

Food ways in the Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

Like other societies Kashmiri society was not a homogenous society. There were different sections of the society marked off from one another on the basis of their settlements in different eco-types of Kashmir with mutually different resource endowments. There were also differences on the basis of belief system and economic differentiation created by exploitative productive relations. While this heterogeneous character of the society is visible in every sphere of life, it is also markedly demonstrated in the food ways of the people. The foods varied from one eco-type to another eco-type, from one class to another class, from one religious community to another religious community, from one season to another season and from normal times to abnormal times.

Keywords: eco-types, class, seasons, cuisine, ethnic, crisis-foods

1. Introduction

Upto quite recent times a large part of Kashmir was *Khushki* i.e., irrigation facilities were not available to these areas. And there were some areas like mountain slopes which were not fit for irrigated crops, therefore, we find the cultivated land of Kashmir divided into two broad categories *Abi* and *Khushki*. *Abi* was that land which could be easily irrigated by channelizing the streams, rivers and springs by constructing canals. As a result the *abi* land produced rice in contrast to *Khushki* land which produced only rain-fed crops. Thus we have two types of staple foods. Rice became the staple crop of those areas which possessed *abi* land. And those areas which had only *khushki* land, their staple food became the rain-fed crops namely maize, wheat, barley, etc. There was also a sizable number of people living in and around Dal and Wular lakes who depended on the wild products of the lake namely *Singhara*. Second important thing noticeable from the different varieties of sources is that the food varied from class to class. While the upper classes, though numerically minuscule, lived a luxury life enjoying all available sumptuous foods even if it would mean importing them, the masses lived at subsistence level, having not even rice for the full year. Third important fact is that the culinary varied between the religious communities. Though the staple food of both the Muslims and non-Muslims was *batta* (rice) and *saag* (*knoll-khol*), and each of them relished carnivorous food, the preparation of their dishes was markedly different. Besides, the religious communities were also divided on the abhorrence of foods. While the Muslims would take beef, fowl, some vegetables and spices, these were anathema to Pandits. Fourthly, the foods also varied from season to season. For example, the common masses used to take *batta* for about 4-5 months after harvest, but when the stock exhausted (generally from June-July onwards) they lived on rain-fed crops, vegetables and fruits. Similarly in the summer season the people used to take green vegetables but during the winter months they depended on dried vegetable, pulses, pickles because during these months land remained dormant and the experience had taught the people to refrain from

eating green vegetables during the chilly season which is why the *knoll-khol* which could survive the severe winter was also uprooted before the onset of winter. Moreover the food varied between normal and abnormal times. During the abnormal times namely famines and food shortages people used to live on sub-standard foods like buck wheat (*trombeh*), amaranthus (*ganhar*), kangni-shoel (*stariatalica*), chena (*pingah*), water-nuts, nymphaea lotus, fruits, vegetable and wild herbs.

1.1 Variety of Eco-types and Variety of Foods

Broadly speaking people of Kashmir lived in three eco-types namely *Kandi* areas, *Wadur* areas and *Pather* areas. *Kandi* areas are those areas which were situated near the mountains with a sloppy relief. With regard to raising of staple food crop of Kashmir namely rice these areas had two locational disadvantages. They were bereft of having any irrigation facility. Therefore the inhabitants had no other alternative but to raise rain-fed crops and to depend on them for their sustenance. Initially wheat, barley, lentil, buckwheat (*trombeh*), amaranthus (*ganhar*), kangni (*stariatalica*) *shol*, chena (*pingeh*)^[1] and many such crops were grown in these areas. However when maize was introduced in the late 18th century^[2], it became the staple crop of these areas, and with this the staple food as well^[3]. Maize food was prepared in different ways. One was what was known as *makia-watt*^[4]. After partially milling the maize it was boiled to become like paste. The *wat* was usually taken with churned curd^[5]. It was a substitute for rice meal. Maize Bread and milled baked maize called *satu* were other forms of maize food which subsisted these people along with tea. It may however be clarified that besides the *kandi* areas a sizeable low level land was also under rain fed crops till fifties of the twentieth century due to inadequate networking of irrigation canals. It is, therefore, not surprising that the north Kashmir was a deficit area so far as the staple food (rice) is concerned. This is not all. We are told by the people of Pargana *Phak* (Srinagar) and the peasants of *Malur* (Srinagar) and *Padgampur* (near *Awantipur*) that until 50s of the twentieth

century their staple food consisted of rain fed crops (mainly maize) for want of irrigation facilities. It was only after 1950 that the irrigation projects were taken on priority basis and a number of canals were built like the *Sumbal Canal* (popular as Shiekh Kuhl as it was constructed by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in the *Sonawari* Division) and *Shalteng Canal* (popular as Bakshi Kuhl as Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was the man behind its construction in the *pargana Phak*) and many other irrigation schemes^[6]. As a result of these efforts land under cultivation increased enormously. In 1976-77, 3.8 lakh ht. were irrigated as against 2.36 lakh ht. in 1950^[7]. It was because of these steps taken by the State Govt. that the consumption of superior food crops like rice in the above mentioned areas became a reality.

A section of people lived in the water bodies which abounded in Kashmir. Water-nuts had been the principal article of food of these people. The *Sinhara* or water-nut grew abundantly in the different lakes in the area around the capital-Srinagar, and especially in the *Wular Lake*^[8]. Floating gardens^[9] known as *radh* in local nomenclature and *Demb* lands were excellent in fertility. Great varieties of crops were cultivated in shallow portion of the lake called *Demb*. Potatoes, onions, white-beans, egg-plants, radishes, turnips, cucumbers and rapeseed flourished on this soil^[10]. The long stem of *Bumbh* was a nourishing vegetable^[11] and *Sharbat* was provided by its white flower^[12]. The stem of the *Nymphaea Lotus (nadru)*^[13] was another article of food for these people to sustain on besides deriving income from them to purchase the staple food of Kashmir (rice) and other necessities. It was acquired in the autumn of the year. It was being boiled for long. The people living in Dal Lake were dependent on it for nearly three-quarters of the year as Moorcraft put it in these words:

Nymphaea Lotus ...supports, perhaps, five thousand persons in the city for nearly eight months.

The people dwelling around the lakes especially Wular survived upon Sigharas (water-nuts) for nearly 2/5 part of the year. Again to quote Moorcraft:^[14]

Another principal article of the food of the common people, the Sinhara or water-nut, grows abundantly in the different lakes in the vicinity of the capital and especially in the Wular Lake... it constituted the almost only food of at least 30,000 persons for five months in the year.

The boatmen and those who dwell near the streams and the lakes also used fish as their food. Although fish formed an important item of the food of all people living in Kashmir but these people depended for a considerable part of their food on fish.

However, the largest segment of Kashmir population lived in the floor of the valley called rice bowl^[15]. It mainly consisted of south Kashmir and the areas lying on the two banks of Jhelum^[16]. Throughout its course river Jhelum was joined by a number of tributaries on both sides. These tributaries (*vishav, rembaiara, romshi, dudganga, sukhnag, ferozpora* and *ningl*)^[17] added to the strength of the Jhelum and provided irrigation facilities to their bordering areas. Rice was and is the main crop cultivated in the valley floor, during *Kharif* season. In times of deficiency of irrigation, the peasant allowed the land to remain lea as they knew that their labour would not be repaid if they sowed other crops^[18] (cotton,

barley, mash and maize).^[19] Since the staple crop of these areas was rice therefore it constituted the staple crop of Kashmir. It may however, be mentioned that these low lying areas were interspersed by long stretches of *karewa* land which grew rain-fed crops. These crops were exchanged for rice and in this way supplemented each other's needs.

1.2 Cuisine and Class

Throughout its history there was a microscopic minority of rich on one hand and the mass of poor population on the other. The rich consisted of land-lords cum bureaucrats who appropriated half of the produce of the land;^[20] and the remaining half was distributed among the toiling masses. Therefore the rich lived a luxurious life and the poor were not more than food gatherers. The rich never experienced the food crisis instead they were benefited by the food shortages as the prices sky-rocketed and the landlords were the beneficiaries being the possessors of huge stocks of grain though for earning the goodwill of people, a small quantity was given away as alms too. Even the *Ulema* and *sufis* were far more fond of rich dishes than the common people. The *ulama* were well known for their gluttony and gigantic appetite of tasteful dishes^[21] while as the kitchens of the *sufis* represent the index of almost all the rich dishes of the period. The feasts arranged by the upper classes were predominately characterized by an extreme variety of dishes^[22] like meat dishes, butter, ghee, milk and beverages (*sharbat*), sweet-meats (*halwa-hai-ranga-rang*), *harisa* (a special meat preparation which was generally prepared during the winter and taken as breakfast with bread) and varieties of bread^[23]. On the contrary the common people suffered for want of a morsel of food for major part of the year as they were robbed of their produce. They took frugal meals, simply to keep their body and soul together in keeping with their economic position. The common people, in times of famines or because of their scarcity of food, used to adopt slightly different method of cooking rice. In this method of cooking rice the quantity of water used was more than in the usual "*bhatta*" preparation and was thoroughly cooked but its all water was not allowed to get absorbed. It was known as "*wugra*". It was taken warm with a slight mixture of salt or vegetables. The main characteristic of this cooking of rice is that it yields more food than "*bhatta*" and its small quantity as compared to "*bhatta*" satisfies the hunger of a man, thus its use corresponds to the days of famine or scarcity of food of the poor^[24]. Besides rice gruel, they lived on wild fruits and other sub-standard kind of diet and sometimes sold their property in lieu of paltry quantity of food^[25]. Also the vegetables proved to be an important source of livelihood to the common masses as every villager has his small garden plot where he raised a wealth of food and more importantly it was not liable to taxes. The people used these vegetables in two ways i.e., fresh and dried (the vegetables were sun-dried and kept for winters). Among them knoll-kohl was, what Lawrence calls, the national vegetable^[26]. Its leaves were taken during the summer, while its roots were kept for winter usage. Apart from knoll-kohl, the other vegetables upon which the people depended during food crisis were turnip, tomatoes, egg-plant, potato, etc. During the perpetual food shortages they used to consume even the wild vegetables like *Van Vangan, Hapat Bazin, Kaneyat*, etc. The varieties of wild herbs consumed by common people were innumerable. These

were thistles, nettles, the wild chicory, the dandelion; in fact every plant which was not poisonous was cooked and even the stalk of the Walnut Catkin was not despised [27]. To such an extreme was the condition of the valley people pathetic that Lawrence remarked: [28]

When one hears of the Old Saints of Kashmir who lived on the wild wopal hakh (Dipsacus Inermus) and the herbs of the forest, one need not picture an emaciated ascetic for a man could live and live well on nature's products in Kashmir.

Similar was the condition of the urban artisans namely *shawlbafs* who constituted the bulk of *shahr* (city). On the one hand, they were highly taxed [29], and on the other they for a considerable period had to purchase the grain from the state on exorbitant rates as the grain dealers were not allowed to sell their grains unless the stock of the state exhausted [30]. Thus the urban artisan suffered on account of food crisis as was the case with the peasants. Once they failed to grapple with the crisis locally they became migratory; either they moved from village to village in search of comparatively relieved conditions or left the valley to become landless labourers in the plains of Punjab to feed their furnished families.

1.3 Ethnic Food

With regard to food-ways there were different religious communities having different food ways. Either the communities varied in the preparation of food or they differed in taking some foods. For example, although almost all Kashmiri Brahmins are meat eaters, their preparation of meat dishes does not resemble with the meat dishes of the Muslims. Perhaps nothing explains the acme of Pandit community's separative mentality more than their rejection of the dishes introduced by the Muslims from Persia and Central Asia. Though the Kashmiri Pandits were meat eaters, curiously enough, they did not adopt the sumptuous dishes introduced by the Muslims. They strictly adhered to their own method of cookery – the attitude, which they maintain down to our own times. Thus, while the Kashmiri Muslims prepare some special dishes on weddings and other festive occasions, nothing of that sort is cooked by the Hindus. Their meat dishes like *kaliya*, *mach* and *tsuk tsarwan* have no comparison with the exemplary tasty curries as *kabab*, *rista*, *roganjosh*, *methi maz*, *qurma*, *tabaq*, *yakhni*, etc., collectively called Kashmiri *wazawan*. As a matter of fact, the contemporary *Brahmana* leadership vehemently opposed taking the dishes introduced by the Muslims, believing that the adoption of any aspect of Muslim culture would initiate the process of conversion to Islam [31]. It is no wonder, then, that even in the preparation of the common vegetable dish viz., *hak* (knoll-kohl), the pattern of cooking varied between the two communities, the preparation of the Pandits being proverbial for being little spicy and, therefore, tasteless. The Hindus used only turmeric, asafetida, oil and salt in the preparation of curries. No other spice, nor garlic and onion were used [32]. The Muslims had no abhorrence for any spice or vegetable except asafetida, which was never used [33]. The Pandits also did not eat tame fowls and tame ducks and their eggs. Red tomatoes, red fleshed Kabuli, vegetable marrow, red carrots, red beans and red apples were an abomination to the Kashmiri Pandits [34]. The Muslims had no such taboo.

However, both among the Muslims as well as the Hindus there were groups of people who held different views on eating food – different from the mainstream groups. For example the Muslim Rishis did not eat meat. They were strict vegetarians – so strict that they did not even cook green vegetables or walk on green grass believing that it is endeared with life which should not be killed. Shaikh Nur ad-Din (1379-1442) lived on wild vegetables for which he was criticized by Muhammad Hamadani's close disciples (the Sayyids), as they called it the Hindu way of life [35]. Similarly among the Brahmins there was also a section which abhorred meat eating. They also did not eat eggs. Even taking any sort of poultry into the kitchen was prohibited in the orthodox families. Alberuni also mentions that eggs of all kinds and tame poultry were forbidden as articles of food in North-Western India [36].

1.4 Seasons and Foods

Foods also varied from season to season for two main reasons. First, because of climatic constraints Kashmir was not producing green vegetables for five to six months. As such they invented the system of drying the vegetables grown by them during the summer season. The main vegetables which were grown and eaten during summer season are knoll-kohl (*hak*), potato (*aalu*), tomato (*rungawan*), snake gourds (*kasher ul*), pumpkin (*punjaib ul*), bottle gourd (*medeeni ul*), egg-plant (*wangan*), radish (*mej*), turnip (*gogej*), carrot (*gazer*), onion (*gundeh*), leek (*pran*), garlic (*ruhan*), Chili (*mirtzwangan*) and cucumber (*lar*). Vegetables like knoll-kohl, tomatoes and pumpkin were cut into slices and then dried while as turnip, carrots and radish were preserved by keeping them in ditches (*kho*) dug in the courtyards to cater to the needs of the chilly months of winter. Also the experience had taught the people to refrain from eating green vegetables during the chilly season which is why the knoll-kohl which could survive the severe winter was also uprooted before the onset of winter. Pickles were also made from vegetables like *knoll-khol*, carrots, turnip and garlic [37].

Vegetables gathered wild included *wopal hak* [38] (*Pipsacus inermis*), *gula*, *kritz* (*Pioscorea*), *numer*, *lisa*, *abuj* (*rumex*), *sutsal* (*mulva rotundifolia*), *hund* (*cichorium intybus*), *pombhak* (*rheum*), *hadder* (*agaricus*) and *kanaghehei* (*morel*). [39] These wild potherbs grew extensively on uncultivated land, pastures and orchards in the spring and greatly relieved the common populace from the general scarcity in the early spring. They were not only cooked during the time of their availability but also dried and preserved for the future. Most of these potherbs were attributed with medicinal values [40]. A good number of vegetables like *bumb* (*nymphaea stellata*) and *nadru* (*nelumbium sp*) were procured from the water bodies like lakes and numbels (swamps) [41].

Fish were also dried as well as baked for consumption during winter. It was in this way that people were able to sustain themselves in the times when neither modern means of communication were available nor people had the purchasing power to buy the cost-prohibitive imports. With regard to staple food also there was no uniformity throughout the year. The common peasantry lived on staple crop and staple food mainly for six months and for the rest six months they lived on sub-standard foods like buck-wheat (*trombeh*), amaranthus (*ganhar*), *kangni-shoel* (*stariatalica*), *chena*

(*pingeh*), water-nuts, nymphaea lotus, fruits, vegetables (both green and dried) and wild herbs because they were robbed of their produce by the state and other revenue grantees.

1.5 Normal and Crisis Foods

The term "crisis foods" has been used on purpose because if we use the often quoted term 'famine foods' it would convey the foods the people were forced to live on because of the food shortage caused by crop failure. Indeed, the shortage of food was a routine affair in Kashmir save a minuscule population comprising the jagirdars, chakdars, madadi maash/dharmarth holders, rich peasantry and a small class of traders and karkhandars. In the circumstances when there was only one-crop- a year economy, the land holdings were small, per unit productivity was dismal, rack renting was a routine state policy and grain was the main medium of exchange with the peasant mass, it is no wonder to see the peasants exhausting their stock of food just after five or six months, leaving them to battle for survival for the rest of six months till the new crop was harvested. It is in this backdrop that we can understand the significance of the two terms, *aapei kal* and *dreag* used by the Kashmiris for two different types of food shortages. *Aapei Kal* means food shortages which the people invariably faced every year and had learnt to survive the crisis by living on sub-standard foods, and occasionally exchanging their little properties for purchasing rice and cereals from the grain dealers. *Dreag*, on the contrary, signifies acute shortage of food on account of crop failure followed by natural calamities such as floods, untimely snowfall, hail storm or cold winds during the ripening process of rice. *Dreag* caused havoc leading to crescendo of death.

Rice: The paddy (in the husk called *dhane*) was the main staple food of the Valley people. It generally grew on the fertile lands adjoining to the river *Vatista*. It was and is the main crop cultivated in the valley floor, during *Kharif* season. The heaviest rice crops were obtained on lands near the deltas of the streams which had sufficient slope to allow of rapid drainage^[42]. Due to the lack of proper irrigation system land couldn't be cultivated on the slope areas (*kandi*-hilly areas & *wudars*-karewas). Thus resulting in less production which was never sufficient to feed the population for the whole year except small segments of society who were economically well-off. *Gurez* was the only exception where rice was not being cultivated, mainly because of steep slope and low temperature^[43].

Maize (Makai): Maize was and is the second important crop of the region in terms of acreage under its cultivation. Unlike rice, maize was grown in all the *tehsils* of the valley. The crop is generally grown on dry land. On the slopes, the upper lands, and all those areas in mountains where some amount of cultivation was possible, maize and pulses were grown. Besides the shepherds, cowherds and *gujjars*, it was consumed by large section of population in regions where little paddy was grown. Although maize was second important crop in the valley, it was first ranking crop in the *tehsils* of *Kernah*, *Uri*, *Baramula*, *Kangan*, *Handwara* and *Kupwara*.

Wheat (Kanak): Wheat was grown as Rabi crop in the region. It was sown in October and harvested in June, thus taking a long maturity period of 7 to 8 months. Since the crop took a pretty long time to mature and was not esteemed as a food item^[44] by the rice eating Kashmiris, so it occupied a meager proportion of the gross cropped area in the whole region. Just as the grain of wheat was looked down upon as a food by the Kashmiris so too, the valuable straw of these cereals was neglected as a cattle food^[45]. Its cultivation in Kashmir was mostly confined to *Dachanpora* and *Khaurpora Parganas*^[46].

Barley: The barley commonly grown in the valley was not of a good quality and no pains were taken in its cultivation. It was grown throughout the valley on *barani* lands which were dependent on rain for moisture. In the higher villages at an elevation of 7000 ft., a peculiar kind of barley known as *grim* or *Tibet* barley was grown and was an important food staple among the mountain people^[47].

Waternuts (Singharas): This crop grew abundantly in the different lakes and especially in the Wular Lake^[48]. The poor peasants living near the Wular Lake or on its banks subsisted on Singharas. Hassan says^[49]:

The poor people of Bandipora, Hajan and Sopore, rather the entire population of lower region below these subsisted on boiled Singharas.

Pulses: Pulses were grown both in Rabi and Kharif season in the Valley. Among the Kharif Pulses *Mong* (Greengram), *Moth* and *Rajmash* were noteworthy. Important Rabi Pulses included *Matar* (Peas), *Masure* (Lentil), *Bagleh* (Bean) and *Chana* (Gram). Pulses were grown on irrigated as well as un-irrigated fields.

Mong: *Mong* was a Kharief crop and was entirely dependent on rain. The *banjar* lands produced large quantities of this crop^[50]. No manure or irrigation was required or given.

Moth (Phaselusa Contifolous): Among pulses it was considered an inferior one and was not liked as food for human but important food for sheep or cattle in winter^[51].

Mash (Phaseolus Rovburghu): Its cultivation was extensively carried out in hilly areas. Its two Varieties were black and green. Comparatively it had less taste than *mong*^[52].

Rajmash: It was cultivated in all most in every pargana and was of different varieties- Peas and beans were cultivated occasionally^[53].

1.6 Vegetables

Vegetables were of great importance in Kashmir and every villager had his small garden plot (called as *Wari*) where he raised a wealth of food. Vegetables were raised by the farmers for their family consumption. The vegetables in regular consumption were^[54]; Knoll-Khol (*Krem Hakh* - national vegetable in the valley^[55]). Its green variety was and is common even now. Lawrence had given out seeds of the purple variety and the villagers appreciate the plant^[56],

Turnips (*Gogji* - second in importance after knoll-khol and was cultivated extensively. Its root was cut into slices and dried for the winter usage ^[57]. Pumpkins (*Al*), Radish (*Mujeh*), Brinjal (*Wangun*), Lettuces, Spinach (*Palak*), etc.

The other varieties of vegetables grown in the region were: *Allu* (Potato – the soil of the valley was well drained friable and loamy and every condition requisite to successful potato cultivation was present ^[58]), *Ruwangan* (Tomato - a popular vegetable, due to shortage of food material in winter, was cut into rings & dried and kept for winter use ^[59]), *Hakh* (greens), *Gandeh* (Onion), *Lar* (Cucumber), *Gazre* (Carrot), *Bandehghobi* (Cabbage), *Phoolgoobhi* (Cauliflower) Moreover, the low temperature conditions during winter didn't favour cultivation of Vegetables.

Dal Lake Vegetable Production:- Rapeseed, melons, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, white-beans, egg-plants, radishes, turnips, and many more flourished on the floating gardens and demb ^[60]. *Mirbahri* people amidst *Dal Lake* depended a lot upon a food, free of labour called *Singharas* (Water-nuts). Lilly-Nut yielded a sweet nut and a warm savoury vegetable in its leaf stem while as Pits (*Puch*) provided a dainty food known as the Lake sweet-meet which was made from a powder collected from the young rushes (*Puch*) in the spring and was boiled into the consistency of cheese. Its roots were also eaten.

1.7 Substitute foods during food crisis

As the valley was prone to famines and shortage of food was a permanent feature hitting hard the common masses, the people were forced to eat all those domesticated and wild grown foods which otherwise didn't constitute their normal diet. Following were the cereals, vegetables and fruits which sustained the people during food shortages and famines:

Cereals: The first thing the people used to do in times of famines or scarcity of food was to adopt a slightly different method of cooking rice ^[61]. They used more water in the preparation of rice than the usual preparation and also its water was not allowed to get absorbed fully. It was known as “*wugra*”. It was taken warm with a slight mixture of salt or vegetables. The main characteristic of this cooking of rice is that it yields more food than “*bhatta*” and its small quantity as compared to “*bhatta*” satisfies the hunger of a man ^[62]. The people also used the grinded rice (*satu*) with tea. The value of wheat and maize as subsidiary foods cannot be ignored. Their flour was used to provide a temporary power to challenge the famines caused by the failure of paddy crops or in times of scarcity of rice. The wheat flour was mainly used for making bread ^[63] while maize was consumed in a boiled form known as *watt* ^[64].

Vegetables: Besides the normal usage, vegetables proved an important source of livelihood to the pauperized masses during the perpetual food shortages as every villager has his small garden plot where he raised a wealth of food and more importantly it was not liable to taxes. The people used these vegetables in two ways i.e., fresh and dried (the vegetables were sun-dried and kept for winters). Among them knoll-khol was, what Lawrence calls, the national vegetable ^[65]. Its leaves were taken during the summer, while its roots were kept for winter usage. Apart from knoll-khol, the other vegetables upon which the people depended during food

crisis were turnip, tomatoes, egg-plant, potato, etc. Besides domestic the people consumed wild vegetables also like *Van Vangan*, *Hapat Bazin*, *Kaneyat*, etc.

Wild Herbs: The varieties of wild herbs consumed by Kashmiri people were innumerable. These were; Thistles, Nettles, The Wild Chicory, The Dandelion; in fact every plant which was not poisonous was cooked and even the stalk of the Walnut Catkin was not despised ^[66]. To such an extreme was the condition of the valley people pathetic that Lawrence remarked; ^[67]

“When one hears of the Old Saints of Kashmir who lived on the wild wopal hakh (Dipsacus Inermus) and the herbs of the forest, one need not picture an emaciated ascetic for a man could live and live well on nature's products in Kashmir.”

Buck Wheat (*Trombeh*): It was grown in hilly tracts and depended very little on irrigation. It was of two varieties; one was called *muth* (sweet), *trombeh* and another *chuk* (bitter) *trombeh* (white or pinkish in colour) ^[68]. The latter was often grown as a substitute for rice in areas where water was scarce. It was mostly consumed in the form of porridge by the people inhabiting *Kandi Illakas* (Hilly Areas) ^[69].

Amaranthus (*Ganhar*): it was grown in cotton fields and also in the maize growing plots. It needed no irrigation or manure, with timely rains large out turn was harvested. The grain was first parched, grounded and then was eaten with milk or water ^[70].

Kangni (Stariaitalica) Shol: During the years, when adequate amount of water was not available most of lands were sown with *Kangni*. A good harvest of it needed two to four ploughings and careful weeding ^[71]. It was of two varieties ^[72] (one small and the other big), small one was generally consumed by the peasants while as the big one was used for cattle feeding. *Kangni* was husked like Rice but the people of Kashmir didn't make much use of it because of its heating properties ^[73].

Chena (*Pingeh*): Its appearance was very much like rice but was grown in dry land. It hardly received any attention and was graded as “cheap food stuff.” It was a troublesome grain, as it was very hard and took long time to cook ^[74].

Water-Nuts: It had been the principal article of the food of the common people. The *Sinhara* or water-nut grew abundantly in the different lakes in the area around the capital-Srinagar, and especially in the *Wular Lake*, which yielded on average from ninety six to hundred and twenty thousand ass-loads a year ^[75]. After being extracted from the shell the nuts were eaten, raw, boiled, roasted, fried, or dressed in various ways, after being reduced to flour. But because of perpetual food shortages the people depended on it for at least half a year. In this Moorcraft writes;

“It constitutes the almost only food of at least thirty thousand persons for five months in the year” ^[76].

Nymphaea Lotus: The stem of the *Nymphaea Lotus* was another article of food, derived from the lakes, for the cultivators of the Dal Lake – the *Mirbahri* people, as they are

called in Kashmir. The people acquired it in the autumn of the year. It was being boiled for long. The people living in Dal Lake were dependent on it for nearly three-quarters of the year as Moorcraft put it in these words;

“Nymphaea Lotus ...supports, perhaps, five thousand persons in the city for nearly eight months [77].”

Fruits:- Kashmir has been famous for fruits from times immemorial. As per Lawrence [78],

“Kashmir is a country of fruits and perhaps no country has greater facilities for horticulture as the indigenous apple... strawberry can be obtained without difficulty in most parts of the Valley.”

A large variety of fruits were grown in the Valley. Important fruits of the region were Apple, Apricot, Almond, Cherry, Grapes, Mulberry, Melon, Peach, Pears, Plum, Pomegranate, Strawberry, Watermelon and Walnut. The fruits were of great help to the people as a food during summer [79] and they came in a pleasant and changing succession. Dried vegetables and dried fruits formed an important article of diet for the people during winters [80]. A few are described as under:

Mulberry was the first fruit in summer to attract the villagers, cattle, ponies, and dogs that all used to munch the sweet black or white fruit [81]. A Kashmiri proverb goes:

Tul Aaw Draag Draaw

[With the appearance of mulberry, famine disappeared].

Next in terms of importance was apricot, which were eaten quickly or stored away for the winters. It also was used as an oil source [82]. Towards the end of summer come the apples, pears and walnuts. The wild apple and pear were obtained with ease from the forests, on the slope of the hills surrounding the valley and the Kashmiris have for generations brought down the wild stock from the hills and planted it in orchards. The most popular variety of apple was as it is *Ambri* or *Ambri* which has a large red and white sweet fruit ripening in October and keeping its condition good for a long time [83]. About the beginning of September the people collected the wild apples and *trel* apples. These were being pierced into small pieces and half dried in the sun for winter usage.

2. Conclusion

Thus we find that the variation among the foods in the society which were marked off from one another on the basis of their settlements in different eco-types, the restrictions imposed by the belief systems not to consume every eatable and the economic differentiation among the people also was a determining factor to go for different foods. The different seasons and the shortage of food were other reasons for the prevalence of different food ways.

3. References

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- Ibid, 150-51.
- Ibid, Saqi, op. cit. 282-83, 90.
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- It is common to hear in the villages of Kashmir that, this piece of land has been sold or purchased in lieu of one trakh of rice or one seer of tea. And the like.
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