

DISCOVERING THE BEAUTY AND FORTITUDE OF KASHMIRI CULTURE AND CUSTOMS

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Abstract

The cultural tapestry and customs of Kashmir form a diverse and intricate montage shaped over the course of centuries. Situated in the northernmost reaches of India, Kashmir's evolution has been molded by a multitude of cultures and faiths, resulting in a distinctive fusion of rituals and ways of life. The inhabitants of Kashmir are renowned for their gracious reception, intricate craftsmanship, delectable gastronomy, and melodic expressions of music and dance, all emblematic of their ancestral lineage. Notwithstanding its allure and opulence, Kashmir's cultural ethos has encountered adversities such as conflict, displacement, and environmental degradation. Despite these trials, the resilience of Kashmiri culture and its traditions has endured, forging ahead with vigor. Through an exploration of the distinctive customs and rituals of the Kashmiri populace, this exposition seeks to underscore the splendor and opulence inherent in their cultural legacy, emphasizing the imperative of safeguarding it for generations yet to come.

Keywords: *Kashmiri, Wazwan, Phoran, Festivals, Occupation, Rabab.*

Introduction

The native tongue of the Kashmiri populace is known as Kashmiri, an Indo-Aryan language. This language is primarily used in the Kashmir Valley, located in the Indian-administered region of Jammu and Kashmir, and it also finds usage in certain segments of Pakistan and the diasporic community. The literary heritage of Kashmir is steeped in antiquity, with roots tracing back to ancient epochs. Among the earliest documented Kashmiri compositions are the Nilamata Purana and the Rajatarangini, both scripted in the Sanskrit tongue. Yet, the bulk of Kashmiri literary works have been penned in the native Kashmiri language.

Kashmiri literary creations exhibit a diverse panorama, encompassing an array of genres such as poetry, fiction, drama, and non-fiction. Renowned Kashmiri poets, including Lal Ded, Habba Khatoon, Arnimal, and Rasul Mir, have indelibly etched their mark in the annals of literature. The variegated tapestry of Kashmiri literature has been shaped by the interplay of different cultures and languages, with Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit weaving their influences into its fabric. Recent times have witnessed the ripple effects of political upheaval in the region, causing ripples across the landscape of Kashmiri literature; some authors have encountered constraints and limitations on their creative expressions. Nevertheless, the essence of Kashmiri literature endures, fostered by a cadre of adept writers and poets dedicated to upholding and propagating the language and cultural legacy of the Kashmiri populace.

Origin of Kashmir

The origin of Kashmir is shrouded in historical and archaeological complexities, and it has been a subject of scholarly debate. The region's history is marked by a blend of myth, legend, and historical evidence. In ancient times, Kashmir was mentioned in various ancient texts and scriptures. The Nilamata Purana, an ancient Hindu scripture, contains references to Kashmir's geography, mythology, and religious significance. The Rajatarangini, a historical chronicle written by Kalhana in the 12th century, provides insights into the early history of the region. According to these texts, Kashmir was believed to have been a lake, which was later drained to make the fertile valley.

Kashmir's early history was influenced by various dynasties and empires, including the Mauryan and Kushan Empires. It became a prominent center for Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. The region's location along the Silk Road facilitated cultural exchanges with

Central Asia, Persia, and China. In subsequent centuries, Kashmir witnessed the spread of Islam, particularly during the medieval period. Various Muslim rulers, including those from Central Asia, ruled over the region. The Mughal Empire established its control over Kashmir, contributing to the cultural and architectural landscape of the area.

In the 19th century, Kashmir came under the influence of the Sikh Empire, and later, the British East India Company. The signing of the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 established the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir under the rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh. The partition of British India in 1947 led to the complicated political situation in Kashmir, with its predominantly Muslim population ruled by a Hindu Maharaja. This resulted in conflict and eventually led to the Indo-Pakistani war over the region. The Line of Control, established after the war, divided the region into Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered parts.

The historical origins of Kashmir are thus intertwined with a diverse range of cultures, empires, and influences over the millennia, shaping its unique identity and significance in the Indian subcontinent.

Food Habits

Kashmiri gastronomy presents an exclusive fusion of spices, flavors, and culinary methods, shaped by the geographical, climatic, and historical factors inherent to the region. This culinary medley is an amalgamation of Indian, Persian, and Central Asian influences, yielding a diverse array of dishes that boast opulent aromas and enticing tastes. The use of saffron, dried fruits, and yoghurt imparts a distinctive character to Kashmiri fare. Among the prominent delights, Rogan Josh stands out as a beloved dish—a lamb-based curry meticulously prepared with a blend of spices such as fennel, cumin, and cinnamon. This slow-cooked marvel allows the spices to permeate the meat, producing a luscious, tender, and fragrant curry that pairs best with steamed rice or naan. Equally iconic, Gushtaba features minced lamb crafted into meatballs, pounded with spices, and simmered in a creamy yoghurt-based gravy. In the Muslim tradition of the region, the Wazwan multi-course feast holds profound cultural significance, serving as a cornerstone of the people's identity and customs, often gracing festive occasions as a culinary masterpiece.

Even the vegetarian spectrum of Kashmiri cuisine flourishes with culinary wonders. Dum Aloo, for instance, showcases potatoes bathing in a tomato-based gravy infused with spices like ginger and cumin. Haakh, a beloved vegetarian preparation, entails greens like collard greens, spinach, or mustard greens cooked in mustard oil, enhanced with garlic and red chili. Dried fruits, a hallmark of Kashmiri cooking, including apricots, raisins, and figs, lend a subtle sweetness to dishes like biryanis, pulaos, and kebabs, resulting in distinct flavors setting them apart from other regional cuisines.

The prominence of saffron further accentuates the Kashmiri palate. Its infusion into rice-based dishes such as pulao and biryani, as well as desserts like phirni and kulfi, bestows an opulent, aromatic dimension. Reflecting the region's historical and cultural tapestry, Kashmiri cuisine harmoniously combines spices, dried fruits, and yoghurt, imbuing a singular savor that entices every palate. The inclusion of both meat-based and vegetarian options caters to a diverse range of dietary preferences. In essence, partaking in Kashmiri gastronomy is an essential endeavor for connoisseurs of cuisine and enthusiasts of cultural heritage, offering a delectable journey into the soul of the region.

Customs

The attire adorning the inhabitants of Kashmir boasts vivid hues and an enchanting allure. The populace predominantly dons customary clothing, with women embellishing themselves in intricate jewelry like nose rings, bangles, earrings, necklaces, and loose-fitting salwar kameez that offer respite from the summer heat. Meanwhile, men opt for attire such as kurta pyjamas, shalwars, skullcaps, and gurabi. During winter, a distinct garment known as the "phoran," adorned with vibrant patches and elaborate embroidery, is a staple to stay warm.

The predominant style of clothing embraced by Kashmiris takes the form of flowing gowns, tailored for comfort. The selection of fabric varies in accordance with the seasons. Among women, skullcaps are commonly worn, while men often don hats. In a gesture of respect toward strangers

and elders, women tend to cover their heads and shoulders. The Kashmiri ensemble serves as an embodiment of their culture and lifestyle, standing as a testament to the enduring cultural values upheld by India.

Music and Dance

Kashmir boasts a distinctive musical and dance tradition that is both unpretentious and remarkable. Music and dance form an integral component of nearly every festival and celebration, adding a significant allure that draws tourists. A plethora of dance forms and musical genres are tailored to suit diverse occasions. During the Hemis Festival, the Mask dance takes center stage as a renowned performance. Adorned in vibrant costumes and facial masks, dancers draped in brocade robes enact ceremonial dances. Chakri, Ladishah, Ruf dance, and Dandaras dance are equally pivotal expressions. The tapestry of folk dance includes Roul, Dogri, and Wuegi-Nachun. The inhabitants of Kashmir deeply cherish folk music and find themselves captivated by the evocative strains of the famed Rabab music. Often, the harmonious notes of Sitar, Dukra, and Nagara resonate within this musical tradition. Wanawun, Ghazals, Sufi melodies, and Choral compositions stand as prominent musical forms in Kashmir. These melodic marvels frequently grace weddings and other celebratory gatherings.

Conclusion

The cultural and traditional essence of Kashmir is intricately intertwined with the historical and geographical tapestry of the area. The inhabitants of Kashmir possess a profound cultural legacy that resonates through their distinctive rituals, practices, music, artwork, and literature. A particularly noteworthy facet of Kashmiri culture is its remarkable diversity. Within the region coexist a multitude of ethnic and religious groups, each nurturing its own set of cultural norms and traditions. The Kashmiri language, music, and culinary traditions, among others, vividly exemplify the array of cultural components that characterize Kashmir's ethos.

The foundation of Kashmiri culture and tradition forms an inseparable thread within the fabric of the region's identity and heritage. The tenacity and multiplicity of the Kashmiri populace have facilitated the safeguarding of their cultural legacy in spite of the adversities they have encountered. The distinctive cultural facets unique to Kashmir stand as a testament to the region's vibrant past, as well as to the imaginative spirit and resourcefulness of its inhabitants.

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