

TRADITIONS IN THE EATING HABITS OF KASHMIRI PANDIT'S

For centuries the directives of 'Shāstrās' have been followed, to a great extent, by Pandit's of Kashmir, the sacred land of Kashyap Rishī, from whom the valley got its name, originally 'Kashyap-Mar'. Pandit means a highly learned Brāhmin. Kashmiri Pandit's are 'Saraswatī' Brāhmins, descendants of Rshīs and Munīs, such as Ḍattātrya, Bhārḍwaj and Kashyap, and had their own script (Shārdā). Almost all are literate. Kashmir, a Seat of Learning, was also called Shārdā Pīth.

During the reign of Muslim Rulers and after the conversion of most of the Brāhmins to Islām, many changes took place in the Brāhmin traditions and habits, which were inherited from earlier ascetic people of the Valley, but, to a good extent, these traditions do exist among Kashmiri Pandit's even now, inspite of modernization. The main object, of following the directives in regards to cooking, serving and eating of foods is hygiene. Total or partial fasting, 'Braj' as it is called, on certain days, in the form of a single meal for the day, or even a saltless single meal, or taking of limited quantity of fruits, some vegetables and milk only on that day, or having only one cereal meal in twenty-four hours, was a common practice before three or four decades. This is done even now by many 'Hinḍūs'.

Main traditional 'Dos & Do-Nots', are as under:-

1. Each person eats in a separate plate.
2. Eating of stale food is prohibited, and is to be avoided.
3. Putting 'Katōrīs' of vegetables etc. inside the eating plate ('Thālīs') is prohibited.
4. Water for drinking is always kept near the diner. In fact, before every main meal a little water is taken in the form of an 'Achman' with a prayer. Without the tumbler touching the lips, water is poured into the mouth from a little distance while drinking.
5. One cannot touch the unused food articles, or bowls containing the food, with the hand with which one is eating.
6. Fruits and green vegetables have to be thoroughly washed before being eaten. Even the knives

etc. have to be scrubbed before using these for dressing etc.

7. Food is eaten while sitting on floor, while eating plates etc. are placed on clay washed wet floor or on a clean sheet, preferably woolen.
8. Washing of hands and mouth, before and after eating any food, is a must.
9. One cannot leave the eating place before the plates ('Thālīs') etc. are removed and the place is cleaned.
10. Eating meals in good light, preferably after sunrise and before sunset, is a directive.
11. 'Fasts' ('Braj') on certain days of every week and every month and on certain days of a year, are recommended, for spiritual and physical welfare.
12. Talking during eating is thought unwise.
13. Short prayers, before and after taking main meals, are to be offered.
14. Before eating always some food is set apart, as a 'Vishnū Arpan', portion, to be used for serving an 'Atīthī' ie., an unannounced guest or a hungry person or an animal.
15. Use of aluminium utensils is not recommended. Brass or bronze or terracotta utensils are used for cooking. Bronze 'Thālīs' for eating food, and bronze cups for drinking tea, were common. To clean bronze it is scrubbed with ashes. For brassware wet clay is used for scrubbing and cleaning. Copper utensils are mainly used for 'Pujā'. Silver tea-cups and tumblers etc. are used by aristocracy.
16. One can serve food only after he or she washes his or her hands. Any food touched by unclean hands cannot be served or eaten. Even food touched with the hand with which one has been eating cannot be served to other people.
17. One cannot transfer any portion of his food, which the person has been eating, to another person's plate.
18. Meat eating, and use of intoxicants, are 'Tāmsik' and are considered to retard spiritual growth and physical welfare.