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1

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Research Paper - History

**Kashmir Before Independence -
A Historical Interpretation**

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ABSTRACT

When we talk about Kashmir in present period of time, it encompasses the Kashmir valley which is the area between Pir Panjal range and the northeast of Himalayas, Jammu, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Aksai Chin. Amongst all the regions in the Indian subcontinent Kashmir has the oldest written records of its history for example 'Rajatarangini' written by Kalhana mentions records as old as 3450 BCE.

Legends say that Kashmir which was earlier known as Kashyapa-Mir got its name from Kashyapa Rishi who drained a lake which covered the valley to make a home for his people. Kashmir has seen several ruling dynasties come and go. We will see the brief history of these Empires which ruled over the area of Kashmir and also how they influenced the lives of people.

Research Methodology-

The methodology used for the paper is analytical and descriptive. The source of the data is secondary data. All secondary data are collected from various published and unpublished records, reports, books, Research journals and magazines.

Objectives-

- 1] To study the rise of various Empires in Kashmir before Independence and the societal and economical changes they brought with it.
- 2] To study how modern-day Kashmir came into existence.

Early History of Kashmir

We can see the mention of Kashmir in many ancient Vedic texts and scriptures. 'Nilamata Puran' is Kashmir's own Puran which was written between 6th and 8th century BCE. Though this text is often considered chronologically incorrect.

'Rajatarangini' is yet another historical chronicle written by Kalhana who was a Kashmiri historian in 12th century BCE. Rajatarangini's literal meaning is 'Flowing River of time comprising of kings and kingdoms'. This book contains invaluable information about early history of Kashmir and its culture, also this text is widely referred as a source of information by many historians.

Kalhana has briefly mentioned about Emperor Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karakota dynasty and characterized him as a 'World Conqueror' who ruled Kashmir for around 37 years from 724 CE to 761CE, his empire was stretched from Central Asia to the Gangetic Plains. The famous Martand Sun temple whose ruins are located in Anantnag was also built by Lalitaditya [This temple was destroyed by Sultan Sikandar Shah Miri in 15th century].

Kashmir was not just a piece of land, among her famous visitors was Alexander the Great who during his expedition to conquer the world visited Kashmir. Here in the folk tradition of this land, some of his names are still preserved like *Yavan Raza* and *Wan Raza* which means someone with fair complexion and it was definitely none other than the Greek prince. She was a home to many great personalities too, Sarangadeva a Indian Musicologist who is also considered to be the father of both Classical and Hindustani music was born in Kashmir. It was a home to one of the subcontinent's greatest philosophers the mystic, Abhinavagupta and scholars like Shankaracharya. Kashmir has many stories to tell.

The Land of Shaivism and how Buddhism flourished in the valley

Since early times Kashmir has been a renowned center of Brahminical and Buddhist philosophy. It was a well-known seat of Shaivism which focuses on manifestation of Lord Shiva and the beauty of the world around us was worshipped as Shakti. Therefore, it became an important pilgrimage for the followers of Shiva.

Emperor Ashoka brought Buddhism into the valley in around 250 BCE, that flourished too with Shaivism and both co-existed in harmony. The Mahayana form of Buddhism became popular during Ashoka's rule and travelled over the mountains northwards and eastwards from Kashmir to Central Asia, China and Tibet. Srinagar the summer capital of modern-day Jammu and Kashmir was founded by Emperor Ashoka. Kalhana in Rajatarangini records Buddhism as a prominent religion in the region and describes how it spread across the region. In 7th century when Xuanzang visited India Buddhism was all across the Kashmir which rivaled the importance of Magadha [The area in which Lord Buddha has lived and preached].

The Sultan Dynasty [1339-1561 AD]- Emergence of Islam in Kashmir

Kashmir had always been a popular route into the subcontinent for traders, scholars and invaders. Islam first appeared in the valley from over Khyber-Pass. Shah Mir an Iranian Turk came Kashmir to seek refuge but became influential and somehow managed to overthrow the then ruling Rinchanas and thus established the first Muslim dynasty, the Sultan Dynasty.

His rule was excepted by the Hindus, Buddhists and whatever little Muslim population was there at that time. His rule was a successful one as he recaptured the lost pieces of land during Mongol invasion. Shah Mir died in 1342.

After Shah Mir his grandson Sultan Shihab Ad-Din came in power in 1355 and expanded the Empire to Baltistan, Ladakh and Jammu. But all these campaigns severely affected Kashmir's Economy. One of Sultan's Hindu ministers also suggested him to melt the statue of Buddha to make mint coins but sultan refused to do so as he didn't wanted to set a bad example for his successors. Due to this sudden shift of power the top bureaucracy was still dominated by Hindu Brahmin ministers. The state at this point of time didn't sponsored Islam in any shape or form. But this was about to change by the arrival of Sayyid Ali Hamdani in 1381 under the rule of Sultan Qutb Ad-Din. Hamdani was a Sufi master and he had a great influence on Kashmiri monarchy. Muslims and Hindus before the arrival of Hamdani lived together and took cultural things from each other, but he saw it as an abomination.

Gradually Sufism helped to bridge the gap between Islam and Hinduism. Kashmiris then slowly used this to convert into the religion of their ruling Dynasty. Rishis was another sect of Sufism which preached religious harmony in the valley.



Sultan Qutb Ad-Din died in 1389 and was then succeeded by his son Sikandar Shah. In contrast to the earlier Sultans like Shihab Ad-Din, Sikandar was not tolerant and believed in the Islamisation of valley. He destroyed many Hindu and Buddhist temples and therefore was infamously also known as Iconoclast. He was closely aligned with puritanical Sufis like Hamdani which led to the oppression of non-Muslims in the valley. *Jizya* which is a head tax for non-Muslims was implemented, Hindu Ministers were also not exempted and there are also the records of forced conversions under Sikander Shah.

This reign of terror came to an end when Sikander's son Zain ul-Abideen came into power in 1420 CE. Unlike his father Zain was known as 'The Akbar of Kashmir' due to his nonpartisan governance. He was also influenced by the Sufis but not the puritanical ones like Hamdani but rather Rishis. He revoked the *Jizya* and improved relations with Hindus and Buddhists. Zain told the Muslims who had converted from Hinduism forcefully that they could revert to their old faith. He converted the valley into a hub of culture where Brahmins were studying Persian and Iranians were studying Sanskrit. Under Sultan Zain's rule Kashmir was lot more prosperous economically too. However, by now Hindus had become a minority.

Sultan Zain ul-Abideen ruled for around 50 years and after him the decline of Shahmiri or Sultan Dynasty started. In 1555 CE Shahmiri dynasty was overthrown by the Chaks who ruled until 1586 CE.

Mughal Empire [1586-1751 AD]

The Mughal Era transformed Kashmir in a whole different way, numerous magnificent gardens and mosques were built. The Mughal Emperors loved Kashmir and always admired its beauty. Mughals appointed Governors to administer and gave Kashmir prominence in their Empire. But the Hindus and Shia sect of Muslims were persecuted by the Sunni Mughal Governors. After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 Mughal dynasty began to collapse and were then overthrown by Afghans.

Durrani Empire [1747-1819 AD]

Some Kashmiri Historians recorded the Afghan rule as one of religious oppression. There are records of Extortion and enslaving of native population under the Durrani Empire. Kashmiri population was burdened by heavy taxes regardless of their class and religion. After the death of Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1773 his son Timur Shah ruled till 1819.

Sikh Empire [1819-1846 AD]

After nearly 400 years of Muslim rule the Sikh army took Kashmir from the Afghans in the early nineteenth century under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In close to 500 years Kashmir was under a non-Islamic rule and this was the beginning of Kashmir as we know it today. Ranjit Singh installed Gulab Singh a Dogra from Jammu, as the governor of Kashmir to rule in his place. He was given complete autonomy so that he even maintained his own army. Gulab Singh's army was led by General Zorawar Singh, in 1834 general captured Ladakh and expanded the Sikh Empire to the north. Maharaja Gulab Singh continued his Himalayan war campaigns even after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death. He extended the Sikh Empire to Gilgit Baltistan, right up to Lake Mansarovar. They extended their boundaries right up to Tibet, China and Russia. But after the defeat of Zorawar in Battle of Toyo in 1842 the then Dalai Lama and Emperor of China signed the 'Treaty

of Chushul' with Gulab Singh which ceased Sikhs to extend their boundaries further. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 there was a power struggle in Punjab and the East India Company saw this as a great opportunity. Company eventually won Punjab and Kashmir in Anglo- Sikh Wars.

Dogra Empire [1846-1947 AD]

Maharaja Gulab Singh stayed away from Anglo Sikh Wars and under the 'Treaty of Amritsar, 1846' he bought the area of Kashmir from the British at 75 lakhs Nanak Shahi rupees which was the exact cost to the East India Company in Anglo Sikh wars.

Now, Gulab Singh was the Maharaja of this newly created state of Jammu and Kashmir. Company had control over the defence and foreign affairs of this state.

Dogra ruled Kashmir for around 100 years. Maharaja Hari Singh was the last Dogra King and he signed Instrument of Accession with India on 27 Oct,1947 after Independence.

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