



**Family Migration
Stories in the Indus
Basin, Kashmir's
Customary Laws and a
Mysterious Murder**



Venus Upadhayaya

Part of a Special Series

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Gural Project

Part of a Special Series entitled 'From Kashmir to Haridwar' based on family history, anecdotes, cultural linkages and ancestry, by journalist Venus Upadhayaya.



Asst. Settlement Officer in the Bandobast Commissions set up Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh. The only picture of Sant Ram Dogra available with the family. This was taken during his work in the Kashmir valley somewhere between 1915-1918. Photo credit: Restored by Venus Upadhayaya.

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Gurnal Project

Venus Upadhayaya is a Senior Reporter, India and South Asia for The Epoch Times. She was born in Jammu and her ancestral home is in a village in the lower shivalik ranges that are also home to the Dogra/Pahadi culture. Her ancestral home has always fascinated her and this series is her journey to discover her roots. The Gurnal Project is her brainchild.



Bridge India is a progressive non-profit think tank dedicated to discourse on public policy. Given its diversity, everything about India, and its polar opposite, is true in unison. Bridge India seeks to highlight and celebrate this nuance, to help India-watchers understand India better.



A world visible from my village, Bhaddu. I started to trace history from here. Picture credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

The concept of nations is just a century old. Before that there was geography and kingdoms. The geography of northern India has always been about the Indus basin and the Himalayan ranges. Criss-crossing this geography, kingdoms and their territories kept transforming while the Hindu who incidentally got his name from the same river kept migrating within and without this massive fertile basin.

The Indus basin stands as a corridor and a witness to conquerors, warriors, seers, traders, invaders and everyone who dared to cross its swirling rivers or walk down its steppes into the civilisation, Bharat. Within this massive canvas of thousands of years of human history, I'm tracing the last few centuries of my forefather's chronicles and through their time I'm trying to discover for myself a very important aspect of Indian history.

The latter is important because in India the traditional way of historical narration was linked to ancestry. Folk ballads, classical performance arts and more importantly the cross-generational records with pandits in sacred towns which could form the background to any empirical anthropological study, were all based on ancestry.

For a journalist like me who's into geopolitics, I'm obviously drawn into discovering new frameworks to historical narration that bring my skills and background to fruition. I'm also drawn to discovering history from the perspective of people while it has been mostly talked about from the perspective of kings and warriors. All the while this work of nonfiction is supported with authoritative sources and hard facts.

Nagas, Brahmins and Greek Settlements

Whenever I asked my paternal grandfather, Amir Chand Spolia from where we have

come from, he would tell me the folklore of a girl born long-long ago in the lineage, along with a naga (serpent or mystical figures akin to dragons) unlike my mother who would tell me the story of the *Saptarishis* (Big Dipper constellation analogous with the seven brahmin lineages of ancient India) and how prince Druv, became the *Druv Tara* (North Pole star) of the constellation.

While grandfather told me the story in our veranda in the Shivalik foothills, my mother told me the story under the starry nights of downtown Jammu city. Their stories depict their respective heritage, and my childhood was lived between these two rich worlds. This story is confined to my discovery of my paternal heritage and probably in some way yours too.

Centuries ago – I don't know how many – my paternal ancestors lived in a settlement called Ploura, about 6km from today's Jammu. Our *kul devta's* (family principal deity) temple is still there on the bank of a massive pond. Ploura was a Greek settlement and according to Dogra historian Shiv Nirmohi who belongs to the same community as I, there was a Ploura in Sakala (today's Sialkot in Pakistan) and a Ploura in Jammu.

One can find a Palaura kalan in Sialkot on Google Maps, near to Jammu city's Suchetgarh international border. In fact there are more Plouras in India, including one at the banks of the Chilka lake in Odisha which was once a part of the Bay of Bengal sea. Sila Tripathi, a noted marine archaeologist from the National Institute of Oceanography told *Down To Earth* in 2021 that Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy (150 CE)

has described today's Palur in Odisha as an important port of the kingdom of Kalinga and referred to it as "Paloura."

According to Tripathi, Paloura on the Bay of Bengal was situated close to the "point of departure" located outside the southern tip of the lake at Kantiagarh, from where ships sailed directly in history for Southeast Asia.

In Greek, Ploura means the last end of a settlement whether that's on the sea or along a territorial route. Today the twin cities of Jammu and Sialkot that held the two "paloura" in history are just over 40km by the modern roadway on either side of the international border.

This means these two Plouras were likely gateways to two important converging pathways – Ploura from Sialkot would likely be the extreme end on some route to ancient Grand Trunk Road and Ploura from Jammu would likely be the extreme end of a settlement on the Mughal route.

According to Shiv Nirmohi first chariots and later tongas were regularly plying between Sialkot and Akhnor – the region where the Mughal road crossed the Chenab or the Aksini or what the Greeks called the Cantabra river. There's also a very important Buddhist site from the Kushan period (that followed Indo-Greeks) on the banks of Chenab in Akhnor.

Were the Plouras two milestones on this route? I leave it for historians to discover.

Somewhere in this historical context my ancestors, belonging to the "Spolia



Paloura shown by red pointer is in Jammu, India and Paloura Kalan is in Sialkot, Pakistan. The brown dotted line is the international border between India and Pakistan. Map adapted by: Venus Upadhyaya.

Upadhyaya" patrilineal, were living in Ploura. In Greek history, Spolia is widely known as the "spoils of war" and sometimes I have wondered if my paternal community was taken as prisoners of war by Greeks/Indo-greeks during some battle on the ancient Indian frontier. Because while Upadhyays are found around India, my community is the only Upadhyaya community in the wider Brahmin milieu that also has a Spolia that can be suffixed or prefixed!

According to William Ramsay, Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow, "Spolia" is one of the four common words used to denote booty taken in war by Romans and Greeks. It's actually a Latin word meaning "spoils".

"Spolia properly speaking, ought to be confined to armor and weapons, although ... [also] applied loosely to trophies such as armor and weapons, beaks of ships and like, which might be preserved and displayed," said Ramsay in an [article \(1\)](#).

Since Spolia had apotropaic spiritual value in Greek culture (2), and Upadhyaya in Sanskrit language means a teacher who informs and imparts knowledge, I also speculate if the "Spolia Upadhyaya" were the Brahmins employed by Indo-Greek rulers of the Ploura of the yore to keep a record of the spoils of war.

Kingdoms ruled by Greeks are known to have evolved "situational identities" (3) For example in Ptolemaic Egypt an individual could use a Greek name with Greek language and culture in one situation and an Egyptian name with Egyptian language and custom in another.

My patrilineal community likely has a similar “situational identity” from the history of Greek presence in the Indus basin. The context however is yet not ascertained. Today “Spolia Upadhaya ” are found widely only in the Jammu plains and steppes and all trace their origin to Ploura since their *kul-devta* resides there.

According to Pt. Raj Kumar Tripathi, an octogenarian from the traditional lineage record keepers of Haridwar, “Spolia” is a “title” just like “Sri is a title in Sri Upadhaya.” Moreover every traditional lineage record keeper I consulted in Haridwar referred Ploura as “Nagmani Ploura” and also told me that there’s an entire village of “Spolia Upadhayas” in Jammu called Seri Pandita.

Interesting a record keeper also told me that in their many-century-old records, geography is cognitively mapped according to how milestones are connected on civilisational routes – for example Jammu is known along with Kashmir, Kabul with Khandhar and similarly Nagmani with Ploura.

There’s a Nagbani township in Akhnoor which is now synonymous with a famous school. I have visited this region in childhood and clearly remember seeing many totems of nagas like the one visible behind the main shrine in my paternal kul devta’s temple.

It’s an historically proven fact that the Greeks were present in the Indus basin in what today spans Afghanistan, Punjab and Jammu and so were the Brahmin communities. There was certainly association between the



An unidentified ancient artifact in a Shiva temple in Paloura, Jammu. Behind it, through the iron grills the pond is visible. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

Greeks and the Brahmins. I don’t want to speculate the extent of this association and its anthropological impact on the culture of the various communities of the Indus basin. But it’s certain that Greek mythology’s mystical physiology has a number of elements comparable with Indian tantrism like serpents, light and ascension (4).

Serpents denote the intelligent, transmogrifying entities that appear to emerge from intangible dimensions from the three-dimensional or triloka concept of Hindu or Buddhist schools. In mythology they have been both benevolent and evil and form an important part of the world view of many civilisations.

For example, let's take the story of the two twin lakes of Mansar and Surinsar in today's Udhampur district of Jammu. My community considers these lakes sacred. A part of the ancient civilisational routes, the two lakes are linked to Mahabharata and Arjuna's son Babruvahana who entered the netherworld from Suringsar (today's Surinsar) and came out of Mansar with a mani or the power to revive his father.

Babruvahana meditated on a rock-enshrined today at Sheshnag temple in Mansar, the site of ritualism for my community. The rock has serpent totems. Not only the Hindu epic, Mahabharata has a strikingly similar parallel in Greek Iliad but the representation of Sheshnag and the wider naga pantheon has some parallel in Greek culture too.

Mansar Lake also has its own historically recorded Greek connection – its *mansariya tota* (5), or Alexandrine parakeet, got its name because Alexander of Macedonia is believed to have fetched it from here during his trip to the region.

Historians know that the ancient Achaemenid empire extended till the Indus basin.

Generational records from across many centuries, sometimes even over 10 generations old, are saved in such handwritten books by the Brahmins in Haridwar on the bank of the river Ganges, India. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.



Noted Greekologist, Udai Prakash Arora writes in *Ancient India and the Greeks*: “Greek intellectualism was not in Athens, the intellectual capital of classical Greece, but on the coast of Asia Minor in Ionia, where the Achaemenid empire had provided an opportunity to Asiatic Greeks to interact with the advanced civilisation of the East” (6).

Panini, a brahmin from Salatura near Taxila (roughly today’s Peshawar in Pakistan) knew of the Yavanas (as Greek are called in Sanskrit).

In certain periods of history, Yavanas, Sakas (Indo-scythians), Kambhojas (south eastern Iranian descent) were neighbours in the Indus river Basin. For that matter Yavanas find their mention in the most revered Hindu epics, Mahabharat as well as Ramayana.

On such a massive scale of time I haven't been able to discover the actual placement of these events from my ancestors' life. However, this dynamics of contact between the communities of Indus and those who territorially marched from the west is certain over an extensively long span of history and prehistory.

It's adequately mentioned in so many literary accounts. Some more recent ones like the 19th century observations of Frederick Fitzclarence who was on a punishment posting to India from 1815.

Fitzclarence mentioned that since the Brahmins (learned men). found it impossible to traverse Indus which he mentioned as "forbidden" the travellers from West came to meet the "wise men from the east" (7).

“My community considers these lakes sacred. A part of the ancient civilisational routes, the two lakes are linked to Mahabharata and Arjuna’s son Babruvahana who entered the netherworld from Suringar.”



Mansar lake in today’s Udhampur district of Jammu. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

So it is certain that my Brahmin lineage’s history of the past many centuries belongs to the Indus basin and my cultural and physiological pedigree has evolved through a massive length of history of wars, migrations, and settlements in the fertile geography of the North Western Himalayas.

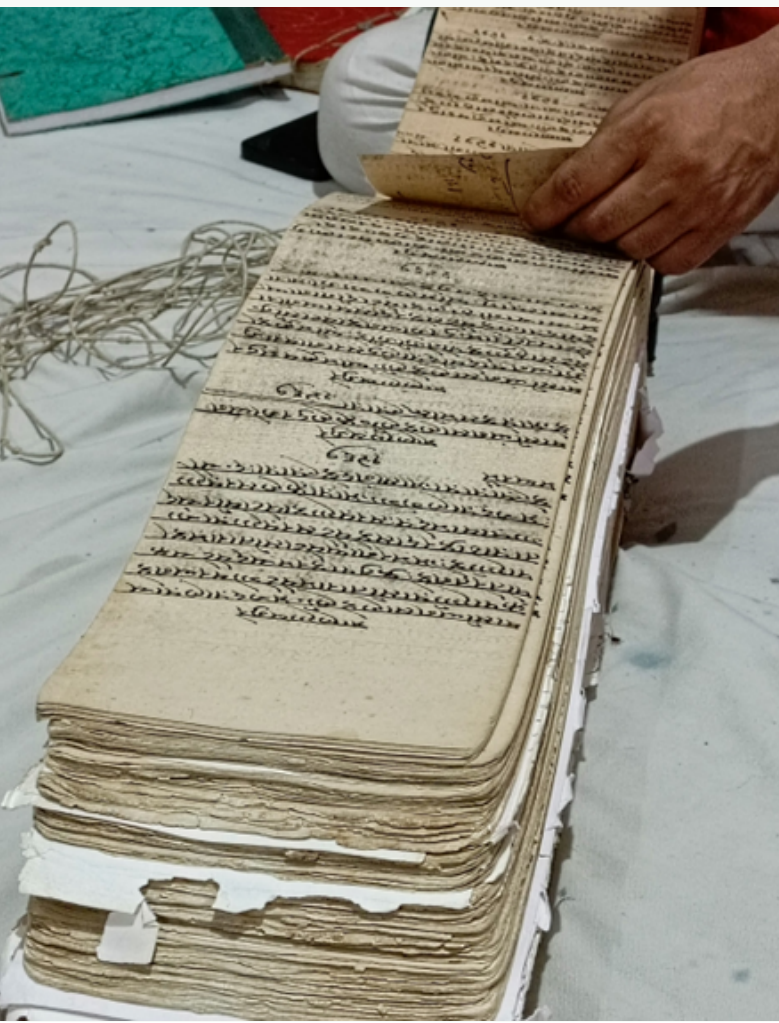
Migration to Steppes

Under some circumstances my ancestors migrated from Ploura which is on an average elevation of 1000 feet to lower Shivalik hill ranges which are on an average 2000 feet above sea level. I understand they came through the ancient route that connected Sakala to Panjtirthi in today's Billawar tehsil. And they brought their naga cultural lineage along.

Panjtherthee or the confluence of five rivers where an ancient Shiva temple stands even today, finds its mention in many historical accounts (8). Kings and chiefants migrated into this region following a route defined by geography. I have traced the farthest mention of this confluence in historical accounts of a King from Almora or the Central Himalayas coming to this region in the 700 AD (9).

This larger region even boasts of Sakya lineage rulers (same as that of Sakyamuni Gautam Buddha). In fact the route through Panjthirthi was the prime route connecting this region with the outside world until the early 1950s when the first road came to the region (9).

About two centuries ago, I found my ancestors living in a village called Rampur Rasool which are actually two small hills facing the flood plains around Panjtirthi. Though our homes no longer exist, even today a small pond in the village is known by our surname – it's called *Padhain da taala* (the pond that belongs to Upadhayas). There's a small freshwater spring (*bowli*) nearby with some ancient etchings. It's not clear under what circumstances the family migrated from Ploura to Rampur Rasool.



The last ancestor whose name we know is Ram Dhan, my grandfather's great grandfather. Somewhere in the second half of the 19th century, Ram Dhan's son, Dhrodhan set off from his remote village which was then under a principality called Bhaddu, on a treacherous journey to Haridwar.

Bhaddu was a small kingdom of just 16km length and a width of 7-10km, however its strategic value was its location at the confluence of five rivers: Ujah, Bhini, Tilhani, Naj and Kund (10). Panjtherthee even today holds the cremation ground of Bhaddu and

An example of many centuries of cross-generational records existing with the Brahmins of Haridwar. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya..



A small temple in the village square of Bhaddu. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

“Though our homes no longer exist, even today a small pond in the village is known by our surname – it's called Padhain da taala (the pond that belongs to Upadhayas).”

there's a 60 minute trek down the slopes of Bhaddu to the confluence.

As a high school girl I had once taken the journey of a lifetime trekking down from Bhaddu with my eldest cousin who was posted as an agricultural officer in a village across the river Bhini. The adventurous trail through thick jungle boasted of extremely picturesque scenery with pine trees standing tall on the edges creating balconies with panoramic viewpoints.

My wish to sight the beautiful Himalayan monal didn't come true then but a few years later someone gifted me the beautiful plume of a hunted bird from his old collection. There were massive hunting grounds around and the forests still boast of rich wildlife.

On the other bank of the river as we started ascending the other hill we came across a small local irrigation dam. If we would have walked further towards the confluence we would have first come across the cremation ground and the confluence further a

mile from there.

The confluence of five rivers meant connectivity with the wider Indus basin through the ancient Grand Trunk road to Sakala and Gandhara towards North West and towards south east into central Himalayas and the gangetic basin. History thus brought people from all over to the flood plains around Bhaddu.

Even today from the confluence one can sight the ruins of the Jasrota fort on the hill along the confluence. People with the surname Jasrotia belong to the lineage of this hilly Jasrota kingdom, that stood as a wall between the plains of the Sikh kingdom and the hilly states of the 19th century.

Bhaddu's Many Stories

Bhaddu's rulers of the past many centuries were called Bhadwals. They came from the lineage of Hindu Shahis, the rulers of Gandhara/Taxila who



Etching seen on the lateral walls of the spring found near where my ancestors lived 200 years ago. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

after their defeat to Gazvanide Turks, roughly 1000 years ago established five small hilly kingdoms, one in Bhaddu and the other four in: Billawar, Basoli, Bhadarwah and Kulu (9).

The Bhadwals built many temples and springs, some of which are still existent.

Beginning in the mid-18th century this tiny kingdom produced some of the best literature laureates like Kavi Dattu who excelled in Hindi, Braj and Dogri compositions. Dattu was followed by other noted poets from the kingdom like Shivram and Threelochan (10). Each of these poets and their languages come with their own history and thus denote Bhaddu's connectivity on the larger language and literature map of India. Sadly unknown today!

Around the time when Dhrodhan was growing up in Rampur-Rasool, the kingdom of Bhaddu and the other hilly kingdoms were going through a politically turbulent time. When Bhaddu's king and Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh's maternal grandfather

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Prithvi Pal died in 1820, the hilly kingdoms were facing the rise of the Jamwal Dogra brothers (10). In 1821, Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh made Gulab Singh the Maharaja of Jammu and a decade later Gulab Singh's brother Suchait Singh on his order dethroned his own uncle and Bhaddu's ruler, Avtar Singh (11).

After the Anglo-Sikh war, when the treaty of Amritsar was signed between Gulab Singh and the British, Bhaddu became a part of the larger Dogra kingdom in March 1846. This was also the peak of the Great Game between the British and the Russians. The British had just won Punjab. Being paranoid of the Russians inching closer from Central Asia, they had started allying with the Dogras who had the best war-horned military in the northern frontier garrisons at that time.

Wars meant the biggest employment industry of that time, other than agriculture, particularly in the Indus basin of the 19th century. Like sanskrit

knowledge was passed on within the family lineage, warrior traditions passed on shastra vidya to warriors within the community.

Gulab Singh, The founder of Dogra kingdom had himself trained under his grandfather, Zoravar Singh Jamwal and at 17 years of age when he set off from home to forge a military career, he had thought of employment with Shah Shuja (12), the ruler of Kabul but ended up working for Dewan Khushwaqt Rai who was managing the jagir of Sardar Nehal Singh of Attari. It was only in 1809 that Gulab Singh joined Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the legendary king of the Sikhs (12).

It was in these turbulent times of military expeditions of the 19th century that Dhrodhan set off from his village on a community duty to Haridwar for performing death rituals of someone important.

Many Haridwar lineage records talk of people who would travel for such

The main gate of the royal residential complex of the former rulers of Patiala called the Qila Mubarak, on August 29, 2023. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.





The outer gate of Qila Mubarak complex in Patiala on August 29, 2023. On either side of this gate are old, colourful, bustling bazaars. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

“After the collapse of the Mughal empire and the Sikh empire, it was the Patiala royalty that gave patronage to the artisans and others skilled from the declining dynasties.”

tasks. While on his way back he decided to visit Patiala—a trip that changed his life and changed the course of my family’s history.

Patiala during this time represented an extremely different polity than whatever was existent around. Its rulers had allied with the British in 1808 and after the decline of the Mughal kingdom its rich rulers and their patronage had attracted skilled workforce and traders.

Lures of Patiala

In the mid-19th century Patiala was a bright and happening city, more politically stable than the states around. If you understand it from a geo-political context they had made it clear that they were with the British Empire right from the time when the French and Russian empire (1807) made their first plan to invade India.

Around this time when Dhrodhan visited Patiala, the kingdom already boasted of Qila Mubarak and majestic ramparts and ten gates around the city that Maharaja Narendra Singh built between 1845 and 1862 (13).

After the collapse of the Mughal empire and the Sikh empire, it was the Patiala royalty that gave patronage to the artisans and others skilled from the declining dynasties (14). Thus inside the walls and besides the residences, Patiala’s mandis and bazaars started to become extremely attractive.

It was in one such bazaar that a Patiala Maharaja was addressing a gathering when commotion broke loose and the tall and well-built Dhrodhan brought it under control.

A 1857-58 medal issued to Dhrodhan by the British after the recapture of Delhi. We don't know his rank in the British-Sikh army at Patiala garrison. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.



The feat brought him into the notice of the Maharaja who offered him a job in his garrison.

I have always wondered what brought Dhrodhan to Patiala. Was it the lures of a very cosmopolitan city, one of the best colonial cultured places of the time? Was he lured by the Sikh flamboyance of the town known for its Patiala Shahi turban (a type of headgear), paranda (a tasseled tag for braiding hair), patiala salwar (a type of female trousers), jutti (a type of footwear)?

Was my family's tradition of wearing soft pink turbans on important occasions came from the the dyers of Patiala who even today continue to dye the turban cloth of famous Patiala Shahi turban, in the royal state colours of soft pink and lemon, in their shops in Adalat Bazaar. History of India can be so flamboyant!

Was Dhrodhan actually looking for employment in Patiala after being pushed by the political turmoil and the

collapse of the Bhaddu kingdom or was he a carefree youth merely led by destiny?

Anything on this matter is unsupported speculation due to lack of evidence. However, I do know that he was a part the northern frontiers. I believe that because the foothills had warrior traditions that forged young men into a livelihood of their interest.

And I also maintain that Dhrodhan was a Vartya or a "warrior with vows" as was the case with traditional warriors in the northern frontiers. I believe that because the foothills had warrior traditions that forged young men into a livelihood of their interest.

While Vartyas in the northern frontiers have a long history, I would just maintain Dhrodhan to be someone trained in a warrior tradition that prescribed certain discipline, upheld by certain vows. Vartyas were known for daredevil travel and this also meant that Dhrodhan wasn't the only one to take up such an arduous journey.

Portrait of Maharaja Mohender Singh of Patiala, the founder of historical Mohinder Singh College as seen in the convention hall of the college he built 160 years ago, on August 29, 2023. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

There were those more exceptional, before him and there were those after him, until the roads first came to the region in early 1950s.

However what's interesting to note in this context is that people migrated within the river basins of Indian civilisation due to various reasons. One of these reasons was the fall of kingdoms that ushered political uncertainty and pushed people to migrate to regions and kingdoms with better avenues for life.

Our family home in downtown Patiala existed until about six decades ago when it was sold by my father's uncle. I recently made a trip to Patiala and visited the location of my ancestral home where today stands a post office and a telephone exchange.

Throughout this unfolding history my ancestors maintained their farms and homes in the hills. I think this was possible and hassle-free because both the Patiala kingdom and the Dogra kingdom were British allies and Dhrodhan's employment in the Patiala garrison would have never been a cause of trouble back home.

It's so important to understand history from a common man's perspective. While history is generally written from the narrative of kings and courtiers, if ordinary people start to trace their family history as embedded in a larger political and geo-political context, many new and worthy ideas will emerge. Many new perspectives of the present and the future will unfold!

Sant Ram Dogra

Dhrodhan had two sons. The eldest was Sant Ram Dogra, the first graduate of the Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir. He was an Assistant-Settlement Officer in the Settlement Commissions set up by the Dogras in the late 19th century and was appointed on special duty in 1915 to write the *Codes and Customs of the Tribes of Kashmir* by the third Dogra Maharaja, Pratap Singh. This work would later become the basis of a "uniform civil code" (15).

Because Dhrodhan lived and worked in Patiala, his sons got to study in the kingdom. Patiala had developed an evolved education policy and was one of the first princely states in India to introduce contemporary education in its schools and colleges.

Maharaja Mohinder Singh set up the Mohinder Singh College whose opening ceremony was done by Indian British Viceroy, Ripon on March 17, 1884. It started as a school of languages and was soon turned into a college providing the first BA degrees in the whole of northern British India. Sant Ram Dogra thus not only became a polyglot but also the first BA in contemporary education from the Dogra kingdom. Immediately after graduating he was employed in third Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh's court.

The Settlement Office in which he was employed as an Assistant Settlement Officer was an interesting colonial institution in the Dogra court. It was set up with the appointment of legendary Sir Walter Roper Lawrence as the first settlement commissioner of Kashmir between 1889 to 1894.

Lawrence's appointment as the first commissioner and his further diplomatic engagements can help us to study the state of affairs in the Dogra kingdom. His appointment in Kashmir is important to understand the institution that initiated the first land reforms in Kashmir and further bore the burden of the complexity and politics involved in this land settlement, colloquially called *bandobast*, meaning organisation or an arrangement in Urdu.

Kashmir at the threshold of hostile northern frontiers and later the geography where the three empires met would never have been an easy state of affairs to manage. And before Lawrence arrived the kingdom was far away from an efficient system of administration, according to British standards. Lawrence mentioned that the kingdom didn't even have a standard currency and Lawrence wrote "money prices did not exist" and salaries were paid in grain.

"I ... was requested to take oil-seeds in payment of my salary," said Lawrence (16).

Despite Kashmir's thousand of years of written history there were no maps of Kashmir and no details about revenue liability or payment (16).

Understandably the office of the Settlement Commission was tasked with overcoming tough constraints, some of which were substantially the remnants of the revenue systems of feudal societies under Kashmir's former rulers Mughals (1580s–1750s), Afghans (1752–1819) and Sikhs (1820–1846).

These remnants survived variedly because of the existence of *jagis* (territorial revenue grant) they issued during their rules and systems entrusted under each of them. The Settlement Commission also had to work through the first five decades of Dogra rule and bring more efficient revenue and land reforms to the kingdom. It boasted of some of the best intellectuals of that time.

Captain J. L. Kaye took over from Lawrence as the Settlement commissioner in April 1895 while Lawrence after this Kashmir assignment was appointed as Indian Viceroy Lord Curzon's private secretary (17).

Kaye's appointment letter also talks about the appointment of Lawrence's assistant, Mr. H.L. Rivett as Kaye's assistant in Kashmir (17). It also listed another appointment of "one native assistant" and the latter was the office that my great grandfather Sant Ram Dogra held. I can't however ascertain if he was in Kaye's team or the one following it.

When Lawrence left office he had already done the land settlement (*bandobast*) of 1327 villages in Jasrota district excluding its tehsil Basoli. Bandobast of Manwur, Udhampur and Raisi districts was also pending. Locally, my great grandfather was credited with and respected for the "bandobast" in our wider native region (18).

There's a story that my father's uncle passed on to him: Sant Ram Dogra's sister-in-law was from the village, Mada in today's Mahanpur tehsil. Once while on his way back from Kashmir, great grandfather visited her and when he made his way back home, natives stood along the path with gifts of dried *copra* (नारियल) and dried dates (सूखे खजूर/छुहारे)" to thank him. Dried *copra* and dried dates are still given in this part of the world with small tokens of money as a good omen and best wishes.



It's this respect that the family inherited from Sant Ram Dogra. There was almost no record of his legacy but such scattered bits of stories passed along the family line during this century.

The best source of information about Sant Ram Dogra's career and how his work contributed to the Kashmir society of the early 20th century is found in the work of Kashmiri Historian Dr Chitrlekha Zutshi, an Associate Professor of History at the College of William and Mary, USA (19).

Mohinder Singh College started after the mid-19 century produced many bureaucrats for the princely courts in Colonial India. Photo credit: Venus Upadhyaya.



“Based on Dogra’s code, the Sri Pratap Act, while granting primacy to Hindu and Muslim Personal Law, recognised customary laws in cases where it had altered or replaced personal law.”

The only picture of Sant Ram Dogra available with the family. This was taken during his work in the Kashmir valley somewhere between 1915-1918 (Restored by Venus Upadhayaya).

Zutshi says in her book, *Languages of Belonging*: “Drawing on colonial policies in the Punjab where revenue collectors had been directed to ascertain the customary practices in each village, in 1915 Maharaja Pratap Singh appointed Dogra to prepare a consolidated code of tribal customs prevalent in the Kashmir valley.”

Dogra toured the valley “exhaustively” and compiled his inquiries into *Codes and Customs of the Tribes of Kashmir*, which enabled the prevailing customs of different tribes in various villages of the Kashmir valley compiled and codified to the level of law.

“The codification of custom was part of the movement by the state to amend, consolidate and declare laws to be administered in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which found fruition in the Sri Pratap Jammu and Kashmir Consolidation Act 1977B

(1920). Based on Dogra’s code, the Sri Pratap Act, while granting primacy to Hindu and Muslim Personal Law, recognized customary laws in cases where it had altered or replaced personal law,” says Zutshi.

The motivation behind this codification in Kashmir was the need for an assessment of land holding rights because the agricultural classes applied customary law in matters of land inheritance and land division.

Sant Ram Dogra was killed on his way home to see his newborn son, my grandfather. He was run over by his own horse buggy on April 17, 1918. If the folklores are to be believed, his adversaries didn’t want to see his work culminating in state law. Land Settlement and issues of inheritance in that feudal society must have made his tenure a very threatening job. Even Lawrence on at least one occasion had

received a written death threat (16).

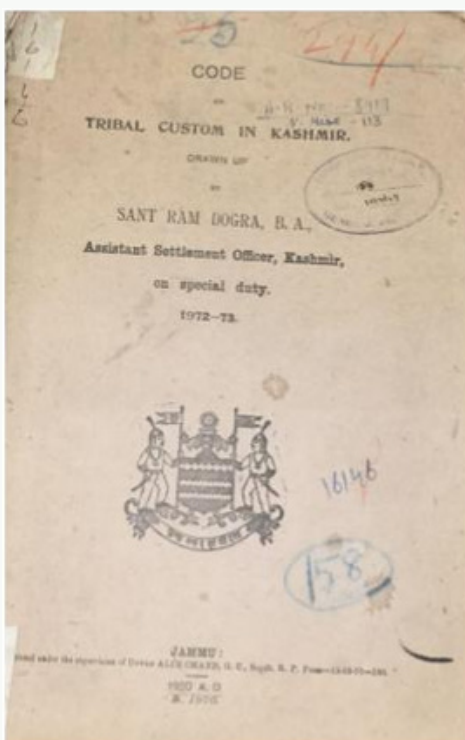
Roughly two decades before Sant Ram Dogra’s “exhaustive travel” through the valley, Lawrence had travelled on inflated bullock skins down rivers during his field trips (16). There were more roads during the former’s time but the countryside was still difficult to navigate—possible either by foot or on horses.

With Sant Ram Dogra’s untimely death at just the age of 41 years we lost much indescribable. He was given a state funeral and his body never returned home. His eldest son who was a teen then had to take the treacherous journey to Srinagar to collect his ashes. There’s a family story of the teen collapsing at Banihal tunnel which was formally opened to the public only in 1922.

Today Jammu Kashmir highway routes through Banihal mountain pass, however before 1922, the Mughal road was the public corridor between Jammu and Kashmir. The Banihal tunnel was extremely narrow then and was the route for royalty and officials only.

His four sons were put on a state scholarship until the age of 18 and his wife Jeeyan managed the home including a tea garden that great grandfather had leased from the king in Dungara village nearby. A few of these plants still exist in an uncle's estate.

The tea garden was an interesting enterprise because there were only a few of them in the kingdom. Jammu was found unsuitable for tea plantation (20) and the nearest to our village was in Basoli, leased to two Muslim brothers (21). My



“The motivation behind this codification in Kashmir was the need for an assessment of land holding rights because the agricultural classes applied customary law in matters of land inheritance and land division.”

The cover of a copy of the “Codes and Customs of the Tribes of Kashmir” from the State Archives Repository in Jammu. Photo credit: Venus Upadhayaya.

research through the State Archives repository in Jammu shows how the Dogra dynasty was trying to diversify its economy by experiments in growing tea and was also trying to save on imports – tea was a very expensive commodity then.

Lawrence had tried to develop agricultural resources of the country during his tenure and had asked for a touring English officer for it when he left. He also talked about establishing a wine business in the kingdom. Sant Ram had also developed a Guava farm in Dungara and at Bhaddu we grew up with stories of a massive black grape vineyard.

Our home in Bhaddu was actually Jeeyan's paternal home and after his death the family went clueless about Dogra's projects. My grandfather never talked favorably about tea and always forbade us from drinking what was widely known as "lipton tea."

Within a decade after Sant Ram's death, Jeeyan lost her daughter who died during childbirth. She was married to Pt. Gouri Shankar, a Professor at Lahore university whose story I have already shared. Jeeyan also lost her two elder sons to illness in their late twenties/early thirties. After such tragedies the family set up a devi temple at home to bring harmony and it still exists.

Jeeyan's other two sons survived to tell the story, particularly my grandfather who ironically never went to school, wrote only his name or "Ram-Sita" because he never chanted, rode high bred steeds and lived fearlessly to later share many adventures with me.

There was a speed to his feet and a daredevilry in his attitude!

Sant Ram Dogra's eldest grandson later went on to become a UN diplomat with the Food and Agriculture Organisation and it's he who got hold of the first copy of his book from a Deputy Commissioner in Kashmir. Dogra's other grandchildren were mostly teachers and clerks employed with the government in post-independence India, a few later also ventured into local politics.

Today the family tree spreads across a few continents and consists of liberals and conservatives, people across many societies and professions, a few successful entrepreneurs and further fewer humanists who have a vision of giving back because there's an ache for their long-lost home.

I sometimes wonder if it's an ache I inherited from Sant Ram who was on his way home but never made it or is it a sense of trauma many have inherited in this geography! We have such an ache to see better times!

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