



CULTURAL HERITAGE OF EARLY KASHMIR-A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The cultural history of Kashmir can be explained in part by its geographical position. Because of Kashmir's natural beauty and moderate climate, it's possible that Kashmiris have a long history of artistic expression. As a result of Kashmir's seclusion, security afforded by the surrounding mountains, and its distance from the centre of Indian culture, Kashmiri philosophy might be unique. Because of the harsh weather and long winters, it's possible that Kashmiris are drawn to philosophical inquiry. The geographic centre of the Puranic world is Kashmir. In this system, Kashmir's significance was recognised as a meeting ground for trade and ideas between the four major regions of the Old World. For the first time ever, the land of opposites attempted to be reconciled through a deeper examination and a more ambitious notion. The study is an attempt to explore the rich cultural heritage of Kashmir in an analytical manner.

Keywords: *Ancient Kashmir, Caste, Culture, Natya Shastra, Society*

INTRODUCTION

Due to its disputed status, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has received a lot of attention. Scholars and legal experts have continued to concentrate either the legal aspects of the Kashmir conflict or the securitization of J&K, marginalising the existing study on the rich history that has defined J&K's cultural landscape. Besides his own scholarly contributions, Professor Kulbhushan Warikoo brings together top scholars on the region in Cultural Heritage of Jammu and Kashmir, making it an encyclopaedic study nearly encompassing all aspects of the territory's history and culture. Only by studying Gilgit, Baltistan and Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh's dominant and marginal cultures in depth can one verify that academic rigour has been established. The contributing researchers also present proof that civilisational impact reaches as far as the Pamirs.

At one time, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures coexisted in the Northern Areas (today's Gilgit Baltistan, which is controlled by Pakistan). It's easy to see how the Karakoram Mountains have been a conduit for cultural exchange since at least 5000 BC from the rock art found across the Northern Areas. According to Kharoshti inscriptions uncovered in the vicinity, the area was formerly home to a Saka village. Some of the inscriptions even mention Saka monarchs by name. The presence of Pahalava monarchs and Kushana-era inscriptions demonstrates the region's role as a bridge between Central and South Asian cultures, as well. The roots of the word Balawaristan can be traced back to the historical records found there (the historical name for present day Gilgit Baltistan). Sargin, the name given to Gilgit by the Hindu kings of the time, is also found.

The Patola Shahi dynasty's inscriptions shed light on the first conceptions of the Bolor (Balawar) state. Additionally, the Kharoshti inscription discovered at Alam Bridge provides the first proof of the Darda Kingdom (located near Gilgit). Patola Shahi emperor Sri Deva Chandra Vikramaditya's inscriptions, uncovered in Hunza, clearly show the dynasty's prominence between the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Few people are aware that Lord Shiva was also worshipped in Gilgit, despite the fact that Saivism predominated in the Kashmir Valley. Archaeological evidence suggests there was a Shiva worshipping cult in the area of Chilas (Gilgit).

The depth to which the book goes in introducing the reader to Kashmir is demonstrated by the fact that 18 of the book's 25 chapters are devoted to it. The book explores Kashmir's past and present from a wide range of perspectives, including religious scriptures and secular literature, temple

architecture, Sufi saints, and modern developments. The poet Abhinavagupta's works show how Kashmir's contribution to aesthetics remains unrivalled, as explained in the book.

The book's discussion of the numerous events that signify the arrival of Buddhism in Kashmir is fascinating. Emperor Ashoka sent a missionary named Majjhantika to Kashmir in order to introduce Buddhism to the region. Kalhana, on the other hand, claims that Buddhism predates Ashoka. Ashoka introduced the Stupa and Vihara architectural styles to Kashmir, with the latter's development peaking around the 6th or 7th century AD. Milindapanha, a Buddhist literature in the form of a question-answer story between the Buddhist sage Nagasena and the Indo-Greek king Menander, contains a lengthy discussion on Kashmir (Milinda). Emperor Kanishka, who hosted the fourth Buddhist council and reestablished Buddhism in Kashmir during the Kushana Empire, is profiled in the book. Abhidharma studies have been enriched by a number of experts from Kashmir.

The Amritabhavana Vihara, built by Meghavahana in the 6th century AD and mentioned by Chinese explorer O Kon, was another example of Kashmir's thriving prosperity during this time period. In addition, the 7th-century Buddhist texts discovered in a Gilgit Stupa reveal the existence of Buddhist ties between Kashmir and Gilgit. Bronze is an essential component of understanding Kashmiri craft. It is mentioned in Kalhana's Rajtarangini that bronze images are adorning temples and monasteries. Craftsmen in Kashmir provided bronze and paintings for the Buddhist kings of Kashmir. During King Avantivarman's reign in the 9th century, the bronze art of the region reached its pinnacle. Astonishing symmetry may be observed in the sculptures. In Kashmir and Western Tibet, the finest specimens of this skill are the Maitreya Buddha and Vishnu images. There have been numerous Puranas, plays, anthologies, and poetry written by Kashmiri intellectuals that have made significant contributions to the canon of Sanskrit literature. With 40 works, the satirical poet Ksemendrav (c. 11th century) was one of Kashmir's greatest poets. All six schools of Sanskrit poetics were born in Kashmir. According to the Dasavataracarita, written by Ksemendra, the Buddha was Lord Vishnu's ninth incarnation. In terms of religious architecture, the Karakota and Utpala dynasties are credited with a surge in temple construction. Lalitaditya Muktapida, Karakota's most powerful ruler, is credited with erecting four temples and a monastery between 724-640 AD. It wasn't until 855 AD, when King Avantivarman founded the Utpala Dynasty, that temple building in Kashmir reached its peak.

Continuing on, the book explains how Kashmiri Saivism and the Islamic Sufi ideology came together to form a syncretic culture in the 13th century, which was best expressed in the poetry of Sufi mystic Lal Ded and her follower Nooruddin Wali or Nund Rishi. It was Lal Ded's Rishi cult that continued to attract mystics who were critical of religious orthodoxy and simplistic notions of deity. Syed Ali Shah Hamdani and his associate Syed Ajad Mohammad Hamdani of the 13th century are traced back in one chapter to explain how Kashmiri Shi'ite traditions, social organisation as well as Shias' geographical distribution came to be.

The evolution of temple architecture in the Jammu region has been explored extensively in relation to the region's history and culture. The Karlah Nag Devta temple at Patnitop, Jammu, is one of the most notable examples of a Nag Devta temple erected by a freshwater spring in the Jammu Shivaliks. Some of Jammu's temples, including the Nagara-style Billawar Temple with its curvilinear pyramidal construction, bear the imprint of the city's Gupta past. When the Dogra dynasty came to prominence in the middle of the 18th century, temple construction sprang up again following a decline between the 12th and 17th centuries. Temples built by the Dogras, particularly Gulab Singh, were characterised by their "shining 'Kalashas,' of Shikhara type brick temples."

Social aspects of Kashmiri cultural heritage

The significance of researching Kashmir's one-of-a-kind social structure and extensive cultural history is not something that has to be emphasised further here. However, the particular nature of the way of life of its people has to be understood in a way that is not limited to thinking of it as an amalgam of various ethical, religious, and cultural influences that have worked on them over the course of a long period of time. Therefore, what the country is today is a composite entity that



has received and absorbed the cultures, religions, and peoples of a diverse range of ethnicities over the course of its history. Whether it be the language or the religion, the dress or the diet, the art or the architecture, any change in these spheres in India had its vibrations in Kashmir also. Yet another significant fact, which strikes most about Kashmir is that the various influences which have affected the life of its people from time to time have followed mostly from the side of India.

Drama and Music: The Natya Shastra

Bharata Muni of the Natyashastra is a name that has been associated with Kashmir since antiquity. Many Kashmiri academics explored the Natyashastra's rasa concept, which was a central theme of their work. There is also the possibility that the Natyashastra's 36 chapters were purposefully chosen to match the doctrine of the 36 tattvas found in the later Kashmiri Shaivite system. Kashmir appears to be the subject of many of the book's most accurate depictions. bhand pather groups in Kashmir continue to perform the one-actor drama described by Bharata as the bhana (bhana patra, in Sanskrit).

Some experts believe that Bharata is a Southerner, and it should be indicated here as a footnote. Interesting cultural linkages exist between Kashmir and South India, such as the worship of Shiva, Pancharatra, Tantra, and the arts, all of which have their origins in Kashmir. According to the art historian Vasundhara Filliozat, who has written extensively on Karnataka, there was an ongoing movement of instructors from Kashmir to the South, and many early Shaivite, Tantric and Sthapatya Agamas are thought to have come from Kashmir.

As the first book on stagecraft, the Natya Shastra by Bharata Muni introduces the language of creative expression. For example, it includes a list of 108 different postures that can be used in different ways in order to create unique dance motions. Understanding Indian art, music, and sculpture can only be achieved through Bharata's ideas. They offer a glimpse into how Indian art reflects a sense of awe and wonder about the world. Translator Manomohan Ghosh argues that the Natya Shastra dates from the 5th century BCE. Aside from the language's pre-Paninian traits and the fact that Bharata refers to the Brihaspati's arthashastra rather than the Kautilya's of the 4th century BC, he rests his conclusion on these two factors.

As far as I can tell, Kashmiri physics was not just influenced by astronomy and terrestrial experiments, but also by speculative thinking and meditation on the nature of consciousness. This knowledge was not constrained by either geocentric or anthropocentric ideas, allowing it to incorporate metaphysics into the physics of the small and the large. Principles from the Younger Vedic school do not reflect a departure from traditional Vedic thought, but rather an expansion on fundamental ideas that have been enriched by new discoveries in astronomy and other physical sciences. Many worlds (or solar systems) made up this framework, where time and space were unbroken, matter was atomized and consciousness sprang from an all-pervading unity, all at the same time. The subtle form of the material atoms, referred to as tanmatra, was first established, from which the gross atoms originated. All descriptions of reality, according to this approach, are constrained by paradox. The universe was viewed as dynamic and ever-changing.

Caste system in early Kashmir

Few sources provide any meaningful insight into the nature and characteristics of the caste system as it existed in prehistoric Kashmir. Early writings like "the nilmatapurana," "the kuttanimatakavya," and numerous of poet Ksemendra's works specifically identify Brahmanas as the highest caste in the valley, but they don't speak much about the other socioeconomic strata that still exist. The Rajatarangini of Kalhana, however, attests to the presence of other low castes in addition to Brahmanas in the populace. They included the Nisadas, Kiratas, Kaivartas, Dombas, Svapakas, and Chandalas. The caste that enjoyed the most privilege and respect in the nation was undoubtedly the Brahmanas. Although it is unknown where the Brahmanism caste originated in the Kashmir valley, there is ample proof that many of the valley's Brahman residents were descended from the Brahmanas of other regions of India. The Brahmanas chose a variety of professions, some of which

included serving as state ministers and councillors. Nisadas appear to be the native tribes of the Kashmir, among other castes. In the community's social life, they held a very low standing. The word "Nisada" in Sanskrit is typically used to refer to someone who relies on fishing and hunting for a living. The boatmen of the valley were also included in the word, according to a text from the Rajatarangini.

Another low caste, the Kiratas, lived in the forest and killed wild animals by starting forest fires and setting traps, according to Kalhana. Their mode of living appears to have been very similar to the Nisadas, as described in ancient literature. As a caste of servants who are occasionally linked to Chandalas, the Dombas have been frequently referenced by Kalhana. We don't know exactly what they did for a living. They are referred to as hunters in one chapter of the Rajatarangini. Kalhana makes reference to Domba singers, and it appears from the tales he has gleaned that the Dombas were generally skilled musicians who supported themselves by singing and dancing. The Dombas, who were lute players and singers, are mentioned by Al Beruni when he discusses the modern castes of northern India.

The basic classes of Kashmir society

In addition to this caste structure, the people of Kashmir might be divided into other classes based on the chosen occupations. There are three main groups of individuals, each with several subgroups. According to Rajatarangini, Domaras were frequently found among landowners and agriculturalists. However, Domaras were not always a riotous tribe with strongholds in the valley's most fertile regions, nor were they always a tribe that lived in the highlands to the north of Kashmir. As the welfare of the common people depended more on them than the monarch, they got their authority from enormous holdings of land and people, and the incessant warfare they engaged in must have been borne at the price of the typical cultivator. They were therefore feudal landowners or territorial landlords. The class of craftsmen and other industrial workers was located next to the class of farmers. By the calibre of its arts and crafts, Kashmir had made itself known as a wonderland to the outside world. Weavers, jewellers, blacksmiths, sculptors, leather tanners, and potters were among the classes of people that participated in these crafts activities. The tradesmen and merchants who built their trading ties with central Asia made up the third class of people. However, it is possible to assume that there were divisions, subdivisions, and gradations within each of these occupational classifications based on each individual's level of education and social standing. There was also another significant class present, namely the officers in the service of the monarchs.

Religious beliefs of Kashmiri culture

One of the first forms of religion in the area was Naga worship, which was practised by the earliest settlers in Kashmir. Later on, it appears that Buddhism, Shaivism, and Vaishnavism made significant progress in Kashmir, converting a sizable population while overshadowing the Naga cult, which eventually vanished into obscurity. Kalhana attests to the Nagas' popularity as deities in Kashmir. He said that Nila, Sankha, and Padma had protected Kashmir. One of the early kings, Gonanda III, is claimed to have studied the traditional method of Naga worship as outlined in the Nilamatpurana when Buddhism was the predominant religion. Buddhism appears to have arrived in Kashmir during the third century BC. It was Majjhantika or Madhyantika who introduced it here, according to Dipavansa and the Mahavansa. Ashoka also created a number of stupas and built the old city of Srinagar, according to Kalhana. However, it is asserted that Kanisha and other Kushana rulers were the ones who brought Buddhism to its pinnacle. Kanishka also convened the renowned fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir. Following the Kushan, a number of regional leaders supported Buddhism. As a result, during the reign of monarch Abhimanyu I, Buddhism began to predominate throughout the country. About 100 Buddhist temples with 5,000 Buddhist priests were discovered in Kashmir by Hieun Tsang.

Though the rising Saiva and Vaishana faiths, which took hold in the valley when Karkota hegemony ended, seem to have overshadowed Buddhism. We do, however, discover that Jayasimha



was a sponsor of Buddhism even in the twelfth century. He erected numerous Buddhist viharas and repaired a number of others. But the valley's Buddhist presence vanished by the end of the thirteenth century. There is ambiguity about the Saivism's origins in Kashmir. Archaeologists have found evidence of Saiva worship dating back to the protohistoric period. Whatever the history of Saivism in Kashmir may have been, there is no denying that Bhutesa Shrine, a sacred site in the valley, was a prominent location for Saiva worship. Among the numerous names by which Saiva was worshipped in Kashmir, Jyestharada, Nandrirudra, Nandisa, Hara, Narendresvara, Mahakala, Bharva, and Ardhanarisvara were notably cited by Kalhana. The many Kashmiri rulers accepted Saivism as their religion. The monarchs Dumudara II, Miharakula, Gokarna, Narendraditya, Khinkhila, Tunja, Paravarasena I, Paravarasena II, and Ranaditya serve as examples. Saivism was also supported by the Karkotaruler and the Utpala dynasties. Saivism continued to thrive throughout the second Lohara dynasty. This dynasty's leaders constructed both brand-new and severely damaged existing temples. Similar shrines and temples were constructed in Saiva's honour by their ministers, queens, and other nations.

Another Kashmiri religion, vaishnavism, emerged throughout the Hindu era. The figure of Vishnu Jayaswamin is said to have been dedicated by Pravarasena II, the city's founder. Vaishnavism appeared to have gained popularity among the general populace while being supported by the Karkota dynasty. Durlabhavardhana, the dynasty's monarch, and his subjects constructed a number of Vishnu temples. Perhaps Lalitadiya's fervour for establishing Vishnu shrines, temples, and status is what led to the spread of Vaishnavism in Kashmir. Later rulers of this dynasty supported Vaishnavism as well. Avantiverma admitted to being a Vaishava even though he publicly professed Saivism, which he did at the time of his death. In the Kashmiri Vaishnavism, his minister Suyya appears to have been an ardent Vaishava as well. In ancient India, there was a synthesis of the many Vaishnava cults.

Early Kashmiri festivals

The Rig Vedic and proto-Indo-Iranian traditions are at the foundation of Kashmiri Brahmanism's religious celebrations. Most of the holidays celebrated by Kashmiri Pandits are also celebrated by other Hindu communities and a few other groups whose traditions are related to the proto-Indo-Iranian religion. The biggest event observed by the populace was Shivratri, also known as Herath, which fell on the thirteenth day of Palguna's dark fortnight (Feb-Mar). Another significant Hindu holiday observed by the inhabitants of Kashmir was Indradvadasi, which fell on the day of the Varahasetra pilgrimage at Baramula on the twelve days of the bright half of Bhadra (September). On the first day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra, on the occasion of the New Year, Navreh was observed (March-April). On the eighth day of the bright half of Jyeshtha, (Zyethatham), a feast was held in Tulmul (May-June). The festival of Pan, which literally translates to "thread," was first connected to the spinning of freshly harvested cotton and was dedicated to the worship of the two local agricultural deities Vibha and Grabha, to whom Roths or sweet bread cakes were brought. In addition to these unique celebrations, there used to be many other customs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, "the study is a rich repository of scholarly work on Jammu and Kashmir not only because it covers almost every aspect of the state's cultural heritage, but also because it traces the organic evolution of the diverse yet interconnected cultures across the temporal expanse of two millennia in a methodologically sound manner. This is a rich repository of work not only because it covers almost every aspect of the state's cultural heritage, but also because it covers almost every aspect of the state's cultural heritage. It is in fact an important step to take if the region's long-lost customs, art forms, and rich culture are to be brought back to life." Doing so would go a long way toward enhancing the cultural connection between the two civilizations.

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