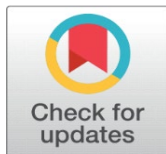
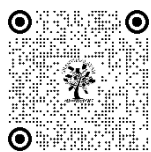


RAJATARANGINI OF KALHANA: A SOURCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

The Rajatarangini of Kalhana is a great source of the socio-cultural history of Kashmir. No history can be completed without knowing its socio-cultural aspects. The Rajatarangini of Kalhana is not merely a 'River of Kings', containing dry accounts of various dynasties, rulers and their activities in court or in the field of war, but it is a veritable encyclopedia of information on the society and culture, the way of life, religious conditions, art and architecture and economic life of the period and so on. As such it becomes a significant source of information to be studied, analyzed and interpreted. Through this research paper, various social and cultural references given by Kalhana, will be explored.

Keywords: Culture, Caste, Center of Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rajatarangini of Kalhana is a veritable mine of information enlightens us about the history of Kashmir, rightly called the paradise on this earth. Though known for a long time, the complete work was not available to the modern scholars almost till the last decade of the nineteenth century CE. The credit of undertaking the arduous task of collecting all the available manuscripts of the Rajatarangini and preparing a critical edition of the same goes to Sir M. Aurel Stein, the then Professor of Sanskrit and Principal, Oriental College, Panjab University, Lahore. He published the edited text in 1892 and its annotated translation was brought out by the erudite scholar in 1900. Stein not only edited, translated and annotated the work but also prepared copious notes on several important aspects, especially on the geographical identifications, which form a compendium to his edition of the Rajatarangini. However, the learned scholar did not dwell upon the socio-cultural history of Kashmir as pictured in this work and the task was left to the future scholars. Later on, other scholars like Durga Prasad and R. S. Pandit also published their versions of the Rajatarangini but this aspect was left out. Professor Jagannath Agrawal of the Panjab University intended to finish the work started by Stein and contributed detailed chapters on the political history of Kashmir in the Comprehensive History of India Volumes III and IV. He had undertaken the work on socio-cultural study of the Rajatarangini but could not complete it in his life time. Some piecemeal work in the form of research papers or flying references in works on the history of Kashmir are available but no comprehensive study of the socio-cultural life of Kashmir as depicted by Kalhana.

2. SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY

Research on Socio-cultural history of Kashmir through Kalhan's Rajatarangini can be done in two ways. The first by exploring the socio-culture aspect of Kashmiri history and second by portraying the picture of contemporary society and its culture by comparing it with the other parts of the country. The detail analysis of the socio-cultural aspect of the Rajatarangini is the reason for the study of ancient Kashmir and Indian historical research in general.

The names of various castes as mentioned by Kalhana in his chronicle and their bearing on the fourfold caste system of ancient India. A close study of the Rajatarangini shows that the population of Kashmir in early times comprised of several castes. There is, however, no well-defined caste system mentioned either by Kalhana or by his predecessors. Though the concept of the population as consisting of the four traditional castes was not unknown to him, as he has used many terms like Brahmana, Rajaputra, Dombas, Kiratas, Canaalas, Nona etc., but there was no such caste as Ksatriyas, Vaisya and Sudra in early Kashmiri society. Many scholars like S. C. Ray believe that there was no intermediate caste in Kashmir, not even Sudra. Caste system, hence, had lost all rigidity and except for the Brahmanas who maintained their traditions tenaciously and who were responsible later in re-establishing the Hindu faith among the people of Kashmir, and low-caste tribes who followed the calling of scavengers, night-watchmen and boatmen.

Kalhana has depicted family life of Kashmir in very detail. He has given plenty of references related to different colours of human life. In traditional Kashmir family setup includes many relations since ancient times, Kalhana in his chronicle has also given plenty of references related to different family relations and presents a wide picture of contemporary family organization. At one place Kalhana says that if a man has seen his son dying of hunger, his wife under the necessity of being sent to another person's house, his best friend in distress, his milk cow paining by want of food and his parents ill and on the point of death. Then hell for that person is there. Through this passage of Rajatarangini one can easily make out the importance of one's family and their happiness for Kashmiri people.

Kalhana has called Kashmir the 'Land of Learners'. According to his work, not only from the different parts of India but also from the rest of world, people used to come to Kashmir for higher education. The different contemporary educational institutions, royal patronage for education and basic educational set-up of Kashmir. The rich contribution to the literary activities of various intellectuals of Kashmir are mentioned in detail by Kalhana in his chronology.

The position of the women is a mirror of the society to which they belong. In detail Kalhana has referred their position in society, their educational rights, various customs and traditions related to women such as prevalence of the system of Sati, etc. In order to have a full insight into the culture of the Kashmir, a survey of the objectives of daily life, such as food and drink, medicines, dress and ornaments, amusements and pastime is very essential. The society of that period was not free from social evil called slavery. Kashmir was also not out of it as we hear of a good many of references about references about slavery in our source-book. Through the Rajatarangini we come to know that mainly two religions were dominating i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism. During the concerned period Kashmir was the hub of Saivism. There were many other minor cults are also described in this chronical.

Through the various names of buildings, as given by Kalhana, the characteristics and specialties of the architecture of that period are discussed as also the sculpture, terracotta and painting mentioned in the work and corroborated by archaeological and other literary evidence.

Kalahana also describe the various economic activities i.e. agriculture, trade, articles, local industries, market setup, transportation etc. are undertaken. It has also included the different groups of people engaged in economic activities.

Thus, we can say that Kalhana has very beautifully depicted the life of Kashmiri people and has given the accurate picture of society and its culture. There are comprehensive and authentic details about family setup, caste-system, position of women, the economic life and various other aspects that have been undertaken.

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