

## KASHMIRI BANDHS AND THEIR BANDH PATHER: THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND LEGACY OF KASHMIR

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### ABSTRACT

*A group of fifteen or twenty people performing a Jashan dance is usually called as Band Pather (Traditional Theatre of Kashmir) in Kashmiri language. There are no heavy musical instruments used. All the performers in the dance put their hands on the waist of their co-dancers and together move backward and forward with the light rhythm of the beating of the musical instruments. Seeing this dance form, it seems that it is directly interacting with the audience since it is all about conveying the tales from the political views to social aspects. The language used in the Bhand Jashan dance is not completely Kashmiri, but the combination of Hindi, Persian, Urdu and Punjabi depending on the subject of the dance chosen.*

**Keywords:** Jashan, Bandh Pather, Theatre, Dancers, Instruments.

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## Introduction

The story of human civilization stands witness to the fact that humans from the times immemorial have developed certain practices to amuse themselves on certain occasions. On these special occasions, people amid complex social tensions used to entertain and amuse to provide color and comfort to their monotonous and dull lives. These occasions are generally termed in human vocabulary as festivals or fairs. Apart from serving as a traditional form of amusement these festivities and fairs also represent the social setup of a community, thereby serving as an important source of knowledge about the past. According to Hellowell, “I have no reservation on acknowledging that a huge mass of invaluable source material that would help the historian in redefining the history of people is still undiscovered and waiting eagerly serious scholarship that would aim at interacting with this rich primary source of history”. The tradition and the history of the Bhand Jashan Dance is said to be performed for many generations. It is actually said to be centuries old that has an aura, to enhance the charm of the Kashmir region. The dance plays an important part of the Kashmir life and culture. Bhand Jashan dance is the famous fold dance of the Kashmir. It is known as the ‘festival of

clowns’ that also has a cultural legacy of 200-300 years old genre of Kashmir’s folk theatre. The dance is the combination of the play and dance in a satirical style. The dance conveys the expression through various parodies made out of social situations. This dance is normally performed in the village squares or in a wider arena in front of a huge audience. The dance is performed by the group of fifteen to twenty people, wearing traditional styled attires. The dance is accompanied by the classical musical instrument like “Surnai” – it is the Kashmiri version of the Indian “Shehnai” along with Peshrao, Dhol and Nagara. Apart from other things these fairs and festivals have resulted in social groupings and humans and on these basis are formed and reformed various local cultures and traditions with which they came to be identified with. The sub-grouping and more practice of certain culture began to serve the dual purpose in the society; on the one hand it became a permanent occupation of that subgroup and on the other hand it became an amusement for the rest. This interplay between nature and human society and the increasing quest for the entertainment resulted in the development of many folklore round the globe, taking different forms in different regions and cultures. The cultural heritage of the India is elegant and rich. Each of its states has a



distinct cultural legacy, thus, the country takes pride as one of the graceful countries across the globe. Amongst various culture and traditions, various dance forms increase the charm and grace of the country. Seeing the performances of this exquisite dance form will take you to another world. Precisely speaking about folk dance, “Bhand Jashan dance” is something to look out for. It is considered to be the most aesthetically dance forms of Kashmir. Bhand Jashan dance is a simple yet very attractive dance form of Kashmir. The term “Bhand” carries the meaning of the clown and “Jashan” means celebration. On every occasion in Kashmir, the dance troupe performs this dance form. Whether it is a child birth, wedding ceremony, or any other festive event this dance form is performed at the fullest. Folk dances of India are charismatic. They are the backbone of the country and represent a cultural impression. You can witness the diversity and variety of this cultural legacy in the dance forms as well. Whether it is a wedding, childbirth, festive season no event goes without dance performances. These folk performances are accompanied with several musical instruments that gleefully and rhythmically mark the occasion.

### **Folk Dances of Kashmir:**

Kashmir is a paradise on earth. Renowned for its quiet lifestyle and natural beauty, the place is the heart throb for visitors across the globe. Kashmir is known for sharing its rich culture through various ways and one of them is through folk dance. The folk dances of the Kashmir encompass the entire populace, as though it is a festival itself. Some of the famous folk dances of Kashmir are Dumhal dance, Kud dance and Bhand Jashan dance. Nowadays the performance of folklores is regarded as the expression of the collective ancestral memory and this art has become the source of expression of very many social aspects of the respective societies. As is rightly said by Mazhar-ul-Islam, “The elements of folklore are social products, they are created, retained and transmitted by the folk and as such, folklore is the mirror of the people – not dead like a piece of glass, but a living one”. The moorings, years, and aspirations unvarnished in folklores of a society has become a common mode of expression. The unseen forces silently work to determine and shape the collective behaviors and pattern of society in inadvertently get expressed in various categories of the popular elements of folklore. Bandh Pather (traditional theatre of Kashmir), a popular folklore of Kashmir gives



multi-layered message in direct or metaphoric manner. As an age old collective experience, Bandh Pather not only refers to a particular psycho-social impulse of the given human society, it also carries in its fold the entire mental make-up of the society. Structurally, it involves a group of people, traditionally called Bandh (performance group), who take a tour to the neighboring villages and perform Pather (theatre) at different places in the villages they visit. The act they perform always carry a message mostly representing the hardships suffered by the society, unequal ruler-ruled relationship of the past, collective and cumulative response of people to the oppressive rulers, and the like. Since the act is a narrative of the local people, their sufferings and survival, its appeal attracts the locals en masse. People come out of their houses and gather around the place of performance not only for the entertainment, but for the recollection of the memories of their recent past. At the conclusion of the act people offer rice to the performers as a token of their effort.

#### **Costume for Bhand Jashan Dance:**

Since this dance form is the famous of all, the dance is performed by both women and men wearing the traditional attire. For this dance, women wear Kashmiri Pheran type Kurta and

Salwar to go along with it. They pin their head with a scarf on their head with a special jewelry of Kashmir. Moreover, there is a long cloth called “Dupatta” that is tied to their waist. Footwear remains the same as like men. In this dance form, men wear vibrant Pyjamas and Kurta with a colorful hat on their head as a headgear. There is this long stole kind of dupatta that is tied on their waist as well as head. Apart from this, men also carry a colorful handkerchief “Rumal” in their hands similar to like a “Bhangra” dance of Punjab state. If you are one of those who love to watch culture and folk dances than Kashmir is the right place to be in. Honed with different cultures and sightseeing, this is one state that brings you the delight in every form.

#### **Conclusion:**

As far as the significance of the study of folklore in general and Bandh Pather in particular is concerned, no cultural study of human society can be possible unless and until collective group behavior, unconscious state of mind, folk ways, and ritual profile of a society or a religious group is taken into cognizance. Without discovering these abstract psychosocial traits, which play a significant role in shaping the collective psyche of the society, no objective study of group behavior

or collective mentality of people can be ascertained. Therefore, in the postmodern era the use rites, rituals, festivals and other elements of folklore is of high importance because of it a researcher takes insights into the vibrant currents of human sub-conscious.

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