

Character of Kashmiris

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Abstract:

The Character of Kashmiris is a very different in nature. Different foreign scholars from different areas of the world has written on the Character of Kashmiris. Among them Walter Lawrence has written in detail about the Character of Kashmiris. After giving information about the different aspects of Kashmiris. He says that in his personal, social and cultural aspects of life the Kashmiri is at his best.

Keywords: Lawrence, Anomalies, Gardener, Horticulture, Character

The Most difficult thing for an outsider is to understand the contradictions one often encounters in Kashmiri behaviour. Quite often the assessments made by them prove completely wrong and they feel frustrated. A British author in his book on Kashmiris had remarked that the most difficult thing for an outsider was to know what is really in the heart of a Kashmiri. According to him a Kashmiri never opens his heart to an outsider. He mistrusts all foreigners who have been his oppressors for centuries. According to him a kind word and a joke would get the best out of a Kashmiri. A part from the anomalies in the behaviour of a Kashmiri, the valley itself is full of contradictions in many ways. Perhaps no foreigner had greater opportunities of studying the character of the people of Kashmir than the Late Sir Walter Lawrence, who was for years the Settlement Commissioner of the State and in that exceptionally advantageous capacity amassed highly useful information, which he utilized later in his famous and authoritative work, called The Valley of Kashmir. In this book he deals at great length with the character of Kashmiris.

Sir Walter H Lawrence writes that it is not reasonable to look for virtues among an oppressed people, nor it is fair to descant on their vices. When one has been for some years living in the villages, and seeing the Kashmiris as they are, one cannot help feeling pity for their lot and being a little blind to their faults. I would add, however, that many of the opinions regarding the Kashmiris are based on observations of the Srinagar people and the boatmen and that the principle ex uno disce omens is often at the bottom of the wholesale condemnation of the people of the valley. "The writer then proceeds as follows, "The Kashmiri can turn his hand to anything. He is an excellent cultivator. He is a good gardener and has a considerable knowledge of horticulture. He can weave excellent woollen cloth and can make first-rate baskets. He can build himself a house, can make his own sandals and makes his own ropes. There is scarcely a thing which he cannot do and he understands profits and loss, and does not often make a bad

bargain. In his home life the Kashmiri cultivator is at his best. He is kind to his wife and children and one rarely hears of divorce or immorality among the villagers. A woman who has behaved badly against her. The husband sometimes chastises his wife and the men talk somewhat boastfully of the necessity for maintaining discipline in their houses. But as a matter of fact the wife, both in Musalman and Hindu houses is all powerful and I believe that as a rule the Kashmiri lives in awe of his consort. The Kashmiri is a real helpmate and joint interests give rise to a camaraderie between man and wife which is very healthy. "He also writes that, "It is difficult to describe a people's character. I would, however, add that the Kashmiris possess an individuality and national character which will cling to them wherever they go. I have seen men who have returned to Kashmir, whose ancestors left the country two or three generations ago. Their dress was changed and their own country, its food, its water and its dress and though oppression has driven them out of the valley many have come back and all are loath to leave. The Kashmiri proverb, which means that a bird is content when it is on its own branch is often quoted by a Kashmiri when advantages of service in the Punjab are pointed out to him. Finally, though the character of Kashmiris leaves much to be desired, I think that it is to their credit that it is not worse, considering the few chances they have had for becoming truthful, manly and self-respecting. The word izzat of often on their lips and they deplore the fact that they have no honour in the eyes of their rulers or of their fellows. A man who can be beaten and robbed by one with a vestige of authority soon ceases to respect himself and his fellowmen and it is useless to look for the virtues of a free people among the Kashmiris and unfair to twit them with the absence of such virtues. The Kashmiri is what his rulers have made him, but I believe and hope that two generations of a just and strong rule will transform him into a useful intelligent and fairly honest man."

It is more than seventy five years since Sir Walter Lawrence depicted the character of the Kashmiris in his book Valley of Kashmir which got published in 1895 and from which I have made some extracts the views expressed by Sir Walter Lawrence that the years have passed, since he wrote an appreciable improvement in the character of the Kashmiris. Though it is perfectly true that nothing changes so slowly as a people's character. From 1586 to 1947 the people of Kashmir adopted themselves in the autocratic rule of different dynasties. Like Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and Dogra's. It is also a matter of concern that people from Srinagar themselves invited the rulers of different dynasties to invade and occupy Kashmir. They adopted themselves in different political conditions of different autocratic dynasties. it is said that Kashmiris are out of fraying pain into fire from 1586 onward. From 1931 onwards they made their courage and raised their ugly head against the autocratic Dogra rule under the leadership of tallest personality of Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.

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