

The Survival of the Cultural Heritage of Kashmir

S. P. Shrivatsa

It is a wellknown fact that Kashmir has been renowned for her rich cultural heritage and splendid natural beauty since the dawn of civilization.

Nature has bestowed all her cherished treasures of charming beauty upon this valley. It is but natural enough to note that Kashmir remained a source of inspiration to other parts of our country in particular and the whole world in general through the centuries. Unfortunately, the cultural and political history of Kashmir has been full of many un-bearable and unexpected upheavals. Situated as she is at the most vulnerable position geographically and the most delicate position politically she experienced the amalgamation of various cultures, social orders and religions. The early Vedic civilvization set its roots in Kashmir, the great Buddhist philosophy flourished there from 300 B.C. to 800 A.D. and unique Shaivaphilosophy originated in this beautiful valley.

It was this Shaiva philosophy which due to its significant synthetic approach, novelty, practical utility and distinct thoughts influenced all the schools of Indian philosophy including Tantra.

Besides the local Naga-cult, Vaisnism and Shakticult also grew there side by side without any hinderance. In the later period the Christianity and Muslim religion also invaded and got themselves established in Kashmir with the same fervour.

The peculiar environmental position of Kashmir provided a fertile soil for all such mixture of religions, cultures and philosophies.

In the field of education too, Kashmir did not lag behind. There was a time when Kashmir was a great seat of learning. The great 'Sharada-pitha' was recognised as one of the most prominent seats of learning in our country. Thousands of students

from all parts of the world used to throng this great centre of learning. Teaching in all branches of learning was imparted there.

In Kashmir's most congenial and favourable environment, many scholars achieved miraculous intellectual heights and contributed their best share to different fields of Sanskrit literature. Their invaluable contribution enriched Sanskrit literature to a commendable extent. The Science of poetics was profound there which later on spread over into other parts of our country. In other branches too, the contributions of Kashmirian scholars exceeded both in quantity and quality.¹ The scholars like Vasugupta, the founder of Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, Mammata, a great rhetorician, Kalhana, a well known historian, Abhinavagupta, a versatile genius, Ksemendra, a prolific writer, Ratnakara, Ananda Vardhana, Bilhana etc. were the scholars and the poets of high merit who produced the sizable literature of an immense value.

All their works dealing with diverse subjects such as religion, philosophy, romance, satire, dramaturgy, history, lexicon, grammar, sociology etc. constituted a rich legacy in Sanskrit literature. It is beyond doubt that there is hardly any branch of Sanskrit literature which remained untouched by the Kashmirian scholars.² Thus the Kashmirian scholars played a significant role, in the development of Sanskrit literature.³

It is worthwhile to note that the poets of Kashmir showed their excellency in the field of poetry. The beauty and grandeur of the poetry composed there was recognised by both the scholars and readers. The poetical creation of Kashmirian scholars also covers a wide diversity of themes.⁴ It was a general belief that Kashmir being the abode of the goddess of learning was the most suitable place for composing a unique and beautiful poetry. Bilhanan claims that because the poetry and saffron are like brothers they, therefore, lived together only in Kashmir and not elsewhere.⁵

According to a wellknown anecdote Shreeharsa, a celebrated poet of the Naisadha Carit (a Wellknown Sanskrit Kavya) had to go to Kashmir to get recognition for his poem. After a great deal of trial the goddess of learning had bestowed recognition on his Kavya⁶. Shree Harsa himself gratefully acknowledges in his poetry the recognition that was granted to his Kavya by the Kashmirian scholars.⁷

It is also gratifying to note that the kings of Kashmir gave a commendable patronage for the growth of poetry and other literature in Kashmir from time to time.

The great kings like Lalitaditya, Avanti Varman and Jayaditya etc. were lover of Sanskrit poetry in particular and other type of literature in general. The poetry always remained a pas-time for them. Again, we remember Bilhana who claims that even the

women of Kashmir were well versed in the Sanskrit language and the majority of people could speak Sanskrit fluently.⁸ Sanskrit remained the official language of Kashmir even during the reign of the early Sultanas time e.g. upto the end of 14th century A.D.⁹

There was a belief among the people that if even a man with mediocre talent would go to Kashmir, he could be able to compose a poetry of the standard spontaneously. The same type of belief is now populpr in European countries about Alps. It is that poetry and the snowy mountains go together ?

The political history of Kashmir has attracted the local historians and chronologists like Kalhana and Jonaraja in 11th century A.D. They have recorded faithfully the account of the political developments in Kashmir. Had these scholars not done this great service to the nation, much historical data would have been last for ever, as it happened in the case of other aspects of cultural heritage of Kashmir. A. Stein therefore, was rightly pained to remark in this respect- 'The favours with which nature has lavishly endowed the land in the womb of Himalaya are not likely to fade or vanish. But these manifold remains of antiquity which the isolation of the country preserved, and which helps us to resuscitate the life and condition of earlier times, are bound to disappear more and more with the rapid advance of western influence. Great are the changes which the last few decennia have brought over Kashmir, greater, perhaps, than any which the country has experienced since the close of the Hindu period.

It is easy to fore-see that much of what is of value to the historical student will before long it destroyed or obliterated. It is time to collect as carefully as possible the materials still left for the study of old Kashmir and its earliest records. I have spared no efforts to serve this end, and in the result of my labours, I hope, there will be found some return for the boons which I owe to Kashmir".¹⁰

This alarming statement of the learned European Orientalist warns us beyond doubt that whatever out of whole substantial contribution of Kashmir and her scholars has survived the onslaughts of time needs to be protected very carefully before it also perishes for ever. Such commendable remarks of Dr. Stein inspire us forcefully to unearth the still hidden treasure of antiquity of the cultural heritage of Kashmir.

Keeping in view this very fact it is the primary duty of the student of Sanskrit to pay his attention to bring to light more and more old record of Sanskrit learning lying Kashmir in whatever form it may be. Lest, it may also be lost for ever, we have to be vigilant to save it.

It is worth mentioning here with appreciation that it was Dr. G. Bühlar who had first of all ventured to take initiative in this respect and made an intensive tour of Kashmir Valley for the collection of Sanskrit MSS from there during 1875-76. Having collected so many rare and valuable MSS he had prepared a detailed catalogue which is known as an extra number of the journal of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1977. The Sanskrit scholarship is very grateful to Dr. Bühlar for this epoch-making work of the preservation of Sanskrit MSS Containg Cultural heritage of Kashmir.

After one hundred years of Dr. Bühlar's above mentioned collection work Dr. K.S. Nagarajun came forward to do Ph.D. on the topic 'The contribution of Kashmir to Sanskrit literature' from the University of Poona. His Ph.D. thesis (now published in a book form) is really a wonderful work from every point of view as it provides a detailed information as far as Kashmir's contribution to the Sanskrit literature is concerned. With the help of Dr. Bühlar's catalogue and Nagarajun's book we can assess easily how much Kashmir has contributed to enrich the cultural heritage of Kashmir in particular and of the entire country in general.

Now it is the need of the time to do a thorough search of all the MSS whichever are still in the ignored condition and get them published before they vanish for ever as Dr. A. Stein had feared more than one hundred years ago. Kashmir's cultural heritage is to be saved at all cost.

References :

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3. Ibid, p. V.
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5. Vikramank Dev Carita, 1.21.
सहोदराः कुङ्कुमकेसाराणां भवन्ति नूनं कविता विलासाः ।
न शारदादेशमपास्य दृष्टस्तेषां यदन्यत्र मया प्ररोहः ॥
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