

Past: the Mirror of the Present-II

PROFESSOR JIGAR MOHAMMED

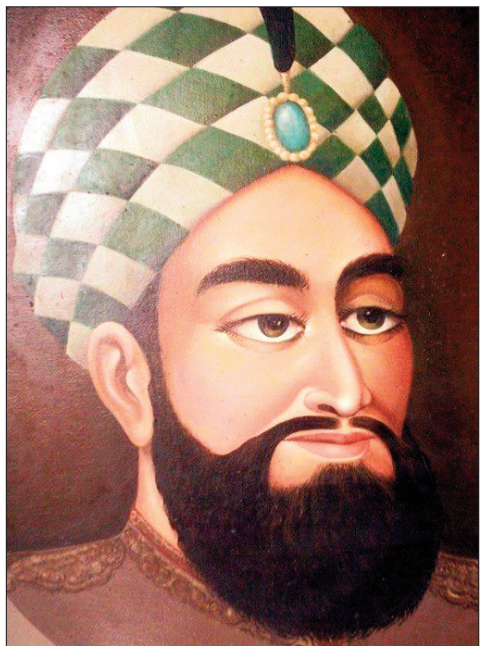
The topography and climate of Kashmir conditioned the political and socio-economic life of the people during ancient and medieval periods. Though the nature of the population of the region was heterogenous in terms of classes, castes and religions, people found themselves nearer to each other because of similarity in food, dress, language and common means of livelihood. Consequently, Kashmiris hardly practised the concept of exclusiveness during ancient and medieval periods. Religious tolerance, common good and working together were the dominant trends of Kashmir.

From the thirteenth century onwards these aspects of Kashmiri cultures were very much intensified. In 1286-87 the Damras, a landed class, emerged as a ruling class of Kashmir. Emergence of a landed class as a ruling class was a purely Kashmiri phenomena. In other parts of the medieval world it was a rare socio-political development. However, the Damra rulers were the practitioners and formulators of the policies of providing opportunities to the all types of people, who were willing to work.

They created a confluence of various cultural trends. Suhadeva (1301-20), a very liberal Damra ruler, adorned his bureaucracy and court with the recruitment of the persons of different racial, religious and professional backgrounds. Consequently, persons from outside Kashmir also came there to seek their fortune. A Tibetan or Ladakhi Rinchana, a Central Asian Shah Mir and Sayyid Sharafud Din, better known as Bulbul Shah, a sufi of Suhrawardi Silsilah, came to Kashmir. Both Rinchana and Shah Mir found opportunity to emerge as the rulers of Kashmir in the fourteenth century.

As for as Rinchana was concerned, he was a Buddhist by faith. But to acquire political power he accepted Islam. Since religious changes were usual and natural developments during ancient and medieval period, Rinchana's acceptance of Islam confined to his personal satisfaction. However, Rinchana was a very hard working and ambitious person. Therefore, he decided to assume the royal authority of Kashmir. In 1320, when Kashmir faced political anarchy, he occupied the political power of Kashmir and declared himself as a ruler assuming the title of the Sultan Sadrud Din and ruled Kashmir for three years.

But after his death in 1323 the Damra rule was re-established by Udayanadeva (1323-38). The latter was succeeded by her queen Kota Rani (1338-39). Under both Udayanadeva and Kota Rani, Shah Mir played a role of prime-mover in terms of the political security in Kashmir. He saved Kashmir from the onslaught of Achala, a



Mangol invader. Consequently, Shah Mir aspired for acquisition of political power of Kashmir.

Since during the ancient and medieval period the superior armed power was the source of the acquisition of the sovereign power, Shah Mir experimented the use of his sword and succeeded in the occupation of the political power of Kashmir defeating Kota Rani in 1339. Shah Mir acquired the title of Sultan Shamsuddin. The rule of Shah Mir dynasty continued for about two hundred twenty five years in Kashmir. The establishment of the rule of Shah Mir led to considerable change in political and socio-economic life of Kashmir. The Kingdom of Kashmir started to be known as the Sultanate. Under the Shah Mir dynasty Centralised administration, territorial expansion, cultural exchange and Sufism and Bhaktism became the major political and socioeconomic trends. The rulers of Shah Mir dynasty started to be called Sultan, means power.

Several Sultans ruled Kashmir during the sultanate period or from 14th to the 16th century. Most of the Sultans tried to ensure the security and socio-economic growth in Kashmir. Though they belonged to Muslim community, they run the administration of Kashmir under the concept of inclusiveness and incorporated both the Hindus and Muslims in bureaucracy. Sanskrit was continued as an official language for long time.

Sultan Shihabuddin (1354-73) made territorial expansion with support of the commanders such as Sayyid Hasan Bahadur, Chandra, Sura and Laula, belonging to both the Muslim and Hindu communities. He patronised the persons of different religions such as Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism



and Islam. When a severe flood occurred in Kashmir, Sultan Shihabuddin extended financial support to the people of all religious backgrounds. Even he founded a town Lakshminagar in the name of his queen Lakshmi.

Although one Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) is known to have harassed some non-Muslims under his rule, his son Sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-70) surpassed all the rulers of the medieval world in terms of religious tolerance and economic growth in his kingdom. Sultan Zainul Abidin revived the Sanskrit historiography, which had disappeared after the death of Kalhan in 1149-50.

He commissioned two of his Kashmiri Brahman courtiers to restart the writing of the Rajatarangini, the tradition established by Kalhan. First he asked Jonaraja to revive the historiography in Kashmir in form of the writing of the Rajatarangini.

It was accepted by Jonaraja and he produced Rajatarangini, covering the history of Kashmir from the twelfth century onwards. When he died in 1459, his disciple Srivara was ordered by Zainul Abidin to carry on the writing of Rajatarangini in Sanskrit language.

Srivara produced Jaina Rajatarangini. He patronised both the Persian and Sanskrit scholars. He also granted huge sum and land to the Persian and Sanskrit scholars. Number of Sanskrit works such as Brihatkathasara, Mahabharat, Kalhan's Rajatarangini, Hatakeshvara Samhita and Puranas were translated into Persian language under him.

For Zainul Abidin, knowledge could be acquired through various sources. He never allowed the concept of uniformity to prevail upon the spread of knowledge. He granted

religious freedom to both the Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir. He allowed all those converts to go to their original faith who had accepted Islam under some hardships.

While Sultan Zainul Abidin appointed a large number of non-Muslims in his bureaucracy, preference was given to the Brahmins. Shiryia Bhatta was the most confidant of the Sultan and superintendent of the court of justice.

Similarly, Karpur Bhatta, Rupia Bhatta and Rupyia Bhatta were appointed as a royal physician, court astrologer and treasurer, respectively by the Sultan. Malik Autar Chand and Daulat Chand were the chief army commanders of the Sultan. Tilakacharya, a Buddhist was appointed as an important administrator of the Sultanate.

The Sanskrit scholars such as Jonaraja and Srivara called Zainul Abidin as a just ruler who cared for the well-being of all. They entitle Sultan as the Vishnuavatara. They term his rule as the Rama Rajya, his capital as Dwarika.

According to them, Zainul Abidin participated in the various Hindu festivals such as Nagayatra, Ganachakra, Vyath Truvah, Chaitra etc. Zainul Abidin's magnanimity, sagacity, generosity and enlightened attitude towards his people made him very popular among the common Kashmiris.

He started to be called as Bud Shad (Great King).

Under the Sultanate of Kashmir, two new social trends emerged in Kashmir-Sufism and Bhaktism.

It is known that Sayyid Ali Hamadani, better known as Shah-i-Hamadani, came to Kashmir from Persia. He initiated the process of inter-faith dialogue. He interacted with both the Hindus and Muslims in terms of the religious discussion. Similarly, the Rishi sufi order emerged in Kashmir during the Sultanate period.

Nuruddin Rishi, the founder of Rishi Sufi order, spread the concept of the Unity of Being. He spread the message of peace and non-violence. His philosophy of the Unity of Being and practices became so popular among the Kashmiris that the Hindus started to call him as the Nand Rishi.

After his death his shrine started to be worshipped by both the Hindus and Muslims. More importantly, his shrine became the centre of the meetings of the people of the multiple faith.

Similarly, Lal Ded or Laleshwari, a Bhakti reformer of Kashmir, also propagated the inter-faith dialogue and taught the people to live together respecting the religious feelings of each other. Lal Ded became the favourite of the subalterns in terms of the socio-economic life.

Her songs became sources of inspiration of the common Kashmiris. Throughout the Sultanate of Kashmir the sharing of political power among the people of the different religions, races and professions were practised by the ruling class. All types of people enjoyed the fruits of economic growth. Kashmir established cultural relations with central Asia, Persia and different parts of India. Political autonomy of Kashmir retained intact by the rulers of Kashmir.