

A Brief Survey of Literary Tradition of Early Medieval Kashmir

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Abstract: Kashmir has always attracted the attention of various scholars worldwide not only for its cultural traditions socio-political milieu or landscape, but also for its unique place in the history as an abode of learning and literary tradition. People from all parts of the known world used to visit Kashmir in order to cater their literary pursuits. Fa-Hien mentions Kashmir during his visit in India during the time of Gupta period. Hieun Tsang spent two years in Kashmir in order to master different traditions associated with Buddhism. In his *Rajatarangini*, Kalhana has mentioned five most famous things which are attributed to the valley of Kashmir and the foremost amongst them was learning. Kashmir was frequented by foreigners and almost all of them have mentioned and lauded the intelligence of Kashmiri people. Kashmiris were known for their intelligence, their good looks, hard working ethos. This was the land which preserved the traditional and conservative aspect of Buddhism in the form of Sravastivadin sect. Moreover, Kashmir during early medieval period witnessed a literary boom where corpus regarding different genres was produced in this region. In present study we will briefly summarize the literary output and diverse canons produced in the given period.

Keywords: Tradition, Pratyabhijna, Dhvani, Rasa, Alankar, Tantrasar, Somananda, Abhinavgupta etc.

One of the most challenging and fascinating perspective that can be attributed to the literature is the entireness of its geographic and historic range. This implies that through literary texts readers may have the access to the lives and thoughts, fears and Desires, sorrows and pleasures, not only of men and women who are around us, but also of those people who have lived thousands of years before us and may not have shared even a language with us. Quite by the way of mouth, literacy and writing hardly depend on the direct or face to face contact between the sender and the receiver. For the interaction between a reader and a writer we only need the work produced by the respective author and the sheer ability of a reader to comprehend it. Although none of us would be able to talk with the composers of *Illiad*, *Odysseus*, *Kuttanimatam* or *Rajatarangini*, we can all engage with their views by reading what they wrote. In this sense, literature helps and surpasses temporal, geographic and even linguistic discontinuities.

Literary traditions in some sense means a conglomerate process of handing down texts for future generations. In another way of explaining things we can say that tradition often involves a process, which is selective, whereby, the important works which are considered to be of immense value are singled out and preserved for coming generations. Since, judgments of what is important and valuable do undergo changes, and as the number of literary works continue to grow due to new works and the discovery of temporarily lost works, for instance discovery of Tiruvanduram plays of Bhasa, the question that what constitutes the important work, is always subject to revisions. For the present research we are going to ascertain the literary traditions which were followed in Kashmir and the galaxy of work produced in this particular geographical entity.

Kashmir has always been known for being the epicenter of Sanskrit learning and there are various factors which substantiate this statement. According to P.N.K. Bamzai, “Kashmir was the high

school of Sanskrit learning and scholars from all parts of India came to the valley to study at the feet of great teachers and savants”. *Sharda Peeth* was well reputed once as a place for learning Sanskrit in the entire Indian subcontinent and it was visited by revered saints like Shankracharya and Vallabhacharya. The temple was built in the honor of Goddess of learning, Saraswati. Sir Auriel Stein who translated Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, dedicates an entire chapter on this holy shrine and elaborates that how this particular place was discovered by him. The visit of the King of Bengal (Gauda) to this holy place is also mentioned in the work of Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*. He states that the king of Bengal visited this holy shrine specifically to pay his homage there. Alberuni in his *Kitab-Ul-Hind* also mentions this centre and claims that it was venerated by all people and frequented by pilgrims. He provides in his work that this shrine housed a wooden image of the Goddess Saraswati. Kashmiri poet Bilhana ascribes the patronage of learning claimed by the city of Srinagar to favor of Goddess *Saraswati* of Sharada. It is also a reality that when Buddhist texts were written in Pali during the time of Ashoka, same was done in Kashmir but the Language was Sanskrit. People not only from subcontinent but also from foreign used to visit valley in order to learn this language. Hieun T'sang spent two years in Kashmir in order to thoroughly understand the Buddhist corpus written in Sanskrit. The contribution of Kashmir in the development of Sanskrit is immense and it is visible in the various treatises being written on the philosophy of Shaivism like *Pratyabhijna* which also includes *TrikaShastra*.

Kashmiri scholars were well known for their remarkable contribution in the field of linguistics, philology and Vedic literature. A commentary on Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* was written by Patanjali and it is claimed by Pandit Anand Koul in his book *The Kashmiri Pandit* that the latter was a resident of Godra village in the valley of South Kashmir. *Kasikavritti* is another commentary on Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* which is written jointly by Jayaditta and Vamanna, two Kashmiri Brahmins and their work has also been mentioned by I-Tsing in seventh century AD. The thought of the Katantra school was propagated in the valley by two Kashmiri grammarians Bhatta Jagadhara and Chiku Bhatta authors of *Balabodini* and *Baghuvritti* respectively. Although *Katantra* school had its roots outside valley these two scholars made strenuous efforts to disseminate the idea of the school throughout the valley.

This is an undeniable fact that almost all the major schools of Indian aesthetics were founded by Kashmiri theoreticians: The *Alankara* School by Bhamaha, *Riti* school by Vamana, *Vakrokti* school by Kuntaka, *Dhavni* school by Anandvardhana and *Achuyta* school by Kshemendra. Though the *rasa* concept was evolved by Bharata, it was only Abhinavgupta who perfected it as an integrating theory basic to the aesthetic philosophy of the Indians. The contribution of the Kashmiri philosophers who analyzed, interpreted, elaborated and commented upon what the original exponents propounded is also tremendous. Profound thinkers like Udbhata (Kavyalankarasarasangraha), Bhatta Lollata of Rasavivarna, Bhatta Nayaka of Hrdyadarpana, Bhatta Tauta of Kavya Kautuka, Ruyaka of Alankarasarvasava, Mahima Bhatta of Sudhasitavali propounded views which provided impetus to the great intellectual debates about the relation of the aesthetic object and aesthetic experience which continued throughout India for quite a long time.

Nilmata Purana is an ancient text from Kashmir written approximately between sixth to seventh centuries A.D. It was used by Kalhana as one of his main sources for writing history and it deals with the folklore, religion, history and geography of Kashmir. According to prominent Sanskrit Scholar and eminent historian Ved Kumari Ghai “If the *Rajatarangini* is important from the point of view of political History of Kashmir, the *Nilmata* is no less important for the cultural history of that part of the country.” The book presents a sheer contrast to what *Rajatarangini* has in store for its readers, where as the latter presents majestic glories of monarchs, their consorts and royal

entourages the former presents the life of common people right from their dietary habits, religious thoughts, customs, traditions and to the amusements undertaken by them.

Kashmir has always attracted the attention of various scholars worldwide not only for its cultural traditions socio-political milieu or landscape, but also for its unique place in the history as an abode of learning and literary traditions. In his *Rajatarangini*, Kalhana has mentioned five most famous things which are attributed to the valley of Kashmir and the foremost amongst them was learning. Kashmir was frequented by foreigners and almost all of them have mentioned and lauded the intelligence of Kashmiri people. Kashmiris were known for their intelligence, their good looks, hard working ethos and for being good foot walkers. Kashmir has given to the progeny an entire galaxy of dramatists and poets idea of the natural beauty of their homeland they wrote dramas, epics, lyrical as well as dialectical poems, essays, fictions and anthologies. King Jayapida was the patron of Bhatta Udbhatta, his court poet known chiefly for his writings on aesthetics. He also wrote the poem *Kumarsambhava*. Damodargupta was another famous poet and moralist and the chief councilor of Jayapida. Most of his poetical compositions are now lost, but he is quoted in several anthologies.

Sankuka was another famous poet of the eighth century circa A.D. and he was known to have composed a poem with historical touch called as *Bhuvanabhyudaya*. The poem depicted a fierce battle between the two maternal uncles of Chipattajayapida, Mamma and Utpala. The kings of the Karkota dynasty were well known for their poetical compositions themselves. The excerpts of poems written by kings like Jayapuda and Muktapida are duly protected and maintained in *Subhastavali*.

Somananda (875-925 CE) was one of the teachers of Kashmir Shaivism and was the author of first philosophical treatise of this school, *Sivadrsti*. He was the contemporary of Bhatta Kallata and both of them were responsible for evolving the first wave of Kashmiri Shaivites to propose in a rigorous and logical way the concepts of non-dual Shaivism. He was the disciple of Vasugupta, another important Shaivite master and author of *Shiva Sutra*, one of the fundamental texts of non-dual Shaivism. Bhatta Kallata was also Vasugupta's disciple and author of *Spanda Karika*, Somananda and Bhatta Kallata were the disciples of Vasugupta and emerged under his guidelines, each propounding a school of monistic Shaivism, *Pratyabhijna* and *Spanda* respectively. There is hardly any difference between the writings of these two eminent scholars apart from the fact that while Somananda's *Sivadrsti* has a philosophical bent of mind, Bhatta's *Spanda Karika* is more practical and shorter in length.

Utpaldev was the son of Somananda and also his great disciple. He wrote a number of works in order to carry on his father's legacy and further develop his works. His work of utmost importance is *Isvarapratyabhijnakarika*, on which commentaries of Abhinavagupta are also available. Utpaldeva also commented on his father's work, *Shivadrsti*. After Utpaldev the work on Kashmiri Shaivism was done by two emerging Kashmiri scholars, Lakshmgupta and Abhinavagupta, the latter being the epitome of Kashmiri Shaivism.. Abhinavagupta amalgamated the teachings from various schools of Shaivism and reached spiritual liberation himself, after which he took on the huge undertaking of uniting all these schools into one coherent system.

Abhinava Gupta was another philosopher from Kashmir who was considered not only an influential musician, but also a poet, dramatist, theologian and logician. During his time period religious tolerance prevailed in Kashmir where Buddhist, Jain and numerous different Brahmanical schools flourished together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Abhinava thoroughly absorbed himself in the wisdom of these traditions, but he finally joined the lineage that reflected most deeply with his intelligent and passionate nature: Tradition of Tantra in Kashmiri Shaivism

Abhinavagupta has to his credit as many as forty-one works. Some of the most noteworthy works of this eminent Sanskrit scholar are *Malini Vijayvartika Paramarthasara, tantrasara, Tantraloka, Isvara Pratyabhijnya Vimarsini, Malini Vijayvartika Paramarthasara, tantrasara, Tantraloka, Paratrimishikavivrti, Bhairavastava, Kramastotra, Bodhpanchdashika and Bhagavadgitartha-Sangraha*. Broadly speaking, his works fall into four groups. The first group deals with his work on the Tantras. The most voluminous work in this group is *Tantraloka* that enumerates the Tantrik Agamas and dwells upon the elevated way to freedom and discusses three methods of realizing the Ultimate Reality. These methods are separately known as *Sambhavopaya, Saktopaya* and *Anovapaya*. *Malini VijayVivrti*, is another important work written by this author, which belongs to this group and it is believed by many that this particular work was composed by him in the eastern part of the Kashmir valley and at a place called Pravarapur.

The second group consists of his *stotras* such as *Bhairavstava and Karam stotraas* well as few small treatises like *Bodh-Punch Dashika*. A third group includes his work on dramaturgy, poetics, aesthetics and the rhetoric. He learnt poetics under a renowned teacher Induraja and the art of dramaturgy was bestowed on him by a great master of this subject, Tota. P.V. Kane in his *A History of Sanskrit Poetics* maintains that in these two branches of learning, *Lochan and Abhinav Bharati*, monuments of learning, critical insight, literary grace and style are found.

The last group constitutes his work on the *Pratyabhijnyasastra*, the monistic philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. This is the group where we find maximum and matchless contribution of Abhinavagupta in the form of several works. Along with Somananda's disciple, Utpaladeva, he is considered as the most important representative of *Pratyabhijna* school. He conceived Shiva as consciousness and expression of freedom and strength. This concept of freedom (*swatrantya*) is one of the principal achievements of Kashmiri Shaivist thought. *Pratyabhijnya* has thus shown to mankind a new way, which he calls as *Nava Marga*, to human peace and freedom.

One of the most important works produced in Early Medieval Kashmir was *Kuttanimatam* of Damodargupta. Kalhana states that Damodara occupied a high position under the Karkota king Jayapida Vinayaditya. In this work an aged bawd (*kuttani*) named Vikrala gives advice to young but unsuccessful courtesan of Benares. The advice comes in the form of two long but contrasting stories of courtesans, Manjari and Haralata. The work provides an insight of the actual state of affairs in post-Jayapida Kashmir.

Kshemendra was another scholar of the eleventh century who lived in Kashmir and wrote in Sanskrit. He was the disciple of famous Shaivaphilosopher and the most venerated teacher of his time Abhinavagupta. Kshemendra produced myriad of plays, descriptive poems, a satirical novel, a history and a commentary on Kamasutra. His noted works are-*Auchitya vichara Charcha, Kavi kanthabharana and Suvrittatilaka*. He is also known for his satire works where he has humorously ridiculed people's stupidity and vices. *Kalavilasa, Desopdesa, Narmamala and Samayamataraka* are some of his satirical works. *Nitikalpatru, Darpdalana, ChaturvargsamagrahaCharucharya* and *Lokaprakasa* are some of his didactic works. Among his devotional work, *Avadanakalapalata* is based on the good deeds of Buddha while *Dasavatarcharita* gives a description of ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Kshemendra's contribution to Sanskrit literature is considerable and valuable. The credit of widening the scope of several branches of Sanskrit Literature goes to some extent to Kshemendra and therefore to Kashmir. He has vividly depicted topics of various interests and artistically caricatured the social issues of that time such as a musical quack or imposter playing upon the credulity of his victims, a student at the university indulging in voluptuous ventures and a state official making hay while the sun shines by taking bribes and resorting to such tricks as forgery and deceit.

Another work of pre-eminence produced during Early Medieval Kashmir was *Kathasaritsagara* of Somdeva. The literal meaning of the title of the work is Ocean of the River of stories and author has done a commendable job in preserving India's ancient folklore in the form of a series of tales in verse. Somananda was court poet of king Anantadeva of Kashmir and he was commissioned by the king to compose a cycle of stories to amuse and calm the queen Suryamati during a political crisis. He borrowed from an earlier work called *Brihatakatha* of a Prakrit writer Gunadhyaya, who probably had used Buddhist sources of an even earlier period. A feature which sets this text apart from others, is the narration of the text which is in first person and this aspect is not to be found anywhere in the Sanskrit texts of the same period. Another unique thing of this text, which sets it apart from other Indian classics, is its unorthodox and progressive approach towards life, where people need not adhere as per social standing. It is a celebration of earthly life without the rigid practices of attaining Moksha or Liberation.

It consists of eighteen books of one hundred and twenty four chapters and comprises of twelve thousand verses in addition to prose sections. The principle tale is the narrative of the adventures of Naravahandutta, son of the legendary king Udayana. A large number of stories are built around this central story, making it the largest collection of Indian tales. The book also contains the *Vetalpanchavimasti*, mostly known to the people as *Baital Pachisi* and it narrates the story of Vikram and Baital, in its twelfth book.

Kalhana was one of the earliest Kashmiri writers who made a significant contribution not only to Kashmiri literature but all of Indian literature as well. "The River of the Kings" or *Rajatarangini* is his most notable and probably the only work for which he is still remembered today. He has presented the genuine picture of common people and has given a realistic touch in his writings. His work shows that he has used critical temperament and scientific approach in his subject matter. His description of the idle and indifferent crowds of city and their feelings shows that he thoroughly understood the nature of his countrymen. While narrating the events, Kalhana seems to be very specific and has given honest and impartial views related with the events. While recording the contemporary proceedings, Kalhana has presented the principal figures in their individual character and not as types. Here he presents a contrast to Bilhana and Bana who have painted their protagonist in brighter light but antagonist in darker shade.

Kalhana started his work when the political conditions in Kashmir were in a state of turbulence and it snatched away the chance of any patronage to the creative work of art and it points out to the fact that *Rajatarangini* was hardly written under the patronage of any king. He considers only historians worthy of praise whose word, like that of a judge, keeps free from love or hatred in relating the facts of the past, and surpasses even the stream of nectar, and can place the past times before the eyes of men.

Jonaraja (c. 15th century) was a Kashmiri historian and Sanskrit poet. His *Dvitya Rajatarangini* is a continuation of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and brings the chronicle of the kings of Kashmir down to the time of the author's patron Zain-al-Abidin (1423-1474 A.D). He fills the gap which was left vague after the death of Kalhana but even his work remained incomplete because of his death in 1459 A.D and then the charge of completing his work was taken by one of his pupils called Srivara.

In the period under study Kashmir saw a wide range of literary corpus which contributed to various aspects of knowledge. These texts weave into their narratives various socio-cultural, historical traditions which reveal not only the facts but various gaps embedded in them. In Jayanta Bhatta we find an expert in the field of *Nyaya* philosophy and his work *Nyayamanjari* sought to assert the dominance of Vedas while rejecting the vague arguments of rival schools. Many texts which were based on *Agamic* traditions like *Malinivijayatantra*, *Shivsutras*, *Siva Drishti* and others helped in

the proliferation of literature in Kashmir during this period. The philosophical aspect of Lord Shiva was canonized during this period and various branches like *Spanda*, *Pratyabhijna*, *Kaul*, and *Krama* evolved there and were refined in the able hands of scholars like Vasugupta, Somananda, Utpalacharya, Kallata, Abhinavagupta and many others. Kshemendra not only defined different forms of poetic tradition but also gave his thoughts on degeneration of society by composing satires which not only entertained society but also made them aware of the corruption and debauchery which was rampant in contemporary Kashmiri society.

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