

Medieval Period a Transformative Phase in the History of Kashmir

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Abstract

Kashmir valley is not only a symbol of natural beauty but is an epitome of composite culture consisting of elements of various cultures from central Asia, Rome, Greece and India. It has assimilated elements of major world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The culture has not only survived but flourished in the process of changing times. The valley desiccated from Satisar (vast lake) by the meditation of famous saint Kashyapa to save people from demon Jaludbhava. The valley became spiritual abode of saints professing different faiths but mysticism unified them as a result of which a unique syncretic culture called Kashmiri culture evolved which transcended the religious boundaries. The Kashmir has unbroken historical record from ancient past. Rajatarangini (river of kings) written by Kashmiri Pandit Kalhana in A.D. 1148-49 is only work in ancient Indian literature that can be regarded as a historical text in the true sense of word. The Kashmir valley has witnessed many changes during different periods of history in religious, social, cultural and economic realms. This paper focusses on the medieval period in which Kashmir witnessed a great change in the sphere of religion, politics, culture, architecture, literature, trade, art and craft. This period strengthened the pluralistic and syncretic culture of Kashmir through infusion of mysticism and spiritual traditions within the Kashmiri culture. During this period Islam became the major religion as people converted to new faith under the influence of Muslim saints like Abdul Rahman Bulbul, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, Sheikh Noor u Din. The change of rulers during this period played a significant role in this transformation. The contacts with central Asia, Persia and Mughal empire resulted in the assimilation of different cultural elements and influenced socioeconomic fabric of Kashmir. They brought their art and craft to Kashmir and the rulers invited skilled crafts men from there to train Kashmiris which resulted in economic prosperity. Two new languages Arabic and Persian flourished. Persian became official language which continued till modern period. The paper discusses at length all these transformations in various aspects of its history leaving behind a rich legacy.

Introduction

Kashmir valley is located in the north of India lies between 33 and 35 Northern latitudes and 73 and 79 eastern latitudes. Kashmir is mostly mountainous, rising in several tiers from plains of south to the high altitude valleys and peaks in the north enclosing some of the loftiest inhabited hamlets in the world. The boat shaped valley is 84 miles long and 20-25 miles broad. The glittering snow clad mountains, vast and

high table lands along the mountain ridges, lush green landscape of extensive meadows,

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gushing brooks and streams dancing over thick alpine forest covered mountain slopes to meet placid and serpentine drain of Jhelum and cool pleasant climate make the area a real paradise on earth. The magic of Kashmir does not end here. The beautiful valley claim a glorious past of grandeur, power and riches beyond imagination.

The Kashmir valley was a vast mountain lake called Satisar and geologists attest to this. As per Hindu mythology the water was drained from Baramulla by the efforts of saint Kashapaya. However Geologists are of opinion that some geological change had let the water of Satisar to drain out from Baramulla. The land forms, fossils also support the fact that valley remained under water.

The ancient period of Kashmir history witnessed two great religions, i.e., Hinduism and Buddhism and the rulers professed these religions. During the Medieval period Kashmir valley came under Muslim rule which lasted for five centuries from 1339 to 1819 and Kashmir underwent transformation in all the spheres. This period is important in long annals of Kashmir as Islam was firmly planted on the soil of Kashmir.

Transformation during the Medieval Period: The transformation which occurred during this period is discussed as under.

Political change: In the early 14th century Kashmir was yet under rule of the Hindu Lohara Dynasty, despite the fact that North and North West India witnessed end of Hindu rule long before with the advent of Muslim rule. In the early 14th century Kashmir was ruled by Hindu king Suhadeva and a Tartar chief Dulchu invaded valley. Dulchu's army looted, plundered, and murdered Kashmiris. The king fled from the valley to Kishtewar. Rinchin, a Ladakhi prince was given protection by Suhadeva when he fled from Ladakh. Another person Shahmir, a Muslim adventurer from Swat also entered in to the service of Suhadeva.

These two persons together with their followers came in to the aid of Kashmiris and did their bit in opposing the invader. Rinchan gained the good will of people and became ambitious. He planned killing of Ramachandra, the prime minister and became king of Kashmir in 1320. Rinchan wanted to become Hindu but was not admitted by in to Hindu fold by priests. Rinchin met Syed Abdul Rehman Bulbul, a Muslim saint who admitted him to the fold of Islam and became thus Rinchan became first Muslim king of Kashmir under the title Sultan Sadr u Din. This was water shed moment in the history of Kashmir. After ruling for 3 years, Rinchin died and Shahmir invited Udyandeva, brother of Suhadeva who ruled for fifteen years. After his death in 1338, Shah Mir ascended the throne under the name of Sultan Shams u Din and laid the foundation of the Sultanate whose kings ruled Kashmir for 222 years. This period is important in long annals of Kashmir as Islam was firmly planted on the soil of Kashmir.

The Kashmir too witnessed this change and the Hindu rule came to an end and Muslim rule got firm hold in the Kashmir valley from 1339 to 1819 spanning over almost five centuries.

Change in religion and Philosophy: For over two centuries following the Mahmud Ghazinis expedition to north and west of India, Kashmir sealed itself up behind mountains. However cultural influences and ideas could not be shut out, how so ever high the enclosing walls might be. Islamic missionaries carried out the teaching of new religion in to the valley. Most of these missionaries belonged to Persia and Bukhara. The first saint who entered the valley was Syed Abdul Rahman Bulbul who deeply impressed people by his method of teaching and persuasion at a time when fortunes of ruling dynasty were in melting pot and people were passing through a

period of political instability, heavy taxation and crushing burden of feudalism . Above all he was responsible for initiating new ruler in to fold of islam and thus elevating it to the level of state religion. After Bulbul Shah other Sufis like Jalal u Din , Taj u Din and the most prominent sufi missionary Mir Syed Ali Hamadani and others entered the valley with missionary zeal . Mir Syed Ali Hamadani have practically established islam in kashmir. His work was continued by his disciples and more particularly by Mir Mohammad Hamadani. The mission was firmly established by local saint Sheikh Noor u Din who fouded rishi order.Thus Islam take firm roots in the valley and became religion of majority of population inhabiting the valley.As a matter of fact ,the kashmiris ,even after their conversion to Islam ,could not avoid retaining the elements of the local ancient religious culture and ethos while adopting to Islamic forms of life and worship.

3. Language and Literature: The rulers during the medieval period encouraged men of letters and revolutionised the existing patterns of art and literature.. They welcomed scholars from Persia . Sanskrit remained official language for a considerable period of time during medieval period .The persian and Arabic started showing its influence on Sanskrit vocabulary towards the middle of 11th century .Persian became official language during the reign of Sultan Zain ul Aabidin (1420 – 1470 AD). and continued till early 20th century.kashmir produced world famous Persian scholars like SheikhYaqubi Sarfi, Baba Daud khaki, Mulla Mohsin Fani , Mulla Tahir Gani. Sanskrit and Persian were the medium of polite literature but Kashmiri was the vernacular language which reached its zenith during medieval period. Lal Ded, Sheikul Alam propounded their philosophy in Kashmiri .The impact of poetry of these two saints has long lasting effect on the society,

culture , philosophy and religion of kashmiris irrespective of their religion.

4. Architecture: No doubt the stone architecture was hall mark of ancient kashmir in the form of stupas,vihars and temples. The stone art reached its Zenith during Hindu period for which kashmiris got name shatra Shilpina(archetects). During the Medieval period stone art was replaced by wooden architecture. However the muslim rulers retained the architectural style of their predecessors .The wooden architecture of kashmir presents a very distinctive style which takes either a form of mosque, palace or tomb . It commands admiration to this day . The Hindu Kashmiri mason of old has rebirth in the muslim carpenter of the latter day. The master pieces of wooden architecture include khankahi Maulah ,Jamia Masjid,, Tomb of Sheikh Noor –U- Din, Aali masjid , Palaces of Budshah. The stone architecture was revived during the Mughal period and they built mosques, Gardens , Rest Houses. The Gardens built during Mughal era made the kashmir adorned this paradise .

5. Art and craft: During the medieval period development of art and craft reached its Zenith. The credit goes to Sultan Zain ul Abidin who invited competent teachers and crafts men from Samarqand to train his subjects in these arts . industries like Carpet , Shawl, Paper Mache, Silk and Paper Making were introduced . kashmiris with their natural aptitude for art and craft soon attained mastery and began to produce articles in such beautiful designs and varieties that they acquired unrivalled fame in Asia and Europe. It is because of this trade that kashmiris came in to contact with with distant corners of globe from medieval to present times . It contributed and is contributing to the economy of kashmir till date. Kashmir will for all times to come be indebted to Zainul Abidin for development of art and craft.

Conclusion

The medieval phase was indeed a transformative phase in the history of kashmir. Kashmir experienced significant changes in political ,social ,religious and cultural aspect. The dynasty that had long lasting impact on kashmir was Shah Miri dynasty which ruled from the 14th and 16th century. Islam was introduced during this period. The Medieval period also witnessed the flourishing of art , craft , literature and archertecture. The period also witnessed the integration of sufism in kashmir society. Sufi saints played a vital role in spreading tolerance and spiritual enlightenment among the people of kashmir. This led to the infusion of mysticism and spritual traditions within Kashmiri culture. Interaction and cultural exchanges with neighbouring counties influenced the socio economic fabric of kashmir. The transformation in the medieval period left behind a legacy that continues to shape the region's identity and cultural heritage to this day.

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