

Literature and Society of Ancient Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The relation between literature and the society in which it is created eludes an easy definition or even description. In different periods, different aspects of the life of society constituted the relevant historical background of literature. What is the relation between history and literature there are many political, philosophical and literary ideas about it. From last three decades, connections have to be made not only across a long-time span, but also between the different literary modes which these astonishingly versatile thinkers are doing. As a great English writer Sartre said, "literature is a reflection of the world". Through this research paper I will try to illustrate this relation through ancient history of Kashmir and its dependency on literary evidences of that particular period.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression. But not everything expressed in words even when organized and written down, is counted as literature. Although the derivation of word literature implies writing, there also exists a large proportion of oral literature. Literature becomes a form of universal truth articulated through powerful personal expression. In a general sense, literature includes creative writings (poetry, fiction, drama, essays) and popular narratives and works produced by the philosophers, historians, religious and social thinkers, travellers, and nature writers. In a more restricted sense of imaginative literature, the definition alludes to what in French is called 'Belles lettres' or 'fine writing'. Imaginative literature can be defined by its fictional and autotelic nature, the dominance of aesthetic function within it and its special use of language. Thus, to define literature is a difficult task. Literature is a creative counterpart of history. Literary writing, as a creative index of history as lived experience of the past, possesses a significant interlinkage with the present. It is both compelling and challenging for a creative writer to assimilate critically the legacy of history, as a reference point for the present as well as to re-interpret and 're-enact the past experience'. The true significance of historical literature lies in its aesthetic interpretation of the salient historical and socio-political themes. However, the traditional historical methodology does not recognize the literary genres as evidence for the reconstruction of the past and perceive them as bearing the imprints of bias. There was a time when historians thought that they had escaped 'merely literary' by establishing historical studies on the solid foundation of objective method and rational argument. But the recent developments in literary criticism and philosophy of language have undermined that confidence and literature has returned to history. Literature is seen not as a (passive) reflection of historical change, but as a significant (active)

vehicle of it. Indeed, literary approaches are profoundly shaping the contemporary practice of history. The historians in their professional zeal for objectivity and accuracy often neglect literature and belittle its importance in capturing the historical reality. They argue that literature is based on the imagination of human mind. But the human imagination is conditioned by the social reality and socio-political forces. Moreover, literature is not written in vacuum. E.H. Carr has aptly remarked, "literature like history is influenced or moulded by the social environment". It is a vital record of what people have observed and what they experienced. If a historian is to reconstruct a realistic picture of the past, literature can be one of the authentic sources. The difference between a historical and fictional account of the world is formal and not substantive. It resides in the relative weights given to the constructive elements in them. The critical analysis of literature proves if a writer is deeply rooted in the popular life and if his writing stems out of this intimacy, he can plumb the real depths of historical truth. Even the Rajatarangini of *Kalhana* which is great example of Indian literature is considered the first historic book of Indians by the great modern European historians.

The literature related to ancient Kashmir, can be divided in to foreign notices and indigenous records. As the information provided by these sources on the whole, is earlier in date and very precise and important. By that time Kashmir was the centre of learning and other social and political activities that we have a long list of literature to mention. To learn what the outer world knew or recorded of the secluded land, we will give a brief picture of the foreign accounts.

FOREIGN LITERATURE

The earliest note on Kashmir by foreigners occurs in the writings, in which Stephanos of Byzantium has preserved from the *Bassarica*, a lost poet of Dionysios, in one passage it is mentioned that Kaspeiroi was a tribe famous among all

Indians for their fast feet. As living in Hamalyan ranges, it is natural that Kashmir people should develop marching powers and gain abroad the reputation of good pedestrians. Hekataios mentions Kaspatyros as a city of Gandhara. This source is believed to be written between circa. 549-486 B.C.E. later Herodotus, 'the Father of History' mentioned the city of Kaspatyros as the place at which the expedition of Scylax of Koryanda, sent by Darius to explore the course of Indus, embarked. As Kashmir has close cultural and political relations with Gandhara (Kabul valley) since the ancient times, it is quite natural that the Kaspatyros of Herodotus should refer to Kashmir. These early classical notices are valuable since they show the antiquity of the name by which the land has been known in India and abroad from early historic period.

Next comes, Ptolemy, in his geographical account of India, which refers to a region held by the Kaspeiraean extended eastwards from the land of the Pandouoi on the Bidaspes as far as mount Ouindion or the Vindhya is undoubtedly exaggerated.

Next detailed mention about Kashmir comes from Chinese records. The first Chinese traveller to enter the valley of Kashmir was probably Che-mong. He mentions Kashmir as Ki-pin which though is designated properly the Upper-Kabul Valley of northern territories of India. He visited Kashmir shortly after CE 404-15.

In CE 420 another Chinese, Fa-yong, started for India, along with twenty-five Buddhist monks, Fa-yong is said to have spent more than a year in Kashmir where he studied the Buddhist texts and the Sanskrit language. Hsuen Tsang visited Kashmir in the year CE 631. He observes that the valley is surrounded on all the sides by the mountains which have saved it from the onslaughts of the neighbouring states.

Most detailed account about Kashmir is given by the Chinese pilgrim Heun Tsiang who reached the valley from Urusha in the west in 632 A.D.E. and stayed on for two years to study Sanskrit and Buddhist lore. He clearly and in accurately mentions the routes through which he entered and travelled in the valley, along with names of several Viharas and Stupas whose identity has been established by the modern historians. His account of political circumstances, social and cultural traditions throw a flood of light on the early history of the land.

The next Chinese notice is found in the annals of Tang dynasty which mentions the arrival of an embassy in the Chinese court from Kashmirian king Tchen-to-lo-pi-li shortly after CE 713 and another from his brother mu-to-pi. Tchen-to-lo-pi-li seem to be Candrapida, and his brother mu-to-pi is undoubtedly Muktapida. The annals of the Tang dynasty further refer to the city of Po-lo-pi-lo-po-lo, i.e. Pravarapura and to the river Mi-na-si-to, i.e., the Vitasta. In the middle of the 8th century CE Kashmir was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Ou-Kong. Ou-Kong saw more than three hundred *viharas* in the valley besides numerous *stapas* and images of the Buddha.

Another account of Kashmir and its people is furnished by Ou-kong, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Kashmir in 759

A.D.E. He also came from Urusha by the Jhelum Valley route and stayed in the valley for four years. His description of the natives through is not as accurate as of the Heun Tsiang, but his many statements are similar to the statements made by Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini* especially related to Stupas and Viharas. He mentioned the three routes leading to valley and spoke of more than three hundred Buddhist centres there. With the decline of the power of the T'ang dynasty, the political relations between China and the northern Kingdoms of India seem to have ceased. The pilgrimage of Chinese Buddhist continued during the next two centuries but no detailed account bearing on Kashmir has been given by any Chinese traveller.

The next work comes from Mohamadan writers by 9th century A.D.E. but the remarkable accurate accounts of Kashmir valley came only in the early part of the 11th century. Mahmud Gazni could not conquer Kashmir this prevented his scholar Albiruni to visit valley. He seems, however to have secured the services of some Kashmir scholars to teach him Sanskrit. Alberuni, the Arab scholar, seems to have gathered most of his information about Kashmir during his long stay at Ghazna and in the Punjab between CE1017 and 1030. In his work he has mentioned the routes, the mountains, the rivers, the lakes and the fortresses. He also gave the accounts of the composition of its population, their dresses, economic life, art and crafts.

The last foreign writer of our period, who has left an account of Kashmir, is Marco Polo (middle of the 13th century CE). He mentioned Kashmir as province inhabited by the people who were idolaters and had a language of their own. They were acquainted with the devilries of enchantment and could perform many supernatural acts.

INDIAN LITERATURE

The old Indian literature, which supplies the abundance of data for our knowledge of old Kashmir, is a great source of information. The earliest Sanskrit literature of the valley, so far known, is the *Nilamata Purana*. The *Nilamata Purana* is an ancient text (6th to 8th century AD) from Kashmir which contains information on its history, geography, religion, and folklore. It was used by *Kalhana* as one of sources of his history. According to the historian Ved Kumari: "If the *Rajatarangini* is important from the point of view of the political history of 'Kashmir', the *Nilamata Purana* is no less important for the cultural history of that part of the country." Its critical edition was published in 1924. It is the national epic of Kashmir along with *Rajatarangini* encompassing modern day regions of today's India, Pakistan Afghanistan, Khorasan, Tajikistan, Modern Dardic regions of world. To quote the words of Buhler, it is a real mine of information regarding the sacred places of Kashmir and their legends. Besides the references to the legendary origin of the country and the rites and worships prescribed by *Nilamata* and observed by the people, the work dilates upon such various topics as the principal *Nagas* or sacred springs of Kashmir, the origin of the

Volur Lake, the places consecrated to *Siva* and *Vishu*, the sacred river confluences and the lakes, the chief *tirthas* of the land and in the end upon the sanctity of the river *vitasta*.

There are few literatures which are no more available like Jalhan poet's work *Sompalvilasa*. This work is mentioned by Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini*. He is introduced as a great poet of *Rajpuri*. This work is considered to be very important from the historic point of view as well. Like this another work was Kalhana's *Jayasimhabhayudaya*. Which was mentioned in *Sarsmuchaya* of *Ratankantha*. In this work Susala's son *Jay singh*. *Jay singh* was the ruler under whom Kalhana wrote his masterpiece *Rajatarangini*. Another important work mentioned by Kalhana is historic poem *Bhuvnabhayudya* of *Shankuka*. In this work war between two brothers named *Mum* and *Utapalla* is mentioned. *Mum* and *Utapalla* were king *Lalitiya's* son *Chipta Jayapida's* Maternal uncle. They killed their nephew and secured throne for *Ajitapida*. So in this poem many important facts about Kashmir contemporary history comes out.

Suvrata wrote the oldest extension works containing the royal chronicles of Kashmir. It is believed that *Suvrata's* compilation the study of the oldest chronicle was discontinued and that complete copy of his works was no longer to be found in Kalhana's time.

Kshemendra in his *Samayamatrika* furnishes us with some useful information about the topographical details of his country. His heroine *Kanakali* travels through the length and breadth of Kashmir. Many of the places visited by her can be traced out on the map. To him we owe the first reference to the *Pir Pansal* route (*Panncaladhara*).

After *Kshemendra* came *somadeva*, the author of the *Kathasaritsagara*. He describes Kashmir as a region in the south of the Himalayas washed by the waters of the *Vitasta*. He mentions some of the holy sites of the valley such as the *Vijayakshetra*, *Nandikshetra*, and *Varahakshetra*, *Ma Lapakshetra* and *Uttararamamansa* and the town of *Hira yapura*.

Bilhana, who lived during the reigns of *Kalasha* and *Harsha*, has also left an account of his native valley. In the last chapter of his poem, the *Vikrama kadevacarita*, he gives us a vivid picture of the Kashmirian capital and the village of *Khonamusha* where he was born. His account, apart from its poetical beauties, is full of local details.

Damodaragupta is one of the renowned scholar of Kashmir is known mostly for his work *Kuttanimata*. Another scholar, *Helaraja*, who was a *Pashupata* ascetic and lived probably in the 9th or 10th century, composed a commentary on the *Vakyapadiya*, known as *Parthivavali*. Kalhana says the composition was of considerable extent of twelve thousand *slokas*. *Vasunanda* was the ruler of *Gonandiya* dynasty of the valley and a son of *Kshitinanda*, whom the goddess has spared as the root-bulb of the family tree. Kalhana gives this information that *Vasunanda* had composed a well-known work on erotic known as *Smrashastra*. However, no work of *Vasunanda* is extant.

Kalhana in his *Rajatarangini* named another poet *Candaka*, who is said to have been a great poet. His identification is unknown to us. *Kalhana* has not even attributed any specific work to him. Some scholars identify him with the same *Candaka* to whom some verses are ascribed in *Ballabhadeva's SubhaCitavali*. He is also identified with the writer *Candra*, who is mentioned by the Chinese traveller *I-tsing*.

Matrgupta was a poet and a contemporary of *Pravarasena II* (c. CE 580) of Kashmir and *Vikarmaditya* of *Ujjayini* (c. 6th century CE). He has given his commentary on *Bharata's Natyashastra* which is referred to in *Sundarasimha's Natyapradipa*. *Kshemendra* quotes *Mātsugupta* in one of his works and some of his verses have found a place in *Vallabhadeva's* anthology.

Next name comes of *Mentha*, for composing the poem *Hayagrivavadha*. The poem *Hayagrivavdha* is lost but *BhartPmentha* is mentioned by *Kshemendra* in the *Suvrtatilaka* and by *Mantha* in *shrika Dhacarita*. The date of *Mentha* is also not known for certain. But *Mentha* or *Bharthmentha* seems to have been a person of fame.

Kalhana gives this information in his chronicle that learned *Bhatta Udbhata* was the *sahapati* or court pandit of king *Jayapida*, known chiefly for his writings on aesthetics, who received a daily allowance of one lakh *Dinaras*. He wrote profusely on the *Alankara* School. He also wrote the poem *Kumarasambhava*, which is not available now. In the reign of the *Karkota* king *Ajitapida*, there lived a poet named, *Shankuka* who is described by *Kalhana* "like a moon over the ocean of learned minds, composed a poem called *Bhuvnabhayudaya*. The theme of the book was centered around the conflict between the regents *Mamma* and *Utpalaka*. The work has not come down but quotations from it are presented in *Vallabhadeva's Subhasitavali*. *Shivasvamin* also known as *Bhatta Shivasvamin* was an ardent follower of the Buddha is also mentioned by *Kalhana* in his Chronicle. He wrote a poem named *Kapphinabhayudaya*, describing the expedition of *Kapphina*, king of *Dakshinpatha* against *Prasenajiat* of *Shravasti*. *Ratnakara*, the next writer from Kashmir, 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 *Shiva*. *Anandavardhana's* work is mainly on the science of poetics, which included *Dhvanyaloka*, *Kavyaloka* and *Sahridayaloka*. *Bhatta Kallata* descended on the earth for the benefit of the people at the time of *Avantivarman*. He was a pupil of *Vasugupta*, the founder of the *Spandashastra* branch of Kashmirian Shaiva philosophy. *Bhatta Kallata* wrote a commentary called the *Spandasarvasva* (on his teacher's *Spandamrta*). Next poet named *Bhallata* lived in the reign of *Shamkaravarmana*. He is known for his excellent work *Bhallatashataka*, a poem of 108 stanzas dealing with morality and conduct. Verses from this work have been quoted by *Abhinavagupta*, *Kshemendra* and *Mammata*.

Along with these names Kalhana has given long list of those literary personalities whose identity is unknown to us like *Manoratha*, *Shankhadanta*, *Cataka* and *Samdhimata*. They are mentioned as great poets during the reign of *Jayapida*. Then *Mammata*, *Vamana*, *Udbhata* were the famous poets under king *Jayapida*. *Muktakana*, *Shivasvamin*, *Anandavardhana*, and *Ratnakara* were court poets of *Avantivarman*, etc.

The *Rajatarangini* or the 'River of the kings' is written by poet Kalhana. He was the son of great Brahman minister of Kashmir known to be as *Chanpaka*. He was brahmin by caste. Kalhana writes that he started writing this book in 1148 CE and he took one year for completing it.

The consciousness of the high office of the poet sharpened his sense of responsibility and impartial adherence to truth brings him close to the modern view of history. He was gifted with scientific approach and a critical temperament. Kalhana along with intensive training in the Indian rhetoric had great knowledge of Sanskrit grammatical lore. He was also inspired by regional patriotism. Before writing the *Rajatarangini*, he had scrupulously studied various previous writings e.g. the *Nilimatapurana*, ancient accounts of 51 *Tirthas*, foreign travellers' accounts, legends, etc. He did not confine himself only to the literary sources but in a detached scientific spirit examined inscriptions of various kinds. He has honestly and impartially related the events, while recording the contemporary happening; Kalhana has presented the principle figures in their individual character and not as types. Aware of his surroundings he portrays a very realistic picture of various aspects of society and culture of his time.

The later chronicles which were composed, after that of Kalhana, with the distinct object of continuing his work furnished valuable supplements to the historical information. These chronicles include: the *Rajatarangini* of *Jonaraja* who continued the narrative down to the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-abidin, in other words up to CE 1459. *Jonaraja* was a scholar of considerable attainments, but apparently without any originality. But outside it he commits himself to the forms like *Purusavira*, the present Peshawar. Next name comes of *Shrivara*. He was the pupil of *Jonaraja*. His work is known as the *Jaina-Rajatarangini*. It deals in four books with the period CE 1459-86. Stein calls him a slavish imitator of Kalhana. His text looks in a great portion more like a canto from the *Rajatarangini*, than an original composition. Notwithstanding the thorough study of Kalhana's work which this kind of exploitation presupposes, we find *Shrivara* more than once betraying ignorance of the old names for well-known Kashmir localities. Thus, we have the name of the Mahasarit stream transformed into *Mari*, an evident adaptation of the modern *Mar*, *Siddhapatha*, the present *Sedau*, represented as *Siddhadesha*, the *tirtha* of *Martanda* regularly referred to by its modern name *Bhavana*. The fourth chronicle finally comes from *Prajnabhata*, named *Rajavalipataka*. This composition was completed by his student *shuka*, some years after the annexation of Kashmir by Akbar in CE 1586. Their works are

said to be inferior even to *shrivara's* chronicle and it is proved by the increased number of modern local names and its author's scant familiarity with the old geography of Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that literature is a great source of information. Literature, in fact, holds a mirror to that particular time of history whose events it actually reflects. History has different dimensions- there is evolution and revolution whether naturalistic or mechanistic. The reflections produced by the literature depend, on the author's world views. As has been said, the past is uncertain, so as the time passes by more and more layers about the past get unfolded leading to knowledge that is never perfect. But the aesthetical values always remain the most important elements of all literature. History of history and history of literature continue running in the same direction.

Literature is often a reflection of history and history can sometimes be influenced by literature. As E.H.Carr says that history is reflection of today. History and historian cannot be separated. History is always influenced by two societies, one in which the facts are produced and second in which those facts are analysed. The core of history is human and same with literature. In both emotions, effects and viewpoints have great importance. In history literature plays very important role. It helps historian not only to understand particular event of history but that too with the psyche of the people belongs to that particular time.

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