

Empire and Regional Identities: Kashmir under the Mughals-II



PROFESSOR JIGAR MOHAMMED

Kashmir has one of the historical regions of the Indian sub-Continent from ancient period onwards. Its people not only made history of their own, but more importantly they also participated in the processes of the making of the history of the other regions of the Indian sub-Continent. Kashmir was the region which introduced the art of historiography. Kalhan not only constructed the history of Kashmir, but also incorporated the historical events of other regions showing historicity of them. The establishment of rule of the Mauryan and Kushans in Kashmir led to the introduction and spread of Buddhism there. Before its annexation to the Mughal empire by the Mughal emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1556-1605) Kashmir was mostly ruled by the native rulers. The Karkota was the first native ruling dynasty which widened the contacts of Kashmir with other region. It is well established fact that its ruler Lalitaditya Muktapada (725-53 A.D) was one of the most successful conquerors of the world of 8th century A.D. The rulers of the Utpala, Lohara, Gupta and Damra dynasties maintained and strengthened the regional identity of Kashmir in terms of social and economic developments. Kashmir was only the region of India where women exercised socio-political authority in a big way. It produced three queens, Sugandha (904-06), Didda (958-1003) and Kota Rani (1338-39) exercised huge political authority and established that women were eligible to acquire and command political power.

With the establishment of the Sultanate under Shamsuddin Shah Mir in 1339, the processes of the territorial expansion and cultural contacts of Kashmir were intensified. The sultans of Kashmir, Shah Mir to Yusuf Shah Chak (1339-1586) largely respected the sentiments of the people of multi-social backgrounds and engaged the latter in the constructive works. Under the Sultanate of Kashmir many new crafts such as papier-machie, shawl-weaving, carpet making, calligraphy and sericulture etc were introduced. Sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-70) encouraged Kashmiri, Sanskrit and Persian literatures in Kashmir. Both the Sufism and Bhaktism flourished in Kashmir under the Sultans. It is important to mention both Nuruddin Rishi or Nand Rishi and Lal Ded or Lalleshwari, the voices of the subalterns of Kashmir developed and propagated the concepts of dignity of labour and inclusion during the Sultanate period.

However, in 1586-87 Kashmir was annexed to the Mughal empire by the Mughal emperor Akbar. First time Kashmir became a part of the Mughal empire, famous all over world for its political grandeur and economic prosperity. Since Akbar believed in the concept of pluralism, he treated the regional identities of Kashmir as important as his own. Abul Fazl, a court or official historian of Akbar and author of the Akbarnama and Ain-i-Akbari, was instructed by the Mughal emperor to give due space to the regional identities in his historical works. Consequently, Abul Fazl discovered various cultural and physical identities of Kashmir and incorporated in his works so that others could know the characteristics of the Kashmiri culture. The Mughals not gave huge publicity to the existing cultural identities of Kashmir through their literary works, but they contributed significantly to the tracing of the history of Kashmir. Abul Fazl in his Ain-i-Akbari records some of the historical events of Kashmir showing how the Kashmiris worked to make themselves politically and economically noticeable by the world. The sincerity of the Mughals to the cause of the Kashmiris in terms of their history and culture can be estimated from the fact that when Abul Fazl initiated the processes of the discovery of the historical changes and developments in Kashmir. He tried his best to see them from the sources of Kashmir. Abul Fazl found that the Rajatarangini was the most authentic source of the history of Kashmir. Consequently he utilized it for the tracing of the history of Kashmir.

Abul Fazl discovers that historical developments of Kashmir in an inclusive way. His works contain the historical events from the policies and achievements of the political masters to the Amarnath shrine of Kashmir. It is important to mention that the Mughals had a very strong tradition of historiography and their history books were consulted throughout India during the 17th and 18th centuries. Since the Mughals had established a coalition form of the government, the description of the regional identities became a most popular medium of the interactions among multiple identities of India.

To give a definite shape to the historical developments of Kashmir Abul Fazl studied the Rajatarangini and collected information from it regarding the history of Kashmir from earliest period to the first half of the 12th century A.D. Abul Fazl gives all credit to the Mughal emperor Akbar for tracing the historical and natural heritage of Kashmir. The extent of the Mughal emperor's interests in the heritage of Kashmir can be estimated from some of the narratives of Abul Fazl. According to one of the narratives of Abul Fazl, "When the Imperial standards (Mughals) were for the first time born aloft in this garden of perpetual spring, a book called Raj Tarangini written in Sanskrit tongue containing account of the prices of Kashmir during a period of some four thousand years, was presented to His Majesty (Akbar). It had been the custom of that country (Kashmir) for its rulers to employ certain learned men in writing its annals. His Majesty who was desirous of extending the bounds of knowledge appointed capable interpreters in its translation which in a short time was highly accomplished. In this work it is stated that the whole of the mountainous region was submerged under water and called Sati Sar. Sati is the name of the wife of Mahadev, and Sar signifies the a lake. One day of Brahma comprises 14 manavantara. Up to the 40th year of the Divine Era, of the seventh manvantara, at which time Kashmir began to be inhabited, 27 (Kalpas) each of four cycles (yug) as before mentioned, have elapsed and of the twenty-eighth three cycles and of the fourth cycles, 4701 solar years. And when, according to the legend which they relate, the waters had somewhat subsided, Kasyapa who is regarded as one of the most sublime among the ascetics, brought in the Brahmans to inhabit the new region. When men began to multiply they sought to have a just ruler over them and experienced elders, solicitude of the public weal met together in council and elected to the supreme authority one who was distinguished for his wisdom, his large understanding, his comprehensive benevolence and his personal courage." (Ain-i-Akbari, Vol.II, English translation, pp.375-76).

It is very interesting and knowledgeable to mention that the Mughals tapped the information pertaining to the origin and growth of socio-political system of Kashmir in a historical perspective. Abul Fazl approximates the age of society and polity of Kashmir in accordance with the social and political changes in the region. For Abul Fazl, Ugnand was the first king of Kashmir who ruled 4044 years prior to 1595-96 A.D. Narrating the nature of the political power of the early kings of Kashmir Abul Fazl writes, "Ugnand fell by the hand of Balbhadra, the elder brother of Kishan in the battle fought at Mathura between Kishan and Jarasandha raja of Behar. Damodara (his son), to avenge his death marched against some of the relations of Kishan who were hastening to a marriage festival in Qandhar, and was killed fighting on the banks of the Sind...Thirty five princes succeeded, but through their tyranny their names are no more remembered. When Lavah ascended the throne, their justice was universally administered and deeds met their just recognition. He founded in Kamraj the great city of Lavapur the ruins of which still to be traced." The Mughals accepted that the Rajas and Sultans of Kashmir were very much conscious to their power and prestige. According to Abul fity three kings reigned Kashmir during 1266 years. Abul Fazl's lists of the rulers of Kashmir mentions Ugnand as its first king and Yaqub Khan as the last sultan before the establishment of the Mughal rule in Kashmir.

Once the Mughals made Kashmir part of their Indian empire, they devised a plan to keep the works of the previous rulers of the state memorable so that local people could make their histories as the sources of their inspiration. Abul Fazl mentions that Raja Pravarasena, a ruler of the ancient Kashmir, earned a huge fame through his good governance and constructive activities. Describing the achievements of the Raja Abul Fazl writes, "Pravarasena was universally distinguished for his justice and liberality. He founded Srinagar, the capital of the country (Kashmir) rendered it populous during his reign with 600,000 houses." Similarly Raja Lalitaditya of 8th century A.D. Kashmir has been portrayed by Abul Fazl as one of the most powerful warriors of the world in terms of his territorial aggrandizement. For Abul Fazl, "Raja Lalitaditya devoted himself to the prosperity of his kingdom and in the strength of the divine aid overran Iran, Turan (Central Asia), Fars, Hindustan, Khata, and the whole hospitable globe, and administered his dominions with justice. He died in the mountains of the north, and it is said that he was turned into stone by the curse of an ascetic, but others relate the story differently."

Through the identification of the political changes in Kashmir from the ancient period onwards the Mughals preserved and propagated that the Kashmiri ruling families followed the despotism which was most effective form of the government of the ancient and medieval period. But the Mughals also presented many Kashmiri rulers as enlightened and just. Abul Fazl found that the Sultan Zainul Abidin made Kashmir an active participant in Asia in terms of territorial expansion, public welfare activities, economic developments and promotion of knowledge. Abul Fazl make the works of Zainul Abidin memorable in these words, "Zainul Abidin overran Tibet and Sind. He was a wise prince, devoted to philosophical studies and it was his fortune to enjoy universal peace. He was regarded by high and low as a special servant of God and venerated as a saint. He was credited with the power of divesting himself of his corporal form, and he foretold that under the dynasty of the Chaks, the sovereignty of Kashmir would be transferred from that family to the monarchs of Hindustan, which prediction after a period of years was accomplished. His benevolence and love of his people induced him to prohibit the slaughtering of cows, as well as penalties and presents of all kinds. He added somewhat to the measure of the Jarib. His private revenues were drawn from copper mines. He often personally administered medicinal remedies and resolved all difficult undertakings with ease. Robbers were employed in chained gangs on public works. His gentleness of disposition dissuaded men from the pursuit of game, and he himself ate no flesh or meat. He caused many works to be translated from the Arabic, Persian, Kashmiri and Sanskrit languages. During his reign musician from Persia and Turkestan flocked to his court; among them Mulla Undi, the immediate pupil of the famous Khwajah Abdul Qadir arrived from Khurasan and Mulla Jamil who in singing and painting was pre-eminent among his contemporaries, Sultan Abu Said Mirza sent him presents of Arab horses and dromedaries from Khurasan and Bahlol Lodi King of Delhi and Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat were in friendly alliance with him."

The Mughals identified the religious centres of Kashmir. Abul Fazl depicts them in terms of their location, religious sanctity and existing structural conditions. He gives a graphic picture of Amarnath shrine. According to him, "Between Great Tibet (Tibet-i-Kalan or Ladakh) ...Parganah (Dachhhiparah) is a cave which an image in ice called Amar Nat. It is considered a shrine of great sanctity. When the new moon rises from her throne of rays, a bubble as it were of ice is formed in the cave which daily increases little by little fro fifteen days till it is somewhat higher than two yards; with the waning moon, the image likewise begins to decrease, till no trace of it remains when the moon disappears. They believe it to be the image of Mahadeva and regarded it as a means (through supplication) of fulfilment of their desires. Near the cave is a rill called Amraoti, the clay of which is extremely white. The snows of this mountainous tract nowhere melt, and from the extremely cold, the straightness of the defiles and the rough inequalities of road, they are surmounted with great toil." But Abul Fazl identifies Martand in a dilapidated condition. He narrated it in these words, "Matan (Martand) stands upon a hill and once possessed a large temple. There is a small pool on the summit, the water of which never decreases. Some suppose this to be the Wall of Babylon, but at the present day there is no trace of anything but ordinary pit."

Through the recognition and propagation of the local identities of Kashmir the Mughals realized the Kashmiris that the latter's regional identities deserved to be highlighted and historically they were as useful as other identities of the Mughal India. It is well accepted that the Mughal emperor Akbar practiced and propagated the concept of 'peace with all' (Sulh-i-Kul), largely followed by his successors. Consequently, the literary men followed the concept of inclusion in selecting themes of their writings. Since Kashmir was an important frontier region of the Mughal empire, the Mughals understood it a their duty to it respecting the local identities.

The descriptions of these identities by the Mughal literary works show that they treated the Kashmiris as the makers of their own histories. The Mughals also accepted that both empire and region could work together when the latter's cultural identities were respected by the empire. The Mughals' policy of the treating the regional identities as the basis of the strength of a region led to the intensification in the process of the association of the Kashmiris with the Mughal empire.