

Theological Heritage of ancient Kashmir**Dr. Pooja Prashar****Assistant Professor, Dev Samaj College for Women, Ferozepur City, Punjab, India****ABSTRACT**

For centuries Kashmir was the home of the great Sanskrit scholars and luminaries, who were not only revered in the valley but accepted as authorities outside as well. One great Indian religion, Saivism, has found some of its most eloquent teachers on the bank of the *Vitasta*. Kalhana and his followers have given a wide picture of theological literary activities through the great works who flourished long before and who thought and wrote with ability on different branches of literature. Ancient Kashmir literature itself has given a wide picture of literary activities through the great works who flourished long before and who thought and wrote with ability on different branches of literature. Through this paper I will highlight the great ancient theological works of valley.

KEY WORDS: Chronicles, *Rasa*, *vihara***INTRODUCTION**

Kashmir produced an endless community of learned and elevated men and women. These great men, by getting encouraged from the strong religion and ancient doctrines, adopted a life of penance and resolved the mystery of existence. They explored the ultimate truth and carried that truth to mankind. Throughout history Kashmir from ancient times is famous as the seat of learning. The land of Kashmir has remained an important training center of Indian culture. Kashmir has a special role in propagating Indian culture in the entire world. There are endless references which show that rulers of Kashmir were also great patrons of learning. To know about the rich heritage of literary activities known or recorded of the secluded land, we will give a brief picture of the accounts of theological heritage of Kashmir.

VAISNAVITE LITERATURE-**NILMATA PURANA:**

The oldest book of Kashmir, the *Nilamata purana* supplies ample information about the prevalence of the Vaisnava cult in ancient Kashmir. Vaisnavism occupies an important place in the *Nilamata* which speaks of *Visnu* more than any other deity. Like other Vaisnava Puranas, it describes *Visnu* as the highest god, praised and honoured even by Brahma and Siva. The ultimate cause of the universe, he pervaded the whole universe and is always busy in rescuing the devotees from distress, showing them the right path, giving them boons and destroying the *Danavas*. He pleases Indra and his title Janardana as a fighter comes in part from Indra. His solar nature is clear from his title Trivikrama and from his mention among the twelve suns. As regards the appearance and the weapons of *Visnu*, the *Nilmata* describes him as four-armed, four faced, lotus eyed, having a complexion like that of a blue lotus or white snow, wearing white or yellow cloths, a crown of jewels and also ear rings. His weapons are conch, discus, club, lotus, sword and bow-the last one made of horn.

KALHANA:

The earliest historical reference to the worship of *Visnu* occurs in the pages of the *Rajatarangini* where it is said that an image of *Visnu Jayasvamin* was consecrated by king Pravarasena II. Pravarasena II might have lived about the end of the 6th century CE. Another image of *Visnu Ranasvamin* was consecrated by king Ranaditya at or near his capital Pravarapura. Ranaditya, who is credited with a reign of three hundred years, is undoubtedly a legendary figure in Kalhana's Chronicle. But the historicity of the temple of *Visnu Ranasvamin* is amply proved by Jayanta Bhattacharya's mention of it in the *Agamavambara* and Kalhana's reference to it in his fifth book where he speaks of a visit paid to *Ranasvamin* by Cakravarman's queen. Mankha (12th century CE) in his *Srikanihacarita* refers to his father's worship of *Ranasvamin*. Jonaraja also mentions *Ranasvamin Visnu* in his commentary and describes it as *Sripravarapurapradhanadevata*. With the accession of the Karkotas to the throne of Kashmir in the 7th century CE, *Visnu*, the adored deity of the family came to occupy a prominent position in the Kashmir pantheon. A son of king Durlabhavardhana, called Malhana, built the shrine of *Visnu Malhanasvamin*, while the king himself consecrated at Srinagar the shrine of *Visnu Durlabhasvamin*. Durlabhavardhana's grandson Candrapida, who lived in the early part of the 8th

century CE, consecrated the shrine of *Visnu Tribhuvanasvamin*. His preceptor, Mihiradatta, built a temple of Visnu Ganbhirasvamin and his city-prefect Calitaka founded a temple of *Visnu Calitasvamin*.

The illustrious Lalitaditya came to the throne of Kashmir not long after the death of *Candrapida Vajraditya*. He too was a great devotee of lord Visnu. Resolved upon the conquest of the world, he built a shrine of *Kesava Visnu* in the early part of his reign. At Huskapura, he built a splendid shrine of *Visnu Muktasvamin* and of the town of *Lokapunya* with some villages he made an offering to Visnu in the town of *Parihasapura*, which the monarch constructed in honour of his adored deity, he built the glorious silver statue of *Visnu Parihasakesava*. At Huskapura, another famous image of Visnu *Muktakesava* was made out of gold. A fourth one that of boar incarnation of Lord Visnu was founded by him under the name of *Visnu Mahavaraha*.

SAIVITE LITERATURE:

HELARAJA

He was a *Pasupata* ascetic. He was a Kashmiri and lived probably in the 9th and 10th century. He has composed a commentary on the *Vakyapadiya*, known as the *Parthivavali*. Kalhana says the composition was of considerable extent of twelve thousand *Slokas*. But the terms in which he mentions *Helaraja's* chronicle, seem to indicate that he has no direct access to it.

BHATTA KALLATA

According to Kalhana's evidence, *Bhatta Kallata* descended to the earth for the benefit of the people at the time of Avantivarman (CE 855/56-883). He was a pupil of Vasugupta, the founder of the *Spandasastra* branch of Kashmirian Saiva philosophy. *Bhatta Kallata* wrote a commentary called the *Spandasarvasva* (on his teacher's *Spandamita*). It is still extant. He was also the author of the *Spandakarika*, an exposition on the work of Vasugupta. His two other books, the *Tatvartha-Cintamani* and the *Madhuvahini* are now lost. Both of them were commentaries on the *SivaSutras*.

RATNAKARA

Kalhana gives the name of another poet, *Ratnakara* in his *Rajatarangini*. *Ratnakara* has been identified with the author of the great *kavya* named *Haravijaya*, an enormous epic in fifty cantos which describes the defeat of demon *Andhaka* at the hands of Siva. From the colophon of the work, it seems that *Ratnakara* whose full name is given as *Rajanaka Ratnakara Vagisvara* composed the poem during the reign of king *Bihaspati Cippata Jayapida*, who, according to Kalhana, died forty years before the accession of *Avantivarman*. It is possible that *Ratnakara* started his career under Cippaua *Jayapida* but was patronized also by *Avantivarman*. Besides the *Haravijaya Kavya*, *Ratnakara* is credited with the composition of two smaller poems, *Vakroktipancasika* and the *Dhvanigatha Pancika*. Some of his verses have found place in Ksemendra's *Suvrttilaka*, in Vallabhadeva's *Subhasitasitavali* and in the *Sarngadharapaddhati*. The fame of *Ratnakara* seems to have spread outside and the poet *Rajasekhara* praises him for his vast learning and wealth of imagery.

BUDDHIST LITERATURE

SIVASVAMIN

Sivasvamin also known as Bhauua *Sivasvamin* who was an ardent follower of the Buddha is also mentioned by Kalhana in his Chronicle. He wrote a poem named *Kapphinabhyudaya*, describing the expedition of *Kapphina*, king of Daksinapatha against Prasenajita of *Sravasti*. At the end of the war, which resulted in his victory, *Kapphina* accepted Buddhism and renounced his worldly attachments. Some of the verses of *Sivasvamin* are quoted in Ksemendra's *Kavikanthabharana* and Vallabhadeva's *Subhasitavali*. Otherwise, *Muktakana* is known only from quotations preserved in Ksemendra's *Kavikanthabharana* and Vallabhadeva's *Subhasitavali*.

CANDRAGOMIN

Candrakomin, the founder of the Candra School of Sanskrit grammar, probably lived in Kashmir. According to Kalhana's evidence, *Candrakarya* revived the study of the *Mahabhasya* and composed his own grammar during the reign of king Abhimanyu.

Kalhana's testimony does not give any clue regarding the date of Candragomin. But it is clear from his statement that the grammarian flourished long before the advent of the *Karkotas*. His Buddhist title

'gomin' and the *Mangalasloka* of his vitti in which he pays reverence to *Sarvajna*; tend to prove that Candragomin was a follower of the Buddha. This literature recasts the work of Panini and reduces the master's eight chapters into six of four sections each. He often rearranges and simplifies Panini. But excepting thirty-five new *sutras*, there is nothing much original in his work.

MAJJHANTIKA

The origin of Buddhism in Kashmir is shrouded in obscurity. Buddhist sources, however, are unanimous in attributing the introduction of Buddhism in Kashmir to *Majjhantika*, a monk of Varanasi and a disciple of Ananda. According to the Ceylonese chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, *Moggaliputta Tissa* was the spiritual guide of King *Asoka*. After the conclusion of the third Buddhist Council, missionaries were sent to Different countries to propagate Buddhism. The Buddhist savant *Majjhantika* was deputed to Kashmir and Gandhara. The story of the Introduction of Buddhism in Kashmir by *Majjhantika* is also told in several other Buddhist texts like the *Asokavadana*, the *Avadanakalpalata*, the travel account left by Hsiuen Tsang and the Tibetan *Dul-va (Vinaya)*. The story is infested with legendary colouring and relates how *Majjhantika* received hostile treatment at the hands of the local Naga people and their chief and how he was finally able to win over to Buddhist faith the entire Naga population along with the king through his supernatural power.

According to the Buddhist text the *Divyavadana*, however, several monks from *Tamasavana* in Kashmir were invited by *Asoka* to attend the third Buddhist Council which was held at Pualiputra. Again, Kalhana describes the establishment of several *viharasin* Kashmir during the reign of King Surendra, the predecessor of *Asoka*. This leads us to presume that the Buddhist faith was already introduced in Kashmir before the time of *Majjhantika* and *Asoka*. However, it also seems possible that Buddhism, though introduced earlier, gained a firm footing in Kashmir only under the spiritual leadership of *Majjhantika* during the third century BCE *Asoka* (circa. 273-236 BCE), whose sway extended to Kashmir as well, is described by Kalhana as a king of Kashmir and the follower of Jina i.e. Buddha and is credited by him with the establishment of several *stupas* and *viharasin* the valley. Thus, he is credited with the Building of a *caitya* of amazing height in the town of *Vitastatra*.

HSIUEH TSANG

Hsiuen Tsang visited Kashmir in 631 CE. He saw about a hundred *sangharamas* and five thousand Buddhist priests in the valley. He also saw four *stupas* built by *Asoka* each of which contained relics of the Buddha. Among the Buddhist *viharas* visited by him he specially mentions the Juska- vihara where he stayed for the night after his first entry into the valley at Baramula. He also speaks about Jayendra-vihara founded by the maternal uncle of Pravarsena II. Here, he stayed for a couple of years and received instructions in various *sastras*. Hsiuen Tsang was warmly received by the king and was invited to his palace where he was provided all facilities including assistance of twenty scribes for copying important Buddhist texts. Hsiuen- Tsang's account proves beyond doubt that Kashmir even during his visit was a centre of Buddhist learning and there were several distinguished Buddhist scholars in the valley that not only commanded mastery over the *vibhasa* and the *upadesa sastras* but also continued composing texts on important subjects with unabated and unfledged zeal and enthusiasm. Admiring the contents of these literary Texts, Hsiuen Tsang remarks that in these texts there was evidence of great Study and research. In them could be found an extra-ordinary insight into the Buddhist lores of various kinds and also into the Brahmanical learning, Indian alphabets and *Vedas* and their *angas*. Hsiuen Tsang also noticed four *stupas* in the valley containing a portion of relics of the Buddha which, according to him were set up by *Asoka*. The well- known Tibetan historian *Taranatha* speaks of King *Asoka* as having bestowed lavish gifts on several Buddhist sagas in Kashmir.

The history of Buddhism in Kashmir after *Asoka* is somewhat obscure. Buddhism seems to have fallen on evil days during the reign of Jalauka, the son of *Asoka*. Jalauka was a supporter of the indigenous Naga and *Saiva* cults and not well disposed towards the Buddhist faith. A change in his attitude towards Buddhist faith is, however, said to have been affected in him later by the intercession of the divine sorceress named Kitya at whose request he built a *vihara* called *Kityasrama*. This *viharas* has been identified as 'Ki-teche' by O'kong the Chinese traveller who visited it during the eighth century CE and further, the site has been identified with the place known as Kitsahom which is situated five miles below Baramula district of Kashmir.

MILINDAPANHO

The next landmark in the history of Buddhism in Kashmir is formed by the famous Buddhist treatise

Milindapanho which records the discussion on important Buddhist topics between the Indo-Greek King Menander or Milinda and the *arhat* named *Nagasena*. The scene of the discussion is said to have remained a spot only twelve yojanas from Kashmir. The author of this famous treatise refers to his intimate knowledge about Kashmir and surrounding regions and appears to be fairly familiar with the people of this region. King Milinda, according to this work, first became a lay devotee, then built the *Milinda-vihara* and after some time handed over the reins of his government to his son to join the Buddhist *sangha*. The epigraphic and numismatic evidences attest to the professing of Buddhist faith by the Indo-Greek rulers, who, after the fall of Mauryan empire, established their sway over whole of the north-western India. It is not unlikely that Kashmir also came under the influence of Indo-Greek rulers and Buddhism flourished in the valley under their benign patronage. A coin of Menander found in Kashmir is now in the SPS Museum in Srinagar.

With Kashmir becoming an important centre of Abhidhamma studies i.e. the *Sarvastivadin Abhidhamma* a large number of distinguished scholars were produced from here that specialized in Abhidhamma studies and wrote commentaries on the same. Many scholars went outside India to propagate the faith. Some, who went to the neighbouring countries of Central Asia, China, and Tibet, translated Sanskrit texts into the languages of those regions. Again, after becoming an important centre of Abhidhamma studies, distinguished scholars from other Countries also were attracted to Kashmir to gain the knowledge.

O’KONG

O’Kong, also known as *Dharmadhatu*, reached Kashmir via Kabul and Gandhara in 759 CE. He stayed in Kashmir for four years and studied Sanskrit and Vinaya texts from the celebrated Buddhist teachers. In Munai-vihara, he studied the Vinaya texts of the *Mulasarvastivadins*. He noticed more than three hundred *viharas* in the valley and a large number of *stupas* and images. Besides, the Mount-ti-vihara, O’Kong mentions the following Buddhist monasteries in the valley: Ngo-mi-to-p’a-wan (Amitabhavana), Ngo-Namli (Ananga or Anandabhavana), Ki teche (Kityasrama-vihara), Nao-ye-le, Je -Jo, Ye-li-t’e-le, and K’o-queen.

KSEMENDRA

The *Avadanakalpalata* was composed by the very well-known poet of Kashmir named Ksemendra during 11th Century CE. It was completed by his son Somendra who added one more chapter to his father's work to make the total number of *Avadanas* 108, an auspicious number. He also wrote an introduction to it. The *Avadanakalpalata* is a huge collection of *Avadanas* which are called *Jatakas* in early Buddhist tradition. Ksemendra has drawn up the traditional *Avadanas* but in a poetical form.

Ksemendra has many works to his credit some of which are known by name only. He composed his works during the reign of King Ananta (1028- 1063 CE) and his son *Kalasa* (1063-1089 CE) as is evident from his works available to us. Ksemendra had a variety of interests and has written on different subjects. Having been influenced by Buddhism also he seems to have studied the Buddhist religion deeply that made it possible for him to compose the *Avadnas* successfully. Further, being impressed by the faith he also included the Buddha among the ten incarnations of Visnu in his *Dasavataracarita*. In the beginning this work had a mixed reception in Tibet on the grounds that it was written by a layman and not by a monk. Because of their imperfect acquaintance with *sutras* and *agamas*, some *lamas* of Tibet even charged that the work contained matters which differed from the real *Jatakas* of the Buddha. But in due course of time the Tibetan scholars realised the merits of this work and started appreciating it. A large number of Tibetan translators as well as scholars devoted their attention to the study of this work which contained the largest number of *Avadanas* than any other work of this class. Each *Avadana* contains a distinct story of an incident in the life of the Buddha illustrating a particular moral. The Buddhist propensity of self-sacrifice is brought to a climax here. In the last chapter the author has illustrated very well the six perfections (*paramitas*), viz., charity, moral character, patience, diligence, contemplation and wisdom, of the Bodhisattva. Describing the merits of the *Avadanakalpalata*, Somendrasays:

“Those well-known *viharas*, gorgeous with the array of pictures, pleasing to the eye, have passed away in the course of time. But the *vihaara* of moral merits, excellent and delightful, erected by my father, in whom the *Avadanas*, with weighty meanings underlying them, are carved out, as it were, and painted in variegated colours by the pencil of the goddess of learning, will not perish even at the end of time not even by the ravages of fire or of water”.

Thus, it can be rightly said that like its scenic beauty, Kashmir valley is even famous for its cultural and religious heritage. The valley of Kashmir is very rich as far as different aspects of its religion are

concerned. Right through ages, it has adopted and assimilated components of various civilizations and religions. The amalgamation of Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist philosophies has added colour and fragrance to the Kashmir culture resulting into a composite culture based on humanism, secularism and tolerance. Besides, it has borrowed certain features from its adjacent regions like Central Asia.

REFERENCES

1. Chandra, Ray Sunil, Early History and Culture of Kashmir, Jay Kay Books, Sri Nagar, 2008.
2. Ved Kumari, The Nilamata Purana, Vol. I (Cultural & Literary study of a Kashmiri Purana, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and language, Sri Nagar, 1968.
3. S.C. Ray, Early History and Culture of Kashmir, 1970.
4. Sir Aurel Stein, Rajatarangini of Kalhana, English Translation with Introduction and Notes by Indian Edition, Motilal Banarsi Das, 1961.
5. Mohini Qasba Raina, Kashur The Kashmiri Speaking People, Trafford publication, 2013.
6. P.N.K.Bamzai, Cultural and Political history of Kashmir, M.D. Publication, 1994.