

THE BEAUTIES OF KASHMIRI CULTURAL HERITAGE **UNDER HINDU DYNASTIES**

Rayees Ul Haq*

Abstract: -The Hindu period of Kashmir history is significant in the sense that it was first time when people with local origin ascended the throne of their land. The Hindu Raja's were the first who established a local mint and struck their own money in the shape of coins. Kashmir has been for centuries the fountain head of art and culture in the east and meeting point of various cultures such as Semitic, the Greeks, the Buddhists, the Shavist and the Muslims. In ancient Kashmir cast system was vague, Nisadas appears to the original tribe of Kashmir. Apart from cast system the people of Kashmir could be also grouped into various classes according to the adopted professions. The Naga worship and snake cult has been one of the earliest religions of the land. Later on the beliefs of Buddhism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism seems to have made some headway into Kashmir. The Kashmiri Pandit share most of their festivals with other people whose cultures are derived from proto-indo-Iranian religion.

Keywords: -Silk route, Semitic, Nisadas, Vogue, Black smiths and Vashnism etc.

Introduction

The valley of Kashmir is a blessed valley because of its undescribed beauty; its lakes, rivers, lush and rolling landscape, rivulets, verdant hills and its backdrop of high snow-covered Himalayan ranges. There is such a lyric charm about it with its softness, its gentleness and its dream like quality that it is difficult to believe that such place exists in this mundane world. Its other blessing is its rich and perfect climate. Here all the persons are well marked. The third blessing of the world is its people. They appear to be the product of their environment. Foreign influences

* **Research Scholar, Department of History Jiwaji University Gwalior (M.P)**

have penetrated into the valley from time to time, but they came more by way of trade to find peaceful means. The old silk route to central Asia passed through this valley and this helped in introduction of new ideas and fresh cultural elements from central Asia. Over and above its natural scenic beauty, the valley of Kashmir is well known to the world for her rich cultural heritage. We have inherited numerous traditions, customs and even beliefs compared with which progress of the western countries cannot boast of any comparison. Over Rishis, saints and Sufis aspired to realization of the infinite, their works are the store houses of wisdom and knowledge. The earliest beliefs and customs still persists in an oriented form in a major section of the Kashmiris. Kashmir has been for centuries the fountain head of art and culture in the east. Being at cross-roads of ancient caravan routes in central Asia, Kashmir has been the meeting point of various cultures such as Semitic, the Greek, the Buddhist, the Shaivist and the Muslim.

Social aspects of Kashmiri cultural heritage

The significance of the study of unique social structure and rich cultural heritage of Kashmir need not be stressed here. The peculiar character of the life of its people has however, to be understood not only in terms of amalgam of different ethics, religious and cultural influence working on them through the slow process of time. What the country present is, therefore a compo-site entity that has received and absorbed cultures, creeds and peoples of many races down the ages. 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 whether it was the language or religion, dress or diet, art or architecture, any change in these spheres in India had its vibrations in Kashmir also.

Caste system in early Kashmir

There are few sources which throw any considerable light on the type and character of the caste system as it was in the vague in ancient Kashmira. Early works like the “the nilmatapurana”, “the kuttanimatakavya” and several of the works of poet Ksemendra mention the Brahmanas distinctly as the uppermost caste of the valley, but they do not say much about the other existing social orders. The Rajatarangini of Kalhana, however, testifies to the existence of several low castes among the population, besides the Brahmanas. There were the Nisadas, the Kiratas, the Kaivartas, the Dombas, the Svapakas and the Chandalas. The Brahmanas were definitely the

more privileged and honored caste in the country. The origin of the caste of Brahmanism in the valley of Kashmir is unknown, but there is clear evidence to show that many of the Brahmana inhabitants of the valley were descendants of the Brahmanas of other parts of India. The occupations adopted by the Brahmanas were varied, some of them were ministers and councilors of the state.

Among other castes, Nisadas appear to be the aboriginal tribes of the Kashmir. They occupied a very low position in the social life of the community. In Sanskrit, the term Nisada is generally applied to indicate person who earn their livelihood by hunting and fishing. A passage from the Rajatarangini points out that the term included also the boatmen of the valley.

The Kiratas, another low caste according to Kalhana, lived in the forest and destroyed wild animals by raising jungle fires and constructing traps. Their livelihood seems to have been much similar to that of the Nisadas, as referred to in ancient literature.

The Dombas have been frequently mentioned by Kalhana as a caste of menials-sometimes they are associated with Chandalas. What exactly was their profession, we do not know? In one passage of the Rajatarangini they are described as huntsmen. Kalhana makes mention of Domba singers and from the stories recovered by him, it seems that the Dombas were generally good musicians and earned their livelihood by singing and dancing. Al Beruni, while speaking of the contemporary castes of northern India mentions the Dombas who were lute-players and singers.

The basic classes of Kashmir society

Apart from this caste system the people of Kashmir could be also grouped into various classes according to the adopted professions. Three distinct classes of people with several subdivisions of their own. We have noted agriculturalists those who are engaged with land, among them Domras were common, according to Rajatarangini, Domaras were not necessarily a tribe inhabiting the mountains of north of Kashmir, nor were they always riotous that their seats of power lay in highly productive parts of valley. They derived their power from large holding of land and people, who were always opposing the king on them, for more than on the king, depended on the welfare of the common people, and the constant strife in which they indulged

must have been carried on the expense of the ordinary cultivator. Hence they were territorial landlords or feudal land owners. Next to the class of agriculture was of the craftsmen and other industrial workers. The wonderland Kashmir had been known to the outer world by its quality of art and crafts. The classes of people engaged in these crafts works were weavers, jewelers, blacksmiths, sculptors, leather tanners and potters. The third class of the people included the tradesmen and merchants, the trade established their trade links with central Asia. It may however, be presumed that even in each of these occupational classes, there were divisions, subdivisions and gradations according learning and status of each in the society.

In presence of such classes mentioned above there was yet another important class, the officers in the kings' service.

Religious beliefs of Kashmiri culture

The earliest inhabitants of Kashmir had some aboriginal beliefs, like Naga worship or snake-cult and had been one of the earliest religions of the land. Later on Buddhism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism seems to have made some headway into Kashmir, converted a huge number of people overshadowed the Naga cult, which ultimately sunk into oblivion. The Nagas were popular deities in Kashmir is testified to by Kalhana. According to him Kashmir was a land protected by Nila, Sankha and Padma. When Buddhism was the common faith of the people, one of the early king Gonanda III, is said to have reviewed the ancient form of Naga worship as prescribed by Nilamatpurana.

In Kashmir Buddhism seems to have entered in the valley during third century BC. According to Dipavansaand the Mahavansa the credit for introducing it here goes to Majjhatika or Madhyantika. Kalhana also tells us that Ashoka built the old city of Srinagar and established several stupas. But it is said that Buddhism attained its climax during the reign of Kanisha and other Kushana kings. The well-known fourth Buddhist council also was held in Kashmir by Kanishka. A number of local rulers, who succeeded the Kushan also patronized Buddhism. Accordingly on the time of king Abhimanyu I the Buddhist came to have preponderance in the land. Hieun Tsang found in Kashmir about hundred Buddhist monasteries with five thousand Buddhist priests.

Though Buddhism seems to have been over shown by the growing Saiva and Vaishana faith which became predominant in the valley after the end of Karkota rule. We however, find that Buddhism even in twelfth century received patronage from Jayasimha. He built many Buddhist Viharas and repaired several. But by the end of thirteenth century Buddhism disappeared from the valley.

The history of the introduction of Saivism in Kashmir is shrouded in mystery. Archaeologists have discovered traces of Saiva worship in the proto-historic. Whatever might have been the origin of Saivism in Kashmir, there is no doubt that Saiva as a popular deity was widely worshipped in the valley at the sacred shrine of Bhutesa. Among the other names by which Saiva was worshipped in Kashmir, Kalhana mentioned prominently Jyestharada, Nandrirudra, Nandisa, Hara, Narendresvara, Mahakala, Bharva and Ardhanarisvara. The different rulers of Kashmir accepted Saivism as their belief. We have examples of certain kings like Dumudara II, Miharakula, Gokarna, Narendraditya, Khinkhila, Tunja, Paravarasena I, Paravarasena II, Ranaditya. The dynasties of Karkotaruler's and Utpalas were also the patrons of Saivism. Under second Lohara dynasty, Saivism continued to flourish. The rulers of this dynasty built new and restored severe old temples. Similarly their ministers, queens and other countries built shrines and temples in honour of Saiva.

Vaisnavism, another belief of Kashmiri people flourished during hindu period. Pravarasena II, the founder of present Srinagar is recorded to have consecrated the image of Vishnu Jayaswamin. Under the patronage of Karkota dynasty, Vaishnavism not only received royal standard but seems to have been popular among the common masses. The ruler of this dynasty namely Durlabhavardhana and his coutries built several temples dedicated to Vishnu. Lalitadiyas zeal for foundation of Vishnu temples, shrines and status was perhaps responsible for the propagation of Vaishnavism in Kashmir. The later kings of this dynasty also patronized Vaishnavism. Avantiverma who though professing Saivism in public was heard a Vaishava, the fact which he confessed at the time of his death. His minister Suyya also seems to have been ardent Vaishava in the Vaishnavism of Kashmir. We find synthesis of the different Vaishnava cults which were current in ancient India.

Early Kashmiri festivals

The religious festivals of the Brahmanism of Kashmir have Rig Vedic and proto-IndoIranian roots. The Kashmiri Pandits share most of their festivals with other Hindu communities and some other people whose cultures are derived from the proto-IndoIranian religion. The people celebrated a number of festivals, chief among them was Shivratri or Herath, celebrated on thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Palguna (Feb-Mar). Another important festival, the Kashmiri Hindu people celebrated was the Indradvadasi held on twelfth day of bright half Bhadra (September), which was the day of pilgrimage of scared sites of the Varahasetra at Baramula. Navreh was celebrated on the occasion of New Year on the first day of the bright half of month of Chaitra (March-April). At Tulmul a festival was celebrated namely (Zyethatham) on the eighth day of the bright half of Jyeshtha (May-June). Pan literally means thread, a festival originally associated with the spinning of newly produced cotton and worshipped the twin agricultural goddesses obviously local Vibha and Grabha, to whom Roth's or sweet bread cakes were offered. Apart from these special festivals, there were many more traditions once.

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