

Contemporary Changes in The Cultural Pattern: A Sociological Content And Context From Kashmir

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Abstract

Kashmir, the official division and one of the Capitals of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent. The valley is famous all over the world for its scenic beauty, high mountains, pastures, beautiful gardens as has been compared to heaven on Earth. Apart from the natural beauty, the valley is famous for its rich cultural uniqueness, which includes language, food habits, dressing style, folkways, festivals, beliefs, norms, family structure, marriage celebration, music, and dance. The unity and brotherhood of Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu philosophies have created an amalgamated and complex culture that is based on unity, honesty, respect, humanism, tolerance, etc., which is known as Kashmiriyat for which the whole state is famous all over the world. Socio-culturally, as well as geographically the valley, is separated from all other cultures or civilizations. Every society is recognized by its uniqueness in cultural and this, in turn, is the identity of the society and can't be compromised for the developmental plans. Cultural situation varies greatly from region to region and in India, it varies every few miles. In the present study, the cultural aspect of Kashmir valley and their alteration with time has been highlighted from various parameters like the interaction of tourists with local inhabitants, modern education, social media, advancement in technology, trade. The study is based on the past literature collected from journals, books, Magazines, observation, and from the experience of experts from the Cultural Academy of Kashmir.

Key Words:Beliefs, Dress, Habits, Language, Lifestyle, Tradition

Introduction

Kashmir, the official division and one of the Capital (summer Capital)¹ of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent. The valley is famous all over the world for its scenic beauty, high mountains, pastures, beautiful gardens as has been compared to heaven on Earth (Ajaz, 2014). The valley is famous for its rich cultural uniqueness, which includes language, food habits, dressing style, folkways, festivals, beliefs, norms, family structure, marriage celebration, music, and dance. The unity and brotherhood of Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu philosophies have created an amalgamated and complex culture that comprises unity, honesty, respect, humanism, tolerance, etc., which is known as Kashmiriyat for which the whole state is famous all over the world. Socio-culturally as well as geographically the valley is separated from all other cultures or civilizations (Kaw, 2010).

There is hardly any region or area in the world which is not visible by the unique cultural richness. The cultural pattern attaches importance to the social, political and economic growth of a society. It would not be overemphasized to say that in India cultural diversity varies every few miles, even within a single village, each caste, each kinship unit has a culture that is somewhat different from that of the others (Srinivas, 1996). Culture

¹Jammu and Kashmir is having two Capitals, one is winter Capital -Jammu and another summer Capital-Kashmir

is defined as “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional assets that characterize a society or a social group, and which includes creative expressions (e.g. Oral history, language, literature, performing arts, fine arts, and crafts), community practices (celebrations and patterns of social interactions that contribute to group and individual welfare and identity) and material or built forms such as sites, buildings, historic city centers, landscapes, art and objects”. Thus, culture is a combination of the norm, faith, belief, music, dance, sculptures, handloom, handicraft, painting, arts, moral law, social law, customs, traditions, and other capabilities, habits, practices, etc. received by a person as a member of society or social group. Indian culture is characterized by enormous diversity (UNESCO, 1995)²(Van et al 2005)

As per American Sociologist Charles A. Ellwood, the concept of culture mean: “a collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, toolmaking, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc. The essential part of the culture is to be found in the patterns embodied in the social traditions of the group, that is, in knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards, and sentiments prevalent in the group. The overt part of the culture is to be found in the actual behaviour of the group, usually in its usages, customs, and institutions. The essential part of culture seems to be an appreciation of values with reference to life conditions. The pure behaviouristic definition of culture is, therefore inadequate. A complete definition of culture must include the subjective as well as objective characteristics. Practically, the culture of the society is total of in its traditions and customs; but tradition, as the subjective side of culture is the essential core”. Graburn states that culture is meaning incorporated by the people by means of which natural reality is recognized and maintained and authentication plays a crucial role in the culture.

Culture is a composite term. It is not only limited to dance and music: not about costume alone. It is all about the ways of social celebration, rituals of birth, death, marriage, etc., it is a total way of life of a particular community: the way they eat, live, worship, speak, produce, create and recreate. It is a totality of the set of ideas, values, beliefs, norms, which constitute the common bases of generally agreed social actions.

Cultural Contribution from Kashmir

Every society in this world has its own and distinctive culture and that culture is the identity of individuals or members of that society (Qamar, Asim, Durr-E-Shawar, & Iqbal Zafar, 2012). The Kashmir division as per religious and socio-culturally is different from other divisions /states of India and is diverse and is extremely influenced by northern South Asian and Central Asian ones. The isolation of the region by the Himalayan mountain range has carved a multiplicity of tribes with unique cultures (Banerji & Fareedi, 1983). Because of its natural beauty and pleasant climate, it has developed a strong tradition in the form of art, painting, dramas, literature, dance, and music.

The isolation and security provided by high snowcapped mountains and the distance from the main plains of northern Indian culture give the originality of Kashmiri thought and may explain the Kashmiri attraction for philosophical speculation. From ancient times the Kashmir region comprises the population of various religions like Hindu, Buddhists, Jains. But during the 14th century with the invasion of Muslims from Central Asia and Persia, changed the whole composition of the population and brought some material changes. This paves the way for the establishment of Islamic Institutions and cultural adaptation took place on a large scale (Sheikh, 2017). A large number of merchants, soldiers, artisans, poets, scholars arrived in the region during the Sultanate period and vice versa. This interaction resulted in the assimilation and adaption of diverse cultures. They brought with them new ideas and new customs. Their customs were mixed in the valley and they, in turn, were influenced by the Kashmiri social order. The elite class of the society like sultans and nobles entered into matrimonial relations with each other. They also got married at different places like Sindh, Jammu, Kashtiwari,

²Additional information can be retrieved from the report published by UNESCO's World Conference on cultural policies 1995

etc which lead to the dispersing of their social activities. The main cultural traits of Kashmiri cultural which differentiates it from the rest of the world with its uniqueness are as:

Language: The unique identity of Kashmiri inhabits is its language known as Kashmiri language (Koshur) and is spoken by approximately, over 5 million speakers both Muslims as well as Non-Muslims of the valley. It is one of the 22 national languages in India. Kashmiri holds a peculiar position because of Dardic characteristics and other Indo Aryan features. There are two main views of the origin of Kashmiri language: the first view considered the Kashmiri language as a branch of Indo- Aryan like that of Hindi and Punjabi as the Kashmiri developed from these languages. Chatterjee argues that “Kashmiri, in spite of a Dardic substratum in its people and its speech, became a part of the Sanskritic culture-world of India. The Indo-Aryan Prakrits and Apabhramsa from the Midland and from Northern Punjab profoundly modified the Dardic bases of Kashmiri, so that one might say that the Kashmiri language is a result of a very large over-laying of a Dardic base with Indo-Aryan elements”.

The second view considered it as a separate group within Indo- Aryan languages called Dardic, Iranian being the other member. Grierson suggests that “the Pisacha languages, which include the Shina-Khowar group, occupy a position intermediate between the Sanskritic languages of India proper and Iranian languages farther to their west. They thus possess many features that are common to them and to the Sanskritic languages. But they also possess features peculiar to themselves, and others in which they agree rather with languages of the Iranian family... That language [Kashmiri] possesses nearly all the features that are peculiar to Pisacha, and also those in which Pisacha agrees with Iranian” (Matto 1988).

The variation in phonological and phonetic of communities may be because of the frequency of certain phonemes. In rural Kashmir, religion, phonetic and morphological combine into one. But due advance and spread of education, religious domination has been disappearing slowly. The Dardic-group has large vocabulary items taken from Vedic Sanskrit which are not found in other Indian languages.

The major two influences of Kashmiri language and literature are: the first stage of Kashmiri language shows the domination of the Sanskrit language. The second stage started after the invasion of the Muslim rulers and conversion of the large population into Islam and led to Persian and Arabic domination.

The impact of the west language is a recent one due to the tourism industry, advancement in education, technology, communication, trade, etc. The status of the Kashmiri language has totally got altered as more and more inhabitants speak Urdu and English languages. Due to communication with other language speaking people by means of tourism, education, trade, etc. the structure of the Kashmiri language had transformed. Even when someone speaks in Kashmiri, he /she uses words from English and Urdu. The percentage of usage of Urdu and English words or the change is more prominent in urban cities than in rural ones. In cities, the younger generation speaks Urdu or English during study hours in their school or college but the scenario is totally different from small children, they speak mostly in Urdu and English even at their homes. The parents in cities prefer to admit their wards in advanced schools to learn other languages. The young generation had forgotten some words from their mother tongue. In the rural area, the young generation is following the changing trend but the elder generation is mostly speaking in Kashmiri.

As per observation a small percentage of people confirm that they feel annoying when small children speak in their mother tongue. Some respondents when interviewed to speak some names of things in Kashmiri, they responded with the answer that ‘we don’t know’.

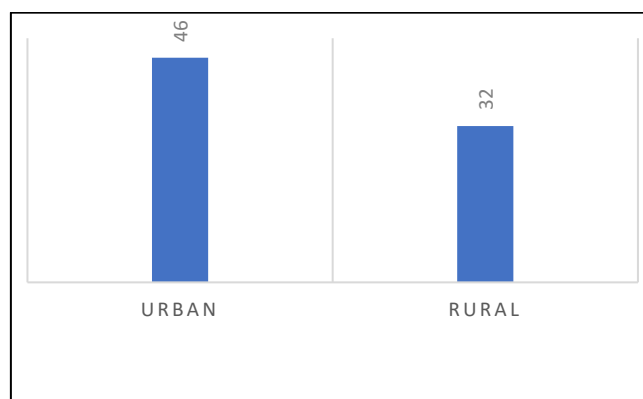


Figure 1 Graph showing the percentage of respondents who responded in other language other than Kashmiri when questioned.
Source: Primary Data has been collected and process by the researcher from the field

The above-cited percentage predicts the future of the Kashmiri language with passing time. If the timely action is not been taken by the concern government agency and other allied agencies. The future is going to be extinctive for the rich cultural language of the valley. People of Kashmir considered their language as a rich heritage but at the same time they feel that due care is need of the hour of their language, which is the responsibility of the government and other allied agencies. Hundred percent of people of Kashmir feel that their language is altering rapidly with more openness of tourism, social media, mass media, printing media and modern education which is totally based on other languages other than the Kashmiri language. A small number of people who feel embarrassed when their small kid speak their own language and reason cited by these respondents was that we have to face the world in other languages, so to get good reputation among our own people we prefer to teach our kid other languages, but most of the people disagree with this mentality.

Dress Code: The climate and geographic conditions of the region give rise to its dress code, which is different and reflected unique features. Mostly men and women wear traditional clothes. The dress of Kashmir has its historical importance. It has undergone several changes during its long history. Harsa (1089-1101) introduced the use of turban and shorts courts due to the influence of Mohammadans before people of Kashmir did not use any dress for the head, they let is loose. The Sufi saints and Muslim theologians who came from Persia and Central Asia brought with them new things in Kashmir. With their advent in Kashmir, people began to use long robe and round turban. The former is thus the forerunner of the *Pheran*, the present dress of Kashmir. During winters, they wear a special kind of loose overcoat called "*Pheran*". It is usually worn over a Kurta. Under the *Pheran*, is a warm fire pot of charcoals called "*Kangri*", which helps in keeping warm. The dress of the upper class looks like the rich people in Arabia, Persia, and Turkistan. The credit goes to Sayyid Ali Hammadani who brought it during the rule of Sultan Qutub-ud-din and later Brahmans began to adopt it. The lower portion of the body was covered with white trousers (Saravit) of Persian origin. The upper portion had a chemise (Qamis) and full sleeves. Over this was a short vest (Sadri). Sadri is like a court without sleeves. Mostly people like to wear it over *Qamis Salvar* and the most preferred colour of Sadri is black. The outer robe was called *choga* and descended to ankles. There was not much difference between the dress of men and women. The main difference was that Muslim women used to wear "Kasab" as a headdress while as in the case of Hindu women, it was called "Taranga". The "Kasab" is different from the *Hijab*. The Kasab is usually worn by the old ladies. It comprises a hat and long cloth; the hat is worn on the head then the long cloth is spread over it and fixed with different kinds of needles. The needles fix cloth with the hat and give a beautiful look to it as the needles are fixed in different patterns. On the other hand, the Hijab is worn by younger girls on certain occasions, like attending religious rituals. But some quota of girls likes to wear Hijab all the time and black color is the most preferred choice.

The overall dress of all the class starting from kids to adults shows large variation with time. The kids wear fancy dresses other than the traditional ones. The most significant change is seen in the dressing style of ladies. Most of the ladies follow the celebrities of the Indian or Pakistani film industry for choosing the dresses. The

ratio of ladies wearing the tradition *Qamis* and *Shelvar* is confined to the older generation only. Nearly 90% of ladies in urban cities find it difficult to wear *Pheran*- a traditional long overcoat in winter. They prefer to wear other types of western overcoats. The *Pheran* is mostly preferred in rural areas in winter. But people usually dislike it in the summer months. The young generation of the valley if they wear *Pheran*, usually make different kinds of alterations in it like stitching front pockets, caps, etc.

The jean wearing among girls is trending fast in the urban areas as compared to rural, but this trend gives the girls a negative impression in rural villages and is considered as untraditional.

The same is case with the gents. Young one follows Bollywood celebrities and wears mostly jeans and other trending clothes and is getting always from the traditional *Qamis*, *Salvar*, and *Pheran*. But the older ones follow the traditional dress more in rural and urban cities.

Food Habits: The uniqueness found in food habits like that of taking salted tea (Noon chai) two times in a day, in the morning and in the evening is famous. The tea (Noon Chai) is cooked in a Kashmiri teapot known as “*Samavar*”. The staple food is rice, generally cook by boiling and then left for cooling, is served two times (Lunch and Dinner) in a day. During the Mughals, vegetables were added as a staple food. Kashmir is also famous for its special kind dishes called *Wazvan*, a multi-course meal in which various dishes of meat, chicken, and cheese are cooked for guests in marriage ceremonies, *Goshtaba*, *Kabab*, and *Roganjosh*.

Kashmiri Feasts and in other parties and are cooked by special cooks known as *Wazi*. *Kehwa* – a traditional green tea prepared with spices like saffron, almond and cardamom, and is served on special occasions and festivals. Tea came from three sources to Kashmir that is, Bombay tea from China, Hill tea from Kangra in the Punjab and green tea China via Lhasa and Ladakh. Kashmiris liked both sweet and salt tea. The former is known as *Kehwa*.

In the recent year, there is little alteration in the food habits, but the traditional food habits still exist with more demand like people from all walks like to have salted tea, *Razvan* is gaining a solid place among the people. Due to the recent advancement, the young generation has a good taste in fast food and likes to visit the KFC, the MacDonal, etc. for get together parties. A number of restaurants have been opened in Kashmir valley which serves other dishes which have been taken from other famous cultures of the world like biryani of various types and people like to taste these types of dishes. The important thing is that people like to have their own traditional food, but the ways of serving and using utensils have changed. Some families in urban cities use dining tables, and spoons while eating and don't prefer to use hands for picking up the food from the plate, which is most preferred way of eating among Muslims and take it as the Sunna. In rural areas people don't use the dining table instead they sit on the floor and take food by using hands.

Festivals and Music: Kashmiri *Wanwun* and *Rouff* are two folk dances which women of the valley perform during weddings and other parties while singing a song in own language. *Damhal* is another dance which is performed by men during feasts, the feasts are celebrated in the memories of spiritual saints or poets or suifs, as Kashmir is known for various spiritual gurus, poets etc. some of them came from other countries, mostly from central Asia and some were born in Kashmir like that of *LalaDed*, *Sheikh UIAlam*, *HabbaKhatoon*(Koul 2000) and is regarded as *Peer Vaer* (Land of Spiritual Gurus). Every land is known for its fairs and festivals. Fairs and festivals are the backbones of a social structure. Kashmiris have also since time immemorial being observing the fairs and festivals which include both religious and secular. Festivals of both Hindu and Muslims were celebrated with great respect and enthusiasm. These festivals include *Shab-i-barat*, *Eid al-Fitr*, *Eid al-Adha*, *Nouroze*, *Diwali* and *Dussehra.*, and *Holi*. People celebrated annual urses and festivals of religious saints. The prominent among them were urse of *Sheikh Noor-ud-din rishi* at *Chrarsharif*, *Baba janbazWali* at *Baramulla*, *Rishi Maloo* at *Islamabad*. People from different corners of the valley assemble on the urse of *Sayyid Ali Hammadani* and *Sheikh Hamza Makhdoomi* in *Srinagar*. The classical examples of Islamic architecture, literature, monuments are *Jamia Masjid Srinagar*, *Hazratbal Shrine*, *Makhdoom Sahib Shrine*, and *Dastageer Sahib Shrines*. There are hundreds of other shrines of great and pious Islamic spiritual Gurus or Peers which are in different parts of the valley Hindus also celebrated the annual fairs of *Tulmullah*, *Amarnath*, *Sindh Berrari* and *Kokernag*. The Holy Shrine of *Amarnath* which attracts millions of Hindu devotees every year and

Kheerbawani temple in Tulmullah Ganderbal attracts hundreds of devotees every year from different corners of the world.

In recent year people, the trend of celebrating these festivals has changed a lot due to modern education, religious domination. Some people totally dislike some of the festivals like *urses* but Shab-i-barat, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha are celebrating with more religious zeal. The religious faith plays a significant part in the celebration of these festivals like the *urs* of a pious religious guru. One group of people consider the celebration of these *urses* as a religious duty and other groups consider it a sin.

The music industry of Kashmir witness variation. Sufi music is disappearing fastly, as the new generation is aligned towards modern music. Although old people of rural areas like to listen to Sufi music, the percentage is very low in urban areas where Bollywood, Punjabi, and other latest trending music are prevalent.

The new generation likes to listen to Bollywood, Punjabi, and other latest trending music. Even some Kashmiri singers sing Kashmiri songs using the latest advanced musical instruments and these songs are welcomed by youth.

Conclusion

The cultural charm of Kashmir is multi-dimensional and is in the form of language, traditional food habits, festivals, art, handicraft, music and dance, etc and is famous for its distinct cultural ethos and cultural heritage. The culture of the division represents a zone of convergence and diffusion of mainly religion-cultural realms namely Muslims, and Hindus. The culture developed and enriched due to the influx of foreigners who came from different areas of the world. They brought with them new ideas and new cultures which had enriched the culture of Kashmir and made it a composite culture. The foreign rulers, especially from Central Asian countries, worked hard to enrich the culture of the region and gave a unique shape to the culture and traditions of the region. This amalgamation of local and foreign cultures resulted in a culture that is characterized by unique features.

Although with the advent of modern education, tourism, social media, mass media, print media, etc, these parameters of Kashmiri culture are altering with time. Some are changing fastly and some are changing at snail pace. The overall look of Kashmiri culture is becoming the flexible, more elastic and easier victim of other cultures. So, to preserve the cultural identity by introducing and taking the best steps by government and other related agencies is the need of the hour, as culture is the only identity through a society get identified.

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