

clothing for the baby and even for his/her natural mother. Some people do not accept these gifts. The elderly people on both the sides complete the formalities of the function after oral promises and agreements. Now a days the adoption has been given a legal shape and requisite legal formalities are completed for such adoptions in a court of law.

As per the promises and agreements made on the occasion, not only the two families concerned but also two different dynasties come close to one another. But in the real life the position is quite opposite. The person who adopts a baby tries his utmost to maintain a distance from the person who offers him the child. By doing so he consoles his own self considering that more the distance, the less shall be the impact of his/her natural parents on the child and the less will be the risk of losing the affection of the baby. Thus by doing so they cut the bonds of attachment between the baby and his/her natural parents, lest he/she should desert them in the long run. The parents adopting such a baby complete all his/her *Sanskars* in their house and according to their own family traditions.

Yagnyopavita -The Holy Thread Ceremony (Philosophical and Historical Perspective)

It is the most important religious binding on the parents to include their male child/children into the Brahminical order which is known as, 'Yoni tra:vun' in the Kashmiri language. Hence it is an occasion of great importance not only for the family but also for the whole dynasty including the relatives. Besides 'Yagnyopavita', it is also known as 'Upanayan' or 'Mekhala'. The celebrations on the occasion consist of two fold, one related to its traditional/ philosophical aspect and the other to its religious/ ritualistic format. The word 'Yagnyopavita' consists of two words, 'Yagnyo' and 'Upavita' both originating from the Sanskrit language meaning 'the Sacred Fire' and 'having come near' or 'having put on.' As for the word, 'Upanayan', pronounced as 'Vo>plnayan' in the Kashmiri language, is concerned, it also consists of two words, 'Upa' and 'Nayana' meaning 'going close to'. Besides, wearing the Sacred Thread round the neck, the word 'Mekhala' means a special pattern of dress-code comprising a rope belt (of *Kusha*), the skin of a deer (for receiving alms known as *Abi:d*), a stick of *Plasha* or Mulberry tree for self protection and a cotton thread to tie round the waist known as 'A:Tipan.'

As far its traditional/ philosophical aspect is concerned, it is an expression, an unshakable belief and faith in our ancient traditions, beliefs, rituals and customs which have proved to be the life-line of this great and continuing civilization of India. The tradition of the pupil-teacher relationship, considered as the pride of ancient Indian education, exists in a miniature form while performing this Sanskar. The tradition has been kept alive by our society by performing un-broken chain of rituals

performed on this occasion. This is because we have given due respect to our great Rishis who were adored as our 'Gurus', preachers and as our ancient progenitors.

The word 'Guru' means 'one who dispels the darkness'. It has been our ancient tradition to consider the *Guru* as the remover of pandemic cover of darkness and ignorance that exists in us and instead he gives us the light of knowledge. Knowledge of who we are, how to relate the Pure One with the material world. Most importantly to know is, how to transcend the worldly illusions and reach to the abode of the Infinite Blesses, which is our ultimate goal.

The 'Guru' should dedicate himself to achieving human perfection through the study and assimilation of *Vedanta* and should live by its precepts so that he is able to conceive such thoughts and remit all these experiences to his future generations as his forefathers did for him. It is an acknowledgement of the importance of *Vedanta* in our lives. *Vedanta* makes us 'Rajarishis' - kingly without and sagely within and without all that, our involvement with the materialistic world may not be possible,

The combination of the teacher's wisdom and the energy of the student make a vibrant and progressive society. It lays stress on the importance of the *Guru* in every walk of life. A sportsman's natural gift and skill acquire direction with the expertise of the coach. A musician's talent is honed by the dedication of his mentor. The same is the case with a person moving ahead on the spiritual path where the ignorance of the seeker's mind is removed by the enlightenment of his path by his *Guru*.

The teacher-student relationship is accorded paramount importance in the Indian culture. The *Guru* is considered as good as God Himself. Spiritual growth is impossible without the help of a *Guru* who is considered, 'Brahmavit' and 'Brahmajana' - established in the state of 'God Realization' and has the teaching skills to impart

the subtle spiritual concepts to his disciple. Though persons with such qualities and caliber are rare, yet India has been blessed with outstanding sages who have appeared in every generation to keep this unique tradition alive. It is to this singular endowment that we pay our tributes and, as a mark of gratitude, we offer ourselves as 'Guru Dakshina' and pledge to continue the tradition for generations to come. Total surrender to the *Guru* is one of the foremost qualifications of the disciple. This does not imply blind following. The seeker must question, probe and analyze the truths taught so as to understand, absorb and transform his personality to achieve the higher realms of knowledge. In order to transcend this worldliness and reach the abode of Infinite Bliss, the most important and ultimate thing for a disciple is to have an attitude of service or 'Seva bhav' unto all.

Maharshi Vyasa has played a great role in the preservation of our *Vedanta* philosophy. He was the famous sage who codified the *Vedas*. *Vyasa Pi:Tha* is the seat from where any spiritual or *Vedic* teaching is imparted in acknowledgement of *Vyasa's* immense contribution to *Vedic* learning. All great teachers bow to *Vyasa* before taking such a seat. He is revered as the first *Guru* although the *Guru-Shishya* tradition was established long before his time. According to the *Puranas*, *Vyasa* was the son of *Rishi Parasara* and his mother was a fisher-woman named, *Satyawati*, and he was the grandson of the great sage *Vasistha*. He personified the sagely wisdom of *Vasistha* and the practical approach of a fisherman. Wisdom and practical life are the two essential approaches to be cultivated so as to lead a successful life. He was born on the full moon night *Purnmashi*, (denoting illumination) of *Ashada* (the third month of the *Vikram* era) and we celebrate the day even today as '*Guru Purnima*'. *Vyasa* is considered to be an incarnation of Lord *Vishnu*. There were supposed to be twenty-eight such *Vyasas* of whom the one referred to above, is said to

be the last one. The saying is that we have been promised twenty-nine *Vyasa*s, and the 29th *Vyasa* is yet to come. In addition to decoding the *Vedas*, *Vyasa* wrote the great Epic the '*Mahabharata*' consisting of nearly one-lakh verses. It is referred to as the fifth *Veda*. He is also reported to have composed the *Puranas* and the *Brahma Sutras*.

While summing up the philosophical aspects of '*Upanayan*' we shall come to its ritualistic observance. It is believed that in ancient times, the people of this sub-continent used to send their wards to the hermitages of the great *Rishis* and *Gurus* for refinement, embellishment, purification and for imparting to them the real and ever lasting values of character, personality, spirit and ethics. Such hermitages or schools were generally located in lonely and deep forest areas, faraway from the reach of the general public. Besides, there were a number of separate hermitages for different schools of thought, viz., *Veda*, *Vedanta*, *Vedangas*, *Dharam Shastra*, *Niti Shastra*, *Samaj Shastra*, *Artha Shastra*, *Vyakaran*, *Puran*, *Jyotish Astrology*, *Astronomy*, *Karma Kanda*, and other allied *Shastras*. The child, entering the hermitage, was handed over to the *Kula Guru/ Rishi* for being imparted the elementary education, known as '*Vidhyarambh*'. The initial education was considered essential for all those coming to the hermitage and admitted for the purpose. The first letter taught to the pupil was '*Om*' - the ultimate truth and the first lesson taught was '*Om Swasti Siddham*' - meaning 'let the Almighty bestow (me) with eternal wisdom.'

The introduction of elementary education was followed by the '*Yagnyopaveta*' ceremony. The word is a combination of two Sanskrit words, '*Yagnya*' and '*Upaveta*', meaning, 'the Holy Fire' and 'going close to'. Thus the meaning of the word is 'going close to the Sacred Fire', whose presence is felt everywhere and by

every one. Hence it is called '*Sakshat*' or '*Prateksha Deva*'. That is why; the sun has been named as the '*Prateshkha Deva*' in the Indian mythology and in the *Puranas*. It is a fact that the real essence of the ceremony has long been forgotten, but the impact of the function has been so impelling that nearly all the ten *Sanskars* which have to be held prior to this *Sanskar*, are now completed on the eve of the '*Mekhala Sanskar*'. In this way it has emerged in a magnanimous form known as '*Upanayan*'. The material element in the '*Upanayan*' ceremony is to invest the Sacred Thread or the '*Yagnyopavita*'.

In almost all the beliefs of the world, a baby is considered as pure as soul and without the impact of this or that religion. No body is born as a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jew or Zoroastrian. The truth is that every child is an offspring of a man and an element of humanity. The social customs and rituals of a particular society make him the follower of any of the said religions. Every society enrolls a baby into its fold by performing certain rituals and customs peculiar to it. Even the '*Stone Age*' man had some peculiar beliefs though he neither followed any religion nor had any set system of philosophy and belief. Even then he used to categorize the children after assessing their devotion to endurance and tolerance². Some tribal people separate the girls of the tribe and keep them in separate confinements and give them special training according to the special needs of their tribe. Physical injury was caused on any of the limbs of a male child to assess his body strength and valour and thus accomplish the ritual³. Circumcision, ritual of a similar type is prevalent among the Muslims known as '*Khutna*' (*Khatan Ha:l*). The Christians have a ritual of a

¹ Hastings, J. (Ed.) Mackichand, - Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, London, 1959 Vol. II. P. 407.

² Frazer, Golden Bough - Children of Man, New York, 1959, II Ed., Vol. III P. 442

³ Panday, Raj Bali, - Hindu Sanskar, Varanasi, 1960 p.144.

similar nature called 'Baptism' and the Zoroastrians have an identical ritual called, 'Nava Jot.' The 'Yagnyopavita' of the Hindus appears to be a similar religious ritual¹.

The probable date of the beginning of the ritual of 'Mekhala,' followed by the Hindus of the continent, cannot be determined with certainty. The Zoroastrians follow a ritual, that has some resemblance with our 'Yagnyopavita' ceremony and thus, the scholars are of the view that the ritual must have been in currency before the scattering of the ancient Indo Aryans to the South-East-Asian countries. The ritual must have under-gone certain changes according to the socio-economic and cultural needs at the time of their interaction with the local populace. The weather of the places, the soil conditions and the environment too must have played its part in forcing such changes, but the ancient character of the ritual seems confirmed². The word 'Brahmchari' is often repeated in the Vedas, Vedangas and the Upnishads. In the Atharva Veda there is a description of a pupil initiated at the 'Vidyarambha.' One of its verses (Richas) is attributed to such a pupil. In this verse we find all those roots of this ritual, which developed into its present shape during the era of 'Brahmanism'³.

The Paraskar Grahi Sutra is considered to be an encyclopedia of our religious rituals and rites. The ritual under review had assumed its present form till it reached the age of Grahisutras. It contains clear directions regarding the age groups of the boys of different castes for casting the 'Yagnyopavita'. It says: -

¹ Frazer, Golden Bugh, -Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. II., P. 407

² Pnaday, Raj Bali, - Hindu Sanakar, Varanasi, 1960 p.145.

³ Ibid., P. 146.

Ashtamay Varsharshay Brahanam Upnayet
gamashatamaiva. Ikadeshay Kshatriyam Dwadashay
Vaisham¹.

'The ceremony should be performed in the eighth year and only in the eighth year for a Brahmin, in the eleventh year for a Kshatriya and in the twelfth year for a Vaisha'.

While making a total assessment of all the Brahmin Granthas and Grahisutras, Pt., Keshav Bhatt, a famous Sanskrit scholar of Kashmir, has written in one of his books, 'Mekhala Pustak': -

Saftamay Varshay Brahmanasay Upayanam,

Navmay Rajanyasya, Ikadeshay Vaishasya,

Aa shodashat Brahmanasay na-tikramah,

Dwavamshat Rajanyasya Chaturvimshat Vaishasya².

'The 'Upayan' ceremony should be performed when a Brahmin boy is of seven years, a Kshatriya boy is of nine years and a Vaisha boy is of eleven years. Casting of the Yagnyopavita to such a Brahmanchari is a clear deviation if a Brahmin boy crosses the age limit of sixteen years, or a Kshatriya boy completing the age of twenty-two years, and for a Vaisha boy after the age of twenty-four years.' This is a clear warning that the 'Sacred Thread Ceremony' should be held before the boys of different castes attain the above-mentioned age limits.

Yagnyopavita is commonly known as 'Yoni' in the Kashmiri language. It appears a direct derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Yoni', meaning 'the origin wherefrom all the animates have originated and then developed in different sects'. It generally comprises three white threads measuring, approximately, one meter, made of three times folded thread and with a reverse knot at the center, known as the 'Brahama Gand.' Each such string comprises three thin strings and all strings are twisted

¹ Paraskara Grahi Sutra- II page 30.

² Pt., Keshav Bhatt, Mekhala Pustak Upnyanam 1925, p. 50

together, thus forming nine threads in all the three final strings knotted together. In general the total length of a *Yagnyopavita* is considered as ninety-six measures on the hand, known as 'Pa:wI.'

The three strings of a *Yagnyopavita* reflect:-

(A) *Tri Varga* : The three stages/*Ashrams* of human life;

- I. *Brahamcharya Avastha/Ashram*,
- II. *Grahasth Ashram*, and
- III *Va:nprasth Ashram*.

(B) *Tri Rin*: The three obligations of a man:

- I Obligations towards the Devas,
- II Obligations towards the *Rishis*/teachers; and
- III Obligation towards the manes.

(C) *Tri Varna*: The three castes of the Indian society,

- I *Brahmin*,
- II *Kshatriya*, and
- III *Vaisha*.

(D) *Tri Loka* : The three domains of this world

- I. *Bhu:*. (Earth),
- II. *Bhawah*. (Beyond the earth), and
- III. *Swah*. (The Havens above).

(E) *Tri Deva* : The three forces of Nature,

- I. *Brahma* - as the Creature,
- II *Vishnu* - as the Preserver, and
- III *Shiva* - as the Destroyer.

The life span of a man is considered to be of one hundred years subdivided into four parts of (1) *Bal/Brahmcharya Awastha* (2) *Grahastha Ashram* . (family life.) (3) *Vanaprastha*, (detachment from family life), and (4) *Sannyas*, (total detachment from the world) and each span comprising twenty-five years. It is because of this fact that our holy scripture contains: -

Pasheema Shardah Shatam, and *Jeevema Shardah Shatam*.¹

Meaning: 'Let my vision be perfect for a period of one hundred autumns and let me live for one hundred years.'

(A) *Tri Varga* - The three stages of human life.

The days of adolescence are already over for a boy who has attained the age for wearing the Holy Thread. This stage called, *Brahamcharya Ashram* is very important for him and he has to perform complete celibacy till he is 25 years old. The scriptures lay emphasis on performing complete celibacy during all these years. It may be pointed out that this fact has been accepted by the modern science too. This stage is followed by the '*Grahasth*', '*Va:nprasth*' and the '*Sannyas*' *Ashrams* that we shall discuss separately.

(B) *Tri Rin* - The three obligations of a man.

A man is born with three obligations; 1) towards the *Devas*, 2) the *Rishis*/ teachers and 3) his fore- fathers, described as '*Tri-Rin*' in our scriptures. These are: -

i. *Deva Rin* - Obligations towards deities.

It is our firm belief that the wishes of *Devas* (gods), deities or some unknown natural forces are behind all our actions and thus these invite our attention. According to Indian ethos things like good weather, crops, rain, sunshine, etc. are all attributed to the wishes of our deities and *Devas* (gods). Therefore, man has developed some obligations towards all these deities and gods so as to please them. These are known as *Deva Rin*.

ii. *Rishi Rin* - Obligations towards our Rishis,

In ancient times there were no schools, colleges or Universities as we have today. There used to be great '*Gurukuls*' or hermitages in forests where different branches of knowledge were taught to students. Great seers and scholars who were considered authorities in their respective fields headed these *Ashrams*. The parents

¹Pt., Keshov Bhat, *Mekhala Pustak, Upayanam* 1925, Ps. 63,71, 170

would like to send their children to these 'Gurukuls' as early as possible so that their wards could get the best of attention and education at appropriate time. These small children would return from the Gurukula after a few years as fully developed youths possessing knowledge and experiences of life. In this way these Rishis were doing laudable work of great importance for the society as a whole and the society too had an obligation to look after the day-to-day needs of these Rishis. Hence the 'Rishi Rin' was one of the prominent obligations of all parents.

iii. Pitri Rin – Obligations towards our fore-fathers.

Lastly, man has an obligation towards his father, mother, grand father, grand mother and great grand fathers and mothers, (both maternal and paternal), likewise towards all those elderly persons who are or were related to him from his father/mother's side and are dead now. All these persons are worth our reverence and devotion. Our obligation towards them is called 'Pitri Rin'. We complete these obligations, called Pitri Rin in our scriptures, by performing the *Shra:dha* ceremonies of all these manes

(C) Tri-Varna - Three castes of the society.

Only three castes of the Indian society i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriy, and Vaish are entitled to the Yagnyopavita ceremony and that too with certain slight variations.

(D). Tri-Loka -The three domains of the universe.

According to the Puranas the whole universe around us, consists of three main parts i.e. 'Bhu', the earth, 'Bhawah', the space, and 'Swah', the Heavens, beyond.

(E). Tri Deva - Three forces of nature.

There are three stages involved in the life of what ever exists on this earth. Every-thing is first born and then it develops/grows and finally fades away or dies. The Indian mythology has entrusted these three powers to three deities named as, *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesh*, also called as the 'Creator', the 'Preserver.' and the 'Destroyer'.

According to one more theory, Yagnyopavita must be completed when the boy is only four years old. That is why the thread of the Yagnyopavita is kept ninety-six hand measures known as 'Pa:wvl' in Kashmiri language. The ninety six hand measures of the thread are considered the ninety six years of ones age and after adding the four years prior to the ceremony we get the total of one hundred years¹, the desired age for a man according to the scriptures.

The Hindus of the valley belong to one particular caste of high order Brahmins and, as such, the variations in the celebration of the ceremonies existing among other castes does not exist there. Kashmir being the most famous seat of learning in the whole of the sub-continent and even beyond it since the times immemorial, aspirants from far and near thronged to this place for learning and education. As Yagnyopavita is the first and foremost ritual for admitting such aspirants in a 'Gurukul', the ceremony appears to have attained more prominence in the valley and was held in accordance with the established norms as contained in our scriptures². This appears to be the main reason that the ritual attained supremacy over all other rituals connected with the Sanskars prevalent among the

¹ Archarya Pandit Sh. Ramanand Ji Shastri, 'Yagnyopavita Aur VaigyaniK Rahasya', Kalyan Gorakhpur, year 24 No: I. P. 613.

² 'Keys to Kashmir', Lalla Rukh Publications, Srinagar, 1953, P. 77.

local people¹. It is probably due to this very fact that the groom or the *Brahmachari*, as he is called, is asked to walk three steps towards the north when this function is held any where in the sub-continent. As Kashmir is to the north of the sub-continent, the three steps towards north represent the movement of the boy towards the *Sha.rada: Pi:Tha* (Kashmir) while performing this ceremony. The walking of 'three steps' is now just held as a ritual.² We cannot, at the same time, ignore the fact that our *Acharyas* and *Rishis* performed the ritual in big hermitages. With the passage of time great changes took place in the whole of the Indian sub-continent. In order to keep the ancient sanctity of the ritual alive, the *Brahmachari* is now asked to walk three steps towards the north so as to keep the idea of his journey to towards the '*Gurukul*' fresh in his mind.

It is the most important duty of the parents or the elders in a Kashmiri family to perform this ritual and thus include their children in their clan or '*Gotra*' through '*Mekhal*'. Thus, it is presumed that this ritual makes them *Brahmins*. It may be pointed out that a person without '*Mekhal*' cannot perform any of the rituals connected with the 'three obligations' i.e. *Deva/Rishi* or/ the *Pitri Kriya*. We may not perform the pre-birth or even post-birth rituals of a child, as already discussed, but we cannot avoid the *Mekhala* ceremony of our male child. There are some instances where some families have not been able to marry their child/children, due to one reason or the other but there is not a single instance where a boy has remained without the Holy Thread Ceremony due to any reasons whatsoever. A father will try his utmost to celebrate the *Sanskar* of his ward/s according to his

economic conditions. He may beg or even borrow for performing the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony of his son/s. People have been found subscribing money for holding this ceremony for the economically weak or poor children of the society. The *Shastras* do not agree to a collective *Yagnyopavita* function due to the fact that separate '*Hawan Shalas*' are a must for the boys having different '*Gotras*' according to our scriptures.

The *Mekhala Sanskar* is completely different from the marriage ceremony as for its ritualistic aspect is concerned. Though the social customs, rites and rituals are different on both the occasions, yet different programs of rejoicing, social gatherings and the items of festivity are common and extended over a period of three days on both the functions. Singing, dancing, playing on musical instruments, video recording and still photography for the coverage of different items, continues for more than four days on both the events.

A few years earlier, a person whose son/s attained the '*Upanayan age*' and who, being desirous to celebrate it as an independent ceremony, i.e. not as an act of pre-marriage function, would start pondering about the different aspects of the celebrations, at least six months ahead of the actual date of the function. Because during those days procurement of various things needed for the ceremony, were not as easy as these are today. There were certain time consuming preparations to be made like purchasing firewood, rice and arranging cooks etc. A person had to arrange all these ahead of the scheduled date. Even today, the arranging of a suitable Guest Houses, cooks, items of crockery, tent houses and the time schedule of the '*Kula Guru*' are kept in view in advance for performing such activities. On an auspicious day known as the '*Shubha Muhurta*' or '*Sho>b Sa:th:*' the family priest (*Kula Guru*) is invited to fix the date for the function and make a list of auspicious days and

¹ Handoo, J.L., '*Kashmiri Aur Hindi Ke Lok Geet*', 1971, P. 70.

² Upadhyaya, Dr.Krishen Dev- '*Malavi Loka Geet - Ek vivechanatmak Adhyana*' - Mangal Prakashan, Jaipur, 1964, p. 141. also, Pnaday, Raj Bali, '*Hindu Sanskar*', *Varamasi*, 1960, P. 179.

horal moments for initiating the following jobs connected with the function:-

1. *Zyun TsaTun* - Chopping of firewood,
2. *KhAri.dA:ri:* - Marketing and purchasing,
3. *Dapun* - Sending of invitation cards,
4. *GarI Na: vay* - House cleaning,
5. *MA:nzi Ra:th* - The night of henna,
6. *Divgon* - Religious rites to invoke the blessings of gods,
7. *Duri BatI* - Official arrival of the in-laws,
8. *Mekhala* - The Holy Thread Ceremony. and
9. *Ko>shal Hom* - Thanks giving.

1. *Zyun Tsatun* - Chopping of firewood.

This is a function of the by-gone days. Now a days every thing is prepared or cooked on the L.P.G. gas stoves. Even the fire-wood required for the 'Hawan', (Holy Fire), is available in the markets of the urban areas. Earlier a day was fixed for chopping of fire-wood. A considerable portion of it was stored properly on an auspicious day so that it dried in the open and was ready for use on the scheduled date. The function was considered to be of social importance as the close relatives and the neighbours would assemble in the morning in order to help the host in this laborious task. Almost all the aunts of the parental sides, their husbands and their children would assemble to help the host. 'VAr' (a salty rice preparation which, besides all the spices, included walnut kernels/meat, etc., as already discussed under the Chapter '*Mundan/ ZarI Ka:say*' (p.s. pp .58-59') and loves of rice flour are prepared and served to all including the neighbours and relatives. The host's sister '*Pu:fi*' (*Po>f*), is generally in charge of this preparation and she gets a good gratification called, '*Zang*' (for

details p.s. '*Mundan*' p. 61, fn. 1.). This salty dish is distributed to all the neighbours and the relatives, thus serving as information to all of them that the day for the function has been fixed and steps have been taken to perform it. After performing this function, the host can chop more firewood on any subsequent date according to his need and convenience. Unfortunately, this function of social value is fast dying due to the availability of the modern facilities; only the sweet memories remain now. The evenings on such occasions were full of excitement. The whole family would finish the feasting or the dinner as early as possible and the ladies of the house would assemble in a large room/ hall with a few '*Tumbakhna:ris*' (a tubular earthen musical instrument resembling the Indian '*Tabla*' on the one side with a long handle and fixed with goat skin) an earthen or a metal pitcher and a set of bronze cups, called '*KhA:si*' as the musical instruments for singing and dancing. There are a number of folk songs attributed to this function. The most common one is recorded here: -

Azi hai Kari vari Tai Azi hai gindIvay,
Babay La:lni gari gindIvay.....Azi hai kari....
BA:ye La:lni gari gindIvay.....Azi hai kari....

The translation of these lines is as under: -

We have prepared the '*VAr*' just today,
 Let us start playing and dancing from today,
 Let us play and sing in the house of our dear father/
 grand father,
 Let us play and dance in the house of our dear brother.

In this way the song starts with a quick rhythm and the names of all the members of the family and the relatives are included and repeated in the song, which is sung continuously against a high pitched fast musical background. The males and the guests sit in a separate corner of the same hall listening to the song with joy. A '*Hukah*' for the elders and smoking of cigarettes for the adults are the charm of the occasion. In the mean time a

young lady or a girl enters the hall with baskets containing cups, saucers, different bakery items and another girl or a lady with a 'Sama:wa:r'. Salty tea is served to all those present in the house at this hour of festivity. After the tea follow other general and 'Li:la:' songs in Kashmiri and the songs of other Indian languages. The hall is filled with the incense of burning 'Niger.' The sweet black tea called 'QAhvI' and the usual tea called 'Lipton' tea follows according to the choice of the guests. Every body takes tea according to his/her choice and thus this social gathering comes to an end late in the night.

2. *KhAri:dA:ri:* - Marketing and purchasing

On an auspicious day, the host and his spouse start marketing and purchasing for the first time for the function. These include different items of grocery, clothes, dry fruits, barley, rice, oil, ghee, spices and all other materials required for the function. First preference is given to the purchase of those items which require the individual attention for their cleaning, washing, winnowing, sieving, pulverizing or chopping and grinding etc. so that these are ready for use. The selection of things takes much time and attention and the host, if he desires so, invites some of his experienced relatives to help him in these jobs. Thus all these things are bought and kept properly stored with identifying markings on them.

3. *Dapun* - Sending of Invitation cards.

'*Dapun*' means a formal invitation to all relatives, friends and neighbours and to the families of acquaintances. The process starts much earlier when the host makes selection for printing of invitation cards. Such invitations contain almost all the details connected with

the function. Besides the name/s of the boy/s and their parentage, the '*Yagnyopavita*' invitation card contains the following details with dates, days and venue: -

1. *Mahandi Ra:t-(MA:nzi Ra:th)*, the night of henna,
2. *Divgo>n* - Invocation of the deities, and,
3. *Yagnyopavita* - The Holy Thread Ceremony.

The invitation cards for the marriage of a son or daughter contains the information about the first two items which is followed by the date and venue of the marriage function. In addition to this it contains the names of the groom and the bride with their parentage and a special printed invitation slip for accompanying the '*Bara:t*' in case of a groom. In the case of a girl's marriage, it contains the first column as '*Mas Mutstrun*' meaning washing and unfolding of the plaits of the bride's hair.

After printing of the cards is complete, the host or any of his representatives, closely related to him, is selected to start the process of invitations on an auspicious day, known as '*Dapani Nerun*'. The cards with complete addresses are handed over to a member of the family or his representatives for distribution among far and near relatives. The persons thus deputed are called the '*Dapan Wol/Wajyani*' Special care of his/her feasting is made by the host to whose house he/she visits as a messenger along with the invitation card. He/she is served special tea with a variety of eatables and bakery items. In case more time is at his/her disposal or the return journey is not possible, a special feast is arranged in his/her honour. During yester years, the inviter would offer a four Anna or eight Anna coin¹ to the invitee, called '*Daplvni*' who would return it with a three/five or ten rupee note known as '*Pushervni*'. This custom is now no more in vogue. It was a kind of sweet binding on the invited just

¹ 25/50 pice coins, respectively.

to help the visitor monetarily for arranging the function or to meet his/her traveling expenses. After completing the job of inviting all far and near relatives, a day is fixed for giving a formal invitation to the in-laws of the host. On an auspicious day fixed earlier, selected close relatives of the host and some prominent members from the neighbourhood, generally on the basis of reciprocity, assemble at the residence of the host and after making some transport arrangements for the whole party, they reach the host's in-laws. Here a formal reception and welcome is arranged for all of them. Special feasting is held. The mother of the groom/ bride who is at this time a special invitee at her parental house, is given a suit and an 'ATlh>or'¹, some money or a present like, a golden chain/ ring/ ear rings/ a set of bangles or a special shawl. The family members such as, the father, the boy/girl get a suit according to their social status and economic conditions. The young boys/girls who are invited to the function and accompany the party, are given cash presents on the basis of reciprocity or as directed by the mother of the groom/bride. All these things are accommodated in a steel trunk or in a suitcase that, besides the things referred to above, contains a packet of salt, some dry fruits/toffees and a pitcher of sugar candy, called the 'Na:bad No>t'. All these presents come under the name 'Daplvlni'. The in-laws who serve as host at the function, make special arrangements for their tea and feasting. The mother of the bride/groom, as the case may be, has to change her dress at her parental house with a new one presented to her on the occasion, besides wearing a fresh 'ATlh>r'.

The act of 'Dapun' or sending of invitations is a very old custom and has undergone a number of changes from time to time. One thing, however, is more visible

that the mode of presenting gratifications in kind has changed. The custom is either discouraged or has completely vanished, except in case it is a costly present - say in the form of a gold/silver ornaments. But the presents in 'cash' have increased more with the passage of time. This has affected the very soul of this society and the custom, so much so that it is becoming more cumbersome for not so rich families to continue such praxis. As the process has been continuing since long, there are a number of folk songs, called 'Vanlvun', prevalent in our society. More stress in these songs has been laid on the mother of the groom/bride whichever the case may be and it includes the common names from our mythology, like Lord Krishna, Devaki (mother of Lord Krishna), etc. Besides, it lays more stress on an auspicious date, day and the lunar mansions for initiating the function. A few lines are quoted here: -

Daplnas kyutlye Rathl mangInovmaye.

Sho>d Nechitur wuchinovmaye

Devlki: Ma:jye kyut Rathl mangInovmaye,

Sho>d Nechitur ,

Mahara:j SA:bun Ho>s mangInovmaye,

HAsitis so>nl sund sa:z karInovmaye,

TAthi peTh Krishna Mahara:j behInovmaye,

Sho>d Nechitur ,

Its translation is as under: -

I sent for a chariot for the sake of sending the invitations,

I got selected the auspicious lunar positions for the same.

I arranged a chariot for mother Devaki,

I got selected.

I called for the elephant of His Highness, the 'Maharaja,'

I decorated it with a golden bridle,

On it I got seated my Krishna as the groom,

I got selected the auspicious lunar position for the same.

¹ For the details of the 'ATlh>r' see the note under the heading, 'Vo>har Vo>d' - Birth Day, (p. s. p. 54).

4. Garl Na:vay —House Cleaning

The cleaning of the house on the eve of all our festivals is a common feature. The function attains more importance when we are celebrating marriage or the *Yagnyopavita* ceremonies. The mother, who works as the chief hostess on all such occasions, cleans a portion of the house on an auspicious day because the process of *Dapun* (sending invitations) cannot be initiated without the formal observation of this custom. As the function is more time consuming, the hostess makes cleaning of a small portion of the house on an auspicious horal moment so that she is at liberty to start the process of invitations at any time as per her convenience. For this purpose she cleans a small room, shelf or a ward-robe, etc., of the house on an auspicious day and the actual function is held two to three days prior to the actual date of the marriage or the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony. On the scheduled date of 'Garl Na:vay', all unnecessary and unwanted articles of the house are stored separately. The rooms are thrown open for the arrival of the guests who start coming in from this date. Though initially very close relatives arrive on this date, the bulk of the guests and the relatives arrive either on the eve of 'Mahandi Ra:t/ Divlgon' or on the date of the main function itself.

The aunt 'Pu:fi' (Father's sister) of the boy/girl initiates this function with sweeping or washing a small portion of the house and the helpers do the rest of the work because she has other engagements like preparing 'VAR' and its distribution. On this date and occasion she gets gratifications from her brother a number of times; as at the time of initiating the 'cleaning' of the house and at the time of preparation of the 'VAR', etc. During the by gone days, the youngsters of the house used to collect the utensils from the neighbours which were used during the function. Now this item of work is no more existing in big

towns and cities, as these items are easily available on hire. Hence the question of collecting them from the neighbour-hood does not arise. During the earlier days, this occasion was of a special significance for the village potter, who would arrive with a big coop full of earthen pottery items comprising different pots for cooking of different dishes, earthen cups and plates etc. Besides, the cost of these pots, he would get a good gratification in kind and in cash as a reward. The next was the turn of the carpenter who would attend to construct a temporary shed for the ceremonial kitchen and would get a good gratification 'Zang' for his presence at the function. Lastly was the turn of the cook, who, after the construction of a temporary shed for the ceremonial kitchen, would construct approximately twelve feet long and ten inches broad fireplace of brick and mud known as 'Vur'. The firewood was burnt in this gap to prepare the dishes and the cook was given a good gratification for the initiation of this work. Due to the advent of the ready-made kitchen-ware and the L.P.G. and its stoves on easy hire basis, all these things are the things of the past for the urban people, though all these celebrations still prevail in the villages and far flung areas of the valley.

The persons present on the occasion are served 'VAR' in the after-noon. A programme of 'Vanlvun', singing and dancing is held either by professional singers or by the ladies of the house. Different musical instruments like the Harmonium, *TumbakhnA:r'*, 'No>t', a set of bronze cups known as the 'KhA:sy' and musical-tongs, a special musical instrument known as 'Chumtl' are played while singing. The 'Vanlvun' on the occasion is of the common order containing the names and the places from our ancient Indian mythology. An elderly lady of the house or a professional lady, known as the

'*VanIvan Wa:janya*'¹, is encircled by elderly ladies of the house/ neighbour-hood and the '*VanIvun*' starts for the first time in the house on the eve of this function. A few lines are quoted here :-

Sho>klam kArith vanIvun hyatuye,
Sho>b fal dyutuye Ma:ji Bho>wa:nye,
Vasldi:v RazInew vanIvun hyo>tuye,
Sho>b fal ,
VeshanI pa:d KamIlav nishi nAni' dra:ye,
JyaTi hayts Parami:sho>ara:ye,
BA:gi: RathInay tapI sA:ti' draye,
HarI Ganga:ye Namaska:r.
A:ka:shi pyaThI yali Ganga: dra:ye'
SA: ti' chis Ka: ran tI Di:vIta:.
AtshI RatshI vanIva:n patI patI dra:ye,
HarI Ganga:ye Namaska:r.

In the beginning of every ceremony or a ritual like '*GarI Na:vay*,' (Cleaning of house), '*MA:nz La:gInI*,' (application of Henna), '*Kru:l Kha:run*,' (decoration of the front door), '*Yoni tra:vun*,' (casting of the Sacred Thread) '*Dasta:r GanDun*,' (putting on a turban by the groom), etc., the '*VanIvun*' starts with the word '*Sho>klam*' (adoring Lord *Ganesh*). It may be pointed out that while starting *VanIvun* connected with any of the *Sanskar*, the first obeisance is paid to Lord *Ganesh*, the

force behind all our performances. He is considered as our saviour who associates himself with us in all our deeds and takes them to the deserved end. The full '*Shalok*' (couplet) as contained in our Scriptures is quoted as under:-

Shoklambardharam Vishnam, shashi varnam
chaturbhujam, Prassana vadhnam dyaye, sarva
vignopashantaye. Abhipritartha siddartham, Poojito
yah Surairapi, Sarva vigna chhide tasmai Shri
*Ganadhipatyeh namah'.*¹

The meaning of this '*Shalok*' is as under :-

'We send our salutations to the one, who clears all our hardships, who is the preserver of this world, whose body is bright and luminous like the moon, who has four arms, whose smiling face expresses joy and happiness, who is the remover of all our impediments and hindrances. Obeisance be paid to Lord '*Ganesh*', who helps to achieve the desired goals, who is adored even by deities and gods, and who is the destroyer of all obstructions.'

Probably the whole Sanskrit *Shalok* (couplet) must have been in use in the '*VanIvun*' during the days when Sanskrit was the language of the masses in the valley. But now only the initial word, i.e., '*Sho>klam*' is in use instead of the whole couplet.

The meaning of the lines of the folk song quoted above is as under: -

After paying due deference to Lord *Ganesh* and *Bhawani*, who favoured us with a good start of *VanIvun*,

We started *VanIvun* at the residence of king *Vasudev* Mother goddess *Bhawani* favoured us with blessings. The *Ganga* emerged from the Lotus feet of Lord *Vishnu*,

And god of the gods (*Shiv*) bore her in his mated hair.

¹ In earlier times this lady was considered as an important figure on the eve of such functions. She retains this position even today. But due to the introduction of the modern facilities like printed '*VanIvan*' books/tape recordings, etc., her importance has lessened with the result that there are very few professionals left in the field now. More-over, with the introduction of the '*Rov/Roaf VanIvun*' of the Muslims and its popularity among the Hindus as well has quickened the process of its disuse. The lady is looked after with great care and respect for all the days of her presence in the house and at the end of the function she is given a good gratification in the form of a suit or a head dress called, '*Kalvayun*'. Due to the change in the dress pattern of the Kashmiri ladies, she is now given a '*Sari*' suit. This job is done by the young Kashmiri ladies using the printed books from which they read the '*VanIvun*' or the modern audio systems are played on the occasion.

¹ Pandit, Keshav Bhatt., - *Shiv Puja*., Bombay, 1925 P. 29

It became visible due to the penance of *Bhagirath*,¹ Salutations to the *Ganga* emerging from *Hara (Shiv)*. When the *Ganga* became visible in the skies above, It was accompanied by scores of gods, The Nymphs, and Fairies followed it while reciting *Vanlvun*, Salutations to *Ganga* emerging from *Hara (Shiv)*.

Then follows the usual singing combined with the playing on the musical instruments as already described. The salty tea is followed by the sweet black tea known as '*QAhvl*' and the night passes in singing, dancing and merry making. Some people invite professional singers to add to the grace of the occasion. The professionals sing and dance for the whole night. In the middle of singing and dancing, the folk dancer called the '*Bachi*' takes a big plate '*Tha:l*' in his hands and while dancing and singing, he receives cash rewards from all those present on the occasion.

5. *MA:nzi Ra:th* - The Night of Henna.

As already described, festivities like chopping of wood, making purchases for the occasion, initiation of the invitations, cleaning of the house, celebrating the night of henna and invoking of deities are a common feature of both the functions i.e. *Yagnyopavita* and marriage. All the rituals, ceremonies, social customs and gatherings are a common feature on both the functions, though the religious/ritualistic performances differ to a great extent as far the final ceremonies of *Yagnyopavita* or marriage are concerned. Celebrations on both the function are extended over a period of three days i.e. *Mahandi Rat*,

Divgon and the final function *Yagnyopavita* or marriage whichever the case may be. The fourth day is generally called the closing day and is known as '*Ko>shal Hom*' and '*Pra:ya:chit*' respectively. In the case of the former it is a kind of thanks giving to the deities for the smooth and happy termination of the '*Hom*' or '*Yajnya*'. In the case of the latter if it has been the marriage of a daughter, known as '*Kanya Dan*'- one of the greatest charities according to the Hindu philosophy, prayers are held in the form of '*Pra:ya:chit*', 'let the sins of donating a girl (*Kanya*) be reduced'. More details will follow under the heading, 'Post marriage rituals', p.s., pp., 252-53).

The main functions on the eve of '*Mahandi Rat*' are: -

- a) Preparation of '*VAR*' (A salty dish already described p.s., pp., 58-59),
- b) *Kru:l Kha:run* (Decoration of the front gate), and
- c) *MA:nz La:glni*, Applying Henna to the groom/bride.

a) Preparation of '*VAR*'

Although known as the night of henna/myrtle, the activities start early in the morning soon after the arrival of the paternal aunt called '*Pu:fi*' (*Po>f*) who once again starts the kitchen activities after lunch. At this time she has to prepare the '*VAR*' and the cakes of rice flour and as soon as she initiates the process, she is offered a good gratification called, '*Zang*' by her brother. After the preparation is ready she first serves a little of it along with a rice-cake to the deity and to the birds, etc. Next it is offered to the groom/bride and lastly it is served to all those present in the house. It is distributed to all neighbours and relatives along with cakes of rice flour. It may be pointed out that the '*VAR*' can be either vegetarian or non-vegetarian on this occasion.

¹ An ancient king of the Solar race, the great grand son of Sagar, the king of Ajodhya who is said to have brought the river Ganga from the heaven on the earth by his penance and devotion so as to bring to life the 100 sons of Sagar who had turned into stones due to the curse of a Rishi.

b) *Kru:l Kha:run-Decoration of the front gate*

In the main time the aunt (*Po>f*) shows her presence at the mean gate of the house. After sweeping it with a special herbal broom known as '*Ja:vi Latshlj*', a soft, fragrant and thorn-less small wild plant used on the occasion as a special case. '*Latshlj*' in Kashmiri means a small broom that grows locally in the orchards. The main door is whitewashed afresh and flowers; leaves and creepers are painted in different colours on the walls of the entrance. Besides, the word, '*Swagatam*'- 'welcome,' expressions like 'such and such person (name of the groom) weds such and such (name of the bride)' and signs of '*Om*' and the mark of '*Swastika*' as sign of good omen, are also painted on the freshly white washed door entrance. She is again offered gratifications for initiating the decoration of the door. It may be stated that the aunt just initiates the function; some drawing experts in the house/family make the other decorations. The aunt is a special guest on this day as is evident from our folklore and '*VanIvun*', a few lines whereof are quoted here :-

'*Krele*' zange' *kya:h kya:h paze*;
Nu:n VAr tai Mo>harI pra:ss.
So>badra: Ma:le' kya:h kya:h paze
VasIdi:v Ra:zun Mo>hrI .Pra:ss.
Kru:l kha:rnas zangi ko>sl a:ye;
ParIme' shwo>ar tai Pa:rthiv MA:j.
So>badra: Ma:le' zangi ko>sl a:ye;
ParIme' shwo>r tai Pa:rthiv MA:j.

Its translation is under:-

What should be the gratification (*Zang*) for initiating the decoration (at the front door)?

She should get salt, '*VAr*', diamonds and a palace.

What should be offered as gratification to sister *Subhadra*?

She should get diamonds and a palace from king *Vasudeva*.

Who came first with a '*Zang*' on the eve of decorating the gate?

Who performed the *Zang* ceremony of *Subhadra*,

It was God Himself and the mother of *Partha (Arjuna)*.

C) *MA:nz La:glni - Application of Henna.*

Henna is considered most auspicious and a herb of joy and prosperity. Out of the sixteen items needed for make-up or beautification, '*Shodasha Singar*,' myrtle is considered to be the most important of all ¹ ingredients. Myrtle is a symbol of well being and beauty according to the western civilization. Myrtle is sacred to *Venus*, the goddess of 'Love' ². The Egyptians and the Jews consider the myrtle as ever lasting for its evergreen nature. Besides, they consider it a main object of natural beauty and prosperity. To the Jews myrtle signifies the promise and beauty of God. In Greece its evergreen quality signifies immortality ³. In this way growth of myrtle bushes in the vicinity of the courtyard or in the garden is considered most auspicious. In England it is considered lucky to have henna growing around ⁴. Different myths are connected with it in different parts of the world. Some consider it just one of the colours while for others the henna plant has descended directly from Heaven. Different civilizations have owned it in different forms and ways and have different considerations for it but one

¹ Bhatia Harsha Nandini, - "Soubhagya Ka Chinha, Sindhoor Ki Bhati, Dharma Youg, 25, November, 1962.

² Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford, London, Vol. VII, P. 813.

³ Standard Dictionary of Folk-lore, Mythology and Legend, Oxford, London, Vol. II, 1975 P. 776.

⁴ Ibid., P. 716.

thing is common that it is considered as something that brings happiness and joy. The German brides used to wear a garland of henna leaves/ flowers. It is said that medieval German brides wore myrtle wreaths on their weddings¹. Though the German society has undergone a great change during the recent past but the ritual was in currency till recent times and the memory may still be fresh in their minds. In the Indian society, henna has a special status, position and importance and this notion is increasing day by day due to our attachment to the established cultural order. We decorate hands, arms and the feet of the bride colourfully with a number of designs. No marriage or *Yagmyopavita* is considered complete without the use of henna. Different functions and rites on both the occasions are extended over a period of three days and nights and we dedicate one full night and a day for the celebrations connected with the use of henna. We have named one full night as the '*MA:nzi Ra:th*' i.e., the night of '*MA:nz*' in Kashmiri language and '*Mahandi*' or '*Henna*' in other languages of the sub-continent. We have now professional and experts for decorating the hands and feet of brides and the ladies of the house with colourful designs. Besides, its social importance, this has kept alive the ancient art of Indian painting and designing. In this way the ladies of the sub-continent have preserved the great treasure of Indian art and paintings till date. Due to its medicinal properties its use increases in the summer months as it is considered to be a heat absorbent. It is also used in the *Ayurvedic* medicines and for dyeing the hair, etc.

The myrtle powder is kept for soaking early in the morning on the scheduled day by the paternal aunt, '*Pu:fi*', (*Po>f*) of the groom/bride. She adds colour, a pinch of salt/sugar, tea/coffee and some drops of oil to it

so as to make its colour more bright and fast. It is kept duly covered for the full day to leaven it properly. In the evening the maternal aunt '*Masi*' (*Ma:s*) washes the right foot of the groom/bride with warm water and then the left one. Seated on a small wooden stool, called '*Chu:ki*', he/she is considered as adorable and pious as *Shiv/Shakti* at that moment of joy. In the mean time the hostess or an elderly lady of the house/family comes in with a decorated fire-pot, known as '*Isband Ka:nglr*' with hot charcoals and starts burning '*Niger*' after taking a little of it in her finger tips and touching the fore-heads of the bride/groom and then casting it into the fire-pot. This action is repeated in respect of all those present there on the occasion. The elderly ladies assemble in a corner and start '*VanIvun*.' The paternal aunt comes with the pot of myrtle, which is now ready for use. Here both the ladies, '*Masi*' (*Ma:s*) and '*Pu:fi*', (*Po>f*) are given a good gratification called, '*Zang*' by the host. The *Pu:fi* applies a little myrtle on the fore-head of the groom/bride first and then a little of it is laid on his/her right hand and foot whereas the remaining decoration of the bride is made by an experienced lady of the family or by a professional myrtle decorator. However, there is no precedence of applying or decorating the hands/feet of a groom with myrtle either on the marriage or *Yagnyopavita* ceremonies. He is simply asked to dip the little finger of the right hand in the myrtle pot and the function is complete. The aunt makes her presence before one and all along with the pot of henna and thus receives cash presents from all the relatives and friends of the family. After-all no body can deny it, males out of the fear of being applied henna by compulsion and the ladies with the desire of getting a bit more for use, All make cash presents to her and thus the act represents a show of sweet and sour actions and reactions.

The '*VanIvun*' on this occasion is almost similar for both the ceremonies of marriage and *Yagnyopavita*. In

¹ Standard Dictionary of Folk-lore, Mythology and Legend, Oxford, London, Vol. II, 1975 P. 717

Kashmiri folk songs of these occasions, the local Kashmiri features are more visible though we also find an account of mythological names and accounts in them.

An instance is quoted here:-

MA:nze' rA:tsly somblrith vA:tsly,
VA:tsly Ganga, Jamna, Saraswat,
VasIdi:v Ra:zInyan sombrith vA:tsly,
KrishnInI MA:nze' rA:atsly kiti,
Tullmuli Andaray RA:gnya vA:atsly,
VA:tsly Ganga.

Pa:tsha:h Ba:gas, Tullmuli Na:gas,
Tra:gas manz khoT MA:nz' posh.

Its translation is as under: -

On the night of henna all came assembled
Here came the *Ganga*, the *Jamuna* and the
*Saraswati*¹,

All came and assembled at king *Vasudeva's* house,
On the myrtle night of Lord *Krishna*,
RA:gnya came from the spring of *Tulamula*,
Here came the *Ganga*,

The flower of myrtle blossomed in the
Garden of the king, in the spring of *Tulamula*,
and in the pond.

In this way stress has been laid on the fact that the myrtle plant and its flowers have emerged from the spring of *Tulamula*, the abode of goddess '*Rognya*:' and thus it is considered as the pious herb. In some of the world civilizations, the plant is considered to have accompanied '*Adam*' when he was ousted from '*Eden*' along-with '*Eve*' as God directed them to live on the earth for their negligence. The story also contains that it was the only scented tree in the Garden of *Eden* and *Adam*

was allowed to take it along with him at the time of his ouster from the heavens¹.

The '*Vanlvun*' and application of myrtle by the ladies continues for a long time and the hostess remains busy in greeting the guests and burning Niger in the decorated fire-pot. In the mean time tea, both salty and sugar, comes in separate '*Sma:wars*' and it is served to all present on the occasion. Each person takes tea according to his/her own choice. This also serves as a signal to the ladies to stop '*Vanlvun*'. Singing, dancing and playing on the musical instruments is followed just after finishing the tea. The host arranges professional singers at least on this occasion. In case the head of the professional singers has his own troupe along with him, they make a half circle around him otherwise, the ladies of the house including the guests, fill this gap and adults of the family/relatives play on all the musical instruments available in the house including those already mentioned. Thus starts singing and dancing and all present, hear it attentively. The main singer gets cash presents from the host when he begins playing on his instrument. He keeps the cash presents given to him, in a plate/*thali* in the center and others, especially the elderly listeners, have to follow suit. On this occasion the first song taken up by the singers is generally the one like this:

MA:nzye' rA:ts Sha:rad wA:ts gindA:nye',
Babai La:lni shuri tai BA:ts gindA:nye'.

The first line of this couplet, which is repeated after every second line, is of great importance and worth pondering upon. The line contains the word '*Sha:rad*' meaning '*Sha:rada*' the goddess of wisdom and learning. Kashmir has been a seat of learning since the

¹ Standard dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, Oxford, 1975 Vol. VII, P. 716

¹ The three famous rivers of ancient Indian continent. Out of the three rivers the last one, '*Saraswati*' has already ceased to flow.

times immemorial and that is why it attained the name, '*Sha:rada Desha*' in a number of ancient scriptures. Invocation of the said goddess on this occasion clearly depicts the nature and the importance of the function. This also leads us to the conclusion that this ritual/custom has been in vogue in Kashmir since times immemorial.

The meaning of the couplet is -

On the night of Henna, goddess *Sha:rada* has come herself for playing/dancing,

All, young and old members of '*Babl La:l*'s' family are playing and dancing.

Here the word '*Babl La:l*' means the elder member of the family. Then follows the repetition of the names of all the members of the family, both male and female individually by the first singer and other companions repeat the first couplet of the song. In this way the song is sung for a long time at one stretch and rhythm as one continuous performance. The melody of the song is so rhythmic that all those present participate in singing. Soon after the other songs follow and the host serves tea or drinks to all according to the seasonal requirements. The singers continue for the full night and when they feel that the dawn is approaching, they conclude it with the following final song: -

Pra:tah ka:lah ghati karta: na:sh Krishna:,

Chama chA:ni a:sh Krishna: pu:ran kar.

Which means: -

Oh morning twilight, remove all our darkness,
Oh Lord *Krishna*, I expect you to fulfill all my aspirations.

The function ends with the approaching dawn.

6. *Divgo>n* - Rites to invoke the blessings of gods

In the scriptures, the ritual is known as '*Kanya Sanskar*', which in Kashmiri language seems to have

changed and attained the form of '*Kani Shra:n*' probably due to the involvement of sacred bath which forms as one of its rituals. How it attained the common nomenclature of '*Divgo>n*' for both, (bride and the groom), cannot be explained with certainty. The words mean, 'a group of gods.' It is pertinent that invoking of the gods, as the ceremony involves, might be the main reason for attaining the name, '*Divgo>n*'. Any way, both these nomenclatures are in common use for this function among the people of Kashmir. It is a common ritual for marriages and *Yagnyopavita*¹. The purpose is to purify the bride or the groom, as the case may be, for both the functions. It is done by special bathing while reciting from the Holy Scriptures so that the deities get pleased and the bride or the groom is purified for taking part in the main function (*Yagnyopavita* or marriage), which is held a day or two after this ritual. The deities are invoked and invited to the venue for holding the main function. In Kashmir the local populace call it as '*Kani Shra:n*'; a bath given to the bride for marriage or to the groom for both, marriage or *Yagnyopavita*. The word '*Kani*' seems to be a direct derivation from the root Sanskrit word '*Kanyak*' or '*Kanya*', meaning a virgin girl - a young unmarried girl who has not attained puberty.

The place for holding the ritual is specially pasted with clay and cow dung. The family priest, on his arrival, makes certain geometrical diagrams on it at the left corner top. The markings are called '*Kalush*' or '*Kalash*' and the mythical symbols thus made on the ground stand for the main deities, the nine planets called, '*Nava Griha*' including the earth, the sun and the twelve Zodiac signs, called the '*Ra:shis*'. The '*Kalash*' differs with the change of the ritual and there is almost a separate '*Kalash*' for separate rituals. '*Kalash*' is a Sanskrit word, meaning a

¹ Hilbrant, A. F. - 'Hindu Worship' - Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol., XII P. 795.

pitcher, doom or top of a building. In fact, a pitcher or something like that filled with walnuts and water, is kept on the geometrical symbols made by the 'Kula Guru.' With the help of the limewater mixture, the Priest, facing west, draws a picture of a plant on the wall of the room just near the 'Kalash' where the ritual is held. He decorates it with the dots of vermilion (*Sindhur/Syndlr*) and Henna. Here it may be pointed out that in case of a son's marriage, the daughter-in-law is to be seated besides this painting on her first arrival in her new home. This figure is known as 'Divl Mu:n'. The word 'Mu:n' means 'a picture', 'a pillar' or 'imperfect whitewashing' in ancient Kashmiri language. Even today we have the words 'Tsitri il Mu:ni' for faulty whitewashing or besmearing with clay and water or 'Tsi:n il Mu:ni' meaning, pillars/walls.

Beneath it, he makes one more geometrical figure for placing the 'Divl Gu:li' - seven balls of cooked rice mixed with 'VAr', dandelion 'Hand'¹, curd, milk and a little Ghee. The words 'Divl Gu:li' appear to be derived from 'Devata' and 'Golak' or 'Gola' meaning ball-like things offered to the deity. The seven deities represented on the occasion are known as seven 'Matrikas', like:-

1. *Brahmi*, - an epithet of goddess *Lakshmi*,
2. *Mahishowari* - an epithet of goddess *Parvati*,
3. *Kaumari*, - represents 'Pancha Kanya,'
4. *Vaishnavi*, - an epithet of goddess *Durga*,
5. *Varahi*, - one of the seven *Matrikas*, the spouse of Lord *Vishnu* in *Varah Avatara*
6. *Narasimhi*, - an epithet of *Chamunda*, and
7. *Indrani*, - the spouse *Indra*.

These are the seven forms of Mother-goddess, which represent the seven forces, behind this universe.

After paying salutations to all these deities, the Sacred Fire is lit and offerings of dry fruit, sugar candy, ghee and barley etc. are made to it while reciting hymns from the scriptures. A tumbler containing sanctified water, milk, curd, flowers, ghee and a nut called, 'Za:fa:l'¹ - 'nutmeg,' are put into it. This water tumbler is used in initiating the Holy Bath of the boy/girl, which ever the case may be. The scriptures entitle the maternal aunt 'Ma:mi:' (*Ma:mani'*) to clean wash or besmear the main corridor of the house with clay for performing the ritual bath of the bride/groom. The priest makes an auspicious mark of 'Swastika'² on the ground and after venerating it with flowers, etc., the girl/boy is seated on it over a small stool, called 'Chu:ki'. Thus starts the 'Kani Shra:n'. This is a hectic occasion for photographs, *Vanlvun* reciting ladies, and all exchange greetings. Males greet the host with the words 'Mubarak', 'greetings' and the ladies greet the hostess with the words, 'Posht'. At this moment Niger is burnt in a beautifully decorated Fire Pot (*Ka: ngr*). Four young girls are called in and they hold the four corners of a scarf-like piece of cloth called 'Chunni/SA:di' which is kept over the head of the bride/groom and on which the aforesaid Holy Water of the tumbler is dropped gently. This is a stage for a boy or a girl when he/she leaves adolescence and enters into the realm of either 'Brahmacharya', in the case of the 'Yagnyopavita' ceremony or the 'Grahasth Asharam', 'Family life' in the case of a marriage. Thus in this way an important stage begins in ones life.

The four small girls referred to above depict:

1. The four stages of life:
 - a) Adolescence, b) *Brahmacharya*,

¹ One of the three nuts listed under 'Trifala' - An Ayurvedic medicinal nut.
² A straight cross mark with four squares one each at the end point with one side open with an outer rectangle with four rectangles within its corners. It is a mark attributed to Lord *Ganesha* - the propeller of all auspicious deeds.

¹ A vegetable grown in wild specially prepared for the new mothers or for a woman who has given birth to a child recently. It is considered very rich in iron content.

- c) *Grahasth*, and, d) *Va:nprasth*.
2. The four enemies of human life :-
 a) *Kam* (Lust), b) *Krodh* (Anger),
 c) *Lobh* (Greed), and, c) *Moh* (Desire).
3. The four stages of *Pra:na:yam* :-
 a) *Pran* ('Ingoing' respiration)
 b) *Apan* ('Outgoing' respiration)
 c) *Dhyan* (Meditation), and
 d) *Moksh* (Salvation).
4. The four human pursuits:-
 a) *Kaumarya*, (Virtue), b) *Aishawarya*, (Wealth),
 c) *Vilas*, (Sensual Enjoyment), and
 d) *Moksh*, (Salvation).
5. The four *Rins* - or the duties of a man.
 a) *Janam Rin*, -The duty to ones life,
 b) *Deva Rin* - The duty towards our gods,
 c) *Rishi Rin* -The duty towards our saints/teachers,
 and
 d) *Pitri Rin* - The Duty towards our fore-fathers.

The boy/girl is considered as *Shiva/Shakti* or *Vishnu/Lakshmi* while performing this ritual and their parents adore him/her in that form. The father is given the water tumbler in his hand while the *Parohit* recites hymns from the Holy Scriptures preferably the '*Purusha Sukhta*', a hymn from the *Rgveda*. Hymns from other scriptures are also recited at the time of bathing *Shiva* and *Parwati* or Lord *Vishnu* and *Lakshmi*: This is done to remove the two impurities of the boy/girl. These are :-

- a) *Karma Mal* - The impurities of the previous births, and
 b) *Karna Mal* - The impurities of the present birth.

All the water of the tumbler is sprinkled over the bride/groom/s and in case of marriage of a son or daughter, the nutmeg '*Za:fa*' is handed over to the father of the boy/girl because he needs it on the eve of marriage at the '*Dwar/Da:ri, Puja*' or paying homage to the gods at

the door on the eve of marriage ceremony. It is just like '*Milani*' in the Indian way of marriages. At the time of the bath and even afterwards, the *VanVyun* and other activities continue. A small girl is asked to play on the '*Tumbakha:ra*' during this ritual bath. It is considered to be an auspicious sign besides keeping the boy/girl apprised of and connected with the worldly features of the hustle and bustle in the midst of their attaining the high profile of gods though for a temporary period. After this ritualistic bath the boy/girl takes the normal bath in a bathroom. The '*VanVyun*' continues in the house with pricks of humor and satire by the young ladies. The maternal people arrange the clothes and other garments, etc., for the boy/girl and the mother on the occasion. The main items contained are :-

1. A suit, shirt, under-shirt/wear, towel, trousers, slippers/shoes, socks, handkerchief, etc., for the boy.
2. In case of the bride, she gets a complete Sari-suit and a 'Head-gear,' and a shawl from her maternal parents in addition to some of the above mentioned accessories.

Even the soap and oil, etc., used by the boy/girl on this occasion comes from his/her maternal house.

This is a common feature while performing the *Yagnyopavita* or the marriage ceremonies of a son/daughter. Now with the changing world a visible change has occurred in this custom. Now-a-days all these things are arranged by the parents of the boy/girl and the maternal people now offer presents in the form of cash/gold as they wish or desire. The *VanVyun* of this occasion is based on our mythological events/names and the places of religious importance. A few examples are quoted here :-

*Aushad*¹ *Na:ray*² *thovamay poshi vuz livithly,*
Me:khal *Mahara:zas chu Kanye* ' *Shra:n,*

¹ It is the short and Kashmiri form of the word, '*Aushadhi*' meaning a medicinal herb.

² A small earthen pitcher.

*Vasundara:*¹ *Ma:mi thovye' poshi voz livithly*
KrishnI Maha:rajas chu Kanye' Shra:n,
*Pi:ri*² *tal thAvamay MaredI RIKhly.*
*HIkI a:yi BhawA:ni' za:faI*³ *hyath.*

The translation of these lines is as under: -
 With the water contained in a small pitcher decorated with flowers and medicinal herbs, The corridor is clean washed, and besmeared (with the clay and water), because it is the 'Kanyi' *Shra:n'* of the groom for *Yagnyopavita*.

The aunt *Vasundara*, kept the corridor duly cleaned with clay and water and decorated it with flowers,

Because of the *Kani' Shra:n* of *Krishan Maha:raj*, Under the small stool '*Chu:ki*' there is the lining made from lime powder,

Bhawani: (the spouse of Lord *Shiva*) came briskly with a nutmeg.

The maternal uncle carries the bride/groom in his lap from the bathroom up to the '*Hawan Shala*', the place where the ritual is performed. On this occasion it is for the first time that the girl makes the use of a *Sari* officially. The bride/groom is brought to the '*Hawan Shala*' with face covered so that his/her first look is aimed at the wall where the '*Divatl Mu:n*' is painted. Again, Nigir is burnt and the relatives and others assemble at the '*Hawan Shala*'. Some embrace and hug the bride/groom and kiss his/her forehead while others extend greetings to the host and the hostess. The parents and the bride/groom keep fast on this day till the function is over. The *Kula Guru*

purifies the boy/girl by sprinkling the Holy Water over them duly consecrated through the recitation from the scriptures. In case of marriage, a fresh *Yagnyopavita* is put on the boy and a marking of '*Tilak*' of vermilion is made on his forehead whereas the groom for the *Yagnyopavita* is marked with the vermilion mark only. It may be added that the special thread called the '*NA:riivan*' is tied on the wrists of the boy in both the cases. It is for the first time that this thread is tied to the left wrist of the girl at this occasion before the actual date of her marriage. After the purification, etc., is over, offerings comprising dry fruit, sugar candy and ghee are offered to the Holy Fire as oblation to the deities. The rituals connected with the groom end here though the parents have to complete a few rites more before the ritual finally comes to an end.

The process is a bit lengthy in the case of a bride. In the mean-time the ornaments and vessels etc., called '*Sattra:th*' in the common language, which the father has to give as a wedding gift to his daughter, are brought to the *Hawan Shala*. The *Shastras* authorize the daughter to receive these items as a donation from her father after checking their purity. It is because of this very fact that the *Kula Guru* asks the girl to strike these presents with a small stick of '*Plash*' or '*Mulberry*' so as to ascertain their purity formally before accepting them. It is said that the pure vessels make sound when struck whereas the impure vessels do not. An experienced lady of the house keeps herself present for parting the hair of the bride from the center into two locks with the help of two duly consecrated *Plash/Mulberry* sticks and then ties them into two braids with the help of the '*NA:riivan*' thread. The bride, seated on a wooden stool '*Chu:ki*' like goddess '*Parvati:*', the spouse of Lord *Shiva* or like '*Lakshami:*', the spouse of Lord *Vishnu*, is decorated with ornaments jewelry, etc., called '*Singa:r*'. She, at the moment, is considered as one of the said goddesses seated on her

¹ It is one of the names attributed to the mother earth. Panini has given the following derivation for it, '*Vasum Dharayati Yah Sa eva Vasundharah*'. The preserver of all minerals and hence *Vasundhara*.

² A wooden seat like a low stool known as '*Chu:ki*'. '*Pi:r*', is the old Kashmiri version for the Indian '*Choki*' or '*Chouki*'.

³ Nutmeg - A nut used in the *Ayurvedic* medicines. It is also used in betel leaves and in the '*Qahva*' tea to make it more fragrant.

godly throne and here she is given the 'Abhisheka' which include:-

1. *Avahana* - The ritual call or invitation,
2. *Asana* - A seat,
3. *Padya* - Water to wash the feet,
4. *Argya* - Water to wash the face,
5. *a:tsIman* - Water to rinse the mouth.

In this way end the nine *Sanskaras* of a girl as contained in our scriptures.² Here also four young girls keep a spread scarf over the bride's head and the fifth small girl is asked to strike gently the 'Tumbakha:r', the musical instrument. All the five girls represent the five great ancient Indian women who, though married, are considered to be eternal virgins as mentioned in the *Puranas*. They are:-

1. *Ahalya*, 2. *Draupadi*, 3. *Tara*, 4. *Sita*, and 5. *Mandudari*.

All these great ladies, of ancient India, though married, are considered as 'Pancha Kanya' - 'Five Eternal Virgins,' by the *Puranas* for their great deeds/virtues and virgin-like purity.

The five girls also depict the five elements 'Pancha Bhutas' or Five 'Maha Bhutas' or five main elements of all animate of the universe. These are: - 1. Water, (*Jal*), 2. Fire, (*Agni*), 3. Earth, (*Bhumi*), 4. Air, (*Vayu*), and 5. Ether, (*Akash*).

Or

The five human virtues - *Pancha Vargas*, or the five essential duties of a householder, called the *Pancha Maha Jaynyas*. These are:-

1. *Vidhya*, (Wisdom), 2. *Patratwa*, (Deserving),
3. *Dhan*, (Wealth), 4. *Vilas*, (Sensual, enjoyment) and 5. *Moksh*, (Salvation).

¹ Royal welcome

² Bhatt Pt. Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak*. 'Kanya Sanskaa' 1925, P. 134-155.

The kitchen preparations required on this occasion are: -

1. *Khira* (Rice, milk and sugar pudding),
2. *Mo>ngI Wari*, (Fried cakes of crushed *Moong* added with salt and spices).
3. Cakes of rice flour,
4. Preparation of 'VAR',
5. Preparation of 'Hand', (dandelion), and
6. A vessel of cooked rice for offering to gods/ deities.

All these things are brought to the 'Hawan Shala' and the priest makes seven round balls of the cooked rice after mixing it with 'VAR', 'Hand', milk, curds, and ghee. Making offerings of the left over rice to the Holy Fire, he asks the hostess to put the rice balls in front of the 'Divi Mu:n'. The hostess, also called the 'YAzman Ba:y' worships these as the seven forms of goddess *Shakti* as already mentioned. After completing this process seven earthen plates called 'TA:kya' are filled with sweet rice-milk pudding called, 'Khira.' A cake of rice flour, a cake made of *Moong* pulses, 'Mo>gI Wari' a walnut, a little of 'VAR' and 'Hand', a string of special thread called 'NA:rivan' and a walnut, is kept on each of them. All the seven plates known as 'Divi tabchi'¹ are venerated in the form of seven deities and are then gifted to the seven ladies closely related to the family, i.e. mother's sister/s, father's sister/s, Aunts, grand mothers and other ladies of

¹ There is a ritual of similar nomenclature celebrated by some of the Kashmiri Hindu families, known as 'Divis Khira'. This function is held on a horal moment and on an auspicious day of the year and seven small girls 'Kanyas' and a boy (representing Shiva/ Vishnu) are venerated. The word 'Divis' appears a direct derivation in the plural form of 'Deyvian', the seven forms of goddess *Durga*. These are, 'Brahami, Mahishowari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Narasimhi, and Indrani. The Mother Goddess is venerated in the above mentioned forms in a number of families of Kashmiri Pandits according to their individual family rites and rituals. Some people arrange a *Hawan* on this occasion. After washing the feet and hands of all the invited children, vermilion is applied on their fore-heads and *NA:rivan* is tied to their wrists. They are worshipped with flowers and offered some cash payment as, *Dakshina*'. A towel or hanky, a bowl of 'Khira' and a spoon is also gifted to each of them on the occasion.

the family who are the cousins and belong to the same 'Gotra'. Here the hostess and other ladies of the house are asked to rotate round themselves seven times keeping their hands stretched up and palms open. This appears the only dancing pose surviving till date in a ritual with a religious background. The last but not the least ritual of the function is to sprinkle the holy water from the 'Kalash' on all present on the occasion and distribute the walnuts to all as 'Naived'. Thus end the rituals connected with the 'Devgo>n'.

We know that the man has always paid his obeisance to the natural powers and gods before starting any act of the betterment for his own self. He has considered all his happiness, distress, pain and sorrow as the wish of gods and he has always accepted all these ups and downs in his life as the gifts from the above. This thought has prevailed from times immemorial and is prevalent even today. That is why, on the eve of any function of joy and happiness, our first action has been to invoke gods and, therefore, many rites having obvious social values like the marriage rites, etc., are connected with the worship¹ of gods and deities. The rituals and customs of this type are prevalent among many societies and religions of the world. There is a continuance of such rituals and rites in India since the time of the Vedas. There is a precedence of such rituals in Kashmir on the eve of all functions connected with our religious ethos including our marriage and Yagnyopavita ceremonies as is contained in our folk songs 'VanIvun'. These contain the names of people and places from the Indian mythology. Thus one cannot deny that these have been in vogue since ancient times.

¹ Hilbrant, A. F. - 'Hindu Worship' - Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol., XII P. 795.

In the following lines the gods and goddesses are approached for the welfare and betterment of the bride and the groom :-

Po:re' kho>tkho Sirye' di:sho, du:re' karyo
Namaska:r,

tsl ti chukh sa:rinly pra:na:di:sho, So>riv Tapl
Resho Sada:shiv.

Sl:ta:yi o<sum so>nI sund ki:sho, KhA:rith ta
ni:ham DanDakhvan

Ra:m tI Lakhiman sl:ti: tas Di:sho, So>riv Tapl
Resho Sada:shiva.

VasIdi:va Ra:zIni DharamI po>ro<sho, Ja:yi ja:yi
Adiitham Dewa:n Kha:n,

So>Thkuk dyo<n tai Mo>khtuv Pasho, So>riv Tapl.
Kotar bacho karu bol boshu, Kotur chhaham

Divgo<nas peTh,

MA:li Ma:ji bu:znay bol tai boshu, So>riv Tapl ---

Its translation is as under: -

Oh sun, you have emerged from the East, your
homeland

I pay my salutations to you from a distance.

You are also the life - source for all of us,

Oh Rishi remember the everlasting Shiva in your
deep penance.

Sita had the plates of golden hair,

She was taken to the deep forests known as the
DanDak Vana,

Lord Rama and Lakshmana were seen
accompanying her, Oh Rishi remember

Oh law-abiding person of king Vasudeva,

You constructed the palatial buildings with lofty
drawing - rooms ,

Plinths made of diamonds and roofs made of pearls
at a number of places, Oh Rishi remember

Oh young one of a pigeon,¹ sing a sweet song,
You are just like a pigeon at the *Devo*>*n*,
Your parents have listened to your sweet singing,
Oh Rishi remember

In the same folk song there is a picturesque account of some of the months of the year. A few examples are quoted here: -

Chitri: pho>laham verike 'mi' posho,
Goshas rATltham Janglan ja:y,
Sontas tl Navrehas tsiti chhukh kho>sho,
So>riv Tapl Resho Sada:shiv.
A:dan pho>lham ba:da:m posho,
Goshas rATltham Parabat' ja:y,
Cha:ni pho>lanl ba:gan a:mut josh,
So>riv Tapl Resho
Zi:Thi: pho>lham Gula:b poho,
Goshas rATltham thari pe'th ja:y, ----
HA:ri: pho>lham tsI ti Pamposh,
Goshas rATltham Saras ja:y, ----
Shra:vIni pho>lham Datlri' posho,
Goshas rATltham tsho>Tas peTh ja:y, -----
BA:dlri pho>lham Kapse' posho,
Goshas rATltham vuDlran ja:y, -----
Ka:rtiki pho>lham tsI ti Kong posho,
Goshas rATltham PA:mprl ja:y.

The translation of these lines is as under:-
On the onset of Chaitra², the '*Virikyum*³', flower blossomed,
He chose his beautiful abode in the forests,
You chose to blossom at the dawn of the Spring (*Sonth*)
or the New Year's Day (*Navreh*)

¹ Used in the sense of an innocent person.

² The last month of the Vikram era.

³ It is one of the herbal flowers now at the verge of extinction. The *Nilamata Purana* Edited by Dr. Ved Kumari Ghai Vol. II, has named it as *Iramanjari*.

Oh! Rishi remember the Almighty....

Oh! Almond blossom, you have arrived early,
And chosen your abode in the beautiful '*Ba:da:m Wa:ri*' (Almond Gardens) of *Ha:ri: Parbat*¹,
With your blooming the gardens have become excited and colourful,

Oh! Rishi remember

The Rose blossomed in the month of *Je'shT*²

You have chosen your sweet place on a thorny bush

Oh! Lotus you have blossomed in *Ha:r*³

You have chosen your abode in a pond,

You have blossomed in *Shra:vana*:⁴ Oh Stramonium⁵,

And chosen your place on a heap of rubbish

Oh! Cotton flower you have blossomed in the month of *Bha:dra*:⁶,

You have chosen the hillock as your abode,

Oh! Saffron flower you have blossomed in *Ka:rtika*:⁷

And your abode is at Pampore⁸ hillocks.

In this way there is a beautiful description of some of the summer months of the year with their special blossoms and their places of growth.

After completing the '*Yan'yan*' and the religious rituals, all the members of the family and the guests take their lunch/dinner as the case may be.

¹ The famous hillock in the vicinity of Srinagar city, considered as the abode of goddess '*Sharika*'.

² The second month of the Vikram era known as *Jyashta*.

³ The third month of the Vikram era known as *Ashada*.

⁴ The fourth month of the Vikram era known as *Shravana*.

⁵ A wild medicinal plant, its seeds are intoxicant.

⁶ The fifth month of the Vikram era known as *Bhadrapada*.

⁷ The seventh month of the Vikram era known as *Kattak*.

⁸ A town near Srinagar city.(J.&K.) Called '*Pampore*', famous for Saffron cultivation.

7. Duri' Batl

Official arrival of the In-laws

It is one of the main social functions combined with the 'Devgo>n' rites especially on the eve of the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony. The in-laws of the grooms'/brides' father and their very close relatives arrive at their daughter's house on a pre-scheduled date along with a large steel trunk containing clothes, for their daughter, son-in-law, the girl (In case of marriage) and the boy/s (in case of marriage/*Yagnyopavita*). It also contains a packet each of salt, sugar, some specially prepared bread, turmeric (representing spices), puffed sugar-candy cakes, 'Bta:say', a pitcher of sugar candy, a present in cash or in gold and an 'ATTho>r' for their daughter. On reaching the main gate of the house of their daughter, the ritual of 'a:lath' (to throw water and rice grains in a plate after roving it round the head of the main invitee/s carrying the trunk), is held by the eldest-lady of the house. She receives cash present from the father of her daughter-in-law as an entrance fee, which she has to return to the payee after adding some amount to it or even after doubling the amount. It is known as 'Purvlini'. The guests are led to a room already arranged and decorated for them. Here milk, biscuits, sweets are served to them as a special privilege which is followed with a special lunch. This special feasting is known as 'Garl Atsan Sa:l'-'Feasting on the occasion of entering the house'. After feasting, the mother, brother's spouse or the elder daughter-in law of the hostess, opens the trunk and shows all things to the guests who by then assemble in that room. One of the guests from the maternal party starts collecting cash presents from all the guests accompanying them. It is known as 'Garl AtsIvlni', cash present on account of entrance into the daughter's house. The collected money is handed over to the hostess along with

a list of payees (guests) for her reference. During all this time burning of Niger continues and the greetings are extended by one and all. The father of the son-in-law, besides returning the 'a:lath', has to pay the cost of carriage of the trunk, called 'MAhiv Ha:rl' to the father-in-law of his son along with some packets of sweets as a gesture of good-will.

In the evening elderly ladies and the hostess assemble once again to take the 'Divtl Gu:li' to the pond/ river/ stream as the case may be. The seven balls of cooked rice, a little rice out of the left over from the offerings of rice made to the Holy Fire, a knife and a walnut, all these things are kept in a plate 'tha:l' and taken to the river/stream for immersion. On their way to the river and back they sing the following *Vanlvun*: -

Ani gaTi kanyan sI:ti' kArith na:llmAtiye',
Shri Saraswatiye¹ ya:rlbal vas,
Ani gaTi kanyan sI:ti' karith nallmAtiye',
DevIki² MA:jay ya:rlbal vas,
Ta:rlbal³ khAtskhay shra:na kA:rith,
Dya:na: sorthay Bartha:⁴ sund.

The meaning of these lines is as under:-
In the darkness while hugging the cobbles on the rough road.

Goddess *Saraswati*, you start for the river bank,
In the darkness while tossing over the cobbles on the road,

You, mother *Devaki* start for the rivulet,
You have just returned after bathing at the river crossing,

¹ The goddess of knowledge and wisdom.

² Mother of Lord *Krishna*.

³ A Ghat on the river bank fixed for crossing the river in a boat. A famous place in the *Dal Lake*, Srinagar, Kashmir, where the boats are loaded or unloaded.

⁴ Sanskrit word '*Bharta*' meaning 'husband'.

While bathing you remembered your husband.

On reaching the water-spot, the ladies immerse the rice balls into the water gently and after making a few cross marks on the surface of the water with the help of the knife, they take kernels of the walnut as 'Naived' and return home.

According to the Indian mythology, water is considered to be a veil between the earth and the under-worlds thought to be the abode of the *Asuras*. The under-worlds are thought to be seven in number. They are: -

1. *Atal*, 2. *Vital*, 3. *Satal*, 4. *Rasatal*,
5. *Talatal*, 6. *Mahatal*., and 7. *Patal* .

By making seven cross marks on the surface of water after immersing the seven rice balls we give the share of our offerings to the said seven under-worlds. In this way all the rites, rituals and customs connected with the pre- *Mekhala Sanskar* come to an end.

8. *Hawan Shala* - for Yagnyopavita

The *Yagnyopaveta*, *Mekhala*, *Upanayan*, *Upayan*, the *Brahm Sutr*, and 'Yoni' are some of the names given to the Holy Thread Ceremony. It is perhaps the most important duty of the parents as well as of the teacher, in the form of *Kula Guru* to recognize the absolute necessity of this *Sanskar*. Those who bring a child into this world in a family of twice born, make themselves directly responsible to the law of the *Karma*. These responsibilities cannot be attained without giving proper *Sanskar*s or guidance to our children. Even little carelessness or selfishness on the part of the parents, will involve heavy penalty and it would cause hindrances in their child's path to spiritual attainments. If parents fail to extend all the help and guidance, which their child has a right to get from them, they shall be doing genocide of their community as a whole. Yet how often do the modern parents entirely ignore this obvious responsibility? How often is their child ignored by them and considered just an object of fatuous vanity? Man has been bestowed with power to think, assess and attain. It is no excuse that a person may confess that he did a murder in a fit of rage and should be let free because it was a senseless act. But that does not entitle him to be let free from the clutches of the law. In the same way it is the utmost duty of a person to see his children better off and prosperous. Man has been provided with the power of thinking and everything can be achieved in this world with the power of thought. Our civilization, our *Vedas*, *Puranas* and other Holy Scriptures are not only works of art and poetic excellence but have also inspired the people of India through ages with their useful instructions about different aspects of human life. Not only this, our great *Rishis*, saints, philosophers and scholars have so deeply associated themselves with these scriptures that they have prepared

separate treatises for different shades of knowledge and thought. That is why our *Rishis* are considered authorities in different fields of knowledge and are of global importance and fame even today. One among such philosophers and thinkers is *Rishi Laugakshi*, who is said to be the compiler of all the rituals including the *Sanskars* in the form of a 'Samhita'. The rituals, customs and rites in whatever form they have reached to us, are the out come of long penance and deep research of *Laugakshi*. He has classified and approved twenty-four *Sanskars* for all without any gender discrimination and so far most of us stick to all the twenty-four *Sanskars*, in whatever shape and form they have reached us to day. Presently we perform only nine *Sanskars* in respect of our female children even though no such discrimination is made between the males and the females as for as our scriptures are concerned. One such *Sanskar* is *Upanayan* or *Yagnyopavita*, which we perform in respect of males only. No doubt our *Vedas*, *Upnishads* and the *Vedangas* clearly say that a girl child is entitled to the study of Holy Scriptures after her *Upanayan* and a girl possessing the *Yagnyopavita* is worthy of marriage, but still the things are quite different. *Manusmruti* clearly mentions that 'even if a person is a low caste by his birth, the *Sanskars* elevate him as a *Brahmin*'.¹ It is because of this that an unmarried boy wears a three fold Holy Thread before marriage and it gets doubled after marriage. His father-in-law, while offering his daughter in marriage, offers the additional three strings of the Holy Thread to the groom and thus he shoulders the responsibility of his spouse as is contained in the scriptures.

While commenting on the *Upanayan Sanskar*, *Rishi Laugakshi* has clearly mentioned that he has compiled all these rituals and rites from various sources. For instance he confirms that he has taken the ritual

Bijawapan from various *Grahisutras*¹. Latter *Valmiki* gave a vivid description of Lord *Ramas Yagnyopavita* in his famous epic *Ramayana*.

In earlier days when more space was available, a major portion of the courtyard was plastered with brown clay mixed with the fresh cow dung. The specific places for 'Agni Ko>nD,' the Holy Fire, the 'Kalash' and the places for other deities to be invited on the occasion, were kept ready for use a few days before the actual date of the function. Barley was sown at places like the outer space around the 'Agni Ko>nDa,' 'Kalash', etc., so that these places looked green and pleasing to the eye, on the day of the actual function. This would give a divine look to the whole *Hawana Shala*. Now a days the preparations of cleaning and decorating the place starts as soon as the host is free from the 'Divgo>n' function. The function generally requires a space of 9x9 meters. And this much space is thoroughly clean washed and mud plastered. In the center is raised a 'Hawan Kund' - a square pit measuring 1x1 meters supported with bricks and mud so that it can hold firewood for the Holy Fire. The main 'Kunda' is made in a square shape whereas its upper outer side is made in a triangular form pointing towards the east. To its left on the top is laid the base for the 'Kalash' by the priest with different coloured lime powders. It is considered to be the seat for seven 'Grihas'- planets, excluding the sun and the moon, who have a separate and a special place at this particular function. The priest places the pitcher containing walnuts on the 'Kalash' after recitation of Holy *Mantras*. The remaining space to the right of the 'Kalash' is meant for: -

1. The moon, called the *Chandra Deva*.
2. The Sun, called the *Surya Deva*,

¹ Bhatt, Pandit Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak, Upayan* 1925, p. 2.

¹ Bhatt, Pandit Keshav, *Mekhala Pustak, Upayan* 1925, p. 2.

3. The 'Mandala', a group of twelve kingdoms meant for the twelve 'Rashis' or Zodiac signs
4. The 'Khe- 5. The earthen lamp called 'Tsong'. The planets, the Zodiac signs, the sun and the moon, all of them are heavenly bodies. The lamp is, as such, considered as 'Swaprakash' in the scriptures meaning, 'the light created by ones own self' so as to visualize the heavenly bodies. Hence it is lighted while performing all the rituals and rites.

The main jobs done at the *Hawan Shala* can be described as under: -

a) Agni Ko>nD (Agni Kunda) - the Holy Fire.

The images of Heavenly bodies cited above are made by the "*Kula Guru*" and by his helpers with different coloured lime powders. All these formations are generally geometrical figures with certain artistic insertions as directed by the scriptures. All these give an artistic look. Next the priest starts the decoration of the 'Agni Ko>nD' with the help of different coloured lime powders. 'Agni' has been named as '*Safta Zyavha*' in the scriptures meaning 'having seven tongues' Here it is actually worshipped at nine places. These include the four corners of the main square, the four mid points on each side of the square and one at the top point. The bottom mid point is considered as the '*Ganesh*' and the top most point is known as '*Jwala Ling*.' To the north of the '*Hawan Kund*,' are kept all the ingredients meant for offering to the Holy Fire. Close to it is kept a well-furnished seat meant for the '*TsandraI Ta:rukh*' or the

head priest. Nearby is placed a cleanly covered small tea-poy, a table lamp and a few bolsters. The head priest keeps his scripture texts, known as '*Pothi*' (*Pu:thi*) on the tea-poy while reciting from them. A big tub containing the duly washed barley and rice mixed with dry fruits and sesame etc. is kept at a corner to the south of the *Hawan Shala*. A canopy covers the whole area and its interior is decorated with bunting, paintings and portraits of different gods and goddesses. To the front side of the '*Hawan Kund*' are kept the seats for the priests, host/s, groom/s and other visitors who attend the ceremony or have to take part in it. Outside the *Hawan Shala* and in the space available are laid chairs and tables for all the guests, friends and relatives who are expected to take part in this gathering.

All these jobs are time-consuming and after every job is complete, the *Kula Guru* starts the function with the auspicious blowing of the conch (*Shank*). The earthen lamp is lighted though there might be ample arrangement of electric lights. Incense is burnt. Flowers, milk, curd, ghee, rice, fresh water and utensils of different sizes and shapes required, are brought to the '*Hawan Shala*. The '*TsandraI Ta: rukh*,' (the head priest) opens his '*Pothi*' and starts reciting the '*Kalashi Pu:za*:' paying his salutations to all the deities whose presence is sought on the occasion. The other priest who works as a help to the '*Kula Guru*' acts according to his instructions. In the mean time, the helper prepares the following items out of the '*Kusha*:' also known as '*Darbha*' or '*Darlb*' in Kashmiri language,

1. Finger-rings of seven straws of the sacred grass twisted together known as, '*Pawethl*' '*Pawitra*'¹ one each for the use of the host and the groom/s.

¹. While performing any religious rite, it is worn in the '*Anamica*,' the ring finger, as it is considered impure in its absence as per scriptures.

2. Single straw knots of ring type with projections on both the sides, known as '*Ve'shTur*', 50 numbers for: -
 - a) 21 numbers known as '*Eka Vimshati Rishin*', a cluster of twenty-one Rishis having a special place at the *Hawan Shala*. These are kept, in a clay pot filled with holy water, to the South of the *Hawan Kunda*.
 - b) The remaining are used either at the places of different deities or for sprinkling water etc., on the host/ hostess and the groom/s on the eve of each *Sanskar*.
3. A hand-full. Of 51 straws with a reverse knot at the top, known as '*Brahma*'. It has a special seat in the *Hawan Shalla* atop a clay pot filled with fresh cow-dung.
- 4 Seven *Darbha* straws knotted at the top, known as '*Vo>pyam*,' '*U>pyam*,' which is placed on the left ear by the '*Hota*' while performing different rites.

After adoring the '*Kalsha*' and all other deities for their presence at the *Hawan Shala*, the host and other family members are invited to start the worship of the deities etc. The host is offered a fresh *Yagnyopavita*. Here a small girl performs the '*Zang*' ceremony of the host who is also given vermilion '*Tilak*' on the forehead and a fresh wristband called the '*NA:riwan*'. This process is repeated in respect of all the members of the family who are invited to the *Hawan Shala* and a collective welcome salutation is offered to the deities and gods on this occasion called '*a.rithi*' it may be pointed out that the host arranges a loud speaker on the occasion for recitation of the Holy Scriptures.

b) *Hum (Hom) - Kindling of the holy fire.*

In the meantime a few young men bring firewood for kindling the Holy Fire. They keep the logs at the fireplace arranged on one another and the fire is kindled amongst chanting of hymns from the scriptures. As soon as the flames are visible, salutations are paid to it by one and all. After completing obeisance to the Sacred Fire, the

following items which are either used on the occasion or provide a means for the completion of the *Sanskar*, are also worshipped by the host: -

- I) '*Parohit Pu:za*': after worshipping the Holy Fire, the *Brahmachari* has to pay his reverence to his *Kula Guru* by touching his feet and seeking his blessings.
- II) '*Vo>man Ho>ri*' '*Pu:za*': Two long metal ladles used for offering ghee to the holy fire, are called '*Sruk*' and '*Sruv*'. One among the two has a single spoon-like shape at the front tip while the other has two spoon-like depressions. As per the scriptures, the host used to arrange these for his *Kula Guru* on the occasion
- III) '*Samidhi Pu:za*': Eleven hundred small mulberry braches measuring not more than 9 inches long which form a part of offerings, are adored on the occasion.
- IV) '*Pustak Pu:za*': The *Brahmachari* next pays his salutations to the Holy Scriptures in the form of '*Saraswati*,' the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.

Casting offerings into the Holy Fire is called, '*Hum*' in Kashmiri language. It appears a changed form of '*Homa*' of the Sanskrit language, meaning to burn offerings or a pit like formation on the ground for the Sacred Fire '*Agni*.' Fire is considered the sign of life and light from the times immemorial and the teacher apprises his pupil of this fact at the outset of his educational¹ career. As such, the process of starting the '*Hum*' or offering of different ingredients to the Holy Fire has a special place in our *Sanskars* and it is well described in the '*Vanlyun*' or the folk songs. A few lines of the same are as follows: -

Agni Ko>nDas sAndrIsu: tyo>nglo,

Manglla: 2 zangay anA:se'.

Brahaspat 3 Go>ran sAndrIrasu: tyo>nglo,

¹ Panday, Rajbali, *Hindu Sanskar, Varanasi*, I, 1960 P. 178.

² One of the names attributed to the Mother goddess. Her abode is considered near the village '*Watchi*' of the District *Pulwama*, Kashmir.

³ Jupiter is considered to be the teacher of gods.

So>bhAdra:¹ zange' anA:se'.
 Brahama: Juwas ma:ngai² mange',
 Kanyak zange' anA:se'.
 VasIdi:v Ra:zas ma:ngai mange', (Kanyak)
 AgIn SAndra:vu Tsandan lIshē',
 Ziniche' lIshē' la:ga:se'.
 VasIdi:v Ra:zIni Tsandan lIshē',
 Brehaspat Go>ro sAndra:vu.
 AgIn SAndra:vsu: Tsandan go>ne',
 Wanay wa:lus To>lsi:³ ka:Th.

The translation of these lines is as under-

Let the holy fire be kindled in the pit with the help of burning charcoal,

Goddess 'Mangala:' may perform the 'Zang' ceremony,
 Jupiter - the teacher (of the gods), kindled the fire with the help of burning charcoal,

Subhadra may perform the 'Zang' ceremony.

Let Brahma be approached repeatedly,

Ask an unmarried girl to perform the 'Zang' ceremony.

Let king Vasudeva be begged repeatedly,

Ask an unmarried

Kindle the fire with the help of Sandalwood pieces,

Then apply small pieces of firewood.

With the Sandalwood pieces from king Vasudeva,

Oh: Priest Brihaspati, you kindle it.

Kindle the fire in the heap of Sandalwood,

Go and fetch the dry Basil branches from the forest.

¹ Subhadra is the sister of Lord Krishna, she was married to Arjuna, the son of Pandu of the great Epic, Mahabharata.

² Ma:ngay', wages paid in kind to different professionals in the past.

³ The famous Ayurvedic medicinal plant 'Basil'. It is considered as a holy plant according to the Indian mythology.

C). Social gatherings

The process of pre-birth and post-birth *Sanakars* that we have already discussed in detail and which include the religious, social and ritualistic aspects as well, start just after the Holy Fire is kindled. Besides, we have also discussed the philosophical and religious background of this *Sanskar*, 'Upanayana'. Therefore, here onwards we will discuss the ritualistic and social functions connected with this *Sanskar*.

The following functions connected with the celebrations of this *Sanskar* invite much attention as the host, hostess, a number of close relatives, photographers and the video camera men, all remain busy when these functions of social and cultural values are initiated. A few of these are described hereunder: -

1. KallvAlini BA:gra:wIni-Distributing the headgears

The word 'KallvAlyun' comprises two Kashmiri words. 'Kall', means 'head' and 'VAlyun' meaning 'a covering' or 'a gear'. Previously the Kashmiri ladies had a peculiar head dress comprising; a round cap with golden or silver brocade top, a lining of white cotton ribbon with a number of wrappings around the border of the main cap that was covered with a transparent material called 'Shi:shi La:Th'. The brocade top of the cap was partially covered with a small piece of cloth with a brocade lining on the length sides, called 'Zu:ji' and over it was placed a long piece of a thin muslin cloth called 'Pu:ts', rolled in at the two length-sides giving it a snake-like shape, reminding us of the impact of *Naga* civilization and culture on Kashmir. This headgear was called 'Tarangl'. Besides all the accessories, a new long outer gown, called 'Pheran' along with an inner cotton gown as a lining, called 'Po<Ish' was given by the hostess to each aunt of the groom and the list included his maternal and paternal

aunties also. Now a suit of *Sari* along with an *ATIho>r* is offered to each lady of the family due to the change in the dress code. In addition to this the host, his parents and close relations get a suit of clothing, like shirts etc. as present on the occasion. Needless to say that a new suit of clothing and a towel are given to the *Kula Guru* and his helper at the time of dressing up the groom for the ceremony. Burning of 'Niger', the busy schedule of photographers/ video men and sounds of greetings like 'Mubarakh' and 'Poshtl' are main attractions of the hour. The folk song about the time of binding of the headgear, 'Tarangl' is as follows: -

*DanDakhvan¹ KhAtsIkhay NA:ri: NA:ri:,
BAji Byni HA:ri: Taranga: ganD. (DanDakhvan,)
RlkhlMAni² MA:li: Taranga: ganD.*

Its translation is under: -

You ascended the 'DanDakhvan' through the ridges,
Oh! Eldest sister, you please bind the headgear.
You have climbed the 'DanDakhvan' through the
narrow ridges,
Oh! Revered *Raukhamani*, you please bind the
headgear now.

The folk song continues for a long time and the names of the host, hostess and other elderly members of the family are inserted in it instead of the mythological names cited above.

2. NA:rivan Kha:rIni - Binding of the hair plates

Binding of the hair of the hostess and of other female family members of her *Gotra* into two plaits with the 'NA:rivan', a raw cotton thread of red colour used as

¹ Lord Rama spent fourteen years of exile in forests known as the *DanDakvan*. It is a mountain range in south India. A forest area in Handwara, Kashmir, is also known by this name.

² *Raukhamani* the spouse of Lord Krishna. This name is given to the hostess at this special occasion.

the wristband on all auspicious occasions, has already been discussed under the headings 'Bijwapan'.

On the eve of binding the hair locks with the 'NA:rivan' the following folk song is sung by the ladies: -

*Away anithay NNA:rivan thAJi: :¹
Sha:ba:sh Sha:rada: MA:ji:ye.
Ku:r chakh Dakhi Praza:paIni:ye:²
Hi:ma:l Parbata: kArthay attay,
Divlki: MA:ji: kArthay attay'
Ku:r chakh Divakh³ Ra:zAni: .
KrishnI JiwIne⁴ zyanay tsAjiye⁵ gatay,
Ku:r chakh Lautay Ra:zAni:⁶
DanDakhvan khas Ra:zay BA:yi:
Di:vl RA:yi:⁵ mang NA:ri:van.
TsandInuk hang ganD Hangl To>MA:ri:.
Ba:l wAtsh da:⁶ Kha:rl NA:ri:van.
VasIdi:v Ra:zInI Anta⁷ MA:li:
DA:nlInI sl:ti kha:r NA:ri:van.
VasIdi:v RazInI Va:nyani⁸ ku:ri:
KA:ni:⁸ pyeTh kha:r NNA:ri:van.
Sha:ba:sh tas ma:ji yas ma:ji za:yakh
A:yakh tl kA:rith NA:ri:van.
Bhishmakh⁹ Ra:zInI ga:Tlji ku:ri.*

¹ A bigger form of 'Tha:l' or 'Tha:li' - a big plate.

² A famous character of 'Shiva Purana', the father of *Parwati*, (the spouse of *Shiva*), who was destroyed by *Shiva* himself for his impertinence.

³ This appears to be either the father of 'Devaki', the spouse of 'Vasudeva' of the *Mahabharata* or the famous king of Kashmir known as *Deva Sahi*. *Khingla* alias *Narendra Ditya*, the son of *Huna ruler Gokarna*. Who ruled Kashmir in the sixth century A.D. P.S., The History Kashmir by P. N. K. Bamzai, 1973, p. 79.

⁴ This probably is the name of Lord Lytton, the Viceroy of Kashmir during the reign of *Maharaja Pratap Singh*. P. S., *History of Kashmir*, by P. N. K. Bamzai, 1973, p. 678.

⁵ Probably it is the name of *Deva Sarman*, the Chief Minister of *Jayapida* alias *Yinayadiya*. P.S., *History of Kashmir*, P.N.K. Bamzai, 1973, p. 126.

⁶ The front (gate) side of the house, known as 'da:r'.

⁷ Derived from the root Sanskrit word, 'Anta' meaning a pregnant lady.

⁸ The upper most story of a house, called 'KA:ni:'.

⁹ The most famous and powerful Chief Minister of *Kuta Rani*, named *Bhishkha Bhatu*, who was treacherously killed by *Shah Mir* in cold blood. (P.S. *History of Kashmir* by P.N. K. Bamzai, 1973, p.s. 172,314).

Pa:siki' khA:rith NA:ri:van.
Di:vakh Ra:zInI Po>khtai kA:ri:
Mo>khtlki' kA:rith NA:ri:van.
Di:vakh Ra:zInI kori Ko>ma:ri,
HA:ri:¹ khA:rith NA:ri:van.
Bhishmakh Ra:zInI' asvInI' ku:ri:
Prasnay khA:rith NA:ri:van.²
Do>has manzly ko>h tI ba:l tshAnDithay,
Taway gAnDithay NA:ri:van.
Bhishmakh Ra:zInI' da:yakh³ ku:ri:
NA:ri:vanan cha:yak chuy.

In the beginning of these lines there is a reference to 'Sha:rada:', which clearly denotes its ancient origin.

The translation of these lines is as under: -

Have you brought a large plate containing the 'NA:rivan' for this very purpose?

Well done, mother Sha:rada:, the goddess of wisdom and learning.

You have lifted the mountain Himalaya on your back,

You are the daughter of Dakshi Prajapati,

Oh mother Devaki, you have arranged (all this) single-handed

You are the daughter of king Devaka (Deva Sahi).

The darkness has vanished due to the birth of Lord Krishna,

You are the daughter of Lord Lytton.

Oh sweetheart, you please ride the 'DanDakhvana' forests,

And ask the great philosopher Deva Sarman.
to offer you the NA:rivan.

¹ Merle or sparrow like bird known for its beauty, cleanliness and good habits.

² A recently married lady who has not yet attained mother-hood. Her 'NA:rivan Kha:rInI' putting on the hair bands on the occasion, is considered auspicious.

³ A lady who is full of wisdom and can give good advice

Oh lady of splendid beauty and height, adjust your headgear with a piece of sandal-wood,
The young lady has gone to the front door for adjusting her 'NA:rivan'.

Oh pregnant and loving spouse of king Vasudeva,
You put on your 'NA:rivan' with a dentifrice.

Oh splendid daughter of king Vasudeva,
You put on your 'NA:rivan' on the upper story of the house.

Worth praise is the mother, who gave birth to thee,
You have put on the 'NA:rivan' just on your arrival.

Oh wise daughter of great Bhikshna Bhatta,
You have put on the 'NA:rivan' made of pure gold.

Oh matured lady of king Devaka, (Deva Shahi),
You have put on the NA:rivan made of pearls.

Oh unmarried daughter of king Devaka,
Oh sweat-heart you have put on the NA:rivan.

Oh smiling nymph of king Bhishmaka (Bikshana Bhatta),

You have put on the NA:rivan before your attaining the mother-hood.

You have made a search in all the forests and mountains in a single day,

It is because of this that you have bound the 'NA:rivan.

Oh wise and counseling daughter of king Bhishmaka,

I welcome your NA:rivan.

3. Distribution of the 'Tyeki' ta:II' - Decorations of the headgear

Distribution of a pentagon shaped paper and pasted with multi coloured shining piece of paper is the next function of the hour. Each lady of the family of the same clan or 'Gotra', the maternal and the paternal aunts are given this piece of paper, which they fasten to their upper muslin cloth of the headgear or on the 'Sari' at the border covering the head. Previously a pentagon figure containing the symbols of *Ganesh*, a *Swastika* and the letter 'Om' was marked on the head side of the outer muslin cloth with henna and vermilion by the *Kula Guru*. It now being available in the market in the ready-made form, the hostess keeps them in stock according to her requirements. Leaving its ritualistic aspect aside, it gives a distinct and a respectable look to all the hostesses among all the relatives present. One can easily point out the ladies connected with the family more closely and belonging to the same 'Gotra' or family. Probably it appears to be a sign of respect, which the society has given to the ladies on such special functions of joy¹. The folk songs or 'VanIvun' of the occasion include a number of mythological names, the joy expressed by the hostess, social customs of reciprocal nature in the form of cash presents, the excitement and cheerfulness felt by the ladies of the family on this joyous function, are contained in it. A few such couplets of the 'VanIvun' are quoted here: -

*Te'ki' Pu:tsi Te'nDi' mA:nz chiti nAri'va:ran,*²

¹ The 'Tyaki' Ta:I' is offered to each lady of the family on Divgo>n held on the eve of the marriage of a boy or girl, besides the *Yagnyopavita* Sanskar.

² Front sleeves of a long gown 'Pheran' bordered with bright coloured chintz cloth worn by the ladies whose husbands are living. Widows do wear a 'Pheran' but without such a lining.

*Ya:yimas chakh kara:n lo>llmatl la:y.
Te'ki' Pu:tsi cha:ne' pyaThI kinA:ri,
Talai Van HA:ri: NA:ri:van ha:v.
Divlki: ma:je' pyaThI kinA:ri,
Mo>khtI chus Dallyun tI So>n shola:n.
KrishnInI Me'khali gAnDIth SardA:ri,
Talai Van HA:ri:
Te'ki' Pu:tsi cha:ne' Aratali vAthlr¹
Mye'thIrl a: ye' Gulimyu:Th² karA:ne'.
Divlki: ma:je' Aratali vAthlr,
ShAthlr payinay khoran tal,
PoshtI MA:ji: poshtI chuye',
Shola:n du:ran tI zA:li jumkan.
Cha:yakh mA:ji: cha:yakh chuye',
No>sh chakh HarI ChAndra:zA:ni:³*

The translation of these lines is as under: -

The upper muslin of the headgear is marked with vermilion and finger print specks of henna, And the front sleeves are decorated with the chintz cloth

Oh! hostess, you are busy with your chorus, Your vermilion printed muslin of the headgear has a lining,

Oh! Wild merle please show us your *NA:rivan*, There is a lining over mother *Devaki* also, The gold of her pendent earrings is glittering and the pearls are shaking, She has got all this superiority due to the *Mekhala* of *Krishna* (Oh! wild merle,)

¹ A design in embroidery work, a leaf with eight corners, commonly used in such designs. A mystical figure known as 'AshTI dal'.

² 'Gul' is the Persian word meaning 'flower'; or 'hand' and 'Myu:Th' means 'Kiss'. The conjugated word means, 'appreciation'. Here it denotes the cash payment/ money, which the relatives and others present to the host/ hostess on the occasions like marriages etc.

³ The legendary king *Harish Chandra* of the Indian mythology famous for his charity and truthfulness.

Your headgear muslin has a vermilion leaf with eight corners.

The friends have come with cash presents,

Mother *Deviki* has a eight cornered leaf,

May her foes prostrate at her feet

Salutations are to you welcome mother,

Your frilly earrings are glittering.

Salutations are due to you O worthy mother,

You are the daughter-in-law of King *Harish Chandra*.

d). *Mekhala*: *sanskar* and the folk songs

In the mean time the groom is helped by his paternal/maternal uncle/s in getting his hair shaved by the barber commonly known as 'Chudakar', 'ZarI Ka:say' or 'Mundan' which is the pre-requisite for the *Mekhala Sanskar* and thereafter the *Brhmachari* takes his bath. The *Vanivan* of the occasion gives a vivid picture of this hour in the following lines: -

Tani kAmi la:jiiyo Pe'tran tI Ma:man,

Ja:man chay po>t ze'ybA:yi;

PatI bronThI vuchiyo VasIdi:v Ra:zan,

Ma:man kho<rkho ko>che' ke'th.

Ya:rlball khA:sith Go>ras nishi tsa:kho,

Za:kho Yendre'yi¹ kore' nish.

Ya:rlball khA:sith Pamposh prA:vitho,

NA:vtho Gangay zallai² tan,

Wufi aki kotur³ kuThi byu:Thu:kho

Dayi Dyu:Thu:kho bha:ge'va:n.

MA:lis tI Go>ras nishi byu:Thu:kho,

Asi Dyu:Thu:kho bhage'va:n.

MA:lis khovIri Go>ras dAchini,

Vo>ni' tsay rAchinay Na:ra:yan.

MahAniv su:zitav VeshikarIm cha:nas¹

Krishnas kyut ani tshA:rith ja:n

Translation:

Who helped you to wear the ceremonial clothes?

It was the maternal and the paternal uncles.

From the back looks, the clothes appear decent.

King *Vasudeva* looked after you more carefully.

Your maternal uncle brought you here in his lap.

You came before your *Guru* after your return from the bathing place.

You are born of the daughter of god *Indra*.

You have attained the look of a lotus after your return from the riverbank.

You have washed your body with the water of the river *Ganga*.

You came flying like a pigeon and sat in the room. The Almighty considered you as the most fortunate one.

You sat close to your father and the *Guru*.

We have considered you as the luckiest one.

Father is to your right and the *Guru* is to your left.

May God '*Narayan*' save you from now onwards?

Go and send a messenger to the carpenter. '*Vishvakarma*'²

He may choose a good (dwelling) for Lord *Krishna*.

¹ According to the Indian mythology, '*Vishvakarma*:' is the famous Engineer of the gods

² The word carries a hidden meaning of giving an idea to the boy to make him understand that the days of struggle for maintaining a separate family are ahead for which purpose he would require the services of a mason/carpenter.

¹ The daughter of god '*Indra*', the head of all the gods, a nymph.

² The water of river *Ganga* is considered most pious and holy according to the Indian ethos.

³ It is a mark of faithfulness, obedience and simplicity.

9. Yoni Tra:vun : Mekhala Sanskar

Once the hair-cutting and bathing of the groom/s is over, he is brought to the *Hawan Shala* by his maternal/paternal uncle, because the horal moment of wearing the Holy Thread is fixed and can not be altered. Here the groom/s and all the members of the family are served 'PanchI gavya' by the *Kula Guru* for their purification. After this the groom/s is/are directed to wear the ceremonial dress specially got prepared for the occasion. This includes: -

1. A yellow coloured long gown without any stitches on its borders and neck called, 'Mekhali potsh'
2. A yellow coloured cap that covers the ears and extends up to the neck, named as, 'KanI Khu:li'.
3. 'Darbi Raz' - a three-fold rope made of 'Kusha' used as the belt.
4. 'Mriga:zan' - The skin of a deer used as a bag/ shield.
5. A lions-cloth, called 'ShranI PaTh' and a cotton belt, called 'A:Ti'pan'.
6. 'Pawitra' - A knotted round ring made of 'Kusha' worn in the ring finger at the time of performing any religious rite.
7. A set of *Yagnyopavita* dyed in yellow colour - one to be cast by the *Kula Guru* and the other to be cast by the father/grand father.
8. A metal Thali (with a walnut and a little curd in it) for receiving alms, called 'Abi:di Tha:l', and
9. 'Dandam' - A stick of 'Plash' or mulberry tree for self-protection.

The groom wears the ceremonial dress amid recitations of hymns by the *Kula Guru* at the *Hawan Shala* and this is the hour of great pomp and show. All the guests, relatives, friends and neighbours attend this spectacular show. The photographers, video camera men,

burning of 'Niger' congratulations to the host and the hostess, the occasional high tone of the conch shell, the loud recitations by the *Kula Guru* and other priests, and 'VanIvun' of the ladies, are the special features of the hour. The main functions that follow are as under: -

a). *Vidyarambha* Introducing the Alphabet

The ceremonially dressed boy is called the *Brhamc:ari* and he is introduced to the written alphabet, known as '*Vidyarambha*' on a slate or paper. Previously it was done on a wooden slab, called '*du:ji*'. Blue clay soaked in water, was used for writing on it with a hollow-reed pen known as '*NarkA:ni*' *Kalam*'. Now a days we see that this *Sanskar* serves as a pre-requisite of the marriage ceremony and the boy who is asked to display all such rituals including the introduction of the first alphabet known as the '*Vidyarambha*', appears just an artifact only. But if we ponder a bit deeper into the over all meaning of the words which the *Brhamchari* is asked to write three times on the occasion, we see that it has a deeper significance and meaning than the words carry. The words which he is asked to write are: '*Om Swasti Siddham*', pronounced by the *Kula Guru* in the typical *Sha:rada* phonetic order evolved by the then scholars of *Sha:rada* script for written Kashmiri language. The narration is repeated like this, '*Wo>ma wom, Swo>yam so, Te'wis te', Se'dav se', damar dham - Om Swasti Siddham*', and the *Brhamchari* repeats all of it in the same phonetic order, three times. The meaning of these words is, 'May the Ultimate Truth bring welfare and happiness (by bestowing) success, and fulfillment and thus satisfaction.' to the bearer. According to the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the first sound caused at the time of the creation of this universe is '*Om*', which took the

magnanimous form¹ in due course of development. It is also considered as the ultimate end of this universe and it transcends itself with 'Sa:dhana'. It is a means to understand the Truth that is beyond articulation, reasoning and thinking. The question arises, 'Why is Sa:dhana required?' The answer is that everyone wants to become successful in life. No body wants to lead a meaningless or unsuccessful life. The highest philosophy of success is to achieve the state of Awareness. Those who are aware are successful, whereas those who remain engrossed with the mundane are always unsuccessful in life. Successful people are always guided by their awareness and they never get engrossed with life. An engrossed person is not able to assess any situation correctly, so he fails to take appropriate and timely decision. In the wake of deep infatuation, his discretionary consciousness and intellect become so clouded that he cannot take proper decisions in life. His 'third' eye remains closed because of the dense layers of illusion and ignorance. The philosophy for successful life is to attain the state of Awareness. So the highest aim of ones life is to attain it. A man who is not aware can never achieve satisfaction and Awareness involves education. Hence, the *Brhamchari* requires the benedictions of a teacher or '*Guru*'

b). *Yagnyopavita* by the *Kula Guru*.

After the completion of the '*Vidyarambha*', the *Kula Guru* first of all casts the *Yagnyopavita* to the boy/s before the Holy Fire. Then a Saffron *Tilak* is put on his forehead, from the tip of his nose up to the tonsure through his hairline on the forehead. On all these occasions listed above, a young girl is asked to perform the '*Zang*' ceremony of the groom as a gesture of good omen. The *Yagnyopavita* cast to the boy by the *Kula Guru* means that the *Brhamchari* has to follow certain codes of conduct. These are: -

1. *a:tsIman* : The rinsing of the mouth with water before taking food on an auspicious or on a fasting day.

2. Placing the right foot on the stone pestle, '*Ka:jwaTh*', the boy confirms that his mind and heart shall remain as strong as the stone pestle, and on the *Guru*, the incarnation of *Brihaspati*, blesses him saying, 'Let your heart be as strong and the mind be as luminous as mine; let your words attain the perfection of '*Brihaspati*'. He touches the chest, of the boy with his right hand called, '*Hriday Sparash*' The *Brhamchari*, touching his feet requests the *Kula Guru* to convey to him the codes of conduct which the *Guru* explains to him after serving three spoons-full of curd, three times. The *Brhamchari* is told the following codes of conduct: -

1. The three codes of self-restrain: -

- a). *Yam* - Restraint from passion,
- b). *Niyam* - Observance of right conduct, and
- c) *Nirwan* - Salvation.

2). '*Gayatri Mantra*, Utterance and adoption of the '*Ga:yitry Manthlr*' into the right ear of the *Brhamchari*, three times,

3). '*A:Tipan*' Tying an inner loin cord called, '*A:Tipan*' made of three-fold cotton strings, and

4). '*Darbi Raz*' Tying of an outer belt with a three fold rope made of *Kusha* grass,¹

All these items have number 'three' in common, which clearly shows the three-fold life-code to be adopted by a *Brhamchari*. These further strengthen the codes of self-restrain as mentioned at S.No: 1 above.

Finally the *Guru* gives the boy '*Mrigazan*', the skin of a deer to wear. This serves as a symbol of a bag or

1. Three kinds of belts are prescribed for *Brhamcharis*' of different castes: a) A three-fold rope of '*Darbhā*' for a Brahmin, b) The string used in the bow called, '*Pratyancha*' for a *Kshatriya*, and, c) Cotton rope for a *Vaisha*. (see *Mekhala Pustak* by Pt., Kesho Bhatt, 1925, Page 63. Also see *Hindu Sanskar* by Rajbali Randa, 1960, P. 179.)

as a shield to him for collecting alms/self protection for day-to-day survival as a *Brhamchari*. The '*Brahma Sutras*', however clearly say that the greatest wealth of a *Brahmin* is charity¹

C). *Yagnyopavita* by the parents:

Taking the '*Mulberry*' or the '*Plasha*' stick, called '*Dandam*' in his right hand and the '*Abi:di Tha:l*' for collection of alms in his left hand, the *Brhamachari* is brought to the southeast corner of the *Hawan Kunda*. Facing towards the western direction, the '*Masi*' '*Ma:s*,' (mother's sister) is directed by the scriptures to first initiate the offerings of the alms, '*Abi:d*' to the boy and after completing this ritual, the father or the grand-father is directed to cast the Holy Thread to boy/s after performing the '*Zang*', ceremony. The crowd present on the occasion claps. The video filmmakers and the photographers take a sigh of relief after a long pause of hectic business. The sweet smell of the burning the '*Niger*' makes the whole atmosphere fragrant. Every body congratulates the host and the hostess. The people present at the '*Hawan Shala*' hug and kiss the groom one by one and bless him. All the people assembled there start leaving the '*Hawan Shala*' to attend to other jobs. All these celebrations are performed according to the scriptures and with great devotion and on the lines as directed in the *Vedic* hymns. Here ends the ritualistic portion of this particular function though the offerings of ingredients to the Holy Fire continue for the whole day according to the directives of the Holy Scriptures. Thus we complete a few additional *Sanskars* on this eve, an account of which will follow.

Before taking up the ritualistic aspects connected with the main function, '*Mekhala*:' it is in the fitness of

things to discuss the social and community related praxis highlighted in the folk songs connected with different aspects of this main function.

On the arrival of the boy in the '*Hawan Shala*,' after his bathing, he is introduced to the alphabet first, called the '*Vidyarambh*'. Our folk songs give a graphic description of the function in the following lines: -

Krishen go>am tsa:TIha:l¹ Divlki: zu:ji² a:lvInas
Hachi hund po<rud³ mye'tsi sA:ti⁴ bArize⁵;
 Ongji sA:ti¹ li:khize² Wo>ma: wom.⁴
So>nI slnz du:ji¹ tai Ro>pl slndi kallmo,
Go>Dnyuk achur chuy Wo>ma: Wom.
VasIdi:v Ra:zIni so>nI slndi kallmo,
KrishnI Juvan Iyu.khnam Wo>ma Wom.
So>nI doji pyaThly ro>pl sund kallmo,
Do>yim achur chuy So>yam So.
Wo>ma: Wom So>yam So Tyvis te¹ pArize⁵;
Dya:nI kin so>rize¹ Shri Ra:mun.
Vidya:rambas kamuy pA:thlr.
Nu:n VAr tai be'yi MohrI pra:s,
Brahma: Jiyas ma:gay mange¹;
Kanyakh zange¹ anA:se¹.

The translation of these lines is given below: -
Krishna went to the school with a small board (*Patti*, '*du:ji*') in his hand.
Devaki circulated the inner muslin of her headgear '*Zu:ji*', over him.⁵

¹ Known as school or '*Pathshala*', in Hindi and in other Indian language.

² The inner short muslin cloth, embroidered on two longer sides covering the headgear.

³ A wooden slate called '*Dhu:ji*,' or '*Mashikh*' was previously used by the beginners for writing. Special blue clay called, '*Syaf*,' was used to write on it with a hollow-reed pen, '*NarIkAni Qaklam*.'

⁴ It is the Kashmiri phoneme for '*Om*'.

⁵ It is believed that by encircling the '*zu:ji*' over the head of the boy, he is saved from the evil and witch-craft.

¹ '*Brahmasya Dhanam Biksha:*,' *Kashetrasyaya Dhanur Dhanam, Vaishasya Krishir Yanijayam*,' Bhatt. pt., Kesho, *Mekhala Pustak*.
'*Upayanam*, 1925, P. 69

The wooden slate should be smeared with clay dust, and you should write 'Wo>ma: Wom' the first letter with your fingertip *uā* it.

The slate is golden and the pen is made of silver, The first letter is 'Wo>ma: Wom'.

Oh golden pen of king *Vasudeva*, Lord *Krishna* has written 'Wo>ma: Wom',

On the golden slate with the silver pen, The second letter is 'So>yam So'.

You should read 'Wo>ma wom, syo>m so, tyavis Te',

You should adore Shri *Rama* in your inner heart. *Vidyarambha* invites just,

Some salt, 'VA' and a pure golden coin. Let us approach the 'Brahama' to direct,

A small girl to perform the 'Zang' ceremony.

Next comes the function of putting the Saffron 'Tilak' on the fore-head of the groom and this has rightly been described in the folk lore or the 'Vanlvun' of this specific hour in the following words: -

Da:to¹ karsu: ta:baydA:ri, Goro² la:guš she:re' posh,
VasIdi:v Ra:zlni'guri' gand ba:gas,
Badi BrahmanI kar Da:tas tyo>k

The translation of these lines is as under: -

Oh benefactor, you express your obedience,

Oh Guru, you put flowers on his forehead.

Go and tie the horses of *Vasudeva* in the garden.

Oh senior *Brahmin*, you put the mark on his forehead.

It is followed with tying of the *NA:rivan* on the right wrist of the groom. The ritual too is covered in our folk songs in the following manner: -

Tsa:Tho karsu: ta:baydA:ri:, Goro ganDsu: NA:ri:van.
Dyaki prazhyoyo Ttyo>k wo>zlyoyo,

¹ The root word 'Data' meaning 'the giver.' The host is the giver on the function.

² The distorted form of 'Guru.'

Mo>luly gAnDizyas KA:kni¹ band

The translation of these lines is as under; -

Oh pupil you remain in complete obedience,

Oh teacher you tie him the *NA:rivan*.

Your forehead has flushed and the mark of 'Tilak' has become redder.

You might put a costly/ golden band on his wrist.

The priest sprays a little of Holy Water on both i.e., The boy and the host so as to further purify them and prepare them for the occasion. Touching the feet of the priest by the *Brhamchari* on this occasion, is contained in the following words: -

Kho<ran lavl dyu: zapl ke' zorai,

Goro wandlyou pa:dan rath.

Lavl dyu: kho<ran tl bayyi chikl she'ras,

Nakhl chukh Goran tai PAnDitan.

A:dlnlki kolo² lavl dyu: kho<ran,

Goran sA:ti kar shokl ma:n ma:n.

It is translated as under :-

You sprinkle water on your feet with the force of penance,

Oh! *Brahamna*, I shall swear your feet with my blood (shall perform complete obedience).

You sprinkle the Holy Water on your feet and head.

For you are near the *Brahmins* and the most qualified.

Oh first offshoot of the family, come briskly and spray your feet with Holy Water,

You compete with these *Brahmins* out of your own volition.

Wearing 'Mrigazan' is contained in the following folk songs: -

Lolay Pu:tis Mriga:zan nA:li:,

MA:li: tro<vnas kinl BrahAni'?

¹ Wrist ornament made of gold, 'Kanak'. Probably the rich people may have had the practice of wearing golden wrist-bands on the occasion.

² An address of annoyance /order for a young boy by an elderly person.

*VsIdi:v Ra:zIni za:faI zanDo
TshA:gis trovhai Brahmay ganD*

The translation is :-

The dear son is wearing a 'Mrigazan' (a deer skin),
Has it been put on him by his father or the Brahmins?
Oh you nutmeg - bush of king Vasudeva,
Your sacred tuft of hair has been given a sacred knot.

Then comes the turn of binding the three-fold rope
made of 'Kusha' grass and we hear the following folk
song on the occasion: -

*Nyamith tI gonDhay darbe' Dyu:nThuy
Samith tI devta: sonuy A:y
KrishnI Mahara:Jas Darbe' Dyu:nThuy
YAtshith tI ShivI Ji sonuy A:v*

The translation of these lines is as under :-

While bending, a knot of 'Kusha', was made
around your waist,

All the gods have assembled in our house.

A knot of Kusha has been fastened to Krishna

Lord Shiva has come to our house of his own.

While tying the lions-cord (A:Tipan) the following
lines are sung:-

*Ko>ngas tI syandIre' wo>thlyo brotuy,
Brahmanan pilvunas A:ti:pan.*

Translation: -

The Saffron and vermilion has trickled down (on
the fore-head),

The Brahman has extended the cotton lions-cord
(A:tipan) to you.

At the time of fastening the under garment with the
loin-cord made of cotton, we come across the following
couplets of the folk-song: -

*Dayi sund darIm tai YAndrI sund dya:nly.
Brahmanan pilvunas shra:nay paTh.
Krishnas Yoni vo<t YendrIne' dyanay.
Brihaspath la:gyas shra:nay paTh.*

Translation :-

With the blessings and grace of Indra and God.

The Brahmin has extended to him the under
garment.

The auspicious hour of Krishna's Holy Thread
Ceremony has come with the blessings of lord
Indra.

Jupiter, the teacher of the gods, shall put the under
garment on the boy.

At the time of rinsing the mouth with a little water
(a:tsman) and at the time of serving the 'Panchagavya' a
mixture of five holy ingredients, the following folk song is
sung: -

*VasIdi:v Ra:zini krenkay go>bro,
So>nl wa:ji sA:ti kar a:tsayman,
Guh gyav do>d grumyut na:bad so>mbrith,
AmryatI¹ sA:ti kar a:tsayman.*

Translation: -

Oh gem-like son of king Vasudeva,
Rinse your mouth with the water touched by you with
your golden ring.

Blending cow-dung/urine, ghee, milk, and sugar candy,
You rinse your mouth with the Nectar.

The following lines are sung while adoring the
'Samidha'² 'mulberry sticks' that are used either as
DanDam or fuel: -

KrishnI Mahara:jini' So>bAdra: beniye',

¹ 'Nectar', of the Indian mythology. The five ingredients received from a cow
i.e., milk, curd, ghee, urine of a small calf that has not yet tasted grass and
sugar candy. 'Gavya', is a Sanskrit word and means, 'from cow'. A
mixture of all these five things is called 'Pancha Gavya'; it is considered
as good a purifier as Nectar, when prepared according to the scriptures.

² The root Sanskrit word is 'Samidha' meaning fire. The 'Samidh' - small
sticks (1100 in total) and a long one, one for each boy, known as
'DanDam', is either made from Plasha or mulberry tree. The sticks are
rubbed with butter as contained in the scriptures. It is believed that a stick
treated in oil, ghee or butter makes it strong and easy to handle.

Samidan thaniye' mA:IA:se'.
Va:sIdi:v Ra:zInI La:Il tI Du:ro,
Athan samidI mu:rly chai.
 The translation is :-

O! Subhadra, the sister of king *Krishna*,
 You rub butter to the mulberry sticks.
 O! the most dear and the 'pearl' of king *Vasudeva*,
 You have got a stick of mulberry tree in your hand.

The invitation is extended to all the gods and deities to attend the function and this fact is recorded in our folk songs: -

HumI She'chi' ladhA: Maha: Rodras' tai
Gatshtay mo>hniv dorA:vi'to<s.
Brahmay Lu:klkis² Brahma: Jiyas
Tas pazihe' yo>t va:to<nuy.
Mekhali pazihas tan dini asiti, (Gastay...)
KA:la:sl pyaThIkis Shivi Na:thas tai,
Shu:bihe' Mekhali pyaTh wa:tun yo<r.
Humas pyaTh pazihas Vi:d vanun tai,(Gatshtay..)
YAndreyi lu:klkis YAndra:zas tai
Pazihe' yami gari yo>r va:tun
Na:na: rAngi po<sh tAmi' Da:li su:zi'nas tai, (Gats)
GAgNI pAki' DivIta: Bhu:mi pAki' sA:ri;
Krishnas vA:sh Mekhali vA:ri:ye'.

Translation:-

Go and inform Lord Shiva about this great 'Hom'
 (Holy Fire)
 Go and depute a messenger to inform him.
Brahma, whose abode is in *Brahma Loka*?
 He should have come to this place,
 He should have helped us in this *Mekhala* of ours,
 Go and depute

¹ A name attributed to Lord Shiva.

² One of the three lokas - *Vishnu Loka*, *Shiv Loka* and *Brahma Loka*. This one is attributed to 'Brahma' according to the Indian mythology.

The Shiva, whose abode is on the great *Kailasha*¹
 He should have attended this *Mekhala*:
 He should have recited the *Vedas* on this *Hom*, (*Go.*)
Indira of the *Indra Loka* (Heavens),
 He should have arrived to this place at this hour
 He has sent multi-coloured flowers as a gift (*Go.*)
 The gods passed through the Heavens and all
 walked on earth,

It is time for the Holy Thread Ceremony of *Krishna*,

The time of wearing the Holy Thread is considered as the most important occasion among all the rituals of the hour and this has received a well-deserved attention in our folk songs recorded below: -

Yiyiv ma:li BrahmnAv khAsiv sa:ni he're',
LA:giv ma:li tyo>k posh arIg² she're',
So>rI ro<3 Yonich gAr yuthNI ne're', (LA:giv ma;li..)
Ru:hini:³ chi pra:ra:n tsAndramI ne're',
Yiyiva ma:li BrahmnAv gAtshiv ma:li Jama:h,
Kariv ma:li humuk sama:cha:r⁴.
Trika:ran⁵ Maharshi: a:yi yath sa:tas,
Do<has bo<zni tsatur Vi:d⁶.
Brahama: Ji: a:v Azikis sa:tas,

¹ The famous *Kailasha*, a peak of the Himalayan Mountain Range.

² Whole grain of rice soaked in water. It is used in religious ceremonies along with flowers.

³ Out of the twenty-seven lunar mansions (*Nakshetras*), *Rohini Nakshetra* is reserved for holding *Mekhala Sanskara*. It is also considered as the spouse of *Chandra Deva* (Moon) according to the Indian mythology.

⁴ It appears a conjugation of 'sam' and 'a:cha:r', meaning, a collective action.

⁵ Three forces: 1. *Brahma*, (the Creator), 2. *Vishnu*, (the Preserver), and 3. *Shiva*, (the Destroyer).

Three timings: 1. Morning, 2. Noon, and 3. Evening.

Three time spans: 1. Present, 2. Past, and 3. Future.

Three aims of life: 1. Love, 2. Duty, and 3. Wealth. Or
 1. Gain, 2. Equality, and 3. Loss.

Three castes: 1. *Brahmin*, 2. *Kshettry*, and 3. *Vaish*.

A confluence of the three major rivers of India, 1. *Ganga*, 2. *Yamuna*, and 3. *Saraswati*.

⁶ The Four Vedas, 1. *Rgved*, 2. *Atharvaved*, 3. *Samved*, and 4. *Yajurved*.

Ve'shin tI Shivil Ji: sA:ti: hyath,
 Sa:vitri:¹ hyath ne'ri sa:yam ka:las,
 Ravl a:v bovnas tsho>h a:v Ko>ngas,
 Sanz lo>g Mekhala: ta:rA.nas.
 Agnuh dlh kho>t gAgInchi ra:shye',
 KA:shi:² Andriuk Brahma: a:v.
 Swo>manI kapsa: donIne' a:v,
Krishnl Maha:rajni yatsha:ye'
 Vasude:v Ra:znyan Da:ran dra:ye',
 Tsu:r dini dra:ye' gri:si' ba:ye',
 ShabnamI lavi sA:ti' khasith A:ye',
 (Krishnl Mahara:jni)
 Ra:tas manz so>y tullInay A:ye', (Krishnl)
 Vaslde:v Ra:zInI Zi:ch Zi:ch kapsI:,
 DapI:si: karsay Yone' han ,
 Athi vo>th to<sl tI athI vyatshIno<voy,
 Tathi karInA:vly Yon' han,
 Divlki: vyatshIno<voy Kanike' ko>tuy,
 Sha:rika:³ Bagwati: slthIra: ko>tuy.
 Yo<nyah su:zI yo< Na:rA:ni:.....
 The translation of these lines is as under :-
 Oh my dear Brahmins come and ascend our
 staircase,
 Put on the mark of 'Tilak', flowers, and rice grains
 on the forehead.
 Be careful so that the time fixed for the
 'Yagnyopavita' does not expire.

¹ The scriptures have divided a day into three parts under the charge of three forces of Mother goddess. The evening time is considered under the charge of 'Savitri'.

² The Brahmins of Ka:shi or Banaras are considered very pious throughout the sub-continent from the very ancient times.

³ One of the names attributed to Mother goddess. Her abode is considered on the Hari Parbath hillock near Srinagar city. She is considered to have eighteen arms.

Rohini: is waiting for the appearance of Chandra
 Oh dear Brahmins come and assemble'
 Make the arrangements for the Holy Fire.
 Great Rishis, having a vision beyond time and space,
 have arrived at the right time,
 To hear four Vedas for the full day.
 Brahma has specially come on this occasion,
 Accompanied by Lord Vishnu and Shiva.
 He will return in the evening along with goddess
 'Savitri.'
 The sun has arrived on the earth and the Saffron has
 reddened.
 The process of completing the Mekhala has started,
 The smoke of the Holy Fire has gone up into the sky,
 The Brahmin from Kashi (Banaras) has just arrived.
 He has come willingly to sow the cottonseed.
 Due to the good wishes of king Krishna,
 This has grown in the fields of king Vasudeva,
 The ladies of the farmers have come to weed it,
 It sprouted with the wetness of the dew (Due to....
 It was got collected on the same night (Due to ...)
 O long fiber cotton of king Vasudeva.
 Ask him, I shall make a 'Yagnyopavita' out of it,
 Pure cotton has come out of it that was carded by
 hand,
 And the Yagnyopavita was got prepared from it.
 Devaki carded it and the little girl spun it,
 Goddess Sharika has spun the cotton thread,
 Lord Narayana has presented the Holy Thread to
 you¹.

¹ The name/s of the host/ hostess are inserted by the lady heading the group of the ladies singing the folk songs, at all those places where the mythological names appear in the folk song so as to make it more charming and presentable to the assembled audiences.

This is followed by invitations, which we extend, to all the deities and gods through our folk songs to attend the Holy Thread Ceremony. A few examples are quoted here: -

*Agnai ko>nDI manzI LAKhimi:¹ dra:ye',
Treyi laTi² a:ye' zanIm hyath
SAmi:ri³ Andray Ga:yitray⁴ dra:ye',
Lolay pu:tis hyath a:ye'.
ParbatI Andray Sha:rika: dra:ye', (Lolay pu:tis..),
Arda:hav naryao ko>rnas sa:ye', (Lolay ...)
TullmulI Andray RA:gnya: dra:ye',
KrishnI Maha:ra:jas hyath a:ye',
Bhishmak Ra:zInI mye'ti De'sha:ye',
Triku:Ti: Divta Di:vi: hyath.*

Translation of these lines is as under: -

The goddess of wealth emerged from the Holy Fire,
She attained her birth three times,
Goddess *Gayatri* emerged from behind the mountain 'Sumeru',
And she came along with my beautiful doll, son,
Goddess *Sharika* came from the 'Parbath'⁵ hillock,
She adored my son with her eighteen arms.

¹ The goddess of wealth and wisdom.

² The three divine powers of a man:- 1. Desire (*Icha Shakhti*); 2. Knowledge, (*Gyana Shakhti*) and 3. Performance (*Kriya Shakhti*).

³ An imaginary mountain. It is said that the sun rises from behind this mountain and hence an omen of hope and happiness. A number of idioms and proverbs exist in Indian languages including Kashmiri and our writers and poets have made use of this word in a number of shades.

⁴ Like *Savitri* the goddess of the evening, *Gayatri* is considered as the goddess of the morning and hence goddess of joy and hope. *Yagnyopavita* too is named as *Gayatri* or (*Gayitray*). It is also one of the *Vedic* hymns. Every Hindu recites it early in the morning at the time of bathing and washing of the *Yagnyopavita*. It is also recited at almost all the religious functions.

⁵ A small hillock near the city of Srinagar considered as the abode of goddess *Sharika*.

(And she came....)

Goddess *Ragnya* came from *Tulamula*,¹

She came along with Lord *Krishna*.

I had seen myself (at the residence of) *Bikshana Bhatta*,

Thirty Million gods with their spouses.²

In this way the main folk songs connected with the Holy Thread Ceremony present a complete description of the main ceremony, though the performance of other rituals continues for the whole day. This ceremony, as a whole, can be divided into two parts. The first part comprises the rituals held prior to and up to casting the *Yagnyopavita*, and these include the pre-birth and post-birth *Sanskars* as well. The second part of it contains all the rituals and praxis, which are completed or performed after casting the *Yagnyopavita*. These include the following rites/ *Sanskars*: -

(1) Pre- Mekhala Rituals:-

- a) *Kalash Pu:ja*, and
- b) *Agni Kunda Pu:ja*,

(2) Pre-Birth Sanskars :-

- a) *Bijawapan or Garbhadan*,
- b) *Simantonayan*, and
- c) *Pumsawan*.

(3) Post- birth Sanakars:-

- a) *Jatakar*,
- b) *Namakarn*,
- c) *Surya*, (*Siryi*) *Darshan*.
- d) *Chandra Darshan*,
- e) *AnIprashun*,
- f) *Chu:da:karan*. and

(4) Mekhala.

After completing the function of putting on the

¹ A small village in the *Ganderbal* Tehsil of Kashmir considered as the abode of goddess 'Ragnya'.

² According to the Indian mythology there are 'Trikoti Devas', thirty million gods and goddesses.

Yognyopavita, the groom and the host return to their original seats in front of the *Hawan Kund* to perform the following rituals and ceremonies.

d) A:Zya Dharshan- To see reflection in Ghee.

At the beginning of each ritual the host/boy is asked to perform the "a:zya darshan". All those relatives, friends, and neighbours who come to offer 'Abi:d' at the function complete this ritual. After application of the vermilion on the fore-head and tying of the 'NA:rivan' on the right wrist, (in case of the males) and on the left wrist, (in the case of the married females), by the priest they perform this ritual. The person is given a walnut, or a wood-apple or a piece of sugar candy in his /her hand by the priest. He/she adds a coin to it and after seeing his/her reflection in the 'ghee'; he/she throws it gently into the 'pot of ghee'. The priest dips the long ladle into the *ghee* and the person after putting a little dry fruit on the ladle filled with *ghee*, takes a handful of barley in his/her both hands joined together and, amidst chanting of hymns by the priest, offers it to the Holy Fire. With this ends this ritual.

In the common Kashmiri language, the ritual is called as the 'a:di darshan' which does not look as close to the ritual as the former one. 'Azya' is a Sanskrit word and means 'ghee' and 'Drshan' means 'to see'. According to the scriptures the reflection that one should try to see in the ghee-pot, include :-

1. The reflection of ones own face,
2. The reflection of the *Agni* or the flames, or
3. The reflection of the sky.

Thus confirming the purity of the substance.

There could be two reasons for the small monetary help extended by the devotees on such occasions. The first and foremost appears that all such functions were

held in the hermitages by the great *Rishis* and in order to give a little monetary help, people might have been making some contributions for such functions. *Ghee* being one of the most important, dear and scarce items in past as it is today, the host was given a little monetary help for its purchase which appears to be the second reason for such donations. All the relatives, friends and neighbours do it out of their own free will and there is no compulsion as for as the scriptures are concerned. This further confirms its nature of being just a 'monetary help'. It may not be out of place to mention here that the host kept the amount for performing such functions till recently. With the changing times, he repudiated to keep this donated money. Thus it became an additional earning for the *Brahmin* acting as '*Hota*' on such functions.

e). Va:rida:n: Earthen Stove.

The whole *Mekhala* ceremony comprises twenty-four rituals known as '*Pakhya:k*', out of these sixteen require cooked rice as an offering to the deities, besides other ingredients. As per the requirements prescribed in the Holy Scriptures, rice is to be cooked for all the sixteen rituals separately. The *Pu:fi* cooks one or two kg rice on an earthen oven, known as '*Va:ri da:n*' with many holes on top for separate pots, approximately sixteen in number. This being a cumbersome task, the society, as such, appears to have amended it by cooking it on a stove separately and then completing the formality by putting it into different pots, thus retaining its ancient originality in a mini form. The '*VA:r*' in Kashmiri means a small round earthen pot and '*Da:n*' means 'hearth', '*Chu:la*' or oven. Derived from the root Sanskrit word '*Da:n*' meaning 'the place where fire is burnt'. The '*Va:rida:n*' is just like a portable earthen stove having a single window for insertion of firewood. But its top, unlike the common

stoves, is covered with a pan with multiple holes in it. The cooking holes in it are generally sixteen in number to hold sixteen small pots for cooking. The 'Pu:fi' (Po>f) completes the function and she gets a good gratification from the host/hostess for arranging this ritual. This is an hour of hectic actions for the 'Pu:fi,' photographers and the video film makers. Every body greets 'Pu:fi' on this joyful occasion.

In the actual practice the 'Pu:fi' is asked to prepare a pot of rice for all the rituals collectively and then she performs the obligations as described above. She manages all this so as to keep up the sanctity of the scriptures and also to get the gratification from the host which is generally paid to her in cash as well as in kind. Some affluent people give costly presents or even a golden ornament on the occasion to the 'Pu:fi' just to please her at this hour of joy. We have got the following folk song which denotes the importance of 'Pu:fi' on this happy function: -

*Shankara:cha:rlch¹ me'tsi tai Gangay wa:ne'.
So> bAdra:yi ko>r Va:re'da:n.
Myatsi tai pA:nis khAts khAmbi:rl,
GAmbi:re'² kho>r asi Va:re'da:n.
Asi ko>r Va:rida:n So>bAdra:ye',
Arzan³ Di:vIni bA:riya:ye'.
Harmo>khI pyaThI che' baji Ganga:ye'⁴
SonI sInzi gAje' Ro>pI sund Tha:n.
GangI wa:ni sA:ti myAts A:DranI a:ye', (Arzan...)*

¹ It is a small hillock to the north of the city of Srinagar, Kashmir.

² Root Sanskrit word, 'Gambhir' meaning, 'sky', 'ocean' or 'deep thought'. Here it has been used in the sense of thoughtfulness.

³ Arjuna, the third son of Pandu of the great epic Mahabharata. He is also the husband of Subhadra, sister of Lord Krishna.

⁴ Known as 'Gangbal', the source of river Sindh 'Uttara Ganga' or 'The Ganga of Kashmir' is to the North of the Kashmir valley near the Haramukata mountain range. The Hindus of Kashmir consider it a pious place and also perform the *Shra:dha* of their dead at the Gangbal Lake on the eighth bright fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada each year.

*VasIdi:v Ra:zIni Ta:The' Go>bro,
Varida:nas rANew Ka:Thay Chon.¹
So>rgI da:rl Andray KabrA:j² ma:s a:ye', ...
So>nI sund va:ri pho>t vo>Di pyaTh hyath.
So>bAdra: sA:ni' tas raTne' dra:ye'. (Arzan)
VaikonThI³ pyaThI yo>t Ka:mdlid:n⁴ a:ye',
Vignye'⁵ tsa:yi do>d hyani tas
Ami do>dl sA:ti' batI ranIne' a:ye' (Arzan .)
ChAtIrl Ha:rl Anzul AnIpur:na:ye',⁶
Va:rida:nas so>y ranIne' a:ye',
Sha:rika: Bgagwati: bA:grInI dra:ye', (Arzan).
Va:re' da:nas shayitrlh tsA:ri,
Va:rida:nas sANdri: tsandan llShe',
Ziniche' trIsh'e' la:gA:se',
Va:rida:nas sANdri: tsandan go>ne',
Vanay va:lus to>lsi: ka:Th.
HA:r rani batI va:ri do>day sA:ti:
DarIba:yi⁷ a:ye'i ka:ra:ne' Hum.
Va:rida:nas rANimay KhAZI:r llShe',
Ho>day Shi:shay⁸ kAri:zye's,
So>bAdra:yi rAniyo khAZI:r llShe',
BrihaspatI thA:vizys Ho>day shi:sh.
These lines are translated as under: -
Out of the clay from the Shankracharya hillock
and the water from the Ganga,
Subhadra has made the Va:rida:n,*

¹ It is one of the old varieties of paddy crop known for its fragrance and taste.

² It appears to be a distorted form of 'Kaviraj', meaning a 'wise' or 'an experienced' lady.

³ The abode of Vishnu in the heavens, the name of a Paradise, considered as the abode of gods.

⁴ Cow belonging to Indra and believed to yield whatever may be desired from it. A cow that gives plenty of milk.

⁵ Nymphs.

⁶ One of the names attributed to the mother goddess as 'Annapurna'

⁷ 'Dhar' a high caste among the Kashmiri Pnadians.

⁸ The left over portion of the offerings form the sacrificial offerings meant for the devotees.

The clay and water was leaven together,
 The learned lady has made a *Varida:n* for us.
Subhadra, the spouse of *Arjuna*, has made the
Va:rida:n for us.
 (It has come from) the high mountains of *Hara-
 mukaTa Ganga*
 Its inner portion is made of gold and its li \bar{c} is made
 of silver,
 The clay was made wet with the water from *Ganga*
 The spouse of *Arjun Deva* did all this.
 Oh dear son of king *Vasudeva*,
 Cook the rice from the '*Ka:ThI Chon*' paddy on
Va:rida:n.
 The most experienced *Masi* has arrived from the
 Heavens,
 With a golden coop on her head filled with the pots,
 Our *Subhadra* came forward to receive it from her.
 The spouse of *Arjuna Deva*,
 The '*Kamadenu*' has arrived here from the Heavens,
 The fairies have entered (the shed) to milk her.
 They have arrived to cook the rice with that milk,
 (The spouse)
 She arrived to cook it on the *Va:rida:n*,
 Goddess *Annapurna* has a golden umbrella and a
 necklace with trimmings, (Or)
Annapurna has brought the rice extracted from the
ChAtrI Ha:r or *Ha:rI Anzul*¹ varieties of paddy.
 And goddess *Sharika* started its distribution.
 The *Va:rida:n* has thirty six holes,
 Kindle fire in it with the pieces of sandalwood,
 Then put the fire wood pieces in it.
 Kindle the *Va:rida:n* with a Sandal wood log,
 Go and fetch the dry basil plants from the forest,
 The merle would cook the food with milk,

¹ '*Chatraha:r*' and '*HarI anzul*' are the old varieties of paddy which were grown in Kashmir previously.

The ladies of *Dhar* families have come to participate
 in the '*Homa*'.

I cooked the pieces of dates on the *Va:rida:n*,
 You should keep the residue (*HotIshi:sh*) out of
 the offerings made.

Subhadra has cooked the pieces of dates,
 O Jupiter, the Priest of gods, you should keep the
 residue out of it.

In the mean time the hostess arrives among the
 ladies' gathering that were busy with singing of '*VanIvun*'
 since morning. They address the hostess in a chiding
 manner in the following words for having neglected them
 for such a long time: -

Vo>Di tyaki' pu:ts tai hali dya:rI dAjiye',
*Vo>thi DaykI Bajije'*¹ *ke'ntsha: khya:v*,
VasIdi:v Ra:zInI' mutsar dya:rI dAjiye', (*Vo>thi ...*)
Di:vakh Ra:zInI ku:ri DyakI bAjiye',
Ka:ndur oye' tso>chi pAjiye' hyath
Tso>chi khAnd ditam ya: Bo>TI tserI pAjiye'

Translation: -

You have the vermilion marked muslin on your head and
 bag filled with money tied to your belt.

Stand up Oh, prosperous one, give us something to eat.

You open the money bag of king *Vasudeva*, (Stand)

Oh you auspicious daughter of king *Deva Sahi Khingla*,

The baker has come with a coop filled with bread,

Either give us a piece of bread or a coop of sweet apricot,

'*Bo>TI tserI*'² (Stand up)

After the breakfast the ladies engaged for the
 '*VanIvun*', feel satisfied and then the '*Hawan Shala*' and

¹ The lady whose husband is alive.

² '*Tser*' means an 'apricot'. The '*Bo>TI Tser*' is bigger in size than the ordinary one and is more common in the valley. Laddakh, also known as '*BotI Desha*' in old scriptures of Kashmir, is most famous for this special variety of fruit. Hence it appears that the nomenclature has adopted the prefix from the said word, '*BotI*'.

the 'Brahmins' present there, become their target. And they address them satirically:-

*Brihaspat Goro Mattan¹ ta:m gAtsizihe',
 ATas kyath wA:lizihe' tyaki' kastulah²
 GorI shndis buthis Siriyi chu prazla:n,
 Asi konI go>nDun KA:rkini band.
 Asi' Di:vi: chay Sa:m Vi:d gayva:n
 Tohi' Brahman konI ShA:nts para:n³
 Brihaspat Goro Day toThyo yo,
 Shyankay shabId ti bu:zuy no*

Translation:-

You should have gone to Mattan, Oh Brahman,
 And bought in hand a pot for keeping the vermilion.
 The face of the priest is as resplendent as the sun,
 Why have you not tied a wrist knot to us?
 We goddesses (ladies) are singing from the Samveda⁴,
 Why don't you, Brahmins, recite the 'Sha:nti Pa:Tha'?'
 Oh Brahman (Jupiter), may God bless you,
 We didn't hear even the sound of the conch shell from you.

¹ The name of a village on the Anantnag Pahalgam. Road.. The 'Mahatamyas' and Kalhana's Rajatarangini contain, among other names, this name of the village, but in the common Kashmiri language it is known as 'Bhawan' derived from Sanskrit word, 'Bhawan' meaning lofty buildings. The old remains now almost buried under the ground confirm the fact. It is also known as the 'Surya Tirtha' and the Hindus of the sub-continent perform the 'Shra: dha' ceremony of their fore-fathers at this Ti:rtha.' during the additional lunar months known as 'Malamas' and 'Bhamumas'.

² Also known as 'Katsal Du:n' made of brass. 'Du:n' means a walnut. As its shape resembles it, hence called 'Katsal Du:n.' its both halves fit on each other and it contains a vermilion or Saffron paste used for marking on the forehead.

³ Derived from the root Sanskrit word 'Shanti Path'. In the midst of each ritual, a special 'Shanti Path' is collectively recited by all the Brahmins from the holy scriptures in a melodious voice called 'ShA:nts'. It contains prayers/good-wishes for the betterment of the whole universe.

⁴ It is one among the four Vedas. It is considered as an authority on the 'Sangita Shastra' and it is believed that Shiva has compiled it himself.

Now the ladies, busy in singing the 'VanIvun', examine the other essential things pertaining to the 'Hawan Shala', and they address the Brahmins in the words that follow. There are a number of words in this portion of the 'VanIvun', which have clearly been borrowed from the Persian language and adopted in these lines of our folk songs. For instance the word 'Gar', in the first line which means, 'maker', 'mender' as in 'Zargar', the 'gold smith', etc. It shows that the lines are a recent addition to these folk songs:-

*Tohi chivI chandI gar asi kya: Bu:zo,
 ManDlas¹ kits gA:r ro<zA:vo.
 Bo<z ma:li Brahanno ro<z kan dA:rith.
 ManDul ma:li trA:vzi vyastA:rith.
 ManDIlIchi ja:ye' vyasta: a:vyo,
 Auta:r Krishn JuvA:ne',²
 ManDul li:khiv sami sami ja:ye',
 Sha:ye' Shri: Bhagva:na:ye'.
 MunDul li:khiv na: na: rangay,
 Zange' a:yo<v Parami:shwo>r.
 ManDul lekhanas dApiv kumy pA:thI,
 Nu:n vAr tay be'yi mo>harI pra:s.
 Na:ra:n Juvas mangai mange',
 Kanyakh zange' anA:se'.
 ManDul li:khiv pamposh khArith
 Pa:nI Bhagva:n a:v lekha:ne'.
 ManDul li:khiv Siriyi prakA:sho,
 Naqa:sh³ animay lekha:nye'.
 ManDul lyu:khyo Ko>ngI tI Se'ndre',
 YAndra:zas rut bo>vi:nay.*

¹ A place decorated with the coloured lime stone powder meant for twelve Zodiac signs called 'ManDul'.

² It is the name of an unknown Brahmin who appears to have mastered in the art of 'ManDal' decoration. In the VanIvun, the name of the host/Kula Guru is inserted in place of the name quoted above.

³ Persian word meaning, "Engraver"

ManDul Lyu:khuy lyo>dur tai cho>tuy,
Na:ra:n hyo>tuy A:si:nay.
ManDlas chA:nis kha:ryam poshi thare',
GarI lyu:khu:yo HarI TsAndra:znly
Brihaspat Goran kha:re's poshi thare',
GarI lyu:khun chA:nis Yonyas pe 'Th.
VasIdi:v Razas pho>ji poshi thare'.
KrishnI Bhagwa:nInis Yonyas pe 'Th.
Arshi¹ pye 'ThI vo>th Arzun,
ManDul lo>g lekhIne',
Farshi² pye 'ThI Brahama: vochIne' a:v.
Vuchtav Brihaspat Goras athas,
ManDul kathay kara:n chus.
Sha:ba:sh Brihaspat Gornis pa:nas,
ManDul khorun tha:nas pye 'Th.
MandDlas chA:nis gul³ gayi roshan,⁴
Yuni yuni poshan phullyah ja:n.
VasIdi:v Ra:zInI gul gayi roshan,
Lasinas tI kArinas po>tray ka:r,
DivIki: Ma:le' rum gayi roshan,
(Vuni Vuni ..)
Vaiko>nThI Andray ManDul chu khasa:n
Brahma: chu vasa:n vuchA:ne'.

Translation:-

What have we heard? You are worried about your
 pockets,
 Haven't you a keen desire for the preparation of the
ManDul?
 O my dear *Brahmin*, hear me attentively,
 O dear you should draw the *ManDul* with care.
 You have got a good knowledge about the place of
 drawing the *ManDul*.

At the house of Autar Krishn jo,¹
 You draw the *ManDul* on a level ground,
 Just near the place of gods.
 Draw the *ManDul* with the help of different
 colours,
 God himself has performed the 'Zang' ceremony.
 There is a single act for drawing the *ManDul*,
 Salt, a cake of spices and a pure gold coin.
 Go and request *Narayana* repeatedly,
 Ask a small girl to perform the 'Zang' ceremony.
 Also draw a lotus while laying the *ManDul*.
 God himself has come to draw it.
 Draw the *ManDul* in the broad day light,
 I have called in the engravers to lay it
 Draw the *ManDul* with vermilion and saffron,
 May god *Indra* prosper,
 Colour the *MaDul* yellow and white.
 May *Narayana* be your well-wisher.
 I made the flower branches on your *ManDul*,
 The spouse of *Harishchandra* completed the inner
 portions².
 Jupiter, the priest raised its flower plants,
 Inner portions were completed on the eve of your
Yagnyopavita.
 The flower plants of king *Vasudeva* have bloomed,
 On the *Yagnyopavita* ceremony of Lord *Krishma*.
Arjuna has come from the heavens and started
 drawing the *ManDul*.
 And *Brahma* has come on the earth to see it.
 Oh see the workmanship of the hands of the priest.
 The *ManDul* is speaking of it loudly.
 Salutations are to the dignity of Jupiter, the Priest,
 He has laid the *ManDul* at its proper place.

¹ Persian word meaning, 'Heaven'

² Persian word meaning, 'ground', 'earth'

^{3, 4} Persian words meaning, 'Flower', and 'Bright', respectively.

¹ Here the name of the host is inserted in the VanIvun.

² The famous legendary king *Harish Chandra* who faced odd trials for keeping his promises and commitment to up-hold the truth.

The flowers of your *ManDul* have become bright
 The blossoms are still bright.
 The flowers of king *Vasudeva* have become bright
 Let his son live long and perform the son's duties.
Devaki felt greatly honored and elated.
 The blossoms are still bright.
 The *ManDul* emerges from the heavens,
 The *Brahma* is coming to see it.

f). *Abi:d, 'Bhiksha' (Byakhya):-*
 Receiving of Alms.

Attainment of peace is the ultimate goal of human endeavour. It emerges from the enlightenment of human mind and enlightenment of mind needs education. It is because of this very fact that our society had established great schools of thought in the past in remote hermitages and the children were sent to these centers for the attainment of education. The society too had the obligation to look after the needs of these centers, more so when their own kith and kin were involved and attached with such centers. Hence a little of their income was put aside and donated for the maintenance of these centers. Such donations were sent to these schools through their wards in the form of alms known as '*Biksha*' pronounced in Kashmiri as '*Bye'khya:*' so as to relieve the propellers of these centers of the worries of day-to-day requirements. The pupil was sent to the nearby areas and villages to receive alms meant for the *Ashram* (School). Thus the teachers of such institutions remained free from the economic worries for the upkeep of their centers. In this way they achieved peace of mind and devoted more time for furtherance of the activities of their schools of thought. It helped them to achieve perfection in their cause because peace of mind is the pre-requisite for the attainment of perfection.

Though the existence of such *Gurukuls* or schools, met a total annihilation as a result of changed social order, but asking for alms for the *Kula Guru* is still alive in our *Mekhala Sanskar*. All the relatives, friends and neighbours who attend this function present their '*Biksha:*' or '*Abi:d*' to the boy after they are marked with '*Vermillion*' on their fore-head, tie the wrist knot, '*NA:ri'van*' and go through the ritual of '*Aya Darshan*'. The boy gets up with the '*Tha:li*' in his left hand for receiving alms and the '*Dandam*', the '*mulberry stick*', in his right hand and addresses a male donor like this, '*Bhu, Bhiksham Dehi, Abid Mahara:*' and to a lady donor like this '*Bhavati, Bhiksham Dehi, Abid Habi*'. Besides the content, the language in both the sentences is *Sanskrit* and the *Bramhachari* asks for alms in this very language. The only two words of Kashmiri language used in the sentences are '*Mahara*' and '*Habi*' as the '*concluding words*' to denote the gender of the donor. The '*address words*', '*Bhu:*' and '*Bhavati*', and other words of the two sentences are in *Sanskrit*. Besides clarifying the gender of the donor, it is the first attempt to introduce the *Bramhachari* in a society and the household so as to teach him the art of conversation

As contained in the scriptures, the first '*Abi:d*' is to be given to the boy by his *Ma:si* (mother's sister). In order to save the *Bramhachari* from having a feeling of inferiority, the boy has been directed to go to his '*Ma:si*' for asking for the first alms. It is a natural instinct in a man that a boy is more close to his '*Ma:si*' even than his mother. Hence the first '*Abi:d*' from her according to the scriptures. After the *Yagnyopavita* by the father, this process gets momentum as the groom returns to his original seat, i.e., in front of the Holy Fire. Our folk songs too have given a due place to this ritual in the following words: -

Athas tshNimay so>nI sInZl vA:ji;
Ma:ji ti goham Abi:de'.

*Do>has phyu:rham A:nay Daban,
Baban ti goham Abi: de'.*

The translation of these lines is in the following words: -

I put a golden ring in your hand,
You still went to your mother for 'Abi:d'!
You wandered for the whole day among the
palatial balconies fitted with mirrors,
You still went to fatherly people for 'Abi:d'!

In addition to the extracts from the folk songs already discussed, the ladies singing the 'Vanlvun' included the 'Ram Lila' and the 'Kriashna Lila' in their folk songs so as to extend 'Vanlvun' for the whole day. Occasionally they make a satirical attack on people and the society through their Vanlvun. A few such examples are quoted below: -

*Te'lik'i BaTI¹ kya:h darmi: A:si:
KA:shi' do>h A:si kara:n ne'ra:ha:r.
BA:shi' do>h khyava:n brynI su:rI² khA:si
Raml Lakhiman vanvA:si go>y
Aziki' BaTI kya:h pA:pi: A:si,
KA:shi' do>h chi: khyava:n ga:ri³ phalha:r
BA:shi' do>h chi: khyava:n ne'ni batI khA:si:
(Ram Lakhiman...)
Te'liki' BaTI kya:h darmi: A:si,*

*SatI vArishi A:si' kara:n Kanya: Da:n,¹
TimInly So>rgIki bar vIthi' A:si:(Ram Lakhiman .)
Aziki BaTI kya:h pA:pi: A:si,
SatI vIri'shan ko>re'n athI da:ra:n,
Timnly NrIkIki bar vAthi' A:si:(Ram Lakhiman...)*

Translation:

How devoted were the people of those days,
They would keep a complete fast on the eleventh day of
the bright fortnight,

On the twelfth day they would take cups full of ashes
from 'Bre'n' tree

Rama and Lakshmana have gone to the forests to live
there.

How sinful are the Hindus of today,
They take water chestnuts as a fruit-diet on the eleventh
day of the bright fortnight.

On the twelfth day they eat cups full of meat and rice

How pious were the Hindus of those days,

They would marry their daughters when they were only
seven years² old.

The doors of the Heaven were open for such people,

How wicked are the Hindus of to day?

They extend their hands before their seven-year-old
daughters for receiving their earning,

The doors of the hell are open for such people,

g). The Gayitray Mantra .

After completing the Holy Thread ceremony, the *Brahmchari* makes a vow to act according to the directions of the scriptures. The *Kula Guru* blesses him for a long life and prosperity. He also utters the 'Gayitray

¹ The root word is 'Bhattaraka'. BhatI, appears a short form of it and is a common sub-caste of a number of people of the valley. However, the word 'Bhat' is specifically meant for a person from the Kashmiri pandit family.

² It is a famous tree used as timber, fodder and firewood. It is said that in the past its ashes were used for washing clothes as the bleaching powder or soap was not known in those days. But how far it was used to clean wash human stomach, is a matter of research. Actually it appears that the original text should have been 'BrahmI Su:tra' meaning the work containing the precepts, compiled by Ved Vyasa known as the 'Brahma Sutras' - a filiform between the man and the Supreme Self.

³ Water chestnuts or its flour used on the fasting days as an edible.

¹ . Marriage, (donation of a girl in marriage according to the Indian thought.)

² This shows that child marriage was common during the medieval times in the Kashmir society.

Mantra into his right ear. In ancient times of the '*Shrutis*' and '*Smritis*', the *Vedic* truths including the hymns were transmitted by the word of mouth into the human ear and these were listened so attentively that these could be reproduced word for word by the listener. The importance of listening is further exemplified when the *Guru* whispers the *Mantra* into the right ear of the pupil and the disciple listens to it whole-heartedly. It is enough for the disciple to get enlightened. Listening not only helps in assimilating what is being said but it also prompts a person to speak less. It is a fact that the language changes with the change in time and place but the words never die and are said to be eternal. That is why our scriptures have called the 'word' as '*Shabda Brahma*' - the 'Eternal Word'. The '*Gyatri Mantra*' uttered into the right ear of the pupil reads as under: -

*'Om Bhur Bhawah, Swah Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Di Mahya Diyo Yonah Prachodayat.'*¹

Meaning:-

'I adore the eternal power which is in the form of '*Om*', which is omnipresent and all powerful in all the three worlds - earth, atmosphere and the universe, which is the Supreme Soul, the morning confidence, the cause of formation, preservation and annihilation, worth owning for all, which is the source of light and fortune. I adore such a great power. May the Fountain-head of all such powers give me the perfect wisdom so that I take the path of truthfulness.'

h). *Netri PaTh* -

Cover cloth for '*Shanti Pa:Th*' or '*ShA:nts*'

The scriptures call it '*Ushnish*', meaning a '*turban*' or a '*diadem*'. Actually in the Holy Thread Ceremony a sheet of white cloth is thrown over the head

of the groom so as to cover his head and body. The priest continues chanting hymns for the well being of the whole world, hymns connected with the codes of conduct for the daily life of the *Brahmchari* and asks the boy to move his hands up and down gently in confirmation. The pupil is asked to meditate deeply on what is contained in the Holy Scriptures for peace and illumination of his self/ soul.

The meditation opens two energy centers in the body- the heart, (The *Anahata Chakra*) and the crown (The *Sahasrar Chakra*). When the two charkas are open, the divine energy flows down the practitioner, making him contented and joyful. He becomes a channel of divine energy. This energy is used to bless earth and all the beings on it with peace and divine light. Thus it is a means of bringing happiness and prosperity to the whole universe. The practitioner experiences increased prosperity, sharpening of his mental faculties, inner peace, reduced stress level, heightened intuition and self-confidence through continuous meditation. Meditation generates tolerance, peace of mind and a feeling of well-being - an intimate feeling of oneness with everybody, whether foe or friend. The purpose of keeping the pupil under the garment is to seclude him from the worldly temptations because meditation requires concentration and concentration is the result of maintaining silence. The *Bhagwad Gita*, the *Upanishads* the *Samhitas*, all lay stress on maintaining silence. In the *Gita*, Lord *Krishna* says 'I am Silence' whereas the *Upanishads* call it '*Shabda Brahmana*.' The soul is considered as the pure silence and the Ultimate Reality is silence. It plays a vital role for a spiritual aspirant while ascending the spiritual ladder. In silence one goes deep into inner core of ones being to hear the voice of *Atma*. The silence is God Himself and He speaks from within when we are silent. Silence is a pre-requisite for meditation. It saves our inner energy, which we exhaust while talking. A person with a worldly mind makes much noise like an empty vessel whereas an

¹ Bhatt, Pandit Keshav. *Mekhala Pustak, Upayanam*, 1925, p.62.

illuminated mind works noiselessly and unshaken. A mind working silently generates new ideas. If our aim in life is spiritual evolution then practicing silence has to be accepted as a powerful means to achieve it, even if we are engrossed with the material world. A sure way of practicing silence is to become a good listener. Hence the scriptures have directed to keep the *Brahmchari* covered with a piece of cloth on all such occasion when he is asked to meditate deeply,

*i). Ma:sI Do>d TI Po>phI Cha:y -
Milk/Tea Served by the Maternal/ Paternal Aunts*

After completing the '*Abi:d*' ceremony both the aunts of the paternal and the maternal side start serving milk, called the '*Ma:sI Do>d*', prepared by the maternal aunt and the '*Po>phI Cha:y*', provided by the paternal aunt, to the guests who start pouring in. It is a social obligation for the two to help the host on the occasion. Besides, the in-laws of the host come forward to serve either fruit or sweets to the guests. The milk and tea served on the occasion should be specially prepared and must contain cashew nuts, cardamom, cinnamon, and almonds. It should be flavoured with a little saffron. If the tea/milk served, is not of a good quality, the ladies singing the folk-song pass satirical remarks on the hostess. Therefore, to avoid all this humiliation, she keeps a personal watch on the quality of the stuff. All these things are served to one and all without any discrimination

Now a days different eating stalls are set up with a variety of edibles. The guests can have things of their choice from these stalls. However, some families observe complete social reform and establish their own stalls on such occasions. As such, the '*Masi*' or the '*Pufi*' neither accept anything from the host nor have they to spend anything on such activities. But it does not affect their

right to give '*Abi:d*' to the boy at the '*Hawan Shala*'. Though some people consider such a reform as a good step for the society while others consider it the main reason for the disintegration of the families. Though nobody can deny the fact that maintaining the social traditions is as important as observing the rituals itself but without any pomp and show and well within one's economic means.

j). Post Mekhala: rituals

Again we return to the '*Hawan Shala*' where the priests are busy in reciting '*Sha:nti Pa:Th*' and completing the post *Mekhala* rituals. The guests come and after completing their ritualistic formalities in between these recitations, offer their '*Abi:d*' to the groom and leave the '*Hawan Shala*'. The main rituals completed are:-

1. *Trividicam* Includes the introduction of the Vedic knowledge etc., to the *Brahmchari*.
2. *Upakrama*: Paying of homage to the *Rishis*, twenty-one in number.
3. *Chatur Hotricam*: Paying salutations to *Brahma*, the creator of this universe.
4. *Apavargah* Paying thanks to *Rishis* and *Brahma*.
5. *Pravargya Vritam*: - The *Brahmchari* is taught the codes of conduct for the day-to-day rituals to be performed by him.
6. *Apavargay Pravargya* -----do-----
Vritam
7. *Arun Vritam*. *The pupil is taught the modes of deep penance in complete seclusion.*
8. *Apavargay Aruna Vritam*. : *The pupil is given the basic knowledge of day-to-day rituals.*
9. *Aupanishada Vritam*: *All the hosts and their spouses and the boy/s are called to pay their oblations to gods by offering a handful of barley to the Holy Fire, called family 'Athi Pho>I'.*