

Identity Crisis

Craze for non-Kashmiri brides

It is perplexing to note that all those leaders who talk loudly about the identity of Kashmiri Muslims take measures that cut deep at the roots of Kashmeriat. Their marriage with non-Kashmiri girls goes a long way in dealing a death blow to Kashmiri Particularism (Kashmeriat)

By G L Jalali

Marriage is a sacred 'institution' whose social and biological purpose has often been discussed by the sociologists and psychologists. Without it, as the sacred Hindu Scriptures say, the "Brahmand cannot stay". For a Hindu non participation of his wife in any religious ceremony is an incomplete performance and without any meaning. That is why the wife of any Hindu is called "Ardangni" (half body of man).

In the Hindu pantheism almost all the prominent deities are (female) goddesses such as Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity; Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, Parwati, the goddess of creation; Kali, the goddess of destruction etc. It is a sad story that these days women are not respected as they used to be in the past and are generally deprived of the rights that are due to them as the "better half of the man".

It has often been observed that the wife-beating, dowry deaths and bride burning are very common in the Indian society which has been dominated by the male members since times immemorial. Alluding to religions, Muslims have been ordained to give due respect to women folk as per the Shariat law. In their holy book, it is said the "heaven lies at the feet of mother".

The man should consider his own wife as field to be cultivated with mutual understanding." Even Christ and Buddha preached reverence for women.

Historically speaking, Indian women have played prominent role in all the spheres of national life. They rose to high positions because of their worth and ability.

It is pertinent to refer to our valley which produced eminent women personalities, saints, poet and mystics such as Lal Ded, Rupa bhavni, mathematician Leelawati (some say she was born in Kashmir), Habbakhatoon etc. But the darkest period in Kashmir was ushered in when the feudal order caught the valley under its strong grip.

Time has come when she is being treated as a commercial commodity in the matrimonial market. Dowry system and the craze for non-Kashmiri brides constitute the bane or curse of Kashmiri society.

There is absolutely no exaggeration in the confession that this craze for non-Kashmir brides has become fad with our politicians, wealthy business- man and even clerics" who claim to be the sole religious monopolists doing politics under the garb of religion. It is just to gain their personal ends and vested interests.

This snobbery started in the elite section of Kashmiri Muslim society in our valley with the marriage of the first Awami Chief Minister of our state. He married a non-Kashmiri lady in early thirties. The bride's father (some say) was a Christian or Jew (not exactly known) who came to Kashmir from Great Britain for

business purposes. He is credited for establishing the first western-type hotel in the heart of Srinagar. By chance he married a (Gujar) Muslim lady who was earlier divorced legally by a Lahore based foreigner. After her marriage to the highly educated Kashmiri youth, she was converted to Islam and all along her life she remained a devout Muslim lady, taking deep interest in the state politics. Reverently, she was called Madri-Meherban (Affectionate Mother). Both she and her illustrious husband rejuvenated the dormant Muslim society and brought them political awakening.

The eldest son of this leader of towering personality followed into the footsteps of his father, he also married a non-Kashmiri girl who was also British national.. After the death of his father, he too became the Chief Minister of the state. Had he desired, he could have chosen a Kashmiri lady and married her. The father of the bride was a well known Kashmiri businessman who had business connections in London. Born and brought up in London the girl (bride) was an employee in a London hospital. Her husband, a medical doctor by training, is a flamboyant politician who had done a lot for the welfare of his people in the state as the chief Minister of J&K.

His son, the present Chief Minister of J&K state, did the same as his father and grandfather did. He did not deviate from the tradition set up by the grandfather. Shunning Kashmiri brides, the young Chief Minister married non-Kashmiri class mate-Sikh girl.

The examples of choosing non-Kashmiri brides are not just stray ones. Perhaps the youth belonging to the elite section of Kashmiri Muslims have no liking for marrying non Kashmiri girls. I can quote many examples of Muslim bureaucrats who are married to non-Kashmiri girls. Even they got their daughters married to non-Kashmiri grooms. One such bureaucrat was a senior most commissioner in the rank of Chief Secretary who got his two daughters married to non-Kashmiri Muslims, including a Bihari Muslim.

Apart from these Muslim bureaucrats, it may not be out of place to refer to a number of valley's top-ranking politicians. Three years ago, the chairman of a well known separatist party in the north Kashmir, married a non-Kashmiri girl who can hardly converse in Kashmiri language. This highly educated leader happens to be the son of a slain separatist leader who commanded a great respect for pleading Kashmir's independence vociferously at the international level. His example was apparently followed by another separatist leader. His religious discourse, usually on Fridays, draws thousands of his acolytes. Surprisingly, this moderate politician, who spends much time on foreign tours, married a girl born and brought up in the United States. She is, for all practical purposes, an American national - hardly conversant with Kashmiri ethos which is so dear to her husband. A well-known Kashmiri Muslim (retired) bureaucrat is married to a Christian lady hailing originally from Norway, Denmark.

A new development in the Kashmiri Muslim community has come to light. Three months ago, a Kashmiri secessionist leader married a Pakistan girl (an artist by profession, they say) in Islamabad. On their arrival the couple was given a warm welcome as reported by Srinagar media. The young newly married secessionist leader said to pressmen, "The bride is the bride of all Kashmiris" (Greater Kashmir)

A good number of Kashmiri Muslim doctors settled in US, UK, Canada, Arab countries etc. are mostly married to non-Kashmiri ladies. There is no consideration of religion for them. Some of them are reported to have married non-Muslim girls.

We have observed one interesting thing about Kashmiri Muslim militants. On their arrival in PoK and Pakistan for receiving arms training in terrorist training camps, they are coaxed by ISI officials to marry Pakistani girls. These facts were revealed by a Kashmiri Militant who crossed the border and was arrested along with his Pakistani wife and seven year old child. Perhaps they are lured by ISI to go for arms training in the terrorist camps in the hope of marrying Pakistani girls.

If any credence is to be given to media reports, general public in the valley resent the marriage of their leaders with non-Kashmiri girls. Obviously, they have reason for it. They think that their marriages with non-Kashmiri girls weakens the true spirit of Kashmiriat. One Srinagar based paper had published adverse remarks on this growing trend among militants. Next day some unidentified men attacked the newspaper office and vandalised it.

For most Kashmiri Muslims it is the question of retaining their identity as Kashmiri Muslims. In other words they fear that this growing trend being set up by their leaders and members of the elite class may prove detrimental to their centuries old identity and traditions. It is strange and perplexing to note that all those leaders who talk loudly about preserving the identity of Kashmiri Muslims they themselves, wittingly, or uncertainly, take the measures that cut deep at the roots of this ethos (Kashmeriat). Marriage with non-Kashmiri girls goes a long way in dealing a death blow to "Kashmiri Particularism" (Kashmeriat).

There is another story related to the migrant Pandit community. The displaced community is scattered all over India. But bulk of displaced Pandits are temporarily staying in Jammu. They are also losing fast their identity and facing a grave social crisis rooted in their forced migration from the valley. It is contrary to that of Kashmiri Muslims but bearing the same results. Unlike Kashmiri Muslims, Pandit girls go in for their marriage with non-Pandit grooms.

Statistically worked out 40 per cent Pandit girls marry outside their caste and community. Their husbands mostly hail from outside state. In the long run these marriages prove an utter failure and end in

divorce. My advocate friend, who passed away in Delhi four months back, once told me that approximately 2000 divorce case were pending in courts.

One may attribute it to the exposure of our young generation to a new environment and social milieu which is quite alien to their age old customs, traditions and cultural pattern. It becomes an uphill task for them to adjust with the new cultural milieu, resulting in domestic feuds. So many psychological reasons are responsible for it.

Time fast coming when Kashmeriat will be totally obliterated, resulting in a social disaster of great magnitude both for Kashmiri Pandits and valley's Muslims.

Like the vanishing Hangul (stag) a Kashmiri true in spirit, having Kashmiri ethos, thinking, social relationship and broad vision and above all imbued with real humanism and tolerance will not be seen anywhere. One who shuns one's culture, traditions and art of living dies - not physically, but mentally - for ever. A man between two stools ultimately falls down, thus goes the old saying.