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An analytical study of religion and religious institutions of Kashmir from the 9th to the 12th century C.E. – A case study of Buddhism

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Abstract--In the present investigation, an effort has been made to reconstruct the history and fundamentals of the religious concepts and practises that were prominent in Kashmir throughout the 9th upto 12th centuries C.E. No attempt at such reconstruction will be successful until we have a crystal clear picture of the religions that were practised in Kashmir before the establishment of the Lohara kingdom. An attempt has been made to explore the state of Buddhism. The development and downfall of Buddhism which was once one of the most dominant religion of Kashmir, has been explored. A detailed analysis has been conducted while stating the state of religion during Harha and his father Kalasa and their contribution to the decline of Buddhism. Role of Sankaracharya, the great Saivite philosopher, has been highlighted and his contribution to the decline of Buddhism and spread of Saivism in Kashmir.

Keywords--Lohara, Buddhism, Tantric, Vaisnavism, Saivism, Vihara, Math.

I. Introduction

To begin, it may be stated that many writings, articles, and books have been produced in both educational and non-educational institutions on various themes and elements of Buddhism. Aside from this, numerous articles, essays, and books are produced on the initiative of various authors, either individually or collectively, out of any institution. At the University level some research works including Ph. D and M. Phil are also being done. Despite this, there are many unexplored and unknown aspects of Buddhism in Kashmir that have yet to be

investigated by scholars and authors; additional research on the different issues and characteristics of Buddhism in Kashmir is predicted in the near future.

Literature Review

Kanai Lal Hazra in his work **“The Rise and Decline of Buddhism in India”** Studies the texts found in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, etc. A bit of a slog, not exactly a history in the sense that very few historical texts have survived. Most of the objective material is from visiting Chinese monks who would write of their experiences upon return to China where historical material has been better preserved. There is some epigraphically material, and scanning of religious texts for historical context. It is thorough and a dense read in 10 point type. If one is not familiar with the various deities, schools and aspects of Buddha you might find the lists somewhat intimidating.

Dr. Gail Omvedt’s book **“Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste”** depicts the 2500-year-long fight of Buddhism in India against caste hierarchy in a historical overview. Traditional Indian society's dominant exploitation system, Brahmanism, has been challenged and religious equality has been the goal instead. Dhamma is a central question in this book, which examines the role it has played in Indian civilisation and how it has evolved in a modern, industrialised world. We've talked about the Buddha's teachings and the various schools of Buddhism. When it comes to caste system, genesis of state, and approach to diverse social groupings, the differences between Buddhism and Brahmanism are well highlighted in this section. Among other things, he investigates Buddhism's influence in the development of a more dynamic and open society in contrast to the Brahmanical social system's hierarchy, village-bound structure, and caste-based social structure of the ancient Indian empire. After that, Buddhism was crushed in India, and Brahmanism was reasserted.

Giovanni Verardi’s work **"Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India"** is a pretty in-depth and archaeological study of the old ruins, often times finding that Hindus had destroyed Buddhist religious places and erected their own places on the same spots. During the time of the Roman Empire trade was prospering even all the way to India and China and the merchant class as well as some kings took up Buddhism. After the collapse of the Roman Empire backwards agrarian caste-based society began to take hold via mostly violent means over a period of centuries. The study more focuses on the archaeological point of view, rather than analyzing the information the study generalizes the facts.

Yaqoob M. Allie, in his book **"Social Life in Ancient Kashmir"** has made an endeavour in the present work to give an authentic, impartial and realistic picture of social life in ancient Kashmir. Literary works, epigraphic evidence, sculptural and archaeological material, and the stories of travellers and historians who have visited the region are some of the sources that were used to compile the information for this book. The vast amount of literature in Sanskrit written during this period is a mine of information regarding the life and culture of the people. However, the study more focuses on the social status of the period under study, but the religious status is meagerly mentioned in this study.

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to explore the religious beliefs existed during the period of this study and to study the revival of Hinduism and decline of Buddhism.

Materials and Methods

Research that relies on archival or primary evidence from J&K state Archives and Indian national archives is what this study is about. It's been hunted down among the 15 documents pertaining to the history of Buddhism in India. Academic and other forms of original historical research are at the heart of our investigation. Accordingly, the data are of library type, and the method is exploratory and analytical. The current study's contribution is the revival of Hinduism and decline of Buddhism the over time.

II. Discussion and Result

Buddhism in Kashmir

Religious beliefs and practises do not alter swiftly in India, and when they do, they do not change the face of the active belief so dramatically that it is rendered unrecognizable. Those ideas that existed previously in Kashmir, as throughout the India, sustained throughout this epoch, but with a perceptible progress in Saivism, which subjugated the field; while Buddhism and Vaisnavism, although not expelled from the ground furthermore tolerated by the rulers and the general public, seem to have vanished from the significance. The attitude of toleration, like in other regions of India, is a prominent aspect of religious life, and this spirit led to a catholicity that triumphed over limited sectarian viewpoints.¹

The Nilamatapurana, thought to date from the 6th or 7th century C.E.² was and continues to be the most prominent and influential scripture of Kashmiri Hinduism. The rites it mandated are reported to have been proclaimed in the distant past by 'Nila,' the king of Kashmiri Nagas and protector of the land,³ and it was regarded as Kashmir's bible.

Kashmir has been a land of holy sites since the beginning of time. "There is no place as large as a gramme of sesamum without a tirtha,"⁴ Kalhana explains. According to Alburini, Kashmir, like Banaras, Kurukshetra, and other sacred places, held the same status in his day.⁵

The tutelary deities of springs and lakes or the 'Nagas', were highly revered by the people of ancient Kashmir. The Nilamatapurana lists a large number of Kashmiri Nagas, estimating their number to be in the thousands.⁶ From the time when Kasyapa, the Nagas' father, drained the Sati (Satisara) lake and the Nagas sought refuge in Kashmir from Garuda, popular legend has it that Kashmir is the deities' favourite dwelling.⁷ These Nagas are referred to as 'dragons' by Hiuen Tsang because they are depicted as serpents residing in the water of the springs that they are believed to defend, similar to Chinese dragons.⁸

The Nilamatapurana also has poems explaining the 'tirthas' associated with Siva and Visnu worship. God Krisna is supposed to have said in a passage that Kashmir's territory is Parvati and its sovereign is a piece of Siva. As a result, the Saivas believed Krisna to have been a Saiva disciple. Similar assertions may be found in various Saivite literature, and interpolations in the Epics and Puranas reveal that mediaeval Saivites strove to adapt Vaisnava tradition to suit their needs.⁹

Wilson is of the opinion about the ancient religion of Kashmir, "The religion of Kashmir has been Hindu from a remote date, originally no doubt it was the opposite or the Snake worship, but this is a part of Hindu rituals, and the Nagas are included in the orthodox pantheon. The adoration of Siva was soon engrafted upon this, even if the two rites were not originally identified".¹⁰

"Snakes and snake deities figure quite important in the worship and traditional history of Kashmir. The extent and permanence of the superstition we may learn from Abul-Fazl, who observes that in seven hundred places there are carved figures of snakes which they worship".¹¹ Thus the sacred narration of Kashmir may be concluded in the words written by Wilson almost a century and half ago, which at a standstill holds good in most particulars in spite of later research.

"If any conclusion may be drawn from such imperfect premises, it might be supposed that the inhabitants of Cashmir (sic) originally followed an idolatrous system of their own, to which, they superadded a few ill defined Gods and ceremonies, borrowed from the Brahmans of the plains; that whilst they were yet open to conversion, an attempt was made from the other side, or from Tartary, to introduce Buddhaism (sic) amongst them, which was combated and finally frustrated by Southern assistance: The national faith of Cashmir (sic) has ever since continued Hindu, and almost exclusive form of adoration has been that addressed to Siva and his Sacti (sic)".¹²

Material Manifestations of Religious Fervour

Kashmiri rulers' religious beliefs and actions led to the construction of several religious structures such as temples, Viharas, and Maths. With the exception of a few, they all attempted to do something for the purpose of religious worth. The Lohara dynasty ushered in a period of rapid expansion and development for Kashmiri Saivism, as well as a flurry of literary production in both Tantric and intellectual areas. Suryamati (1028-63) was King Anante's queen who erected many Saivia temples as well as a Matha with an *Agrahara*, *Banalingas*, *Trisulas*, and other sacred emblems.¹³ Siva temples were established at Vijayaksetra and Tripuresvara at an undisclosed location by King Kalasa (1063-89).¹⁴ King Uccala of the Second Lohara dynasty (1101-11) offered thousands of cows, horses, gold, and other gifts on the Brahmans, as well as erecting the famous Vishnu figure known as Parihasakseva, which king Harsha carried away.¹⁵ 'Sussala', his brother and successor, is attributed with constructing three huge temples in his own name, as well as the names of his mother-in-law and wife, as well as restoring Didda vihara, which had been damaged by a fierce fire.¹⁶ The enthronement of Jayasimha and the following installation of good government appears to have boosted religious engagement. Those in favour of Buddhism

stand out among the king's religious foundations; the vihara of Ratnadevi is tied to his patronage.¹⁷ According to Kalhana, the temple of Siva Rilhanesvara that he built at Paravarapura elicited awe and rose to prominence among pious foundations.¹⁸

King Harsha of the first Lohara dynasty is famous for demolishing temples and shattering gods' pictures, which he destroyed so comprehensively that barely two godly statues of Kashmir were spared by him: the renowned Ramasvamin in Srinagra and the most important figure of the vast temple of the Martanda. Two Buddha idols were secured thanks to the intervention of Kalhana's uncle Kanaka and the Sramana Kusalasri.¹⁹

Kalhana however, tells us that, at the time of his death, king Harsha, uttered the words, "O! Maheshwara; showing his faith in Saivism."²⁰ Harsha allotted a particular official titled as *Vidayaraja* as superintendent for the demolition of gods since the temple looting was so extensive (Devotpatanayaka)²¹ Our sources indicate that no conversions to Islam occurred at this period in Kashmir's history. It is undeniable that King Harsha's father, Kalasa, was likewise a tyrant. It is said that near the end of his life, king Kalasa felt immense regret for destroying the picture of Tamarasmin and died at the sacred abode of deity Surya, despite being a Siva worshipper.²² Prof. Kosambai explains Harsha's behavior by citing "the need for money to pay the army (then engaged in the struggle with Damars and pretenders) and for metal (which in Kashmir was always in short supply for lack of efficient prospects) as the only reasons. No theological necessity was discovered, adduced or needed. Harsha did employ Turuska mercenaries but showed as great contempt for Islam as for his own religion, by his pork eating".²³ This pattern reached its zenith during Harsha's reign, having experienced significant expansion under Kalasa's rule. Even before the Lohars, the monarchs' gluttony had led them to disdain the privileges of the Brahmans and steal the money from the temples. This behavior occurred even before the Lohars.

III. Buddhism

Even though some of them were Saivia or Vaisnava in faith, there is abundant evidence to suggest that the emperors, ministers, and even queens of Kashmir extended their support to Buddhism and created Buddhist foundations. This is the case despite the fact that we have this information. Even if some of Kashmir's monarchs, ministers, and queens were Saivia or Vaisnava by religion, there is enough evidence that the succeeding kings of the region of Kashmir, their queens and their ministers, patronized Buddhism and established Buddhist institutions. King Ashoka reigned over Kashmir, adopted Buddhism, established chatiyas and viharas, and covered Suskaletra and vitastara with stupas, according to the Rajatarangni. Although Buddhism came earlier to Kashmir, since one mythical ruler Surendra is believed to have constructed the town of Soraka in the Darada country's vicinity, as well as the viharas Narendravhavana and Sorasa in Kashmir.

The Nilmatpurana confirms Buddhist literature' accounts of the arrival of Buddhism to Kashmir.²⁴ Buddha is made an incarnation of Visnu in this literature, and the Purana mentions the celebration of Buddha's birthday as an

incarnation of Visnu on the 15th day of the bright half of Vaisakha (April-May) in accordance with this belief. On the said day, it is believed that Buddha's figure should be immersed in water containing herbs, gems, and fragrances, and worshipped by reciting the Sakyas' phrases. Honey will be applied to the place of worship. Paintings will be painted on the temple and the stupa. The Sakyas (Buddhist ascetics) are also to be venerated and gifts of cows, monastic robes (civara), food, and books are to be given to them.²⁵ Despite the fact that the Chinese Buddhist scholar Hieun Tsang paints a negative picture of Buddhism in Kashmir in the 7th century C.E.²⁶ the statement that the contemporary ruling emperor of Kashmir went to Kapisa for paying his greetings to the Buddhist monk demonstrates his admiration for the Buddhist faith.

Despite the fact that Lalidaditya Muktapida was a Vaisnava, we have complete evidence about the construction of a very huge amount of Viharas throughout his regime. Instead of Hieun Tsang's 100 monasteries, Ou K'ong uncovered 300 in the middle of the ninth century. At Srinagara, his minister Cankuna built the Buddha image that Lalitaditya had brought from Magadha. The reference of his minister's magical talents seems to be a symptom of Tantric Buddhism's widespread use at the time. King Ksemagupta (950-68) is believed to have destroyed the famed Jayendra vihara and constructed the Siva temple using the brass from the Buddha's portrait.²⁷ The burning down of the vihara is viewed with doubt by Dr. Sunnil Ray and R.C Mitra, and we agree with the view of the latter that "this rage was possibly prompted by political causes rather than by religious persecution motivations."²⁸ When the ruler Partha (906-21) was dethroned due to ministerial plotting, this vihara provided refuge to the rebel Damara Samgrama.²⁹ Queen Didda erected Vaisnava temples along with the Buddhist viharas during Nandigupta's reign (972-73), and dedicated an image of Bodhisattva Padmapani.³⁰

Since the middle of the ninth century, Buddhism has been associated with evil, and rulers have been anti-Buddhist. According to K.C Pandey, 'an expert on Abhinavagupta', Sankaracharya, the famous Saivite philosopher, arrived at Abhinavagupta somewhere during the second decade of the 9th century, after Sankara gave the last drive against Buddhism in the rest of India.³¹ He is of the view that the visit cleansed the local religion of Buddhist aspects, bolstered the place of the new Tantric belief provided by the two immigrant families, which had already started to gain public acceptance, and ignited their interest in knowing more about it. Despite the fact that Kalhana does not record any religious activity on the side of Buddhism during the reign of Avantivarman (mid-9th century), we find no indication of religious persecution throughout his reign.

Pandey is a supporter of Samkaradigvija and earlier authors. His assertions are implausible; for, not only in the north India, but also in the south India, "Buddhism did not tumble to ruin at the touch of Sankara in the early 9th century, nor did it become complete in the 12th."³² Mitra is correct in believing that Sankara the name was concocted by later on zealots as a convincing human organization with whom to recognize the practice of a heresy-hunt, precisely because these authors fashioned a new philosophy in defense of orthodoxy that looked to have shattered the Buddhist defense.³³ He adds: "though he (Sankara) fortified Hinduism against the assault of the heretical sects by enrolling missionaries in its defense and organizing them into corporate monastic schools

... The legend of his having preached and led a bloody crusade against the Buddhists can't be sustained."³⁴ The brass image was taken from Buddhist viharas by King Kalasa (1063-89). However, we should emphasise that the treatment of other sects was equally horrible in his case. When discussing King Harsha's destruction of gods and spoliation of temple treasure, Kalhana specifically mentions two Buddha statues, one at Parihaspura and the other at Srinagara. While the temples were systematically sacked by an appointed official particularly for the reason, and cherished idols were smashed and made to roll on night soil, Mitra argues that Harsha's atrocity had no anti-Buddhist bias; no such horrible destruction of Buddhist idols and relics is recorded.³⁵ But, while we know that Harsha spared the two most important Buddhist images due to Kanaka and Sramana Kusala's influence, we can't state with certainty that he held Buddhism in high regard, as among the spared images are those of Ranasvami and Martanda.

The Queen of "King Uccala of the Second Lohara dynasty" is also credited with Buddhist foundations. Sussala, his brother and heir, is accredited with restoring Didda vihara after it was destroyed by a violent blaze. According to a recently published book, Jayasimha (1128-1155) had a catholic heart and broke up images and burned down viharas at Arigaon near Srinagara, but it was afterwards rebuilt. "Fortunately," the book says, "just a few fanatics of the type of Jayasimha have been installed on Kashmir's throne." ³⁶ There is no proof that Jayasimha broke the idols of gods; on the other hand, he is credited with a number of new facilities as well as the refurbishment of existing ones.

The Rajatarangni contains no evidence of his intolerance; the assertion stated above is based on a stone inscription found at Arigaon, dated 1197 and inscribed in Sarada characters. An prayer to Avalokitesvara begins the inscription. The purpose of the inscription is to describe the repair of a vihara made of burnt bricks by a vaidya named Ulhana to replace a timber edifice that had been burned down by king Simha. Hadigrama was burned down by Sujji during the reign of Jayasimha (1128-55), according to Syen Konow. Hadigrama was identified by Sten as the contemporary Arigaon, where the inscription was discovered. On the other side, Kalhana claims that Jayasimha founded Buddhist viharas himself. The burning took occurred most likely during the conflicts that arose from Sujji's intrigues. This inscription makes it very clear that there was a thriving Buddhist community in Kashmir towards the close of the 12th century, despite the fact that it provides no indication of religious persecution.

"It is curious to note side by side with close attachment to Saivism on the part of both Kalhana and his father the manifestly friendly attitude which Kalhana displays towards Buddhism throughout the chronicle," Kalhana has a general propensity toward religious tolerance and equal esteem for all religious faiths, according to Stein. From Ashoka onwards, a long series of kings receive his undivided credit for the Buddhist faith's viharas and stupas. The Buddhist faith is mentioned throughout history, not just in the early ages. Kalhana mentions Buddha pictures multiple times, claiming to be particularly interested in them. "On several occasions, Kalhana describes the Bodhisatavaas or the Buddha himself as the comforter of all beings, the personification of pure kindness and purity of heart. They are beings of extraordinary goodness to him, who do not

become angry with the offender and instead treat him with patience. Even during the reign of King Jayasimha, when Buddhism was on the decrease in India, we find mention of Buddhism in Kashmir".³⁷

The subjects resolved to assassinate Citraratha, the revenue minister, because they were tired of his horrible demands, claiming that "the destruction of one wicked person is regarded lawful when many are helped by it, even the Jina (Buddha) slew a large snake that killed living people." Though the Buddhist legend alluded to here cannot be traced, it suffices to show the regard with which the people of Kashmir viewed Buddha and his life even as late as Kalhana's time.³⁸ As a result, Kalhana demonstrates his deep knowledge of Buddhist traditions and vocabulary. According to our research, there was little Buddhist construction activity during this time period, and the old viharas had been destroyed by fire and flood. However, the words reflect Somendra's and Kashmir's deep respect for Buddhism. Buddhist themes abound throughout the Kathasaritsagara. R.C Mitra, who has studied the collapse of the religion of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent extensively, is of the opinion that Buddhism flourished in Kashmir during the 11th century. He disagrees with Foucher's assessment that "Buddhism was particularly enfeebled at this period." However, there is no ground for us to agree with Mitra that the belief of Buddhism was in a blooming position and that there was no lack of discipline. We see clear symptoms of laxity, arid pedantry as well as confirmation of magical and exorcisms, and the Tantric imagination's mystic cobwebs³⁹.

IV. Conclusion and Findings

This brief account makes it clear that the religion in Kashmir was the snake worship and the Nagas were held in the highest esteem; hence a system of idolatrous worship of their own; to which they superadded a few ill defined gods and ceremonies existed in Kashmir. With the enthronement of the Karkota dynasty, the Utpalas and the Loharas, Buddhism which had gained the momentum and had reached the zenith in Kashmir during the reign of Ashoka, gradually now began towards its decline. In this process, Sankarcharaya also played a part. King Harsha and his father Kalasa added more to the decline of Buddhism by their means of destruction. In this way Buddhism which once dominated Kashmir for centuries and enjoyed the royal patronage, was to be replaced by Kashmiri Saivism and Vaisnavism and by finally Islam.

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