



## Changing Village of Kashmir with Special Reference to Changes in Dress: Post1947 Era

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### Abstract

*Majority of people in Kashmir live in rural areas but not much is known about their socio-materialistic characteristics. The Kashmiri society was almost static or experienced a little change under the Dogra regime (1846-1947). But after independence in 1947, the popular government initiated various measures aiming at spread of education and awareness, breaking the isolation of the valley with effective road communication, transfer of property rights of land to tillers, introduction to modern methods of agriculture including HYV of seeds and chemical fertilizers etc. These interventions initiated a change in the material aspects of the society and subsequently had its impact on non-material aspects. The theme of this paper is to divulge on changes in Kashmiri Villages with special reference to dress.*

**Key Words:** Land Reforms, High Yielding Varieties (HYV), Debt, Fertilizers, Dress,

### Introduction

Society in rural India has undergone a large amount of change since ages due to wars, socio-religious movements, modernization, education, rural development programmes and more recent globalization and increased mechanization. Quiet similar to what has happened in other parts of Indian sub-continent, society of the state of Jammu and Kashmir also witnessed a large amount of change. For example, the society changed from subsistence agriculture to modern mechanized agriculture; the institution of bonded labour *begar* got replaced by the institution of free labour. Similarly Superstition of the village got substituted by reason, ignorance by education, traditional practices of living with increasing use of science and technology in day today life.

At the time of independence in 1947, the developmental scenario of the state was characterized by economic and educational backwardness. Backwardness of the state was largely attributed to landlordism.<sup>1</sup> The first popular government under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah introduced its development module on the socialist pattern as enshrined in the famous document of *Naya Kashmir Manifesto*.<sup>2</sup> A visionary document that laid down a comprehensive plan for socio-economic, political, and cultural reconstruction of Jammu and Kashmir State. After coming to power the government passed historic legislation to bring about radical land reforms. It was in March 21, 1948 that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in his very first broadcast from Jammu announced historic Land Reforms.<sup>3</sup> *Jagirdari* system was done away with by passing the cabinet order of 25<sup>th</sup> of May, 1948 and on 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1951 as such all *jagirs* tenable during the pleasure of his Highness held in perpetuity or any kind of compensatory *jagirs* were resumed. This reform as such released 4250 acres of land in favour of cultivators. Absentee landlordism was abolished and actual tillers were granted ownership of the land. Thus an era of change in socio-economic and other spheres of life of rural Kashmir got initiated. This legislation and other subsequent legislations provided an immediate relief to tenants.<sup>4</sup>

The enactment of Distress Debtors Relief Act Samvat, 2006 (1949 AD), provided for Conciliation Boards, which could settle the debts. As a result, an amount of 14.33 lakh mortgaged debts were liquidated. These declarations orders, ordinances and acts were revolutionary in nature. Just with a strike of a pen century's old feudal order was liquidated and lakhs of rural debts cancelled.<sup>5</sup>

These reforms triggered an era of revolution in the socio-economic development of rural Kashmir. Subsequent measures were taken by the government to accelerate the pace of development. As a result 4000 acres of land were redistributed among landless poor. The reforms achieved the twin objectives of according the cultivators rightful place in the social order, and also ensure more efficient utilization of the state's resources.

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<sup>1</sup>The agricultural sector experienced stagnation during the period and more than 96 per cent of population were living under troubled conditions in rural areas. The land less population from rural Kashmir could not think of the betterment of their living conditions. D N Dhar, *Socio-Economic History of Kashmir Peasantry: From Ancient to Modern*, Centre for Kashmir Studies, Srinagar, 1989, pp 234-240.

<sup>2</sup>*Naya Kashmir Manifesto*, a socialist document was adopted by the party on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1945 in its Annual session held at Sapore-Baramulla. See *Naya Kashmir*, Kashmir Bureau of Information, n.d: see also S M Abdullah, *Aatashchinar, An Autobiography*, Gulshan Publishers Srinagar, 1983, pp301-302.

<sup>3</sup>Beg M Afzal, *On The Way to Golden Harvests, in Economic Life of Kashmir*, in *Economic Life of Kashmir*, Ed. Suresh K Sharma, S. R. Bakshi, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, op cit. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Kaw, Mushtaq A., *Land Rights in Rural Kashmir; A study in continuity and change from late 6<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* in Aparna Rao, ed. *The valley of Kashmir, The Making and Unmaking of Kashmiri Culture*, op cit, p 30.

<sup>5</sup>Government of Jammu and Kashmir, *Land and other reforms, 1948-56* ( 9 March 1957), Published by R C Raina, Settlement Commissioner, Jammu and Kashmir Government, Srinagar, *General Statistics*, p 8.

These reforms were further supplemented by the programmes and schemes undertaken to bring more acres under crop production with emphasis on the use of High Yielding Varieties, adoption of latest techniques coupled with use of chemical fertilizers and coverage of more and more land under irrigation facilities. The introduction of the programmes like High Yielding Varieties, Advanced Chemical Fertilizers, Intensive Agricultural Development Programmes, brought about a Green Revolution in the state around year.<sup>6</sup> These interventions initiated a change in the material aspects of the society and subsequently had its impact on non-material aspects. Due to scores of measures taken by government after independence, common peasants began to produce surplus crops and grain. This had a direct impact on their income. Prosperity got manifested in dress, get up, looks and eating habits of the rural population.

### Changes in Dress

Around 1950 and even upto early 70's a common Kashmiri would wear a long loose gown called locally as *Pheran*.<sup>7</sup> This was made of home spun cotton cloth without trousers and any undergarments in summer and this long gown for winter would be made of wool. There was no much difference between the gowns of male and female. It continued its usage in contemporary times. However hand-made *Tschader-i-Pheran* was replaced by the *pheran* cloth imported from Amritsar. The *pheran* became more stylish and delicate than shapeless/indifferent and rough *pheran* used to be woven earlier. People began to use the *pherans* stitched by tailors in different colours. *Pherans* of tweed, kashmilian and cotton begun to be used in post 1947. Women also showed a change in their taste of using *pherans* as simple cotton or woollen form got replaced by *shatantir* and *makhmal* in different clours. A tradition of decorating pheran with embroidery and *pout* began to be used by women.<sup>8</sup>

Men generally wore the *kalposh* on their heads. Some affluent families also used the *Dastar* in place of a simple *kalposh*. Likewise, women belonging to well off families wore the *takani*, a specially made cap of Turkish style.<sup>9</sup> *Kulposh* was gradually replaced by the modern caps, *Jail topietc*, as men's head wear in the period of our study.<sup>10</sup> Caps were generally used under the western influence while the later were used under the influence of Central Asian countries. Veil was not worn by common

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<sup>6</sup>For quantitative study of all such inputs see various issues of *Digest of Statistics*, Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

<sup>7</sup>Jacquemont Victor, *Letters From India*, Edward Churton, London, 1834,p 237, Walter R Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Living Thoughts, Srinagar, Reprint 2010, p 251.

<sup>8</sup>*Tila* is a kind of decoration performed by *tiladose* with needle were as *potie* silk was used by *potgur*with machine. *Sozenkam* was another way to beautify such *pherans*.

<sup>9</sup>FayazFarooq, *Folklore and the History of Kashmir*, Nunposh Publications, Srinagar, 2001, pp 100-107.

<sup>10</sup>*Kalposh*(turban) was a traditional head dress of Kashmiri people.

women but women folk of upper classes, particularly, the Sayyid families used it strictly. Women also began to replace *Kasab* with *sari-scarf* and even *burqa*.<sup>11</sup>

T-shirts and Pants began to be used by the youth under the influence of western culture. School going children started using such dresses and others followed suit. However earlier wearer of pants and t-shirts invited ridicule and contempt of people. But subsequently it became the most popular dress code. Pant and shirt with coat or without a coat was the most preferred dress of bridegrooms during their marriage. *Bell-Bottom* pants (wide bottom and tight upper part) and subsequently slim fit or skin tight pants were worn. First pants were tailored locally and subsequently after around 1980 readymade garments (garments tailored at Amritsar or New Delhi) became the fashion.

In order to protect themselves from the intense cold of winter men wore Jackets from around 1970's. The inner side of the jacket was made up of wool or fur and the outer of cotton, *leather*, *polyster*, *kashmilan*, *pattu* etc. However it was not wore by the common people but mostly by the Government employees, college going youngsters and some businessmen.

In order to keep warmth without *pheran* or jacket a hand knitted garment called sweater or *Banyan* in local parlance began to be used around late 1960's. The sweaters were first knitted by women folk out of the woollen yarn prepared locally and subsequently yarn began to be purchased from the market. However readymade sweaters also began to penetrate in to valley after the establishment of a road connection with the Amritsar.

*Kameez*, *shalwar*, pant, shirt sweaters began to be worn by the people instead of a common gown *pheran*. *KameezShalwar*, however was considered as an honourable and respectable dress throughout the society. It consists of an upper (a long shirt) and a lower (a very loose *paijama*).

In the absence of the inner garment like half trouser and *Panties* people often used to cover the part below the abdomen with a piece of cloth called *chapenketh*. People used to bath, offer *nendeh* (deweeding), visit the field, or catch the fish in this garment.<sup>12</sup>

In a traditional village life one cannot cite a single instance of having seen a woman without *pheran*. A traditional women could be seen with or without the *pyjama* or lower garment but not without a long *pheran*.<sup>13</sup> However due to the influence of modernization and westernization women preferred to put off *pheran* and wear only

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<sup>11</sup>The head dress of Kashmiri Muslim women was the *Kasaba*, were as the Pandit women wore the *Taranga*.

<sup>12</sup> Information based on interviews conducted during the field study, 2014. Inner garments were not in use during the early sixties in the valley. Besides the long loose *pheran* used by the common people a garment in the name of *chapankathe* lower garment upto knees was used by rural males.

<sup>13</sup>An interview with Gh Mohmmad Bhat, resident of Kulgam.

*frock shalwar*. Initially it was seen with contempt in a traditional society now it has become an order of the day.<sup>14</sup>

Under the influence of modernization and increased exposure to different channels of communication, rural women especially school going girls began to wear fashionable dresses in imitation of their counterparts in other parts of country. Women living in urban areas started adopting new fashionable dresses and rural women followed suit. Very fashionable dress type such as party wear, double dye, coloured, embroidery based and stitched in a very fashionable manner started intrusion into the rural society.

*Khrave* wooden chapel and *pulhaur* straw chapel were replaced by plastic and rubber shoes. The water proof plastic shoes began to be used on large scale. These plastic shoes, however, were used only during winter seasons except in hilly areas where they were used throughout the year. With the passage of time, leather, rubber, plastic and sports shoes were widely used. Different types of shoes for winter as well as for summer began to flood rural areas in the period of our study. *Pulhore*, which continued to be the choicest footwear of villagers till late 60s, seems to be nonexistent now. *Chappal* mainly nylon replaced the erstwhile grass and wooden chapel i.e., *pulhore* and *khraw*.

Socks of both types; one made of wool or fur and used in winter and another made of cotton and nylon for summer, began to be used during the period. As a result of increasing connectivity with the outside world due to the communication revolution the people in the valley began to imitate the western style, the Arab and even the Afghan culture in their dress. Their impact could be seen in day today human activities as well. Further the emergence of different religious reform movements influenced the dress pattern of Kashmir's to a considerable extent. The changing material culture and better-off economic condition of people contributed to this change. Further influx of money currency in the villages due to cash returns to fruits led to change in dress habits. The development of means of communication also has its bearing upon the people's choice of dress habits in more than one way. Firstly the improved means of road transport and connectivity of distant villages kept foreign machine made cloth available at doorsteps of villagers. These new types of cloths were made available to villagers through different cooperative stores established in most of the villages. It is worth mentioning that that cooperative movement received a significant growth in the post-1947 period. Secondly the introduction of Television sets in late 70's and early 80's in valley also had its impact on the choice and preference of dress worn by the people. People began to imitate heroes, heroines and other characters of their favourite TV programmes and would feel proud if their dress had any resemblance with any of the characters. Further flow of tourists also increased due to the better means of communication in post 60s. Tourists from

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<sup>14</sup> Slowly *pheran* gave way to *Phirak-Shalwar* along with *sari*. The system of keeping oneself in *burqa* has been gradually disappearing. Even in the period of my study women used to keep their heads without sari which was kept on shoulders.

different world countries laid their impact on locals particularly with regard to dressing style.

### **Conclusion**

Like any other society in the world, rural society of Kashmir also experienced a change. Process of change in rural society of Kashmir took a drastic pace after 1947, when the shackles of autocratic rule were thrown away. Certain measures initiated by Government not only ended the era of isolation of the valley but also set the track for spread of education, awareness, growth in income and employment of the inhabitants. Ripples of this change got manifested in over all living conditions, change in housing, food habits, dress, amusement and recreation of the people.