

## The region of Kashmir in Ancient Literature with special mention to Tribes

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper deals with historiography of the Kashmir region and its mention in the various literary works of ancient times which gives credibility to the fact that Kashmir region was inhabited from a very long period and the social structure had started evolving there starting with the occupation of the tribes. The first part of the paper will discuss the historical references to Kashmir in ancient literature and the second part discusses the tribal structure of the Kashmir region, the major tribes which inhabited the region were primarily Nagas and Pisacas, and the other tribes mentioned may have occupied the region at some time or the region may have had the connection with the neighbouring tribes.*

*Keywords: Kashmir, Nilamata Purana, Rajatarangini, Tribes, Nagas, Kasyapa, Nila, Khasa*

The region of Kashmir find its roots in the early historical literature which gives us varied information about the geography, culture, topographical, religious features of the region. About the origin of the region a legend has it that a lake called satisar was formed in the region and the lake was drained out by a sage called kashyapa from whose name land came to be called as kasyap-pur or kash-yap-mar and later it came to be called as Kashmir.<sup>i</sup> The two works which specifically tells us about the society, polity and culture of the Kashmir are Nilamata purana and Kalhana's Rajatarangini. Rajatarangini is said to be the authentic work for information on Kashmir, it not only gives information about the chronology of the kings ruling the region but it also shares the geographical and topographical condition of Kashmir. The text as well discusses the relationship of kings of Kashmir with the neighbouring rulers along with this it mentions the various tribes which were present in and around the region. The text has been helpful in giving information about the origin of towns, cities, shrines<sup>ii</sup> which can be corroborated by the material evidence present in the region. Another important text Nilamata Purana mentions about the social organization of the Kashmir region, it mentions about the deities and worships prescribed by Nila, mention of sacred springs of Kashmir, the origin of the wular lake<sup>iii</sup>, the scared river confluences of Vitasta and Sindhu have been mentioned in Nilamata purana as a tirtha (religious place of importance), these two rivers have been identified as the holiest and sacred rivers of the region.<sup>iv</sup>

Another work *Samayatrika* written by Kshemendra gives us useful information about the topographical details of the country. The heroine of the text namely Kankali travels throughout Kashmir and mentions many places of the regions which can be traced out with the help of the map.<sup>v</sup> The text also shows the society of the Kashmir region when Kankali travels the area and points out various changes in the social structure of Kashmir. Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagar* also mentions many holy places of Kashmir, the area is

described as a region in the south of Himalayas which was washed by the waters of the Vitasta.<sup>vi</sup> Another author Bilhana who belonged to Kashmir region and lived during the reigns of rulers Kalasa and Harsha has written about his native land, in his poem *Vikramankadevacarita*, poem's last chapter, Bilhana writes about the village of Khonamusa where he was born along with the beautiful description of capital of Kashmir.<sup>vii</sup> Harsha's *Ratnavali* talks about the flavours of saffron of Kashmir, it is said that it is the best type of saffron both in colour and taste.<sup>viii</sup> Today also the saffron grown in Kashmir is popular all over the world. Panini's grammar and Patanjali's great commentary mentions the name of the country and its inhabitants.

Apart from indigenous literature, many foreign accounts also mention about the region of Kashmir. The earliest account on Kashmir is found in Ptolemy's work on geographical account of India in which a region called *kaspeira* is mentioned lying below the sources of *bipaspes*(Vitasta) and of the *sandabal*(Chenab) and of the *adris*(ravi).<sup>ix</sup>

Chinese literary records give frequent references to the Kashmir valley and many travellers who came from China visited Kashmir and envoys were exchanged between the Chinese and Kashmiri kingdom. A Chinese record dated 541 A.D. of Tang dynasty refers to an Indian envoy who was sent to China, describes the northern part of India as a country developed on all sides like a precious jewel by the snowy mountains with a valley in the south which leads up to it and serves as the gate of the kingdom.<sup>x</sup>

The first Chinese traveller to enter the valley of Kashmir was *che-mong*. He visited Kashmir after 404 A.D., another Chinese traveller *fa-yong* came to India along with twenty-five monks, he stayed in Kashmir for more than a year studying Buddhist texts and the Sanskrit language.<sup>xi</sup> Another traveller *Hiuen Tsang* visited Kashmir in 631 and stayed in the region for two years, he describes the kingdom of *kia-shi-mi-lo* as included within the limits of the great basin of the Vitasta and the side valleys drained by its tributaries above the Baramulla. The valley is surrounded by mountains which have saved it from onslaughts of the neighbouring states. *Hiuen Tsang* also records the introduction of Buddhism by *Majjhantika*, mention of four stupas and construction of one stupa by *kanishka* was also mentioned by *Hiuen Tsang*. He refers to the new capital *Srinagar* and also the old one *Purandhisthana*.<sup>xii</sup>

## II

The existence of tribal structure in the region shows the introduction of social structure in which sedentary lifestyle became a part of it. *Nagas* and *Pisacas* were said to be the earliest inhabitants of Kashmir region. All the tribal/ethnic groups do not follow the same pattern some seem to have territorialized themselves and some were still migratory ones, some of the tribes which are referred by the geographical region they inhabited.

The **Nagas** inhabited the valley of Kashmir and they were the aboriginal tribe of the Kashmir, with time the land of Kashmir was inhabited by the *Piscacas* and the inhabitants of *Manu*. *Nagas* are said to be descendants of *Prajapati Kashyap* and his wife *Kadru* who was the daughter of *Daksha*. The other sons of *Kasyapa* were *Daityas*, the *Danavas*, the *Khasas*, the *Bhadras*, the *Garudas*.<sup>xiii</sup> The *Nagas* are frequently mentioned in the text. The *Nagas* and

Pisacas are said to be the first inhabitants of the Kashmir region. The tribe occupied various places in Kashmir which can be said from the fact that a Naga called Sadangula who was exiled from Kashmir to Usiraka in the land of darva, Vishnu at the request of Nila granted him security at that place. Naga Mahapadma occupied the city of Chandrapura.<sup>xiv</sup> As mentioned above the Nagas were not the only tribe to have occupied Kashmir, they had to share the land with Pisacas for six months in the year after the curse of Kashyapa.<sup>xv</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain that Nagas were the real people or the serpents but their mention in the epic literature Mahabharata and Ramayana assign to the fact that they may have been human beings, many incidents in Mahabharata relate to the existence of Nagas where they have been involved in a fight with Pandavas, the Buddhist literature also mentions about the people who worshipped the serpent gods.<sup>xvi</sup> The Naga tribe came to be called by the name of Naga because of the deities they worshipped just like the followers of Shiva came to be known as Shaivites.

The Nilamata purana mentions about the group of **Pisacas** who were friendly towards the daityas and dwelt in the oasis in the middle of the sea of sand, Nikumbha was the chief of Pisacas and was given control over the tribe by the Kubera, the Pisacas as directed by the god Vishnu shared the land of Kashmir for six months for all four ages.<sup>xvii</sup> Pisacas were the original people and probably they may have come from central Asia, the geographical feature mentioned in Nilamata was that they came from sea of sand and central Asia is covered with dry, rugged mountains with less vegetation. They may have been a chalcolithic tribe from Sinkiang who moved towards Kashmir for better land and climate. The location of a Neolithic site on the trade route to India from Sinkiang addresses the fact, the tribe reiterated back to their homeland for six months in summers and came back to the Kashmir valley in winters.<sup>xviii</sup> The Pisacas are also mentioned in the war of Mahabharata as fighting from both sides. They have been shown as inhabitants of punjab and some parts of the Himalayan region in the north. V.S.Aggarwala mentions Pisacas originated from Aryans who inhabited the north-western parts of India and the neighbouring parts of the Himalayas, they were closely connected with the Khasas, the Nagas and the Yakshas.<sup>xix</sup>

The marriage customs and the religious sacrifices of Pisacas have been condemned in the Nilamata purana,<sup>xx</sup> the existence of Paisachi Prakrit also leaves no doubt of their being a real human beings.<sup>xxi</sup>

**Darvas** were the northern tribe and they have been mentioned along with Audambaras, the Kashmiras, and the Trigartas as mentioned in the Mahabharata. The tribe is known by the land occupied by them as darva which is identified with the districts of Jammu and Ballavar.<sup>xxii</sup> Rajatarangini mentions a area of Darvabhisara over which king Ananta of Kashmir had a supremacy.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Abhisara** helped Assakenoi in resistance against Alexander but with time chief of abhisara made peace with Alexander by presenting him with money and forty elephants, Alexander ordered chief of Abhisara to come to his court in person but due to some illness they could not come to Alexander's court and Alexander identified them as the satrap of his dominions

and placed him under his own jurisdiction.<sup>xxiv</sup> As mentioned above Rajatarangini mentions a combined term Darvabhisara as one continuous territory, the land was between the river Vitasta and Chandrabhaga.<sup>xxv</sup> It could be possible that the two tribes may have amalgamated into each other's territories.

The **Gandhara** are mentioned in the Rigveda and Atharvaveda. Gandharas are mentioned along with Kambojas, the Kiratas and the Barabaras in the Mahabharata. Gandhara is identified with the districts of Peshawar and Rawalpindi in the north-west panjab in modern day Pakistan. the close relationship of Gandhara and Kashmir have been mentioned in the Buddhist text Milindapanha.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The **Juhundaras** are part of north-west tribes as they find their mention along with L ampaka, Suhkas, the Avganas and the Gandharas, all of these tribes are situated in north-western areas.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The **Sakas** came from the areas across oxus, the tribe spread in different kingdom including the dependencies of hiau-sium and siun-tu(Sindhu). The southern part of the Kashmir was ruled by Demetrius along with the vast tract of land which extended from Afghanistan to Gujarat.<sup>xxviii</sup> Menander also lived in the southern part of Kashmir and it is assumed that a dialogue between Menander and Nagarjuna was a held at a place which was twelve yojanas away from Kashmir.<sup>xxix</sup>

The **Khasa** tribe occupied the areas to the south and west of the Pir Pantsal range between the middle course of the Vitasta in the west and Kastavata in the east.<sup>xxx</sup> The rulers of Rajauri are also mentioned as lord of Khasas in Rajatatrangini.<sup>xxxi</sup> The khasas are mentioned alongside the Kulutas, the Tanganas and the Kashmiras in Brhat Samhita. It can be safely concluded that this tribe is a hilly tribe and was in close proximity to the region of Kashmir which could be make out from the constant references given in Rajatarangini .

The **Madras** were a northern tribe who occupied the areas between Chenab and Ravi river, the madras are classified as barbarians and evidences show that they came from outside the subcontinent because of the name of their main town Sagala which suggests that it must have been a Saka town.<sup>xxxii</sup> According to Brhadaranyakaopnishad, Madra tribe was well versed in sacrificial studies, but in Mahabharata the Madras are condemned for their close relationship with the Vahikas.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Apart from these major tribes some hilly tribes like **Antargiris** and **Bhairgiris** which were the hilly tribes inhabiting the central Himalayas and lower Himalayas, along with these two tribes Yavanas have been mentioned as one of the foreign tribe and were grouped with the people of Uttarapatha.

To conclude it will be very apt to say that the region of Kashmir was inhabited by the ethnic groups. These tribes find their mention in the Sanskrit as well as foreign literature which tell us that something about their patterns of settlements. While looking at these tribes it will be right to say that they represented different cultural groups. Each tribe brought in with them

their own culture which in turn amalgamated into the culture of Kashmir and in turn helped in shaping the society of Kashmir.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> P.N.K.Bamzai, *Culture and History of Kashmir, Vol.I,M.D.Publications,J&K(1994),p-4*
- <sup>ii</sup> S.C.Ray,*Early History and Culture of Kashmir, Munshiram Manoharlal (1970):p-9*
- <sup>iii</sup> *Ibid,p-7*
- <sup>iv</sup> M.A.Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini, Vol II, Archibald Constable and Company ltd., Westminster ,p-419*
- <sup>v</sup> S.C.Ray, *Op.Cit, p-7*
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid;p-4*
- <sup>x</sup> P.N.K.Bamzai, *Op. Cit,p-42*
- <sup>xi</sup> S.C.Ray; *Op. Cit.,p-4*
- <sup>xii</sup> P.N.K.Bamzai;*Op.Cit.,p-42*
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ved Ghai, *The Nilamata purana, vol.I, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar (1968) , p-46*
- <sup>xiv</sup> Suman jamwal, *Social Geography of Kashmir as reflected in Nilamata Purana, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress Vol.73(2012), p-120*
- <sup>xv</sup> Ved Ghai, *Op. Cit.,p-46*
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid,p-50*
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid,p-63*
- <sup>xviii</sup> P.N.K.Bamzai, *Op.Cit.,p-59.*
- <sup>xix</sup> V.S.Aggarwala, *India as known to Panini, Allahabad, 1953,p-447-448*
- <sup>xx</sup> Ved ghai, *Op. Cit., p--63*
- <sup>xxi</sup> V.S..Aggarwala, *Op. Cit.,p.447-448.*
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ved Ghai,*Op.Cit, p-71-72*
- <sup>xxiii</sup> M.A.Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini ,Vol.I, Archibald Constable and Company ltd., Westminster, p-287*
- <sup>xxiv</sup> J.W.M'crindle, *Ancient India-Its Invasion by Alexander The Great, Archibald Constable and Company ltd., Westminster ,P-129*
- <sup>xxv</sup> Ved ghai, *Op. Cit, p-72*
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid,p-72*
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid, p-73*
- <sup>xxviii</sup> W.W.Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India, University Press, Cambridge(1922),p-155.*
- <sup>xxix</sup> Ved ghai, *Op. Cit., p-74.*
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> M.A.Stein, *Op.cit, p-47*
- <sup>xxxii</sup> W.W.Tarn, *Op. Cit., p-170-171.*
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Ved ghai: *Op.Cit. p- 76.*