



## MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF KASHMIR

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The customs and ceremonies connected with marriage in Kashmir are interesting. The customs vary according to the position and wealth of families and there is some difference between the observances of the city people and the villagers.

But the chief incidents in marriage are the same. If a comparison is made between the customs of the Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims, it will be seen that there are many points of resemblance, and the curious prominence of the walnut and salt and the use of *Mehendi*; will be noticed. Besides the use of *Mehendi*; in both religions there are the *Laganchir*, *Phirsa*, *Gulmuith*; the dress and the title of the *Maharaza* and *Mahareinetc*.<sup>1</sup>All this is focused in this paper.

### Marriage Seasons

The orthodox among the Kashmiri Hindus, who had belief in astrology, attached great importance to the date and the time of marriage. The Muslims kept in their view only their convenience and celebrated marriages at a time when they had leisure as well as resources to hold the necessary feasts and entertainments.

On the whole, for the Hindus the month of *poh* (13th December to 13th January) was highly inauspicious. The Muslims tried to avoid Muharram, Ramzan and the interval between two Ids.<sup>2</sup>

### Hindu Marriage

The marriage of Hindus is all arranged. In Kashmir this is usually undertaken by one of the professional match-makers. When a likely bride has been found for the boy, the family astrologers are called in and the horoscopes of both boy and girl are compared.<sup>3</sup>

If the horoscopes are favourable and there is no hitch, the girl's parents send a little salt and sugar to the boy's parents, sometimes also money. As a rule the boy's mother has seen the girl, and has made up her mind.

Srinagar socially is an advanced plutocracy. Girl who has lost her mother is usually regarded as an undesirable wife.<sup>4</sup>

The astrologer fixes an auspicious day for the marriage and information is sent to the bridegroom's parents of the number of guests who are to join the *Barat*.

Some days before the marriage the houses of the bride and bridegroom are swept and garnished and the rites of *Manzirath* (*henna ceremony*) and *Devgonare* performed and the bride's formal initiation into Brahmanism dates from this *Devgon*.

On the happy day the bridegroom, richly attired, decked with jewels and brave with heron's plumes, sets out to the bride's house in a boat or on horse back or on a vehicle. He is called on this day the *Maharaza* and the bride is the *Maharein*.<sup>5</sup>A close relative of the bridegroom decorates himself on the same lines as the bridegroom and accompanies him. He is called '*Pat Maharaza*'. It is said that if some unwary event happens to the bridegroom the *Pat Maharaza* used to take his place.<sup>6</sup>

Four Hindu attendants accompany him, three with yak's tails and the fourth with a silver cup and shell, and a Muslim, known as the *Shahgasi*, holds an umbrella over the bridegroom's head. As they approach the bride's house conches are blown, and a near relative or honored guest of the bride's family comes down to meet the party.

If the *Lagan* falls in the day time the wedding guests, after feasting, leave the bride's house, and return on the same day to escort the bride and bridegroom back to the bridegroom's house. If the *Lagan* falls in the night the party return in the morning.<sup>7</sup>

After the marriage ceremony, which sometimes takes place before the feast and sometimes after, the bride's father adds three more strings to the bridegroom's sacred thread. Before the bridegroom is allowed to enter his house with his bride, he must pay money to his maternal or paternal aunt or sister who bars the door. After one or two days sojourn in her new home the bride is taken back to her father's house for a day with *Sat-Rat* and she shows her jewels, clothes and presents to her parents. The gifts to the bride from her parents are numerous, consisting of gold and silver jewellery and valuable stuffs. The bridegroom receives from his father-in-law gold ear-rings and gold armlets etc.<sup>8</sup>

The marriage is not consummated until the bride is about thirteen years of age, after that she no longer keeps on her anklets and wears a *Taranga* – one sometimes also worn by girls who have reached a marriageable age though they still wear anklets.<sup>9</sup>

There is an absence of symbols denoting that the marriage is one of conquest. It is a decorous ceremony; there is little or no weeping when the bride leaves her home.<sup>10</sup>

### Muslim Marriage

Muslims generally marry their daughters to some relative, and if the marriage can't be arranged so, the father of the son hires the services of a *ManzimYor*, *Dralor Mianja*.<sup>11</sup> He is not necessarily one who undertakes this as an occupation, but is one who is known for his powers of persuasion. He visits the homes of families with marriageable daughters, tells them highly coloured stories of the wealth, good looks, high birth and connections of his client, and suggests a marriage.

From that time the selected girls is no longer allowed to go out of her house or compound. The *ManzimYor* arranges an informal meeting of both the fathers, at which is settled the day for the *Nishani*.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after, the boy's father goes with a small party of relatives and friends with *bog* to the girl's house, and the party is entertained by the girl's father.

After the feast, the betrothals are announced in the presence of the party, and *Moulvi* asks a blessing, and sometimes commits the contract to writing. The party stays the night, and next morning the boy's father receives a blanket or a turban from the girl's father, and taking back half of the cash, sugar and salt set off to his home.<sup>13</sup>

Afterwards on the four chief Muslim holy days, viz, Id, Ramzan, Id-Qurban, Miraj Sharif and UrsNabi, the boy's father sends presents to the girl. When the day for the final marriage is fixed, the boy's father sends a *Laganchirto* to the girl's father.<sup>14</sup>

Preliminaries are arranged, and *Dapani*(invitation)are issued to relatives and friends. For a week before the marriage, the girl sits indoors with her hair down and at both her house and boy's house singing and drumming go on day and night. The day before the marriage, the boy's father sends a quality of *Mehendito* the bride's house and she prints her hands and feet with the red-colour.<sup>15</sup>

On the marriage day the bridegroom, after a bath, dresses himself up like a *Maharaja*, and decks himself out with all the jewellery he can afford. His relatives give him presents of money and then he and his party set off, riding or walking.

First they visit some neighbouring shrine and say their prayers, then do reverence to the graves of the bridegroom's father (if he is dead) or grandfather, and after that they make for the bride's house, sending on ahead the presents and the palanquin in which the bride will return.

As they draw near the bride's house the women of the bride's party come out, singing the song of *WaniWani*and praising the bridegroom's beauty, and when they come to the door the village barber pours out a jar of water into the empty jar the *Yezman*(leading man of marriage)tosses a rupee. This custom is known as *Aab-Dul*, and is repeated when the bridegroom takes his bride back to his father's house.<sup>16</sup>

When the whole party is assembled the gorgeous groom sits on cushions and they take *Wazwan*(rich meal)which is prepared by special *Waza*. After the feast, the *Moulvi*proceeds to business and if the marriage contract was not written before, he writes it out, receiving a few rupees for his pains.

Before this , however, the two fathers of the contracting parties fix the amount of *Mehror* money for bride, according to the custom of the family. Meanwhile the bride and her friends are examining the wedding presents and when all is ready the bride with her hair done up and in her best dress is carried by her brother or maternal uncle into the palanquin and followed by a party of singing women, departs with her husband.<sup>17</sup>

When the bride reaches her in-law's houses she sits with down-cast head until her mother-in-law comes and raises her face. On this occasion the bride hands over some gift to her mother-in-law. This gift is called *Hash Kant*.<sup>18</sup>

Then all the women of the bridegroom's family kiss the bride's hand and place rupees in it. The *Wazwanis* given on the marriage night and the next day the guests depart.<sup>19</sup>

The bride remains for seven days in her new home after which she returns to her father's house. It generally takes months before the father of the girl is able to invite his son-in-law to a feast at his house where he receives cash presents etc. The bride also generally goes with him and then there is no bar to their coming or going.<sup>20</sup>

Father besides giving away the daughter in marriage, the father brings a boy for his daughter who is to reside in his in-law's home. Such a daughter is called *KhanaNishin* and her husband who is made to stay in her house and to help and manage his in-law's property is called *KhanaDamad* or *GaripethZamtur*.

Generally a person who has not his own male issue adopts a child from another person who is usually a close relative and treats him as his own son such an adopted son is called *Mungta*. Polygamy is common among Muslims. Remarriage is common in both men and women.<sup>21</sup>

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