, directed nine *Rishis* to inhabit this newly created part of the land that had emerged after draining the waters of the *Sati*



*Sara*. They are, *Marichi*, *Atri*, *Angira*, *Pulastya*, *Vishvamitra*, *Bharadvaja*, *Gautama*, and *Jamadagni*. *Maharshi Mirichi*, considered the greatest among these, is said have been the main cause of establishing human society on this earth and is thus called the '*Prajapati*'. The last of these *Rishis*, i.e., *Jamadagni* is considered to be the proponent of the Vedic rituals. But the distinct character of Kashmiri rituals and *Sanskars* strictly follow the doctrines put forth by *Laugakshi*. With the passage of time these rituals and customs came to serve as pillars of the Dharma.

Besides the scholars of Dharam Shastra, the number of Kashmiri luminaries in other fields of learning, was not small. The most famous among them are *Kalhan Pandit*, *Jon Raj*, *Shrivara*, *Bhamah*, *Vamana*, *Mamatta*, *Raudratta*, *Anand Vardhana*, *Abhinava Gupta*, *Udhatta*, *Jayrath*, *Rajanaka*, *Ananda Rattan Kantha*, *Somananda*, *Jaggdhar Bhatta*, *Keshav Bhatta*, *Anant Ram Shastri*, and many others and all of them belonged to the same Brahmin priestly class whose contribution to the society and to the literature of the world in general and of India in particular, cannot be under-estimated. Then why this luminary class of the Kashmir society got neglected and finally almost vanished, un-sung and un-heard? One reason is that the Kashmir society developed and lived in an aloof and peculiar geographical, and climatic surroundings and continued to maintain its rites, rituals and ceremonies without any change that amounted to stagnation. But there were great social, economic and religious upheavals in the whole Indian sub-continent that resulted in the creation of various castes and sub-castes among Hindus. The Hindu society accepted the changes in the social order but retained its old religious fervour firmly even in the castes. Such was not the case with the Kashmiri society. There were sudden and total changes but no caste formation. Since all were Brahmins, they performed all their religious rites themselves. With the passage of time, the elderly persons of the affluent class who till yesterday officiated over their family rites and rituals gave up doing so and employed *Pandit/ Purohits* (Brahmins) for this job. The person who served as a *Purohit* by himself was never taken back by the society he belonged to. All of us know that *Pandit Shri Bhatt*, Prime Minister of Bad Shah, *Zain-ul-*

*Abadin*, was a great reformer and had foresight. He wanted that the *Pandits* who had changed their faith during the Islamic invasion be brought back into the fold of Dharma. They were got purified by the order of the king but their own society did not own them and nicknamed them as '*Buhuri*'. Even today, the Kashmiri society has some reservation with this class as they have with the '*Purohit*' or the priestly class. The sad story is that the temple built at *Vicharnag, Srinagar*, by the progeny of this great reformer is been nicknamed as "*Buhuri Mandar*" and the local Hindus desist from entering into this temple. Any body from any part of the world can build a place of worship in any part of the valley and the people of that faith readily accept and use it. But that is not the case with Kashmiri *Pandit* society. Though all the Hindus of the valley have only one caste, creed and belong to the same '*Saraswat Goira*' yet the people who were reconverted to their parental faiths, were not accepted by their own brethren and were declared as "*Melacha*" and the place where they were settled was named as '*Malech Mar*'. They had ever their separate '*Purohits*'. This is the only case of mass re-conversion of its kind in the whole history of Kashmiri Hindu society, which, unfortunately, was a complete failure, because the re-conversion put them in a different caste, thought the rites and rituals performed by them are the same as of the rest of the Kashmiri *Pandits*.

With the advent of Muslim rule in Kashmir, the official language changed to Persian. A large section of the Hindu society took to the study of languages like Persian and Arabic. Here too they left their mark and we have multilingual Kashmiri *Pandit Purohit* luminaries like, *Kalhan Pandit*, *Pandit Bhawani Dass Kachroo*, *Brhman Raja Chandra Bhan*, *Brhman Lichiram 'Saroor'*, *Raja Anandram Karihaloo* and others, who made a name in the realm of Persian literature. Things turned from bad to worst during the reign of the Sultans. No *Purohit Pandits* were left in the society who could officiate over the religious rites, ceremonies and rituals. Again, it was during the reign of Bad Shah, *Zain-ul-Abadin* that the society decided to spare their sons-in-law or the elder nephews (from sister's side) to perform the ritualistic activities in a family and they became the *Purohits*. Thus a new class of *Purohits* came up in each

family that was later disowned by the society and given a different caste, 'Goar' and it became a 'dependent class' living on the doles and favours of the affluent class, the 'Ka:rkun'. Later in our times, this state of affairs compelled them to take up other means of livelihood to save themselves from progressive poverty and social discrimination. This loose type of priest-hood in Kashmir is unique. In Christianity, the priest is held in esteem and it is the duty of the Church to look after him according to his position in the Order. They have a strong missionary outfit and conversions are open to Christianity and with strong follow-up action. The same is the case with Buddhism and Islam.

No body can deny the fact that the repeated repressions by the alien rulers and numerous migrations from the main land have made some of our rituals difficult to observe but as soon as the society had some peace and prosperity, the rituals and rites flourished again. No doubt, now the priestly class officiating such rites and rituals has almost vanished and a new generation of priestly-class is coming up, that in no way is connected with the profession as it was in the past. It is most likely that our *Sanskars* will get abridged or even changed under the new un-initiated and un-committed class indulging in priest-hood as a side business and it is feared that we might forget and give up some of our rites and rituals, which we have been observing since times immemorial. The present publication is an attempt lest we should forget the nature and observance of our age-old traditions, rituals and rites in the changes that are taking place in Kashmiri Hindu Society for various reasons over which we have no control.

The Women-folk of Kashmiri Hindu Society have done much to keep all these rituals and customs alive to this day and the society has given due place to their efforts and their strict observance of ritualistic performances have been nick-named as 'Ladies Dharama *Shastra*', which, though not available in any written form, has attained the respectability of the 'Fifth Veda'. These rituals and customs, generally called the '*Sanskars*' have been flowing in the form of a rivulet from the high mountain tops, sometimes in full vigour when the circumstances were most conducive and sometimes

in deep-distress under the historically difficult conditions since the very beginning of this society. With the end of every un-favourable condition, these have revived again with more vigour and enthusiasm. Our rituals and customs reflect our wisdom, collected over ages our collective experiences of sorrows, happiness, griefs and hopes. These undergo changes with change in times and history. In this way the forgotten rituals come to the forefront and those, which had a clear currency till yesterday, become obsolescent. But these still revolve round the central Faith - the Dharma. We have been thus perpetuating the civilizational, ethical and cultural heritage in our rituals, customs and festivals. In this way we have been also performing our duty of furthering the cause of our 'Dharma', consciously or unconsciously.

It is most essential to explore the virtues of rituals and customs in a living society in order get an insight into its social, cultural, economic, psychological and anthropological patterns. The '*Kashmir Hindu Sanskars*' (Rituals, rites and customs)- A study, is an attempt towards this end. It is a comprehensive study and includes more details on the subject than recorded hitherto. Every care has been taken to include almost all the details left by the authors of the previous works on the subject. It was felt that they lacked research and scholarship while initiating their work on this subject. But still it is a universally known fact that nobody has been able to speak "the last word" and no-body will do so in future including the humble writer of this book.

*Shiv Rratri:*  
26-2-2006

S.N. Pandit,

## CONTENTS

1. <i>preface.</i>	iv
2. <i>Foreword.</i>	vii.
3. <i>Acknowledgement.</i>	xiii.
4. <i>Introduction to Kashmir Sanskars.</i>	xvii.
4. <i>Contents.</i>	xxiii.
<i>Chapter One</i>	
1 Civilization and Rituals.	1.
2. Aspects of Nature Worship in our Rituals.	9.
3. Gotra.	14.
<i>Chapter Two.</i>	
1. Our Rituals.	23.
(I) Pre-Natal Sanskars and Rituals.	27.
1. Bijwapan/Garbhadan.	27.
2. Simantonayan.	28.
3. Pumsawan.	29.
(II) Post-birth Rituals concerning the Brahamacharya Ashram.	31.
1. The Birth of a Child.	31.
2. Truy, (Third Day).	38.
3. Shra:n So>ndar, (Bathing).	39.
4. Jatakarn (Kaha Ne'thr).	43.
5. Namakarn. (Naming).	45.
6. Nishkraman /Ma:sl Nyathlr	46.
7. Tsatj:ihim Shra:n.	47.
8. Anl Pra:shun.	51.
9. Kan tso>mblni'.	53.
10. Vo>harvod.	54.
11. Zarl Ka:say.	57.
12. Mangl Anun.	64.
<i>Chapter Three Yagnyopavita –Philosophical and Historical Perspective.</i>	
1. Zyun Tsatun.	80.
2. KhAri:dA:ri:	82.

3. Dapun.	82.
4. GarI Na:vay.	86.
5. MA:nzi Ka:tin.	90.
6. Devgo>n.	98.
7. Duri' BatI.	112.
8. Hawan Sha:la.	115.
a). AgnI Ko>nD.	118.
b). Hum ( Hom).	120.
c). Social Gatherings.	123.
d) Mekhala Sanskar and the Folk Songs.	130.
9. Yoni Tra:vun.	132.
a). Vidya:rambh.	133.
b). Yagnyopavita by Kula Guru.	134.
c). Yagnyopavita by Parents.	136.
d). A:zya Darshan.	148.
e). Va:rida:n.	149.
f). Abi:d.	158.
g).The Ga:yatri Mantra.	161.
h). Netra PaT.	163.
i). Ma:sI Do>d TI Po>fl Cha:y.	164.
j). Post Mekhala Rituals.	165.
k). Sna:nvidi.	167.
l). Ko>shal Hom.	170.

*Chapter Four. Kha:nder - Marriage.*

1. Tye'kin Millna:vlni.	173.
2. Za:tukh Mangna:vun.	174.
3. LADkI / LADki: Wuchin	175.
4. GanDun.	176.
5. Marriage – A Historical Perspective.	178.
6. KhandrIki KIsm.	185.
7. KhandrIki RasIm.	188.
8. A Table of Marriage Rituals.	189.
a). Tomul TsaTun.	191.
b). Va:kh da:n.	194.
c). Mas Mutsrun.	194.
d). Singa:r.	196.

e) LagnI Chi:ri.	199.
<i>Chapter Five, Marriage – Main Functions.</i>	203.

(a) Main Functions at the Groom's House.	203.
1. Dasta:r BAndi:.	203.
2. Vyu:g.	204.
3. Bara:t	208.
(b) Main Functions at the Bride's House.	208.
1. Swa:gath.	209.
2. Jai Ma:la:.	210.
3. Vyu:g.	214.
4. Sab.	216.
5. Da:rI Pu:za:.	221.
6. Kanya dan.	223.
7. Yoni Porud.	226.
8. GangI Vye's.	227.
9. AthI Wa:s.	228.
10. La:yi Boy.	230.
11. SaftI PAdi:.	232.
12. Abi:d.	236.
13. Pa:ran Du: ni.	237.
14. Dayi BatI.	237.
15. PoshI Pu:za:.	239.

*Chapter Six. Post-Marriage Functions.*

(a) Functions held on the day of the marriage.	243.
1. Ro>khsat.	244.
2. KadI Ta:r.	248.
3. SatIra:th.	248.
4. ZA:m Bra:nd.	249.
5. MAti Mo>har.	250.
6. KuTh dyun.	251.
(b) Functions held on subsequent dates.	252.
1. Pra:ya:chit.	252.
2. Ko>shal Hom.	253.
3. TrankI Ha:vun.	254.

4. Sha:ndI KAr.	255.	15. Dwa:dashi ( Ba:h )	309.
5. RoTh Khabar.	256.	16. Da:n PratiTha:	311.
6. PhirI Sa:l	257.	<i>Chapter Eleven. Auspicious days of the year.</i>	313.
7. PhirI LaTh.	258.	1. Nav Reh.	316.
8. HA:ziri: .	258.	2. ZangI Tray.	317.
9. Chay ChawIvIni.	259.	3. Durga: AshTami:.	318.
10. GarI Atsun.	259.	4. Ra:mI Navmi:.	319.
(c) The Festivals of the Year of Marriage	260.	5. VaishA:ki:.	319.
1. Vo>har VA:di.	260.	6. Hanuman Jayanti	320.
2. Ne:trI Vo>harvod.	261.	7. Vi:ta:l Shayam.	320.
3. Shra:vnI Punim.	262.	8. Vijay Saftami.	321.
4. ZarmI Sattam.	262.	9. GanI Tso>da:h.	322.
5. Shishur La:gun.	262.	10. BhAdrI KA:li: Jayanti:.	322.
6. He'rath.	264.	11. Ze'yaThI A:Tham.	323.
7. Nav Reh.	264.	12. Nirjala:Ka:h.	324.
8. ZangI Tray.	264.	13. Ro>pi Bhawa:ni: Jayanti:.	324.
(d) Other Functions of General Nature,	265.	14. Ha:rI Satam.	325.
1. NavI Shi:n.	265.	15. Ha:rI A:Tham.	326.
2. Do>d Dyun.	266.	16. Ha:rI Navam.	326.
<i>Chapter Seven. Grahastha Ashram.</i>	267.	17. Ha:rI tsoda:h.	327.
<i>Chapter Eight Va:n Prasth</i>	271.	18. Ha:rI Punim	328.
<i>Chapter Nine Sannya:s Ashram</i>	273.	19. Kamla Ka:h.	329.
<i>Chapter Ten. Antim Sanskar.</i>	277.	20. Shra:vanI Ba:h.	329.
1. AnItsre'Th,- Ante'shtTi:	281.	21. Shra:vnI Punim.	330.
2. Dah Sanskar.	286.	22. Navdal tso>ram. .	331.
3. AstrIkI Tulni.	296.	23. Tsandan ShyashTi.	332.
4. DAhim Do>h.	298.	24. Janam AshTami.	333.
5. KAhim Do>h.	300.	25. Darbi Ma:vas.	334.
6. BAhim Do>h.	302.	26. Vinayak Tso<ram.	334.
7. Chalun.	303.	27. GangI A:Tham.	336.
8. Phchiwa:rI.	304.	28. Lal Ded Jayanti:.	337.
9. Ma:siwa:rI.	305.	29. VyathI Truwa:h.	338.
10. ShaDmos.	305.	30. AntI Tso>da:h.	339.
11. Ti:l.	306.	31. Ka:mbIri Pach.	339.
12. WAharWA:r	307.	32. Nava Durga	340.
13. Shra:dha.	307.	33. Maha: Navam.	340.
14. TirthI Shra:dha.	308.	34. Dashihar	341.

35. DI:pI Ma:la:.	341.
36. Ga:DI BatI.	342.
37. Maha:kA:li: Jayanti:.	343.
38. La:vsI tso>da:h.	344.
39. Khye'tsi Ma:vas.	344.
40. Sishar SA:nkra:th.	346.
41. Shiva Chaturdashi.	347.
42. RangIDo>y.	348.
43. GorI Tray.	349.
44. BishmI A:Tham.	351.
45. Ka:vl Punim.	352.
46. He'rath.	354.
47. Huri A:Tham.	356.
48. Ga:DI Ka:h.	357.
49. Va:glri Ba:h.	357.
50. Shiv Ra:tri.	358.
51. He'rtsI Sala:m.	362.
52. Du:ni Ma:vas.	363.
53. Ti:II A:Tham.	364.
54. Sonth.	365.
55. Navreh Ma:vas.	366.
<i>Chapter Twelve</i> Auspicious Days Connected with Farming.	369.
1. Basant PA:ntsam.	370.
2. Bumsin Ka:h.	371.
3. A:dI r.	373.
4. VAhra:th.	373.
5. ShraVanI Punim.	374.
6. ZarmI Satam.	374.
7. Harud.	375.
8. Ka:mbI r.	375.
9. Manjho>r TAhAr	376.
10. ChII.	377.
11. PhrA:vi Punim.	378.
<i>Chapter Thirteen</i> Sa:th TI Tauhum.	379.
(a) Auspicious Moments	379.
1. Sa:th.	379.

2. Nyechturi.	380.
(b) Tauhum - Superstitions.(I)	382.
i. DraThI PA:ntsuk.	382.
ii. KarI PA:ntsuk.	383.
iii. Mu:l.	383.
iv. GanDa:nt/Ashli:h.	384.
3. Gruhun.	385.
4. Bunyul	387.
5. MalIma:s Banuma:s.	388.
6. Wa:r.	390.
<i>Chapter fourteen.</i> Grah ManDal -Our Planets.	395.
1. GrIhIdi.	395.
2. The Planets and their effect in various Zodiac Positions	398.
<i>Chapter Fifteen.</i> (A) Ni'shi:d Sa:th. - Ominous Moments	405.
1. ZyuTh.	405.
2. Traha: and Traspak.	406.
3. Ma:sa:nt.	406.
4. Sankra:nti.	406.
5. Sa:DI Sati.	407.
6. Daya:.	407.
7. Gruhun.	408.
(B). Important works determined on auspicious occasions.	410.
<i>Chapter sixteen.</i> Tauhum - Superstitions (II),	413.
1. Po>nd.	413.
2. Zang.	415.
3. Hu:ni Wungun.	416.
4. Buth Wuchun.	417.
5. Po>t a:lav.	418.
6. So>pun.	418.
<i>Chapter Seventeen</i> The.Daily Rituals.	421.
(A) Rituals for Men	421.
1. Ne'ndri wo>thun.	421.
2. Zal-Mal tra:wun	422.
3. AthI-Buth chalun.	423.

4. Yoni chalun.	423.
5. Shra:n karun.	424.
6 Sandhya karIni.	424.
7. Tarpan dyun.	425.
8. BatI khyo>n.	426.
(B) Rituals for Women.	428.
1. Brand fush dyun.	428.
2. AthI -Buth chalun.	430.
3. Sani Va:ri barni.	430.
4. BatI ranun.	431.
5. Sandhya: Tso<ng za:lun.	433.
Select Bibliography.	435.
Index.	439.
Errata Et Addenda	463

## Chapter one

## CIVILIZATION AND RITUALS

Life is a series of perceptions and responses and in turn these form the basic ingredients of human civilization. Every performance of our life comprises two parts - the first part is, "Knowing" and the other is "Doing." In fact while receiving the gift of life from the Almighty, man wished for three blessings, "Knowing", "Seeing" and "Doing." We constantly perceive things, human beings, events and situations (Knowing) and respond to these (Doing). The same is true of all different civilizations of the world having various concepts and religions. Every religion has its own ethos and rituals. With the coming of the world closer, the assimilation and dissimulation of civilizations and cultures has been going on and it has effected our ritualistic conceptions and practices as well.

Every individual is a part and parcel of a society and one or the other civilization encompasses every society. All the great civilizations abound with their scriptural wealth. In the Indian scriptural parlance, life is nothing but 'Janna' and 'Karma'. In order to gain knowledge, we need to have faith in whatever we are directed to do or whatever our forefathers have been doing. Faith is instrumental in accomplishing the ultimate goal. We believe and have faith in whatever our sages, seers and saints of yester years have said about our environment. It takes centuries or even more for the civilizations to develop and religion, customs, rituals etc., are all its inseparable components. We should have faith in whatever we are doing and then the goal is accomplished easily, otherwise action without any faith is useless.

Faith is a double-faced phenomenon - "faith" and "blind faith". Superstition or blind belief, based on ignorance, is a state where there is no desire for



confirmation nor is it subject to any verification. Herein lies the difference because we require the support of faith for understanding or doing something for the first time. But once we practice it, we know what it is and in this way, before doing anything, we require faith. True faith is "*Shraddha*" and it only prevails. If we fail in the first step of an action then to accomplish the remaining portion is useless because true faith is open to experiments and modifications and our knowledge confirms it. The *Bhagwad Gita* says "Every person is what his faith is." i.e., a man is a Hindu because he has faith in Dharma and a Muslim is a Muslim because he has faith in Islam. There can never be a person without faith. A rationalist believes in his reasoning ability. A Communist believes in the theory of Marx. In this way every body has faith in one theory or the other. Man has been an embodiment of faith from the times immemorial and this has guided him in his religious thinking and its rites and rituals. All our actions and re-actions are dictated by our vision and understanding of Dharma which becomes more sacred due to its rites and rituals.

Rituals can sometimes become controversial. A simple ritual may mean differently to different people. But it is faith, that makes the rituals to be followed without any reasoning. We some times negate the whole of it or a part of it, calling it blind faith. But there have been great sages and seers who have retained the legacy of faith along with its rites and rituals and accepted it as a positive force, that can move mountains. Such an approach has kept the Indian civilization alive till date. Some people consider these rituals as superstitions while others are of the view that the Dharma and the rituals are opposed to one another. They feel proud to call themselves as rational thinkers and have a secondary attitude towards people who have faith in these rituals and customs. Some others think that the rationalists are dry and crooked intellectuals given to meaningless and dry thoughts with no foundation. Thus

the haves and have-nots, the opinion makers and the opposition, the people having faith and the rationalists, are all an integral part of this society and preponders of its civilizational aspects. All serve the cause of Dharma, its religion, rituals, customs and rites since the times immemorial and continue to do so till date.

With the coming of independence, the Indian civilization and the society started thinking in a positive manner. To be an Indian is no more considered a curse. The great scholars and thinkers of this land started watering the already withered civilization of the land with the result it began showing signs of growth and life. We also learnt that even in a dormant state, the civilization is the very soul of every society. The development made by us in our leisure time in the fields of education, thought, science, religion, rituals, customs, psychology and economy, are the achievements which we have made over the years of our long history. In other words all these countless ideas and thoughts that have blossomed-forth and developed, have all helped to make our civilization vibrant and colourful. Rituals and customs have been the basic structures of all the great civilizations of the world and the same has been the case with the Indian civilization in general and the Kashmiri society in particular. Rituals and customs affect the daily routine of our life in one-way or the other. Our social life and our aspirations have given rise to our daily rituals and customs. While making progress, the individual came in contact with his brethren living far and near and having different civilizations other than that he possessed. Here he started choosing between different faiths and cultures and thus he carved a way for his betterment and prosperity. His zest for such a life gave rise to rituals and customs. The Hindu *Sanskars* are two fold and lay stress on elevating the lot of an individual<sup>1</sup>, both spiritually and morally. The first is through

<sup>1</sup> Panday, Raj Bali, *Hindu Sanskar*, (Varanasi, 1960) p.2.

*Malapanayan*", i.e. by removing the dirtiness from the human mind and the other is, "*Atishodhan*", i.e. by brightening the human mind by applying practices of higher orders. This can be illustrated thus, the first is by filing a piece of rusted iron with a file and giving it a new glittering shape and the other is like giving a sparkling surface to a piece of wood by applying synthetic paints and polish, etc. The first is to brighten the inner conscience whereas the latter believes in polishing the outer aspects. Thus the *Sanskars* purify ones inner-self known as the '*Atman*' and also the outer body. Great scholars have classified the *Sanskars* into two categories :-

1. Those, which elevate us to the heights, and
2. Those that drag us down to the deep abyss.

Some of the Indian scholars propose sixteen *Sanskars* whereas others give a list of forty-eight *Sanskars*. Commonly sixteen *Sanskars* are in vogue in the whole sub-continent and the valley of Kashmir has the exception of following twenty-four *Sanskars* as a special case.<sup>1</sup> The main aim of all these *Sanskars* is to purify the inner conscience of man either through "*Malapanayan*" or through "*Atishodhan*". This purification is also two fold, the former is meant to liberate ones self from the sins and ignorance and the latter is to give more luster and brightness to his wisdom and knowledge, which he has already acquired or is in the process of acquiring it. There is a choice before every man. He has choice either for elevation of his own self or for degradation to the unknown depths of hell. Man can either be good or bad according to his bent of mind. All the religions of the world agree to the fact that every one is born with a Divine Spark in him and no one is good or bad from birth. Our *Sanskars* play a major role in illuminating our future though the part played by one's '*Bhagya*' and '*Karma*' cannot be totally ignored. In the Indian civilizational

context the instinct believing in higher values is called '*Daivi*' and that which lays emphasis on physical enjoyment and materialism, is called '*Asuri*'. The '*Daivi*' tendencies and qualities lead to the liberation whereas '*Asuri*' qualities lead one towards degradation. Greed and temptations lead us to a deplorable situation. Urge for more than what is necessary for ones livelihood is greed. Lust or greed is the main cause of all mental and physical ailments. In order to draw a line to control such emotions and to save the individual and the society from such ailments, *Sanskars* come like a boon to save our society and us. Thus *Sanskars* invoke the inner voice of a man and educate him to discriminate between the good and the bad. One, who knows how to differentiate between the good and the bad, is owned by society. In this way *Sanskars* change the direction of the mind of a person. Once he comes into the fold of the Dharma, he gets deliverance from the sins and the sinful life. In this way *Sanskars* save a person from making spiritual degradation that is worse than the individual suicide.

The preponders of the *Darshan Shastra* are of the opinion that *Sanskars* affect the very soul of a man. On the other hand the followers of *Vedantic* philosophy confirm that *Sanskars* change the mind of a person and these have nothing to do with his soul or '*Atma*', which, they consider, is above all these considerations. Actually the *Sanskars* purify the mind and soul of a man and dispel his ignorance and darkness just like a diamond, which attains its value and brightness when it is cut and shaped by an expert. In this way *Sanskars* elevate and lead a person from degradation to salvation.

The *Sanskars* prevalent in a society/civilization at one time cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. There is interaction between various civilizations and occasionally one civilization proves more forceful and subdues the other one or even annihilates it completely. This civilizational amalgamation gives birth to a new

<sup>1</sup> Panday, Raj Bali, *Hindu Sanakar*, (Varanasi, 1960) p.2

civilization, which may be quite different from the old one. In case, however, the two interacting civilizations get synthesized, the new civilization that emerges thus, is a combination of the two. Environmental behaviours like social, economic, political or psychological, strongly affect the ideas of an individual and also his dress, language and literature. In this way we can see such changes take place in the social set-up, society and the civilization as well.

We know that the aliens have invaded India a number of times. Some of them were only plunderers while others invaded her for making India their permanent home. A few among these were travelers and missionaries who came here to study our culture and civilization. All these upheavals had a very deep effect on the way of our living and thinking. The influences in certain cases were reciprocal and in this way a mixed social and cultural order sprouted forth which is known as the modern Indian civilization. This change had its sway over the whole sub-continent including Kashmir. For instance let us take the contact between Islam and Hinduism. Before the advent of Islam into the valley, the Hindus mostly populated Kashmir. They had their own way of living and worship. Every big and small temple thronged with the populace and every devotee sang devotional chorus songs according to one's own faith and belief, besides performing his individual religious rites and rituals. After their conversion to the new faith they were asked to offer their 'Nimaz' in a mosque and perform their other Islamic tenets accordingly. They readily agreed to all the new patterns of offering prayers. However, they lamented for the age-old practice of singing chorus while offering prayers. It was keeping in view this tendency of the local populace that the missionaries of Islam had to introduce a choric form of devotional singing known as 'Manqabat' (a chorus song in praise of God) and 'Darud Khani' (a chorus song in praise of Prophet Mohammad) for the first time in Islam and that

too for the recent converts in Kashmir. It was the newly emerged culture, which introduced 'Rov' (a kind of folk dance and singing performed by ladies on certain occasions, including marriages) instead of traditional 'Vanlvun'. The 'Vanlvun' of the Hindus on such occasions was quite different in content and pattern from the new form, called 'Rov'. The former has a 'Sophistic' singing pattern on the recitation of the 'Vedic Richas' whereas the latter comprises a to-and-fro dancing rhythm of ladies chorus singing in a semi-circular formation. With the passage of time the whole Kashmiri society accepted the new 'Rov' form of singing whereas the 'Vanlvun' (generally called the 'BaTi Vanlvun') is fading away. Not only this, we continue to use certain words for ritualistic praxis. For example, the Hindus purchase some ingredients like dry fruits, candy, ghee and barley etc., for marriages, 'Yagnyopavita', or for any other religious rituals and is commonly known as "AgnI Vatlr" as a whole. All these components are offered to the sacred fire called "AgnI", while chanting hymns from the scriptures, according to a particular ritual or Sanskar. Hence, it is called "AgnI Vatlr." Muslims too use the same word while purchasing spices, dress-materials on the occasion of marriages, etc. There is a common word, 'PrA.vish'<sup>1</sup> for both the communities for entering into a new house. These facts depict the reciprocity that the followers of the two religions had achieved while entering and adopting the Indian way of living.

Let us ponder a bit deeper and delve into root cause of a Kashmiri Hindu being more influenced by the doctrine of "Ahimsa". All our deities and gods in their all shapes and forms possess one or the other weapon. It may either be an axe or a sword, a bow and an arrow or a trident that they used against a tyrant, absolute and cruel

<sup>1</sup> It is derived from the root Sanskrit word, 'Pravesh'. A list of such common vocabulary can be lengthy and may involve a separate study.

so as to protect the kind and the noble. Contrary to this, the use of a weapon even against a tyrant is not so common among the Kashmiris. The reason is clear that the Brahmanism overpowered all other *Varnas* and, thus the doctrine of "*Ahimsa*" became more vigorous. Religions like Jainism and Buddhism, which originated from the Indian soil and were propagated by some of the renowned scholars of Kashmir, made the conception of '*Ahimsa*' more potent.

## 2. ASPECTS OF NATURE WORSHIP IN OUR RITUALS

Hindu religion is, in fact, a multi-dimensional civilization in which various aspects and secrets of nature are discussed, described and sung. The under-developed thoughts of primitive man and his budding revolt against adverse natural phenomenon are all embedded in his scriptures. That is why almost all our scriptures, *Vedas*, *Purans*, *Shastras* and even Epics etc., contain ample references to almost all aspects of Nature which contain universal acceptability. We have references about this whole universe and of its living and non-living elements. The impact of Nature-worship is so deep on our daily life and deeds that we feel our self greatly under its influence. Our most common associates in life are the sun, the moon, the earth, the rivers, the trees, the animal so on and so forth. *Vedas* and our *Grahisutras* give a vivid picture of the planet we inhabit. These tell us that '*Omkar*' is the root of this universe; feet, legs, body and arms are its extended branches. *Rgved* is its leaves, *Samved* is its flowers, *Yajurved* is its fruit and the *Atharvaved* is its dignity. '*Yajnya*' is its cool-sweet shadow. Always chanted by the learned Brahmins, morning, noon and evening, are its time limits<sup>1</sup>. Concluding the couplet, '*Richa*', the author pays homage to the all-powerful 'Mother' Goddess, '*Ga-ya-iri*', a combination of three letters in the *Devanagiri* script, as our ultimate saviour. He also prays for the good health and well being of not only his own self but also for this whole universe including the sun, the moon, the stars, and the rivers and rivulets. At the very start of a religious ritual, whether a small one like the daily prayer or a big one like the Sacred Thread Ceremony, there is the benedictory ritual of worshipping the *Agni*, the Sun, the Moon, *Brahma* and a cluster of

<sup>1</sup> Bhatt. Pt. Keshav. *Mekhala Pustak*, 1925; P. 1.

twenty one *Rishis* (Appendix I, P - 19) etc. In all the twenty-four *Sanakars* and other religious rites including the marriage, the *Ashras* of *Grahasth*, *Vanprasth*, *Sannyas* and the last rites, obeisance to the Mother Earth named, '*Bhu:mi Pu:jan*' is essential at the start of every ritual. It mentions, 'May our days prosper. May this earth and its mountains prosper. May this whole world flourish including our king. May this Mother Earth bear this of my ritual and enable me to complete it'.

The present religious tenets have the concurrence of a politically bound and advanced culture since the times immemorial. The factors like topography, geography, dialect, economic and racial differences do influence it, locally. It is impossible to deny the presence and the survival of ancient cultural impacts in spite of all the upheavals experienced by the people of this region from time to time. The experience of the past stages of human behaviours does reflect in one way or the other in the activity of human society in various forms of religious activities. Like all other civilizations, the religious rituals too have two distant but main streams. One flows among the educated people in the form of *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and other branches of higher learning and literature and the second one among the uneducated mass of people. This appears to be the main reason that the highly educated *Brahmins* had a sway over all other sects and *Varnas* in the ancient/medieval Indian society as no one could disassociate oneself from performing the *Sanskars* in a family so as to keep one in its fold. The *Sanskars* involved educational training essential for the betterment of an individual and hence the *Brahmins* having an upper hand over general masses, seems imperative.

It is an admitted fact that Dharma is not only religion but also a way of Indian living. Let us take some of the religious praxis in our daily life that we perform or have been advised to perform by our *Vedas/ Upanishads* and which are directly related to the environment around us. The *Upanishads* forbid a person, among other things, from defecation or urination in the open, especially on the surface of naked earth. Stress is laid on using grassy lands or pit like formations for such things if there is no other alternative. Washing of mouth is preceded by washing of feet and before that we pay our respects to the rivulet with the words, '*Namastay Jalashayini*', 'Oh source of water, I pay my salutations to you'. While washing our face, we pay our obeisance to holy places and rivers like, *Prayag*, *Pushkar*, *Ganga*, etc. Before paying our respect to gods, *Rishis* and forefathers, we have been asked to pay our salutations to the sun, the savour of Dharma on this earth. The very fact that all our gods/deities have different animal for their conveyance, show the love that we have for animal. All the gods/deities could have used a single animal to ride but that would have imbalanced the scale of nature. This appears the main reason that from as big an animal as an elephant to the smallest, a rat, every animal has been assigned with a rider deity/god according to our holy scriptures.

The construction of a house for ones dwelling has been the first priority of man from primitive times. He felt this need so as to save himself from natural change in his immediate surroundings, i.e., excessive heat, cold, wind and rain, It also sheltered him and his family from the untimely and unwanted attack from the wild beasts and his enemies. While wishing to possess a dwelling for himself, he showed affection to some of the wild/tamed animal, which, he felt, would prove as his helpers in his future ventures. It is because of this very fact that primitive man included and tamed a number of animal for

<sup>1</sup> Bhatt. Pt. Keshav. *Mekhaala Pustak*, 1925, P. 22

his personal use and some of these have proved as an asset to him and continue to do so till date. Keeping the usefulness of some of these animals in view, it appears that he, while laying the foundation for a residential dwelling, gave due place and reverence to such animal. The scriptures contain that, while laying the foundation stone for a dwelling, called '*Bhu:mi Pu:jan*', due place and honour be given to a number of animal that have stood by man through thick and thin and helped him directly or indirectly. The scriptures clearly name that the following animal be worshipped at the four corners and the center of the house at the time of laying the foundation and their images be placed under the plinth of the proposed house: -<sup>1</sup>

1. North-east corner -- Ox,
2. South-east corner -- Horse,
3. North-west corner -- Elephant,
4. North-west corner -- Man, and
5. Center -- Serpent

This seems to be the highest honour, that the Indian society has bestowed on the animal and appears to be of its unique kind in all other world civilizations.

Kashmir has been a land of holy sites from the times immemorial and in the words of Kalhan, 'there is not a space as large as a seasum (seed) without a *tirth*'<sup>2</sup> and in the words of Alberuni, the great traveler and historian, 'Kashmir held the same position among the holy places as *Varanasi* or *Kurukshetra* has in the Indian ethos.'<sup>3</sup> During all these centuries the *Vitasta* has witnessed a number of devastating floods and the

religious rituals and customs have deeply been buried under the layers of its muddy waters. But that will not prevent the sons and daughters of *Vitasta* from understanding and compiling the practices, rituals and the religious prescriptions followed by our forefathers. Though the toil is tiresome yet the outcome cannot be less rewarding. In the sweet message of our '*Vedas*', 'Let us all adopt the path of enlightenment' - '*Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya.*'

<sup>1</sup> Bhatt Pt. Keshav, *Ved Kalpadrum*, '*Shanku Pratishtha*,' Bombay, 1921, Pt. II, P. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Rajatarangini*, I. 38. Translated by M.A. Stein, Vol. I, (Reprint), 1979, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Beruni's India*, Eng. Tr. Edward C. Sichuan, London, 1910. Vol. II, P 146.

### 3 GOTRA -

#### THE LIVING LEGENDS OF KASHMIR RISHIS

*Brahma*, the Creator of this universe, in the beginning of the first *Manvantra*, created nine Rishis for the inhabitation of this earth. They are *Marichi*, *Atri*, *Angira*, *Pulastya*, *Pulha*, *Vishvamitr*, *Bharadvaj*, *Gautam* and *Jamadagni*. *Maharshi Marichi* was the greatest among these, because he became the main cause of establishing the human society on this earth and is, therefore, called the '*Prajapati*.' *Kashyap*, the son of *Atri* married *Kadru* and *Vanita*. *Kadru* gave birth to the *Nagas* and from *Vanita*, *Garud* was born. The *Nagas* and the *Garuda*, being stepbrothers, had well-known enmity between them. *Vishnu*, on seeing that the *Garuda* was persecuting the *Nagas*, gave them asylum in the *Sati Sara* under the protection of *Nila*, the son of *Kashyap*. The position remained unchanged during the *Kalp* till the end of the 6th *Manu*.

In the beginning of the 7th *Kalp* of *Manu Vaivasuta*, a water-born demon of the *Sati Sara*, named *Jalodbhav*, let loose a reign of terror in the whole area around *Sati Sara*. How could *Nila Nag*, the head of the Kashmir *Nagas* remain untouched? Having been harassed by the demon, *Nila* related the whole story to his father *Kashyap*. *Kashyap* took the matter to *Brahma* and, he, accompanied by *Vishnu* and other gods reached *Kaunasarnag*. The gods took their positions on the high peaks of the mountain ranges. The demon had earlier got a boon from *Brahma* that he would be all-powerful in water but would lose his powers on land. The gods waited for the water-demon to come out of water of the *Sati Sara* but he did not come out. Finally *Vishnu*, with the help of his brother, *Balabhadra*, pierced the bottom of the lake with his ploughshare from *Vitasta:tra* (*Vye'thIvo>tur*) to *Varahamula* (*Varamula* or *Baramula*). Thus the water of the big lake was drained and land

appeared here and there at its bottom. Here god *Vishnu* cut the demon to pieces with the help of his disk. *Kashyap* was accompanied by a good number of *Rishis* including his sons on his Kashmir mission, which he had started from the plains. He advised all of them to settle in the recently created valley of Kashmir. The *Rajatarangini* gives a poetic description of the first Naga settlement in the valley. It narrates that the *Sati (Vitasta)* in the form of a river served as a stalk to the great round lotus umbrella-shaped spring of *Nila (Nila Nag or Verinag)* who was asked to head all the *Nagas* who resided in the valley due to the fear from *Garud*. This expression is to hint at the first arrival of the *Aryans* into the valley who, being superior to the native dwellers, got an upper hand on them and started their territorial extensions and cultural amalgamation in the valley. The amalgamation remained calm at the surface but it had an under current which gave vent a little later and was felt just before the start of the *Kali* era. This can well be judged from the fact that the later dwellers of the valley were compelled to make a treaty with the *Pishachas* - (the original dwellers) to remain in the valley for the first six months of the year and migrate to the plains for the second half of the year. In this way the migration from the plains to the valley started in the spring on the 1<sup>st</sup> *Navaratra*, which falls on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the bright half of *Chaitra*. The return journey started during the autumn *Navaratra* falling on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the bright half of *Ashwin*. These migratory people observed certain ceremonies and rituals on these auspicious days of their yearly migration, which, on the one hand resembled the "*Navratra*" festivals and, on the other hand, appeared in consistency with the present day "*Darbar Move*". It may not be out of place to mention here that there were certain local differences among the people living in the plains and those living in the far-flung areas of the valley while observing these *Navaratra* festivals. The *Rajatarangini* and the *Nilamat Puran* also



confirm it. The recent exodus of the people from the valley has, perhaps, brought us more close to our brethren of the sub-continent as far as the *Navaratri* celebrations are concerned.

The *Nilamat* starts with a conversation between sage *Vaishampayan* and king *Janmejey* as to why the rulers of this great land- Kashmir did not take part in the Great *Mahabharat* War. Taking the story of the *Puran* a bit further, it clearly gives a hint to the rivalry, which the early migrants had to face with their foes - the *Pishachas*, the original inhabitants of the valley. In this narration of assimilation and dissimilation, the *Puran* gives a clear and vivid picture of the different sects residing in the valley then. The *Puran* also hints at the mutual confrontation, which might have been going on at various religious, economic and other fronts. Because of the curse from *Kashyap*, the *Puran* narrates, the *Nagas* dwelt in the valley for six months only and the *Pishachs* occupied the land for the remaining six cold months of the year. Due to this new set up of inhabitation periods agreed to for the year, the newcomers to the valley were unable to perform their traditional customs and rituals previously agreed to with the *Pishachs* and the *Naga* chief, *Nila*. With the result the successors of *Kashyap* and their followers did not follow the traditional path and thus distress befell on them. The result was that they were obliged to leave for the plains for a period of six months so as to save themselves from the severe cold that befell on the land and its people due to the said curse. On the other hand the *Pishachs* continued to maintain their old rites, hence they were saved from the severe cold.

According to Buhler's report on the *Nilamat Puran*, four *Yugas* passed and at the end of this period a distressed old *Brahman*, descendent of the *Kashyap Gotra*, named *Chandra Dev* practiced austerities to please *Nila Nag*. *Nila* was pleased with the austerity of *Chandra Dev* and he relieved the *Brahmin* and his followers from

the afflictions of excessive cold and snowfall. He advised him and his followers to perform some of the old and forgotten rites as mentioned in the *Nilamat Puran*. All these praxis resembled the usual *Brahminical* and *Pauranic* rites and rituals with certain peculiarities suiting the residents of the valley. In this way we can safely say that *Nilamat Puran* contains the description of revival of the old rites and rituals, which were prevalent in the valley during the *Pauranic* period.

The *Rarjatarangini* does not contain a clear reference to the number of Rishis who accompanied *Kashyap*. In verse 1-30 Kalhan gives a reference of the nine guardians of the treasures (*Nagas*) who decorated the land of Kashmir just like *Alkapuri*, the famous city of *Kuber*, the guardian of all treasures<sup>1</sup>. The *Bhagwat Puran* narrates clearly that the *Prajapatis* are 14 in number and they have given rise to various tribes or '*gotras*' in this world. P. N. K. Bamzai has given a reference to 133 exogamous *gotras*, the followers/ descendents of a *Rishi* whose name the *gotra* bears. He, however, confirms that the *Rishis*, in whose name the *gotras* are established, were of the highest order of the *Brahmins*- the "*Saraswats*"<sup>2</sup>. This appears more close to the present number of *gotras* existing among the Kashmiri Pandits.

The followers of different religions, like Jainism, *Buddhism*, *Islam* and *Christianity* had their respective impacts on the Kashmir society since their entry into the valley with the result that the use of '*gotra*' remained confined only to the Pandits of the Kashmir valley whereas its essence was lost in the social positions of different other castes. In the ancient Indian traditions, a person was known by the *gotra* he belonged to and this determined his status in the society. But with the passage

<sup>1</sup> *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. Trans. By M.A. Stein, 1979, Pt.1 (VI- i.30) P.6.

<sup>2</sup> Bamzai, P.N.K., *A History of Kashmir*, 1973, p. 18. Also see '*Modern India and the Indians*' by Monier William, P. 151.

of time the nature of occupation followed by a man, generally determined his social status. Thus the use of *gotra* among the Kashmiri *Pandits* remained confined to rites and religious ceremonies alone.

Today there are approximately one hundred and twenty four known *gotras* among the Kashmiri *Pandits*. Of these twenty-one *gotras*, as mentioned in Appendix I, are started by a single *Rishi*, whereas the remaining one hundred and three *gotras* appear to be an outcome of an exogamous marriages between the *Rishis* of two or more clans having different *gotras* that existed then in the valley, Appendix II.

## APPENDIX -I

(A) GOTRAS OF THE 1ST ORDER

1. <i>Agastya</i>	11 <i>Kashapa</i>
2. <i>Atreya</i>	12 <i>Kashyapa</i>
3. <i>Aupamanya</i>	13 <i>Kaushika</i>
4. <i>Bhardwaja</i>	14 <i>Lougakshi</i>
5. <i>Bhargava</i>	15 <i>Moudgalya</i>
6. <i>Datatreya</i>	16 <i>Parashara</i>
7. <i>Daumanya</i>	17 <i>Pipla</i>
8. <i>Gargay</i>	18 <i>Shandalya</i>
9. <i>Gautama</i>	19 <i>Vasistha</i>
10. <i>Kapishthala</i>	20 <i>Varshayini</i> and

21. *Vishvamitra*

## Appendix II

(B) GOTRAS OF THE MIXED ORDER

- |                                 |                                      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Artha Varshagnya Shandalya   | 21 Deva Vishwamitra Varshayana       |
| 2. Atri Bhargava                | 22. Dipta Swamina Aupamanya          |
| 3 Bhava Aupamanya               | 23 Deva Varshagnya Shandalya         |
| 4. Bhava Kapisathala            | 24 Datasharman Kantha Kashayapa      |
| 5. Bhava Kapisathala Aupamanya  | 25 Data Varshayana                   |
| 6. Bhava Kapisathala Kaushika   | 26. Data Vasadeva Bharadwaja aushika |
| 7. Bhuta Aupamanya Shalankayana | 27. Deva Gargya                      |
| 8. Bhuta Vas Vatsya Laugakshi   | 28. Deva Gautama                     |
| 9. Bhuta Vas Bhuta Aupamanya    | 29. Deva Gautama Laugakshya          |
| 10. Bhuta Vatsya Aupamanya      | 30 Deva Kaushika                     |
| 11 Dhara Baradwaja              | 31. Deva Kauchha treya               |
| 12. Dhara Deva Shalan Kaushika  | 32 Deva Laugakshi                    |
| 13. Dhara Kapishta Aupamanya    | 33 Deva Kashyapa Modgalya Kashyapa   |
| 14 Dhara Shandalya              | 34 Deva Pala Swamina Kaushika        |
| 15. Dhara Kapisathala           | 35 Deva Shandalya                    |
| 16. Data Data Shalan Kaushita   | 36 Deva Shandalya Modgalya -         |
| 17. Deva Aupamanya              | 37 Gausha Watsyana Aupanamya         |
| 18. Deva Bharadwaja             | 38 Isha Shandalya Kausha             |
| 19 Deva Parashara               | 39. Kantha Daumayana                 |
| 20. Deva Vasistha               | 40. Kantha Kashapa                   |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 41. Kantha Kashyapa                           | 72. Swamina Vasa Gargaya..                   |
| 42. Kaushika Bharadwaja.                      | 73. Swamina Vas Atreya.                      |
| 43. Kara Chhanda Shandalya                    | 74. Swamina Laugakshi                        |
| 44. Kara Shandalya                            | 75. Sharman Bhardwaja Shandalya.             |
| 45. Kasha Aupamanya.                          | 76. Swamina Bhargava.                        |
| 46. Laugakshi Gautama.                        | 77. Swazmina Varshaganya                     |
| 47. Mitra Kashyapa.                           | 78. Swamina Kaushika.                        |
| 48. Mitra Sandalya                            | 79. Swamina Bharadwaja..                     |
| 49. Mitra Swamina Kaushika Atreya             | 80. Swamina Modgalya.                        |
| 50. Nanda Kaushika Bharadwaja                 | 81. Swamina Atareya.                         |
| 51. Pala Deva Vasa Gargya                     | 82. Swanima Moudagalya.                      |
| 52. Patha Swamina Kaushika Deva<br>Parashara. | 83. Swamina Bardwaja Vas Atreya.             |
| 53. Pallia Swamina Deva Ratra Pravara.        | 84. Swamina Gargya.                          |
| 54. Ratra Bhargava                            | 85. Swamina Gautama Atreya Shala Kuchha      |
| 55. Raja Dhattatreya.                         | 86. Sharman Atreya.                          |
| 56. Raja Kaushika                             | 87. Swamina Ganakaushika.                    |
| 57. Rishi Kaushika.                           | 88 Swamina. Gautama Bharadwaja.              |
| 58. Rishi Kavi Gargya                         | 89. Swamina Gautama Shandalya.               |
| 59. Raja Shandalya.                           | 90. Sawmina Gautama Gasha Vasa<br>Aupamanya. |
| 60. Ratra Varshayana.                         | 91. Swamina Gautama Atreya.                  |
| 61. Raja Vasistha.                            | 92. Swamina Hasya Dvaseya.                   |
| 62. Raja Data Atreya Shalan Kautsa            | 93. Swamina Kaushika.                        |
| 63 Raja Bhuta Laugakshi                       | 94. Swamina Kantha. Kashipa.                 |
| 64 Raja Kaushika Devala.                      | 95. Swamina Rishi Kavya Gargya.              |
| 65. Ratra Vishwamitra.                        | 96. Swamina Aupamanya.                       |
| 66. Ratra Vishwamitra Vasistha Agastya        | 97. Swamina Kochha Bharadwaja                |
| 67. Sharman Kautsa.                           | 98. Sawmina Vatsya Aupamanya.                |
| 68. Shala Kautsa Sharman                      | 99. Vatsa Gosha Aupamanya.                   |
| 69. Swamina Gautama Laugakshi                 | 100. Vatsa Swamina Maudgalya.                |
| 70. Swamina Shandalya                         | 101. Vasadeva Pala Gargya.                   |
| 71. Swamina Vasistha.                         | 102. Varshaganya Vasistha                    |

103. Vasistha Vishwamitra Varadatta.

## OUR RITUALS

The rituals, which have got the sanction of the religion or the *Dharma* of the concerned society, survive for a longer period than those, which the society adopts by imitation from other societies or civilizations. Besides, the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*, the *Bhagwad Gita*, which is considered to be the essence of all the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and which depicts a way of life for the whole Indian society, in its third canto (a treatise on *Karma-Yoga* in couplets 10-15), clearly lays emphasis on the sanctity of rituals which have accompanied the *Dharma* from the very beginning. Before entering into the realm of rituals of the Indian society one has to make great sacrifices. Sacrifices not in the form of making bodily penance or killing of any living thing but in the form of killing ones own enemies found in ones own self in the form of *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Ahankara* - the six demons which hamper our faith in *Dharma* and its rituals. Here the individual is left to seek the help of a guide who can prove to be saviour to his *Dharma*. Once the faith dwindles, the six enemies referred to above surface to the forefront and the preacher or the teacher and the *Dharma* and its rituals prove meaningless accessories and activities. On the other hand if we have strong faith in our *Dharma* and the normal activities connected with it, none of the demons will dare to raise its head. No doubt, occasionally some of our actions may be, unknowingly or due to our ignorance, against the religious principles and yet we have the comfort of its redressal by our *Guru*/teacher or a deity.

We develop complete faith in a person or an object that we believe will stand by us and help us in our happiness and in sorrow. This notion develops faith in God, - the *Dharma*, and the rituals. This faith is nothing

more or less than complete surrender to Him without any 'doubt' or 'questioning' which lead one to a hell like state. The former mode of thought has given birth to the world civilizations, which in turn prove as a torch of light for man to analyse what is right and what is wrong. Rituals make *Dharma* more acceptable and charming. Rituals and customs exist in one way or the other<sup>1</sup> among the people of the world having different faiths. These have continued in our society as well since times immemorial and are present in our society in their original form or with certain modifications that the society thought necessary to incorporate in them from time to time. In ancient times these were followed more vigorously and they continue till date though with certain curtailments<sup>2</sup>. The need of the hour is a society that can cause the regeneration of such rituals and customs. The betterment of man, his society and the civilization as a whole has always been the aim and object of these rituals and customs.

The Kashmiri Hindus generally agree to the twenty-four *Sanskars* unlike their Indian counterparts who follow sixteen (*Shodasha*) *Sanskars* only, that cover the human life from pre-natal existence till death - the last journey. The treatises named, *Agni Puran*, *Parasar Grahi Sutra*, *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, *Manu Smriti*, etc., all lay emphasis on *Shodash* (sixteen) *Sanskars* except *Ashulayan Grahi Sutra*, which lays emphasis on eleven *Sanskars*. *Veda Kalpadrum*, and the *Kashmir Karma Kanda*, lay emphasis on twenty-four<sup>3</sup> *Sanskars*. *Parasar Grahi Sutra* and *Vaikhans Grahi Sutra* lay stress on thirteen and sixteen *Sanskars* respectively.

Our scriptures have generally given a life span of one hundred years to an individual- "*Jeeva Sharada*

*Shatam*"- Let you live for one hundred autumns. Hindu life span comprises four parts of twenty-five years each known as the "*Ashrams*" detailed below: -

1. *Brahmacharya Ashram* up to 25 years. (which includes *Bal-awastha* also).
2. *Grahashth Ashram* (family life) 25 to 50 years.
3. *Vanprasth Ashram*, (detachment from family life) from 50 to 75 years
4. *Sannyas Ashram*. (Life in a hermitage or total detachment from the world) from 75 to 100 years.

This division of human life involves certain rituals and customs. These are as follows: -

#### ***(I) Pre-natal Sanskars and rituals.***

1. *Garbhadhan* or *Bijwapan* - the ceremony and the ritual of fertilization
2. *Simantonayan*, confinement to a particular limited space or a room of the house during pregnancy.
3. *Pumswan* - The rituals connected with having a male child.

#### ***(II) Post-birth Sanskars and Rituals including those of the Brahmcharva Ashram.***

##### **(A) Rituals connected with the *Bala Awastha* or state of infancy: -**

1. *Jatkarana*, the birth rituals of purifying the child and the mother.
2. *Namkarana*, the ritual of giving a suitable name to the child.
3. *Nishkramana*, taking the child out from the boundaries of the house

<sup>1</sup> Payday, Raj Bali- *Hindu Sanskar* (Varanasi, 1960) p.2

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26

4. *Ani-Pra:shan*, giving solid food to the child for the first time.
5. *Mundan* or *Zari-Ka:say*, to clip or shave the hair of the child for the first time.
6. *Karana- Bedha*, to pierce the ear lobes of the child for the first time.

(B) Rituals connected with Brahmacharya Ashram or adolescence: -

1. *Vidhyarambha* - the introduction of the alphabet.
2. *Yagnyopavita*, - the Holy Thread Ceremony.

(III) Sanskars and Rituals connected with the Grahasth Ashram.

1. *Vivah*, - the marriage ceremony,
2. *Grahasth Ashram*, duties of married life.

(IV) *The Va:nprasth Ashram* — a life away from the family and its struggle.

(V) *The Sannyas Ashram* — the period of seclusion and detachment from the family and the world.

(VI) *Rituals and customs pertaining to the Anteshti*, -

Death or the last rites.

In addition to the above mentioned *Sanskars*, there are other specific rituals connected with our day-to-day life and our socio-economic and political set-up. All these have, as far as possible, been given due place and description at their proper places.

## (I) PRE -NATAL SANSKARS AND RITUALS.

Out of all the twenty-four *Sanskars*, the first three, i.e., *Bijwapan/Garbhadhan*, *Simantonayan* and the *Pumsawan* come under this category.

### 1. *Bijwapan* or *Garbhadhan* - The Conception or Fertilization Ritual

This is a pre-birth ceremony wherein the concerned lady is brought before the ritual *Agni*. Her *Kula Guru* purifies her by spraying holy water on her forehead while chanting the relevant Vedic hymns in the presence of *Agni*.

According to the *Grahisutras*, this ritual is held during the third month of pregnancy. Though this ritual is not in vogue now but still we find a glimpse of it on the eve of *Yagnyopavita* ceremony. It forms the first/ second *Sanakar* on the eve of this function.

### 2. *Simantonayan*. - Confinement to a particular space or portion of the house.

This pre-birth ceremony is performed after the third month of pregnancy. Offerings are made to the ritual *Agni* in the form of ghee and condiments etc. The *Kula Guru* purifies the pregnant lady and her husband with sprinkling holy water on both of them while reciting hymns from the Holy Scriptures. Two small sticks cut from "Sa:l" or 'Mulberry' tree branches measuring nearly nine inches and duly venerated by the priest are presented by the husband to his wife and after taking the sticks in her hands, she makes cross-marks three times with these sticks before her face and then inserts them into her hair in such a way that her hair locks are separated into two

equal parts. While doing so she takes a solemn oath to behave like a matured and responsible lady and avoid being away from her residential house on odd hours during the period of her pregnancy. Then the lady makes two separate plaits of her hair and she is again offered duly purified two *Sa:1Mulberry* sticks along with a knot of '*NA:rivan*' (a kind of red rough thread generally used by the Hindus as a wrist band on all auspicious occasions). The husband presents the two sticks along with the thread to his wife, who has to sit on the left side of her husband on all such auspicious and religious occasions. The husband binds the hair of the lady into two plaits with this thread and throws away the sticks.

All this appears to be a superstitious exercise to day but the ritual denotes much extended values prevalent in the society since long. One should imagine the festive occasion for the family when such a good news was revealed to its members in those days when disease, death, floods, famines and starvation would annihilate a good number of densely populated areas in the twinkling of an eye especially the new born. The occasion must have been worth celebrating. Utmost care was taken for the safety of the pregnant lady. She was forbid from doing more strenuous chores and every body in the family helped her. Any stranger or a person who entered the house late or at odd hours, was not allowed to approach the lady directly. Though there were no hard and fast rules for the purpose, yet the ritual survived in the society till date.

In order to indicate that she has a special position in the family, a piece of brocade, a kind of a special, bright cloth, commonly known as, '*Zarba:ph*' is folded in a triangular form and filled with a few seeds of sesame and chalk powder and then stitched to her head-gear commonly known as '*Kalpush*' or fastened to her hair locks. This social function resembled with our ritual known as '*NA:rivan Kha:rini*', held on the eve of

'*Yagnyopavita*' ceremony. Thus the lady is dressed in a spectacular dress so that every new comer could identify her from a distance and conduct himself according to the set procedure. As for as the position of women in ancient India is concerned, this *Sanskar* appears to have been of much importance but is now considered just a custom and it has gradually lost all its great social and ethical significance. The forces behind it's falling into disuse can be found in our man-dominated society.

### 3 *Pumsawan*—The Rituals Connected with having a Male Child.

This *Sanskar* is performed by the family on the expiry of eight months of pregnancy as is clearly depicted in the *Samhita*<sup>1</sup>. The couple is brought to the *Yajnya Shala* and holy water is sprinkled on them. Offerings to the *Agni Deva*, *Indra Deva* and Lord *Vishnu* are made in three separate plates containing cooked rice, condiments and barley/sesame respectively. The offerings are made to the flames along with ghee amidst recitation from the *Vedas*. Prayers are made that the lady may be bestowed with a male child and deliver the same after completing eight months of her conception, i.e. in the beginning of the tenth month. '*Janayati Putram ashtamay masya sutavi*', goes the *Vedic* hymn. Here too it is clear that the society had a keen desire for a male child. '*Putram*' from the very inception, which indicates a high preference for a male child in the male dominated society. *Panini*, the great Sanskrit grammarian, gives the derivation of son (*putra*) like this, '*Pum namam Narkam trayatay yah sa eva Putrah*.' This rite, now reduced to a negligible function, is completed on the eve of the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony.

<sup>1</sup> Bhatt, Pt. Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak*, 1925, '*Upanayan*', P 40.



There is hardly any practice of singing and dancing on the eve of the conception of a baby in our modern society. But our folk songs hint at such practices. In this connection these lines are worth consideration :-

*Ma:ji tso<pnas tsAndra:yunye*

*MA:li ko>rnas zi:va:da:n*

*Asi santa:n go>tsh a:sunye,*

*Kor kunyi pherIni dra:v.*

*Ja:y yali kArmas garbas manz ,*

*Tso>k mo>dur hyo>tun tsha:nDunlye,*

*Kor kuñye,,,,,,,,,*

Translation:

The mother kept the 'Chandra:yan Vrita,

The father gave life to it,

All this was done just to have a child (in the family)

Where has he gone just for strolling?

When it was first conceived in the womb,

She started looking for sweet and sour dishes.

Where has he .....?

*Chandra:yan* is one of the most tedious 'Vritas' requiring utmost austerity. The process extends over a month's period that includes physical as well as ritualistic practices. In the form of actions, it may include circumambulation of a sacred place of a deity or a place of worship and performance of 'Hawans,' etc. These practices are regulated according to waxing and waning of the moon. The austerity starts on the first day of the bright fortnight of either 'Chaitra Shukla' (March-April), or 'Ashwin Shukla' (September-October), considered as the most auspicious months of the year for such austerities. The ascending order of 'Vrita' starts from first day of the waxing moon and continues up to the full moon day (*Puranmashi*) and after that the descending order starts till the last day of the dark fortnight (*Amawasya*). Accordingly the physical and, the ritualistic practices go

on waxing and waning as per the calendar of the moon for the specific month.

## (II) Post-birth Sanskars and Rituals Including the Brahamcharya Ashram.

1. The birth of a child.
- 2 'Truy:', The third day's rituals.
3. 'Shra:nSo>ndar,' First ritualistic and medicinal bath,
4. 'Jatkarn', *Kaha Ne 'thlr*, The birth rituals,
- 5 'Namkarn', Giving a name to the new born,
6. Nishkraman 'Ma:sI Ne 'thlr', Rituals on the expiry of one month,
7. 'Tsajji.him Shra:n' Fortieth day bath.
- 8 'Anni Pra:shum', Serving of solid food for the first time.
9. 'Kan tso>mbIni' 'Karan Bedha' - Piercing of ear lobes.
10. 'Vo>har Vo<d' or 'Janam Din' Birthday celebrations.
- 11 'ZarI Ka:say', 'Mundan'- To shave the hair of the baby for the first time.
12. 'Mangtl Anun' - Adoption of a child.

### 1. The Birth Of a Child

The birth of a baby is considered as a matter of great joy in almost all civilizations of the world. The birth of a child is the greatest pleasure and a pious hour in a man's life and when the newborn is a male, the joyous celebrations become two-fold. All the members of the family celebrate this event together with their relatives. There is hardly any country or civilization, society or family in the world, where its members, either today or in the past, have highlighted the birth of a female child. The birth of a male child is an occasion of joyous celebrations in the male-dominated society since times immemorial. Our religious scriptures too have highlighted the birth of a male child called as *Putra* - the saviour of his parents

from a particular Hell, called 'Pum' (according to the derivation made by *Panini* as already discussed).

In ancient times the family kept a complete record of the pregnancy period of a lady through certain crude measures. This is possible to day due to the fact that the health care facilities are available at every doorstep in the form of our Health Centers. Thousands of years ago when a simple medicine or even a watch for keeping the time record was not available, all these things were extremely difficult for a common man. But still the practice continued till date.

All relatives, neighbours, friends and well-wishers wait impatiently for the moment of the delivery. The pregnant lady is a very important member of the family during all this period. Special care for her good health is taken. Minor house-hold jobs which involved bodily movements are considered more suitable for the health of such a lady. She is served small amounts of highly nutritious food, juices and health-drinks during all this period. As the period of her pregnancy advances, she is not allowed to move out from her residence during odd hours. She is asked to remain indoors during lightening, thunder and eclipses (sun and moon). There is a superstitious belief that the pregnant lady must remain completely calm and motionless during the eclipse otherwise the newborn bears the mark of her action/s if done knowingly during the eclipse periods of her advanced pregnancy. In such a state of care and restrictions the final hour of delivery approaches. The lady is free from all the burden of excitement and care. This is really the hour of thoughtfulness for every body, whosoever he may be, remains with a bowed head before Him at this moment as every body considers it to be an hour of life and death for the pregnant lady. The whole family, relatives and neighbours, all assemble with concern and expectation. Every body is in a pensive mood praying that the Almighty may bestow a moment of

successful and easy delivery upon the lady. In the meantime the most concerned lady of the house orders an elderly member of the house to bring some seasmum and acacia arabica (*KA.nThgan*) duly sanctified by a saint or a seer. At the same time she asks a young girl or lady of the house to bring water in a cup after dipping the right toe of the husband of the pregnant lady in it and the lady in labour is asked to drink this water. The nurse or the mid-wife, present on the occasion, orders to bring a cup of salted tea with added cream. The lady is also asked to keep the end point of her hair plait in her mouth so that she could take long breaths. All these actions are supposed to stimulate the process of delivery. The labour room is all filled with ladies, old and young, everybody consoling the patient to have courage. At this hour of trial, promises for offerings to gods and presenting oneself at a number of holy places and at the shrines of great seers and saints, is made for the safe delivery of the child. In the mean time, a sweet cry of a baby, strikes the ears of those present in the labor-room. All the family members feel relief and the members of the family start coming out and going in, in utter joy and pleasure, every body asking one another, 'is it a male or a female child'? There is no sign of anxiety on anybody's face. This hustles and bustle remains just for some time and every body prays for the long life and prosperity of the new born. Every body is happy that the lady and the new-born, whether it is a male or a female child, both have survived. The ladies of the house offer good wishes '*Vadlv*' (greetings) to each other. The word '*Vadlv*' appears to be a derivation from the Sanskrit root word '*Vid*' meaning 'to know'.

With the coming of the new born, whether male or female, the whole family including all cousins (from the father's side) excluding daughters and the sons who are without the Holy Thread Ceremony, commonly known as the *Yagnyopavita*, including the daughter/s-in-law and the lady concerned, are all considered impure for a period

of ten days from the date of the delivery, known as 'Hontsh.' The scriptures say that even the married and the un-married girls of the family have this impurity for a period of three days. This conception is in vogue even now. The scriptures have further elucidated that in the case of two impurities (due to the birth of two children in the same *Goitra*/family) occur one after the other, only the first 'Hontsh' or the one preceding the other be taken into account. But in case the second event is the death of a person in that family, the latter should be taken into consideration. The word 'Hontsh' appears a derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Ashouch', meaning impurity due to the death or birth in a family. It is the word 'Shouch' with 'A' as prefix. 'Shouch' means cleanliness or purity and due to the prefix 'A' the meaning is reversed and it means unclean or impure. It is of two kinds according to our *Dharama Shastra*, i.e., the 'ZyanI Hontsh' called as 'Sutak' in case the birth of a baby takes place in the family. It is called the 'Maran Hontsh.' or 'Mritak' in case of the death of a person in the family. No outsider can take cooked food or any drinks prepared or touched by any of the so-called impure persons of the family during the first ten days after any of the two events take place in a family. If any body takes it due to negligence or by mistake, he too is considered impure for a period of ten days from the date of his taking such food/drinks. All religious rites and ceremonies other than those connected with the delivery/birth of the child or the death rites of the deceased, are completely forbidden to be performed by the members of the family during all these days. The said impurity ends on the eve of the eleventh day after taking 'Pancha Gavya' - a mixture of five elements like water, milk, curd, ghee and a few drops of a calf's urine duly sanctified by the *Kula Guru* according to the scriptures.

Three superstitions are closely connected with the time of the labour and the delivery of a pregnant lady:-

- 1 Entering of any other pregnant lady into the labour-room is considered ominous till the baby is born. In case such a lady enters the room knowingly, her own labour-time is believed to become more difficult and painful.
- 2 A married lady, without any child, considers it auspicious to enter into the labour-room. It is believed that by doing so the chances of her conceiving a child increase.
3. Prior to the onset of the labour, the pregnant lady is forbidden to lock any room/s, boxes/trunks with her own hands. In case she has done so, she herself or any member of the family is asked to unlock them. It is believed that locking of rooms, etc., make labour period more painful and lengthy.

In the meantime the attendance in the house increases. People come and congratulate the family members saying, 'God has saved the life of the two.' In case the newborn is a male, he is said to resemble Lord Krishna while others compare his or her limbs and facial structure with his/her parents. Some others pray for his/her good future and longevity. In the case of a girl child, the attendants say that the child is as beautiful as a gem. They further declare that the hair of the baby is so long and dense, as if the mother has been spinning wool on the wheel all-through her pregnancy. In the midst of all such conversations, an elderly lady of the house enters the room with a fire-pot (*Ka:nglr*) filled with live charcoals and starts burning 'Niger' (commonly known as 'Isband') after touching the fore-head of each person with just a few seeds of 'Niger' with the finger tips of her right-hand and then throwing it into the fire-pot. Just then the elder daughter or the daughter-in-law of the house asks the head of the family to please the mid-wife or the nurse by giving her a good monetary reward in

token of gratitude for the service rendered by her on the occasion. It is after receiving the said gratifications that the mid-wife or the nurse cuts the umbilical chord of the child otherwise she keeps them all waiting. This is the most precious time for the nurse to extract more gratifications in the form of cash and kind from the members of the family. The head of the family does not want to be cursed by the nurse at this hour of joy so he rewards her handsomely. After separating the 'naval string' she washes the baby with hot water and wraps it in a clean and new cloth, preferably a white shawl/towel and shows it to all others to extract some more money from the family members. A representative from the maternal side of the child comes with presents like sweets, cakes/biscuits and a new dress for their daughter and the new born and other presents including some cash, known as 'Pya:v'. The other members of the family and the relatives give presents in cash that is later on reciprocated. This is also the appropriate time when the elder member or the head of the family is asked to recite the holy words, the '*Gayatri Mantra*', into the right ear of the baby. Here a tentative family name is given to the baby, which is either retained or changed by the family priest (*Kula Guru*) after he prepares the horoscope of the baby. Needless to say that the name given to the baby should corroborate with the position of stars at the time of its birth. The baby is returned to the mother so that she can suckle her child. The elderly lady of the house asks the head of the family to note the correct time of the baby's birth for casting his/her horoscope, etc.

In ancient times, special care was taken to collect very soft parts of the paddy-grass, commonly known as the '*Go>DI Guyun*' much before the delivery of the child. It was carefully preserved for preparing the temporary bed for the first ten days after the delivery, as the mother was considered impure for ten days of her post delivery period. Hence, to save the household bedding from

getting defiled, the patient and the child were kept on this grass-bed after making a lining with mud plaster and lime powder in a circular form around it. At the lower end of the grass-bed was kept a new earthen pot called, '*Huri*' *Le 'ji*' to the right side of the patient. It was also known as the '*Huri*' *Ra:zI*'. The said lining was pasted a fresh every morning with clay and water and pasted with lime powder. A portion of rice/vegetable/ meat prepared for the mother was first put into this pot along with a glass of fresh water. It was a superstitious belief that the pot, thus kept, was considered as the bodyguard of the lady during her post delivery days and keeping it well fed, would keep the mother and the baby satisfied. It was also believed that keeping the '*Huri*' *Ra:zI*' satisfied, the baby would feel contented, otherwise it would keep weeping and wailing in spite of the best care taken. The pot was kept at the right lower end side of the grass-bed of the mother for all the ten days. On the, eleventh day, after it was served its due portion of the '*Shra:n So>ndar*' feasting, the pot and the temporary grass-bed was gathered up in the evening, and thrown away at a solitary place, generally known as the '*Huri*' *Kho>d*'.

We generally believe that the impurity invites evil spirits. A lady is considered impure for all the ten days of her post delivery period and it is thought that the evil spirits arrive to tease the lady and the baby. In order to please these spirits, to gain their good will and to keep them away from doing any harm to the mother and the child, the circular space outside the grass-bed of the mother was plastered and lined with lime powder daily. It was a practice that presumably kept away the evil spirits from the mother and the baby. Hence rice and other eatables prepared for the mother were first served to it so as to please the evil spirits. It is also a belief that the evil spirits keep away from all those places that are guarded by some weapons. It is because of this that an iron sickle

or a knife is kept under the pillow of the new mother to keep away such spirits.

All the above mentioned social customs and ceremonies clearly denote a notion of alacrity expressed by our society on the birth of a child and the religious rituals make them more comprehensive and special as far our social structure is concerned. In our present changed social set up, the religious rites connected with these functions are postponed till the 'Yagnyopavita' ceremony and are not generally held at the right occasion.

With the advent of the modern medical facilities, a pregnant lady is now immediately shifted to a hospital or to a Nursing Home for the safety of the child and the mother. This has changed the age-old practices of the family not only in the urban areas but also in the remote corners of our country. Now the delivery takes place on hospital beds and, hence the superstitions have vanished and instead modern and scientific thoughts have replaced the old beliefs. We have got special and splendid beds even in our middle class families now. Hence, the delivery of a child on the grass bed 'Hur' is now not in vogue with the result that all the old superstitions connected with the said 'Huri' Ra:zI have since gone out of our minds and memories. No doubt, we have retained only a sweet memory of all our past praxis and beliefs till today.

## 2. 'Truy' - The Third day's rituals.

After spending three days in her delivery bed made of pure and soft grass called 'Hur', a special messenger is sent to the parents of the new mother, to inform them about the delivery of a child by their daughter. It is called 'a:nay'. The person deputed for the purpose takes a present along with him, comprising white sesame fried in oil and milk, cream, and garnished with

kernels of walnuts, groundnuts, almonds, together with coconut, cashew nuts, cardamom, sugar-candy, dates, etc., and flavored with saffron. This preparation is called, 'Truy Tyal'. Besides, offering it to all the relatives and neighbours etc., it is especially sent to the parents of the lady duly decorated in a tray and is also accompanied with five to eleven packets of sweetmeats, mostly, 'Barfi', preferably packets of two kilogram each, according to ones economic and social status. The parents of the lady have to reciprocate the said 'a:nay' in cash, according to ones status, with an addition to include the approximate amount spent on the said preparation. This repayment is called 'Purvini'. The word 'a:nay' appears to be a distorted form of the Sanskrit word, 'Anayan', meaning 'bringing' or 'intimating' and the word, 'Purvini' seems to be the changed form of the Sanskrit word, 'Purak' meaning 'complementary, compensatory', or simply an 'addition'.

A light massage of oil or ghee is given to the hair of the baby in the evening, known as 'Truy Ti:l'. It is believed that the hair of the child shall remain bright and shining throughout his/her life as a result of this massage done on the third auspicious day of its birth.

## 3. Shra: n So>ndar - The Ritual and medicinal Bath.

After performing the 'Truy' on the third/forth day, the health condition of the mother and the baby is checked by an elderly and expert lady of the house and, if all is well, the day for the first bath of the new mother and baby is fixed on the seventh, ninth or the eleventh day of the delivery.<sup>1</sup> In case both are hale and hearty, it could be done on the seventh day otherwise it is postponed so as

<sup>1</sup> The climatic conditions prevailing are also kept in view while fixing the date for the bath.

to suit the health conditions of the mother and the baby. Besides, it is performed on an auspicious day of the week, preferably on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. The religious functions connected with the 'Jatkarn' or 'Kaha Ne 'thlr', purification of the mother and the child and the 'Namkarn' - giving a name to the child, are performed on this very day as the mother and the child is considered to get purified after the said bath. Sometimes both the functions are performed simultaneously on the eleventh or the twelfth day provided it is one of the auspicious days of the week mentioned above. The whole family is considered as impure, having 'Hontsh' or 'Ashouch' till this purification is done before the 'Agni' while chanting the specific hymns from the scriptures. Offerings are made to the 'Agni' on this occasion. In case it is not performed on the said dates/days, the function is to be performed invariably before the functions like, marriage, 'Yagnyopavita' or the six-monthly 'Shradha', known as the 'ShaDmo>s,' in case of the death of a family member takes place. This ceremony is generally performed on the day of 'Yagnyopavita' ceremony now in case none of the said events takes place between the birth of the child and his Holy Thread Ceremony.

There are a number of folk-songs, tales and rituals connected with the 'Shra:n So>ndar' celebrations. Once the day for the celebration is fixed, the mother and the child are given a medicinal bath with hot boiled water known as the 'Fo>ti' Wo<ni', or the 'Losl Wo<ni'. This water is boiled along with a number of herbs, known as the 'Fo>ti' Masa:l'l' and is then kept to cool down. In the mean time the grass bed of the mother is removed and kept aside. The place is properly besmeared with mud plaster. The earthen pot too is cleaned properly and half filled with fresh water. A good feast, generally non-vegetarian, that includes preparation of fish also, is arranged on the said occasion. The elderly ladies of the neighbourhood and a few among the close relatives are

invited. The mother and the child are dressed in new clothes after the bath, which come from the mother's parental house. The two are seated on a fresh and clean bedding. An elderly lady of the house comes with a lighted earthen lamp, which is kept on a stand in the center of the room. A metal pot half filled with fresh and clean water is kept beside the lamp stand. The lady keeps a bunch of birch-bark in her left hand. A leaf of the bark is lighted on the lamp and then circulating it round three times over the head of the mother and the child, is thrown into the metal pot. The exercise is repeated over the heads of all the ladies and other family members (generally ladies) present in the room. The process is called, 'Burzl Me't KaDini'. The hostess, who performs this show, sings this folk-song on the occasion: -

Shokh tl po>nlsun ... Shokh tl po>nlsun  
 YAzman ba:y pAti' a:yi bro:nThi' a:yi,  
 Suml diwa:n kaDIl diwa:n,  
 Vani' diwa: n Vari diwa:n,  
 Dyakl bADi'nas bakhtl bAdi'nas,  
 Bab lAsi'nas ba:y lAsi'nas  
 Shokh tl po>nlsun, Shokh tl po>nlsun.

These lines are repeated for all those present at the function. The words 'De'd/Bab/TA:Th/To<Th, Ma:l/ Mo<l/SA:b,' etc., according to the age group of those present there instead of the words, 'YAzman Ba:y', are inserted. Like Ma:s De'd (in case of mother's elder sister), Ma:s/TA:Th/To<Th (in the case of mother's younger sisters/brothers-in-law, etc.), are added according to their seniority. In the case of the youngsters the words 'Ra:j/TA:Th, like 'BA:yi' Ra:j', Beni TA:Th, younger brother/ sister, is also added to this lineage.

A general assessment of the very first line of the couplet hints to its very ancient origin when Sanskrit was probably the language of the common masses in the valley. The two Sanskrit words 'Shashwat' for 'Shokh' and 'Punah su:ti' for 'Po>nlsun' meaning 'eternal' and

'pregnancy again,' respectively hint towards it. The meaning of this rhyme can be assessed as under: -

'Cheerfulness and once more a pregnancy,  
The lady (managed all) going hither and thither,  
By making bridges, (contacts) big and small,  
Searching and offering hotchpotch,  
Let her husband live long,  
Let her prosperity be manifold,  
Let her father live long,  
Let her brothers live long .....

The rhyme also shows the busy time schedule of the lady who has been looking after all big and small things during the period of pregnancy in her family. Besides, it also includes good wishes for the other members of the family.

In the meantime seven big plates, known as '*Tha:l*', duly filled with cooked rice, meat, fish and a few vegetables including 'dandelion' '*Hand*', a wild vegetable considered very rich in iron content, are brought into the room. One, among these, is first served to the 'earthen pot', which is kept at the foot of the mother's bed to the right side for all these days. The second plate is served to the mother, who picks up a little rice and mixing it with a little of meat and vegetables touches the forehead of the baby with it and keeps it to the right side of the baby, near his/her head/cap before she starts eating herself. The remaining plates are offered to the most near and dear relatives, generally the ladies. All those present including the neighbours and relatives invited on the occasion take part in this special feast and celebrate it.

On this day the parents of the mother come to the house of their daughter with a number of presents in a big decorated basket and this function is known as '*Pho>t tsa:nun*'. Now a days the presents are brought in a steel trunk which, besides a new set of clothes for the child and the mother, contains some candy-cakes, turmeric, some loaves of bread, walnuts, a packet of salt,

sugar candy and some money in cash. The person carrying this trunk is called '*Kani*' '*MAhniv*', and he is allowed to enter the main door of the house after performing '*a:lath*' (a ceremony in which a little water and a few grains of rice are kept in a plate and circulating it over the head of the man, carrying the trunk and the persons accompanying him. It is then thrown away). In return the man accompanying or the father of the girl has to pay some amount of cash for his entrance into his daughter's house, called '*a:lath*'. This amount is returned to him in double at the time of his departure or after some days. The return money also includes the labour charges for carriage of the trunk, called '*MAhniv Ha:rl*'.

#### 4. *Jatkarn* - '*Kaha Ne'thIr*',

##### The birth rituals.

The literal meaning of the word, '*Jatkarn*' is 'Birth ritual', and in the common Kashmiri language it is called, '*Kaha Ne'thIr*'. Like all other rituals of the similar type, all the ingredients are required for making offerings to the Holy Fire. Besides, the baby is to wear round his/her neck a golden/silver ring attached with a *NA:rivan*, duly sanctified by the *Kula Guru* and the host by making offerings of the condiments and *ghee* to the Holy Fire. While chanting hymns from the *Vedas*, half of the offering of *ghee* is offered to the holy fire while half of it is cast on the ring placed in a bowl.. The offerings are repeated several times. After completing the ritual, the ring soaked in *ghee* is touched to the lips of the baby. It is then washed and put back in the same bowl for further benedictions during the '*Namkarn Sanskar*'. The *ghee* left in the bowl is to be rubbed gently on the head of the baby for a couple of days in the evening. It is a conception that rubbing the ritual-residue of *ghee* develops the brain and the hair of the baby. The *Vedic Richas* of this ritual

contain good wishes for the longevity of the baby and his/her parents<sup>1</sup>

The *Kula Guru* next sprays the duly sanctified water over the mother and the baby. In the midst of the chanting from the *Vedas*, the mother is wished that she may have sufficient and tasteful milk in her breasts so as to breast-feed her baby for a sufficient period of time. Thus seven offerings are made to the fire in this behalf<sup>2</sup> where after the parents embrace the child and give it nine benedictions putting their right hand on the head of the baby. These are :-

Oh my child, ( here the name given to him/her on its birth along with the *Gotra* is recited along with his/her parentage), you may:-

1. Live long, 2. Attain your full age, 3. Prove to be truthful, 4. Attain prosperity, 5. Be full of valour, 6. accomplish fame, 7. Feed all the deserving, 8. Keep complete austerity (*Brahamcharya Dharma*), and 9. Live for a period of one hundred autumns<sup>1</sup>.

It may be re-called that the impurity on account of the '*Su:ta:k*' continues in the whole family and that no further religious rites of whatsoever could be completed unless accomplishment of this rite. The *Namkarn* ritual follows immediately during which further offerings are made to the Holy Fire after which the ring is tied to the neck of the baby. The folk songs of both the rituals are of the same nature as we shall see in the fore-going chapters.

<sup>1</sup> *Agnerayurusita Hiraryana Mukha Myadhyam Kritah*, Bhatt Pt. Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak*. 1925, P. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Saftabhirajyam Stanow cha Payiyeth Pita*, Bhatt Pt. Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak*, 1925, P. 43

## 5. *Namkarn*- Giving a Name to the New-born.

This is purely a ceremony connected with giving a name to the new-born. At the time of uttering the '*Gayatri Mantra*' into the right ear of the baby, consultations are held between the members of the family/relatives present there, to decide upon a suitable name to the new-born, which is finally decided by the elders and lastly confirmed or even changed by the family priest after he casts the horoscope of the baby. The name of the baby should corroborate with the position of the 'stars' in the heavens at the time of his/her birth. The baby and his/her parents are brought before the Sacred Fire and after sprinkling Sacred Water on the trio; offerings are made to the fire amidst chanting of hymns from the Holy Scriptures. This portion of the function is of negligible importance now and the society has given it up. This religious and ritualistic portion of the post-birth ceremony, which the society seems to have considered as an effete practice and which is now performed on the eve of the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony, is a complete deviation from the set procedure.

The following extract from a folk song gives us a vivid picture of the period of pregnancy and the celebrations, which it involves: -

*A:Th ryath gAyi path kun a:da:,  
NAyimi ry>ti za:v Shehza:da:,  
Huri bi:Th tay muri ro>Tnaye'  
Ko<r kunlye pherlni dra:v.  
MA:li',sombrinas JyotIshi' tI PAnDith,  
Ra:zI po>tras Za:tukh gANDiv,  
Ra:zI po>tras chu Ra:j karunye'  
Ko<r kunye' pherlni dra:v.*

The translation of these lines is as under: -  
When eight months had already passed,



The Prince was born in the ninth month,  
 She sat on the maternity bed and took the child in her lap.  
 Where has he gone just for strolling?  
 His father invited astrologers and Pandits,  
 (And asked them) to prepare the horoscope for the  
 born Prince,  
 The Prince has to enjoy the kingship,  
 Where has he gone just for a stroll?

### 6. *Nishkraman/Ma:sI Ne'thIr* – Rituals on the expiry of one month.

The literal meaning of the words '*Ma:sI*' and '*Ne'thIr*' is 'month' and '*Nakshetra*' or constellation, respectively. At the expiry of a month and after examining the health condition of the baby and the mother, this ritual is celebrated on any of the auspicious days, as already mentioned. In the morning, after bathing and dressing the baby, a circular diagram known as '*Yyu:g*' is cast at the main entrance of the house, commonly known as the, '*Vuz*,' with the help of different coloured lime powder. The baby is wrapped in a clean towel, and is kept on it beside a stone pestle placed on a round grass ring, '*A:r*', especially made for it. An elderly lady of the house arranges all this and in case the baby is a male one, pointing towards the pestle she says, 'Here is your bride.' In case of a female child, she would say, 'Here is your groom'. This ritual is also known as, '*Siryi Darshan*' and the mother of the baby is asked to step out of the house for the first time after the delivery so that she may be at liberty to move out of the house any time even if it is not one among the auspicious days. Hence the ritual is called '*Nishkraman*' meaning 'going out'. A little sugar is given to the new mother outside the house as a good omen. Salted yellow rice, commonly known as '*TAhAr*,' is prepared on the occasion and after offering a small portion of it to the deities and birds a little is kept

near the pillow of the baby and the remaining portion is served to the members of the family.

It appears that the age-old precedence of celebrating the ritual after an expiry of one month had been on the re-occurrence of the same '*Nakshetra*' when the baby was born. The social custom of pestle; and '*Yyu:g*', has changed the nomenclature of the word '*Nakshetra*', into '*Ne'ther*'.

There are some references in our folklore and folk songs, which show that the birth of a child was celebrated for full one year from the date of his/her birth and the whole family observed the rituals and customs connected with these celebrations. Let us examine some lines of the folk-song relating the '*Ma: sI Ne'thIr*' of a child: -

*Ma:sI Ne'thIras sivimay karI kanI kha:li;*  
*SA:risly ShahrAs bA:garIni dra:y,*  
*Pra:ske'n dya:ran KanW:A:li' gArimay*  
*Ko>rmay Barkho>rda:ryI na:v.*

Translation:

I got boiled the beans and the kernel on your attaining  
 one-month's age,  
 And I distributed it to the whole city,  
 Earrings were made for you from the presents made  
 on your feast,  
 And I named you as my son.

### 7. *Tsaj:him Shra:n* : Fortieth-day bath.

On or before the fortieth day, the baby and the mother is again given a bath with hot herbal water on an auspicious day of the week, Now the lady is considered to be completely fit for doing all the house-hold chores or attend to her duties in or outside the house, as the case may be. It needs to be mentioned here that during all these forty days utmost care is taken of the baby and the mother. She is not permitted to walk with bare feet. She is not allowed to wash or bathe with cold water. She has

to take a boiled herbal concoction, called '*Losl Sharbath*' before morning tea or breakfast is served to her. Water meant for her drinking is thoroughly boiled and is known as '*Foti Wo<ni*'. The pot containing the water is kept wrapped in woolen cloth so that it remains hot and unaffected by outer atmospheric cold. Every care is taken about her eating and drinking all these days. She cannot eat anything, which is not fresh. Preferably, outsiders are not allowed to enter her room during odd hours. In case the entry is essential, the person has to keep his/her hand on the head of the mother/baby and then sit at the place of his/her choice. All this is done to avoid the entrance of evil spirits, who are thought to be accompanying such late travelers. It is a superstitious belief that such spirits harm the mother and the baby.

In the family set-up of the Kashmiri Pandits, there is hardly any evidence to show that there is any mass cultural or social celebrations held on the birth of a child, either male or female even in a collective manner. There is, however, evidence of folklore, folksongs and folkdances, etc., prevalent within the concerned family bounds on many other such occasions. In the *Atherva Veda*, there is a complete hymn that clearly describes very soothing methods involving less labour pain during the birth of a child<sup>1</sup>. In the Valmiki *Ramayana*, there is a reference of singing and dancing by the deities and angels on the birth of Lord Rama<sup>2</sup>. The poets of the Kashmiri language have adopted and incorporated the same ideas and descriptions in their Kashmiri versions<sup>3</sup> of the *Ramayana*. Kalidasa has also given an account of rejoicing in the "*Raghuvamsha*" on the eve of the birth of Prince '*Aja*'<sup>4</sup>. It narrates that a congregation was held in

the palace and singers and dancers were invited to put up their show on the occasion. It appears that the later Indian poets like *Tulsidas* and *Surdas* have repeated what *Valmiki* and *Vyas* have described about this ritual in the '*Bal Kanda*' of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, respectively.

All these facts show that the birth of a child in a family was a matter of great rejoicing and merrymaking for the whole family. Social and cultural celebrations were held throughout the Indian continent on such an occasion and Kashmir could not have remained untouched by such practices. But presently no such celebrations take place in our society. It appears that with the passage of time all these celebrations have been forgotten by our society and are now restricted to a few ostentatious functions only.

No doubt, the folk-songs, sayings, etc., which generally form a part of our '*Vanlvun*' (*BaTi Vanlvun*) on the eve of *Yagnyopavita* ceremony, clearly tell us that there must have been some social and cultural celebrations observed in the Kashmiri society on the birth of a child.

The changes in the socio-religious and cultural patterns must have affected all such customs and finally the society must have given up all of them, though gradually. Pressure from a different civilization must have put a stop to the day-to-day celebrations and performance of religious rites for obvious reasons forcing the society to combine all these elements of rejoicing to one single function that is the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony. The same appears to be the fate of some of the rituals and customs which form a part of all the existing *Sanskars* out of which only a few have survived.

References to various festivities are evident in our folk songs (*Vanlvun*) and folk tales, which clearly refer to the observance of such celebrations from time to time

<sup>1</sup> *Atherva Veda*, I - 11

<sup>2</sup> *Valmiki Ramayana (Bal Kanda)* 17-18

<sup>3</sup> *Rama Avatara Charita* by Prakash Ram Kurigami, Trans. By Dr. Shiban Raina, 1975 (*Bal Kanda*) XX, 7-8, P. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> *Raghuvamsha* by Kalidasa, 3-19.

during the period of maternity. Let us examine the lines of the following folk song :-

*Vina:yaka tso<ram tl a:thwa:r dArmay*  
*Ko>rmay Barkho>rda:rly na:v,*  
*A:Than re'tan kru:Th kya:h bo>rmay,*  
*NAvimi ryl za:v Ba:lIgu:pa:l,*  
*ThanA yAli pyoham tl ranl pe'v kArmay,*  
*Ko>rmay Barkho>rda:rly na:v,*  
*Truyis tre' trakh te'l kya:h ko>rmay ~*  
*DandI gu:gi sA:ri: masa:lI kya:h kAri'may .....  
 NA:li kiti rangl rangl vastlr karimay .....  
 Zitishan ta PAnDitan sa:l kya:h ko>rmay ...  
 Ko>rmay.....*

'Vinayak' is one of the names given to 'Ganesh' - the propeller of all our actions according to the Hindu mythology. When combined with months, dates and days, it means the bright fortnight of *Bhadrapad*, i.e. September. The fourth day of *Bhadra Shukl*, is known as '*Vina:yak Tso<ram*'. In case it falls on a Sunday, it is considered extremely auspicious. In the Kashmiri families, a special kind of sweet bread fried in ghee, called '*RoTh*', is prepared on this date. In case it is not possible for a family to adhere to this date, the preparation is postponed and held on the other auspicious day of the same fortnight or on the fifteenth bright fortnight of *Ka:rtika Shukl*, i.e. Oct. Nov. The function is known as '*Pan Dyun*'. Besides, September is the season of harvesting cotton in the valley, a raw thread got spun or prepared by an un-married girl out of newly harvested cotton, has got a special significance on this function. The girl gets a special sweet bread, called '*Kanikl Vo>r*' and some little money, as a reward for preparing the thread. Needless to say that the cultivation of cotton has disappeared from the valley since long due to the preference for some other cash crops, but the ritual survives to this day even after our exodus from the valley.

From the study of the folk-song mentioned above, it appears that this date, day and fortnight, had a special significance of celebrations on the birth of a child in a family. A possible transliteration of these lines could be as under; -

(I) Kept a fast on Sunday, the fourth day of the bright half of *Bhadrapad*,  
 And I named you as my son,  
 (I) had a trying time for all the eight months,  
 And in the ninth month (I) gave birth to the Handsome one (*Krishna*),  
 (I) arranged a good feasting on your birth,  
 And (I) named you as my son,  
 On your '*Truy*'-Third day (I) got prepared three *Trakhs* (fifteen Kilograms approximately) of sesame,  
 (And I arranged) milk, kernel and all condiments  
 And (I) named you as my son,  
 (I) got colourful clothes for you to wear and  
 (I) arranged a feast and invited all *Pandits* and astrologers.  
 And (I) .....

### 8. *Anl Pra:shun/Pre'pyun* - Serving of solid food for the first time.

This ritual of socio-religious importance is celebrated when the baby is nearly six months old. A vegetarian feast is generally arranged on this day. A special dish commonly known as '*Khi:r*' (thoroughly boiled mixture of rice, milk, sugar and garnished with almond kernels, coconut, dates, etc.) is prepared on this day. The baby is neatly dressed. Besides, new suits for the baby and the mother, a big plate (*Tha:li*) and a cup, saucer, a spoon and a tumbler preferably made of silver come from the maternal house of the baby. This serves as a gift to the child from his/her maternal grand parents.

There is a clear mention in the scriptures regarding this *Sanakar*. The scriptures direct that this function should be celebrated either when the baby is six month's old or has started cutting its milk teeth. Sweet rice-pudding (*Khi:r*), Ghee and other dry fruit are offered to the *Agni* while reciting the relevant hymns from the Holy Scriptures. A portion from the offered *Khi:r* is placed before the baby as a residue. Other things like, books, a pen, a writing slate/paper, a knife, etc. are kept just within the reach of the baby. In case the child's first catch is a pen or paper, it is believed that the baby will become a great man of letters. In case he/she catches the *Khi:r* first, it is said that the baby will be a common man more inclined to eating. In case, the baby's first choice is a knife, it is presumed that it would become a great warrior, a technician or a doctor, etc. The following extract from the scriptures clearly hint towards this fact: -

*'Devaagrato atha vinyasya shilpa bhandani sarvashah,  
Astrani sarva shastrani tatah pashyet lakshnam,  
Prathamam yat mrajyat balah tato bandam swayam tada,  
Jeevatam tasya balasya tenaiva tu bhavishyati.'*<sup>1</sup>

The translation of this couplet is as under: -

Keep on all the sides of the baby different kinds of utensils,  
Different weapons and armaments to see the liking of the child,

The first thing, which the baby touches of its own,  
Should be considered the main source of liveliness in its life.

The ritualistic portions of the celebrations on this occasion have completely vanished from our society now. The socio-economic aspect is still prevalent involving giving of a few petty gifts by the maternal side. This aspect too is now at the verge of extinction in a large section of our society. The ritualistic part of the *Sanskars*

is now observed on the eve of '*Mekhala*' (the Holy Thread Ceremony), since it is one of the most important *Sanskars*. However, no such provision is left for a baby girl for completing this *Sanskar* if it is not celebrated at the proper time. Needless to say that the *Yagnyopavita Sanskar* is now restricted to the male children only.

There is a beautiful narration in one of our folk songs, which give a vivid description of this function. It reads as under: -

*Shima:sis ko>rmay AnI Pre'pyunIye',  
Man do>das ko>rmay khir taya:r,  
Kho<s, gila:s tI tha:I kyah go>rmay,  
Ko>rmay barkho>rdarIy na:v.*

The translation of these lines is as under: -

(I) Celebrated your '*AnI Pra:shun*' for the first time when (you) were six months' old,  
(I) got prepared the sweet dish (*Khi:r*) for one pound (36 Kg. approximately.) of milk,  
(I) got prepared a cup (*Kho<s*), a tumbler (*Gila:s*) and a plate (*Tha:I*) for you,  
And I named you as my son.

### 9. *Kan tso>mbInI - Karan Bedha - Piercing of the ears.*

This was a ritual of purely social nature celebrated during yester years. An experienced lady of the house or of the neighborhood was invited to pierce the ears when the baby was nearly six month old. Besides ears, the nose of the baby girl was also pierced. Piercing of ears was common among males as well as female babies. The parents had the mythical notion that this was a safeguard against any kind of witchcraft or natural calamities. There are references in our folk-tales to confirm this notion. The story of the lion and the man with the pierced ears point towards it. The lion left the man from its clutches on seeing a cut in his ears and considered it a worthless-prey

<sup>1</sup> Pandit, Keshav Bhatt, *Mekhala Pustak, 'Upayana'*, 1925, Ps. 55-56.

as a meal for the king of the forests. The social gatherings on such occasions have now disappeared. The piercing of the ears of a male child has since been given up and only a girl child's ears and nose etc., are pierced now by a trained doctor in a hospital and with out any celebrations.

#### 10. *Vo>har Vvo<d* - Birthday Celebrations.

This function of socio-cultural importance held in addition to the *Sanskars*, is celebrated with pomp and show when the baby is one year old (according to the lunar calendar). A new dress is got prepared for the baby on the occasion. All the close relatives are invited to a feast and the whole family and the invitees hold celebrations. The mother and the child get a new set of clothes from mother's parents which include a set of '*ATho>r*' for the mother (a tassel-like swinging set of ear ornaments made of tinsel thread called, "*Kala:bot*" either of gold or silver colour). Some affluent families get it made of solid silver or gold or is designed from its thread. It forms a part of the '*Dejho>r*' - a swinging ear ornament especially worn by Kashmiri girls on their marriage.

Besides, feasting, a special salty dish of rice made yellow with turmeric while cooking, called, '*TAAr*', is prepared on the occasion. Some families prefer preparation of '*Khi:r*' (sweet milk and rice pudding) in case the birthday falls on the full moon day or the eighth bright half of a lunar month. A ritualistic prayer called the '*Pre'pyun*' is offered by the *Kula Guru* on this occasion. '*Pre'pyun*' appears to be a combination of two words, '*Para*' and '*Arpan*' meaning to give to others, to offer or to present to others. It is a recitation from the Holy Scriptures which concludes with the sweet words, 'Please accept this "*Naived*" (the preparation thus made) like the "Nectar" which was procured by the gods in ancient times after churning the oceans '*Kshir Sagar*'. A

small portion of it, called '*tso T*' is offered to the deities and birds, it is generally put on a temple wall or on the housetop. A small portion is kept as a mark of gratitude on the hearth or stove on which it has been cooked. The remaining portion is distributed among all those present in the house and those invited to attend the feast. It is known as '*NAvi:d*' or *Naived* - meaning the left-over of a ritualistic performance. Thus the dishes prepared on the occasion are first served to the relatives and neighbours and the remaining is taken by the members of the family known as '*Ho>tl shi:sh*' the 'left over.' This function is repeated on a year-to-year basis according to the lunar calendar.

On every birthday the family priest is invited to perform this ritual. Besides, offering a new '*Yagnopavita*' to his host, (in case he has undergone this *Sanaskar* earlier), he ties a special coloured thread called '*NA:rivan*' to the right wrist of the host. It may be mentioned here that '*NA:rivan*' is tied to the left wrist of married ladies. The word appears a direct derivation from the root Sanskrit word '*Nadi Bandhn*' meaning 'wrist knot.' Besides its religious sanction, the modern science has accepted the importance of such a knot. It is considered useful for the ailments of heart and blood pressure, etc. The '*NA:rivan*', with the duly sanctified Holy Water sprinkled on it by the *Kula Guru* after chanting hymns from the scriptures, contains seven knots that represent the seven mythological luminaries of valour and wisdom of the ancient Indian mythology who, it is believed, have been granted immortality by the gods. They are:-

1. *Ashwathama* The great hero of the *Mahabharata*, son of *Dronacharya*, whom *Drishtadyuman* killed treacherously.
2. *Bali*: The famous *Rakshas Raja*, the great grand son of *Bhakti Prehlad*. He had conquered the three worlds with his penance and was

betrayed by Lord *Vishnu* in the guise of a dwarf old *Brahman* by measuring all the three worlds by taking only three steps.

- 3 *Vyas* The great Rishi mentioned in the *Puranas* who is also considered as the first teacher and the writer of the great Epic the *Mahabharata*.
4. *Hanuman* The 'Hanuman' of the great Epic *Ramayana*.
5. *Kripachary* The teacher of the 'Pandavas' and the *Kauravas*'.
6. *Markanday* He is considered as the writer of the 'Markanday Puran' He attained perpetual life due to his penance.
7. *Parshuram* The son of *Jamad Agni*, the great Rishi, considered to be a staunch opponent of the *Kshetriyas*, who is said to have framed the *Karma Kand-* the book of religious rites. *Parshuram* is reported to have extirpated the *Kshatriyas* from the whole world 21 times.

The 'Yagnyopavita' of an unmarried boy consists of only three strings whereas it consists of six strings in case of a married man. It is believed that according to the *Dharma Shashtra*, the father casts the three strings of it to the boy whereas he wears the remaining three strings as a result of his marriage with the girl with whom he is to share everything in life.

Now due to the impact of the Western civilization, the cutting of 'the cake' ceremony is held in the afternoon on the birthday. Some families celebrate the 'Birth day' ceremony according to the Christian calendar also.

There is a reference of celebrating this festival in our folk songs as well. The narration is as follows:-

VA: rshini Go>bro cha: v kya:h bo>rmay'  
 Bandan tI Ba:ndawan ko>rmay sa:l,  
 Naren kitsI so>nI slnz GunsI ju:ri gArmay,  
 Ko>rmay Barkho>rda:rIly na:v.s

The translation of these lines is as under:-

Oh; my one year old son, how eagerly (I) celebrated  
 And arranged a feast for all relatives and well-wishers,

(I) Got prepared a set of gold bangles for you,  
 And I named you as my son.

### 11. *Zari Ka:say, Mundan or ChuDakar-* The first tonsure of the baby.

This ceremony is especially celebrated in respect of a male child only when he is three years old or even before that. The scriptures clearly mention that: -

*'Triteeyasya varshasya bhuyishtyashu gateshu chudah karayati, Dakhinta kaputa Vashisthanam, ubhayate Atri Kashpayanam, Munda Braguvwah, pancha chooda Angirasanam, Vajinah eka mangalartham Shikhino anyatha yatha kala Dharma va, Shuddha pakshasya punyahe, parvani va yathoktam upasamadhaya.*

(Bhrihu Samhita <sup>1</sup>)

The literal meaning of these lines is as under: -

'When the baby attains the age of three years, he is shaved or ton shored'. Then follow the directions for the mode of shaving the hair of the babies of different 'Gotras' or clans, like *VasisThas, Atris, Kashyapas, Ba:rgavas, Angerasas*, etc. The *Samhita* has further elucidated and kept the mode of shaving open for all according to their traditions while following their individual religious ceremonies and rites. Closing the chapter, the Rishi has laid stress on the month, preferably the auspicious/bright (free from other ominous impacts), fortnight, day and date for holding such ceremonies as contained in the scriptures.

After making the offerings comprising sesame, barley, coconut, dates and sugar candy, and ghee etc., to

<sup>1</sup> Bhatt, Pandit Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak, 'Upayana,' 1925, P. 56.*

the Sacred Fire, the '*ChuDar*' - 'the ritualistic hair cutting of the baby', is done by the family priest with the help of '*Darbha*', '*Kusna*<sup>1</sup>', a sacred grass considered holy and used in all religious rites. For this purpose two earthen saucers known as '*TokTA:ki*', one containing water required for hair cutting and the other containing four walnuts, known as the '*ZarI Du:ni*' are made use of on the occasion. The hair of the baby is kept in this earthen saucer along with the walnuts and afterwards these are sown or buried at a sacred place of pilgrimage or in ones own garden/ orchard/courtyard etc., along with the hair of the baby. The idea behind sowing of the walnuts along with the hair of the baby is lest these are misused because the hair of a person is considered as a very important ingredient in different practices of witchcraft. So to avoid this, the hair of the baby is buried. The family barber is given a good remuneration in the form of a piece of cloth called '*Lu:ngi*' used for hair cutting, a packet of salt, a full plate of rice or more, a few walnuts and some money in cash - say Rs. 10/- and onwards. Some prosperous families give a suit of clothing to the barber as a present on this happy occasion. A special dish called '*VAr*' and loaves of rice flour, are prepared on this occasion in case the ceremony is not combined with the '*Yagnyopavita*' function on which the '*VAr*' and the loaves of rice flour are prepared a day or more earlier, preferably on the eve of '*MA:nzira:th*' or '*Mahandi Rat*' - the night of 'Henna'. Besides this, a small cake of all spices mixed together; called '*VAr*' is also used. It is a mixture of all the spices kneaded with black kidney-bean flour called, '*Vari FAlI*' and it is used as a vegetable dish. There are two types of preparing the special dish, '*VAr*'. One is vegetarian dish, which

contains walnut kernels, rice, turmeric and other spices, oil, and salt, and the second is the non-vegetarian dish containing all the above said ingredients except the kernels. Meat, preferably the innards of a sheep or goat called '*Chichar*' form a part of this non-vegetarian dish. The dish is served along with rice-flour cakes to all those present on the occasion. It is also distributed to all the neighbours and relatives according to ones social contacts. Generally vegetarian feasting is arranged on the occasion and all relatives and neighbours are invited. Though this ceremony is repeated on the eve of '*Yagnyopavita*' function but it involves the ritualistic portions only as directed by the Holy Scriptures. It has already been mentioned that only the social gatherings are held on the occasion and the ritualistic portions are avoided at the time of celebrating the 'Tonsure' of a baby on its scheduled date.

Generally speaking, this is one of the most important celebrations after the birth of a baby. The Holy Scriptures call it '*ChuDar/karan*' or '*Mundan*'. In India it is known as '*Mundan*' and in Kashmir we know it as '*ZarI Ka:say*'. The word '*ZarI*' means the first hair of the baby and '*Ka:say*' means shaving. The '*Mundan*' of the baby is necessary from the point of view of his betterment, good health, beauty and longevity according to the scriptures. It is one of the oldest rituals of the Indian religious practice and was more assiduously followed during the *Vedic* period when a boy was first introduced to his '*Kula Guru*' for imparting education to him<sup>1</sup>. The '*Grahisutras*' and the '*Atharva Veda*' contains special directions for this ritual<sup>2</sup>. Our Epics, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and even Kalidasa's '*Raghu Vamsha*' contain a vivid description of this function. The Kashmiri poets like Krishan Joo Razdan and others, have described

<sup>1</sup> The Kula Guru makes a ritualistic (nominal) hair cutting. The barber who is offered a good gratification for the purpose on this auspicious occasion does the actual hair cutting.

<sup>1</sup> Panday Raj Bali, *Hindu Sanskar, Varanasi* 1960, p. 121

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123

this function more vividly while giving the Kashmiri version of the *Ramayana*.

It is a fact that with the advent of modern education, the practice of sending our children to the 'Guru Kuls' for education has come to an end and the ritual has undergone a great change. The celebrations, which involve social and cultural gatherings, are still held with pomp and show but its ritualistic portion is now completed on the 'Yagnyopavita' ceremony. No doubt, even to day some families stick to their ancient practices and insist on performing all the socio-religious functions as per schedule and worship Lord *Ganesha* and other deities in the presence of the Holy Fire, and make offerings to it as specified in the Holy Scriptures.

Though our folk songs, 'Vanlvun' contain references regarding this celebration, but there is no reference to any kind of dancing or singing on the occasion. A perusal of these songs clearly depict our links with our ancient mythology and include almost all those mythological names of places and acts with which every Indian is familiar. No doubt that some of the couplets of these folk songs contain references peculiar to Kashmir alone. These include cutting of the hair of the baby at the 'Sharika Pi:tha', commonly known as the 'Di:vi: Angan'. The hair cutting of Lord *Krishna* and the joy expressed by 'Vasudeva' - the father of Lord *Krishna*, preparing the razor out of pure gold for the hair cutting of the baby etc. are the main features of the folk-song which starts with a conversation like this: -

Mas Ka:sn:k sanz yatu:thay,

MAnzi' hyatu:thay Parameshwar

Krishnlni ze 'nay syun ron Ve'nay'

Krishnas ka:sav ze'nay mas

ZarI ka:soyo Di:vi: Angan,

Gari Ka:yo Me'khali sanz,  
 MA:li: Go>rlyo sonI sund khu:ruy,  
 Goran ko>ryo Chu:Da:ka:r,  
 VasIdi:van Go>rlyo sonI sund Khu:ruy,  
 Brahaspatan ko>ryo Chu:Da:ka:r,  
 SonI slndis khu:ris Ashmi hund dastay,  
 AstA astA ma:li karus Chu:Da:ka:r,  
 Vo>stay ka:ro khu:r raTh wa:ray,  
 Baha: sheri ganDlyo sonI dasta:r,  
 Vo>stay ka:ro astI astI kuDusu:,  
 TshA:gis vursu: Mo>khtay ha:r,  
 Na:ra:n Juwas A:hi: mange',  
 Kanyak' zange' anA:se',  
 ZarI ka:snas kya:h kya:h paze'?'  
 Nu:n VAr tay beyi MohrI pra:s,  
 NA:vid dapa:n kya:h karI to>mlas?  
 Me' gatshyam ShimI ta KA:ni: Sha:l,  
 Vo>stI ka:r dapa:n kya:h karI vari hani ?  
 Lari travun chum tsu:rim por<e,  
 Vo>stI ka:r dapa:n kya:h karI da:nyas?  
 Me' gatshyam Ka:ni Ha:myuc JA:gi:r,  
 Vo>sta ka:r dapa:n kya:h karI Nu:nI hani,  
 Lari hani tra:vaha: Zo:nay Dab.  
 Yi ha: tsI mangItham ti: bo dimlyo,  
 Krishnas Tu:Thinam Na:ra:yan,  
 Divki: vo>nInay ti: bo dimlyo,  
 Mahara:zas rAchinam Na:ra:yan,  
 Ka:samay zarI tay tho>vmay tsho>guy,

<sup>1</sup> Before starting performance of any of the religious rites other than those connected with death, anniversaries, etc., an unmarried small girl is handed over a plate of rice containing a few walnuts/almonds, salt and some money on it. She touches the right shoulder of the person, performing the ceremony, thrice at the time of making a vermilion mark on his fore-head or at the time of his wearing a new Sacred Thread. This process is called 'Zang' It can be an occasion of wearing a new suit of clothing, marking a 'Tilak' on the fore-head at an auspicious religious functions or on any of the auspicious days of the year.

<sup>1</sup> A kind of wild 'mint-like' shrub not used as vegetable. It is a very fragrant plant, hence used in the religious functions along with flowers.



*Bhawa:ni bo>guy so>zu:nay,  
ZarI ka:sith dra:kh o>brI tall Siryo<,  
Go>bur chukh Vasldi:v Ra:zo<my,  
Lu:ngi' hye'th dimIyo khu:r bo darmas,  
Brahman zanmas Namaska:r,  
NA:vidas nishi a:kh isla:h kArithly,  
Vasu ya:rbal khas shra:n kArith,  
Sara Pamposh Tu:ri' gaya ta:zay,  
ZarI Mahara:zay lasi:nam.*

The conversation starts with an obeisance to God and other deities and then follows some question and answers. The translation of these lines is as under: -

You started the hair cutting ceremony and in the mean time remembered the Almighty,

On the eve of Lord *Krishna's* first hair cutting, the shrub 'Ve'na' was got prepared as vegetable,

Let us cut your first hair at *Di:vi Angan (Sharika Pi:tha)*

And make preparations for your *Yagnyopavita* at our home,

The father got prepared a golden Razor and the family priest completed the razor of your hair.

*Vsudeva* got prepared a golden Razor, and the Jupiter, Brahaspati completed your hair cutting

The golden razor has the handle made from precious stone,

Oh dear; please razor his hair very gently, oh; learned barber, handle the Razor carefully,

I shall manage a golden turban for you, oh barber; soften his hair very gently,

Encircle the Tonsure with a diamond necklace,

Ask a little girl to perform the beginning rite, 'Zang',

What should be the reward for the first hair cutting?

Salt, a cake of spices and a good number of gems,

The barber says what shall I do to the rice?

I should get a good suiting and a 'Kani Shwa l'<sup>1</sup>  
The barber says what for do I require the cake of spices?  
I want to construct the fourth storey of my house,  
The barber says what for do I require this paddy?  
I want the free hold Land Grant of *Kanihama*<sup>2</sup>,  
The barber says what shall I do to this little salt?  
I want to construct a 'Zu:nl Dab'<sup>3</sup> of my house,  
What ever you ask for, I shall give you,  
May God (*Narayana*) bless my (son) Lord *Krishna*?  
I shall pay you what *Devaki (Krishna's* mother)  
promised,

May Lord *Narayana* bless my groom?<sup>4</sup>

I celebrated the first razor of your hair and kept your Tonsure

Goddess 'Bhawani'<sup>5</sup> presented this to you.

On your first shaving, you sparkled like the sun coming out of the clouds,

You are the son of king *Vasudeva*

I shall donate the shaving cloth along with the razor

Salutations for your attaining the 'Brahmin janma'.  
'twice born,'

You have just returned after shaving from the barber

You now return after taking a bath from the 'Ya:rbal'<sup>6</sup>

The lotus buds in the lake have become fresh

May my clean shaven bride (*MahAra:zI*), live long.

After the bathing, the boy pays his salutations and makes a few offerings to the Holy Fire while the priest

<sup>1</sup> A special kind of Kashmiri shawl made of pure silk- yarn which passes through a ring. Also known as 'Ring Shawl'.

<sup>2</sup> Name of a village in the valley of Kashmir famous for bumper paddy crop.

<sup>3</sup> It is a kind of projection made of timber on the second/ third storey on the moon-lit side of the house.

<sup>4</sup> The boy at the time of *MunDan/Yagnyopavita/Marriage*, is named as a groom 'MAHra:zI'.

<sup>5</sup> A name attributed to Mother Goddess as the spouse of Lord *Shiva*.

<sup>6</sup> A selected place at the bank of river/pond/lake/spring/rivulet specially meant for bathing/washing etc.

chants hymns from the scriptures. Thus the function comes to an end.

## 12. *Mangal Anun (Dattak)* - Adoption of a child

In case a couple is childless due to obvious reasons, they can adopt a son or a daughter of those who are in a position to do so. The main reasons for adoption are :-

### (1) *Medical.*

In case any one or even both of the married couple are medically not in a position to produce a child, there is no option left with them but to adopt a child.

### (2) *A baby born on Mu:l, GanDa:nt Nakshetra (lunar mansions).*

There are 27 *Nakshertas* (lunar mansions) of approximately 24 hours orbital durations each in the path of the moon which form a lunar month. The last 2 - 5 hours of '*Jishta*', '*Revati*' and '*Ashlisha*' *Nakshetas* form the *GanD:ant*. If a boy/girl is born within 1.12 hours at the beginning of the '*Ashwani*', 1.36 hours within the '*Magha*' 3.36 hours within the '*Mu:la*,' and at the concluding period of 4.58 hours of *Revati*, 4.24 hours of *Ashli:sha* and 2.24 hours of *Jishta Nakshetas*, he/she is considered as born on '*Mu:l GanDa:nt*' and the baby, if born during these periods, is considered inauspicious either for the parents or for the family and its prosperity and progress as a whole. There is a religious binding on the parents to give away such a baby in adoption. Though such a religious binding appears to be as a curse but if we ponder a little deeper into the idea behind such religious bindings, we can easily see that by doing so our religion has paved a way for our childless couples to get a chance for having a child in their otherwise dull and monotonous

family life. In this way this religious sanction is a blessing for giving a child for adoption to the childless, which on the one hand lessens the burden of the parents who do not wish to have more kids due to one reason or the other and on the other hand it bestows life and happiness on the childless.

### (3) *Birth of Twins.*

In case a lady gives birth to two babies at a time called ("*Dukri*") and she or her family is not in a position to keep both the babies due to their extended families or health conditions of the mother, she or the father of the baby is in search of a person or the family who are in search of a baby for adoption. This is an adoption based on reciprocity.

Whatever may be the reason behind such adoptions, our society considers it an act of great blessing and importance. The giver of a baby is considered to have planted a shady tree in the courtyard of a barren family and thus satisfied the deep desire of a childless family.

Adoption of a child is an ancient custom in the Indian family set up. We have a number of such references in the epics and the *Puranas*. Previously, while adopting a baby, its '*Gotra*' was kept in view because it involved less rites and rituals. According to the *Dharama Shashtra*, a person can adopt a child of his own '*Gotra*' or family even though he might have already gone through the Holy Thread Ceremony. A baby outside ones '*Gotra*' can also be adopted provided his *Yagnyopavita* ceremony has not already been performed. The *Shastras* clearly restrict the adoption of a baby from the brother-in-law's side (the brother of the spouse). Both the families invite their nearest and experienced relatives after the date for the final give and take of the baby, is finalized. The person who adopts a baby brings some new suits of