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KALHANA
POET-HISTORIAN OF KASHMIR

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PREFACE

This lecture on Kalhana, the twelfth-century historian and poet of Kashmir, was delivered on October 14th, 1955, at the London Branch of the Indian Institute of Culture (62, Queen's Gardens, W. 2) by Shri Somnath Dhar of the Information Service of the High Commissioner of India at London. For several years an educationist in his native Srinagar, Shri Somnath Dhar is the author of three books on Kashmir: *Kashmir: Eden of the East*, with an introductory essay by Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, *Kashmir in Stories* and *Kashmir Folk-Tales*. He is a member of the Institute of Public Relations in London and of the Indian Council of World Affairs.

Kalhana displayed in his Chronicle, to which the lecturer introduced his audience, a detachment and a tolerance which would have won him distinction as a historian even in countries where historians abound, as they do not in India. Add to his qualifications as a historiographer the poet's sensitivity and Kalhana's mastery of the exacting requirements of Sanskrit prosody and his place in Indian literature is incontestable. The *Rajatarangini* (The River of Kings), as this lecture brings out, not only sheds light on the Kashmir of Kalhana's time; it also justifies certain inferences about conditions in other Indian States of the period.

Such a lecture, to which the Indian Institute of Culture is happy to give wider dissemination, is not only a contribution to mutual appreciation between peoples; it also helps to bridge the centuries.



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KALHANA

POET-HISTORIAN OF KASHMIR

India's distant past is blurred for lack of precise chronicles. The conception of history in ancient India took the form of chronicles of achievements of the rulers—real or mythological. The *Puranas*, for instance, gave genealogical records and described at length the achievements of kings who ruled India before the advent of the Aryans. But few facts about these rulers are available for attempting a scientific history. In the whole period of Sanskrit literature there is no writer who can be seriously regarded as a critical historian.

It is only after the sixth century of the Christian era that we get chronicles of illustrious rulers, such as Bana's *Harshacharita*, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the *Akbarnama*, etc. The facts contained in these books can be verified with reference to a mass of historical material contained in contemporary works of literature and also to epigraphic and numismatic evidence. Thanks to Kalhana, Kashmir occupies the place of pride in India for having a comprehensive recorded history extending to thousands of years past.

The *Rajatarangini*, or the "River of Kings," by Kalhana Pandita, is the earliest extant history of Kashmir.¹ A unique historical poem, written between 1148 and 1150 A.D., the *Rajatarangini* contains valuable political, social and other information pertaining to Kashmir and the rest of India. In the words of H. G. Rawlinson, it is "Hindu India's almost sole contribution to history." Among the extant works of Sanskrit literature, Kalhana's Chronicle stands out for its comparatively exact chronology. It has also offered the key for fixing the dates of many Indian Scholars who wrote literary and philosophical works.²

¹ An abridged edition of the *Rajatarangini* in Persian was brought out by Haidar Malik, who began it in 1617 A.D., in the Emperor Jehangir's reign. An edition of the work was published in Calcutta under the auspices of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1835. The first complete translation from the original Sanskrit appeared in French. Sir Aurel Stein translated the *Rajatarangini* into English in 1900. A literal translation of Kalhana's Chronicle into English, complete and unexpurgated, was made by the late Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, whose wife, Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit, is now Indian High Commissioner in Great Britain and Ambassador to Ireland.

² Sir A. Stein introduces thus his translation of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*: "The interest of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* for Indian history generally lies in the fact that it represents a class of Sanskrit composition which comes nearest in character to the Chronicles of Mediæval Europe and of the Muhammedan East. Together with the later Kashmir Chronicles which continue Kalhana's narrative, it is practically the sole extant specimen of this class. . . . Kalhana nowhere claims the merit of originality for the plan and form of his work. On the contrary, he refers to various earlier compositions on the history of Kashmir Kings which he had used. But none of those older works has come down to us. Nor has Sanskrit literature in any part of India preserved for us remains of Chronicles similar to the

Indeed, the Chronicle has contributed a good deal to the reconstruction of ancient Indian history.

KALHANA AND HIS TIME

Facts regarding Kalhana's person and contemporary life have been gleaned from his narrative by patient research. Compared with Kalidasa, who is the subject of conflicting anecdotes, Kalhana Pandita stands out as a definite and rather attractive personality. "Kalhana" is a Prakrit variant of the Sanskrit word *Kalyana* which means "auspiciousness." Kalhana was born in an aristocratic family in Parihaspura, a town in Kashmir. The colophons with which each book of the *Rajatarangini* is concluded ascribe the composition to "Kalhana, the son of the great Kashmirian minister, the illustrious Lord Canpaka." Through this and other indications scattered throughout the Chronicle instructive facts regarding Kalhana and his time and surroundings have been gathered. His father, Canpaka, was a Kashmiri nobleman, who held the office of Lord of the Gate (*Dvarpati*) or commandant of the frontier defences during the reign of the ill-fated King Harsha.

The major portion of Kalhana's life passed in what was for Kashmir one long period of civil war and political strife. The commencement of the twelfth century brought an important dynastic revolution in Kashmir which affected the political life of the country.³ King Harsha, whose reign (1089-1101 A.D.), initially secured prosperity and peace, became a victim of his own Neronian disposition. The landed aristocracy of the Damaras, harshly persecuted by him, rose in revolt against the king. Harsha was killed. The usurping brothers, Uccala and Sussala, partitioned the country.

In his chronicle Kalhana speaks admiringly of his father, Canpaka, though he does not share the latter's affection for his royal master, Harsha. Kalhana holds the whimsical king up to derision for his many failings. He mentions Canpaka's acts of valour during Harsha's expeditions. Canpaka remained absolutely loyal to his patron till his last battle against the Damaras; thereafter, he (Canpaka) played no part in public life. Kalhana's work makes it clear beyond a doubt that he had never known want or worked for a living. He did not hold office under any of the rulers of the new dynasty.

The family heritage of Kalhana was noble *par excellence*. Deeply impressed by the life and character of his father, he was proud of his birth

Rajatarangini though indications of their former existence have come to light in various quarters."

³ In his Foreword to R. S. Pandit's translation of the *Rajatarangini* Jawaharlal Nehru says: "Kashmir has been the meeting ground of the different cultures of Asia, the Western Græco-Roman and Iranian and the Eastern Mongolian, but essentially it was a part of India and the inheritor of Indo-Aryan traditions. And as the economic structure collapsed it shook up the old Indo-Aryan polity and weakened it and made it an easy prey to internal commotion and foreign conquest."

and lineage, but he did not write to praise or to blame any individual or group. Belonging to the Brahmin élite, Kalhana and his family yet were tolerant towards Buddhism. (The Chinese pilgrim Ou-K'ong, who visited Kashmir in 759 A.D. found three hundred Buddhist converts in Kashmir. Later, however, Buddhism was supplanted by Kashmir Saivism.) Despite close attachment to the Saivist creed of Brahmins on the part of Kalhana and his father and their ancestors, Kalhana shows a friendly attitude towards Buddhism throughout his Chronicle. Kings from Asoka down to Kalhana's day are admired for founding *Viharas* and *Stupas* to propagate Buddhism. "Kalhana does not hesitate to refer repeatedly to the Bodhisattvas or to Buddha himself as the comforter of all beings, the embodiments of perfect charity and nobility of feeling." Kalhana's belief in Karma, similar to that of the Buddhists, is prominent in the Chronicle. He evinces thorough familiarity with special points of Buddhist tradition and terminology. And Kalhana's tolerance was even extended to idol-breakers and iconoclasts—for as a historian he was an independent and dispassionate observer.

KALHANA AS HISTORIAN

Kalhana did not belong to that order of Brahmin Pandits or *Kavis* who were compelled by poverty or ambition to lay their talents at the feet of vain monarchs. By custom and literary tradition, Indian authors, particularly the court poets, showered praise and flattery on their royal patrons; the *Rajatarangini* offers negative evidence on this point. Nor is Kalhana's Chronicle merely a collection of old legends and myths like the *Shahnama* of Firdausi.

On the rôle of the historian, Kalhana says: "That man of merit alone deserves praise whose language, like that of a judge, in recounting the events of the past has discarded bias as well as prejudice." Living up to this standard, Kalhana's standpoint as the historian is that of an unbiased chronicler. Non-Kashmiris, e.g., Bengalis who did great things in Kashmir, elicited unstinted admiration from him. Royal love affairs, court intrigues and military campaigns were described with the same veracity with which he gave accounts of famines, fires and floods. He gave dates only after 819 A.D. for from that year onwards he was sure about their authenticity. About events and personalities of contemporary history, Kalhana was consistently impartial and precise.

Kalhana's Chronicle is neither Voltaire's *History of Russia* nor Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. His was not only a serious contribution to history, it was pre-eminently a work of art (*Kavya*). He looked upon himself not merely as a historian but also as a *Kavi*, a seer-poet. R. S. Pandit compared Kalhana to Æschylus and Homer, "as a poet of veracity and universality." Kalhana himself thus defined the qualifications of a *Kavi*:—

Worthy of praise is that power of true poets, whatever it may be, which surpasses even the stream of nectar, inasmuch as by it their own bodies of glory as well as those of

others obtain immortality. Who else but poets...able to bring lovely productions can place the past times before the eyes of men!

In Kalhana's pen pictures the past of Kashmir is gloriously vivified and re-created. It is his skill as a *Kavi*—the merit of his poetic composition—which has saved from oblivion the history of his country.

To shine forth as a *Kavi*, Kalhana had had a rigorous literary training. He was schooled in the study of classical literature and had mastered the elaborate sciences of grammar and rhetoric. He had a passion for the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as the old historical treatises. He, however, quoted more from the *Mahabharata* than from the other epics. The *Harshacharita* of Bana—the well-known historical romance describing the exploits of King Harshavardhana of Kanauj—and the *Vikramankadevacharita* of Bilhana (another great poet of Kashmir) seem to have influenced him considerably. Mankha, Kalhana's contemporary poet, has noted that Kalhana knew no limit to his enthusiastic devotion to the study of stories and legends of many kinds. Kalhana was intimately acquainted with economics, the art of government, astronomy and other sciences and the arts, including even erotics. As a historian, however, Kalhana stresses art and humanistic studies rather than economic life; still, there are accurate descriptions of food prices, currency, taxation and famine. There are many references to ancient Indian lore and mythology, e.g., the legends of the descent of the Ganga (*Gangavatarane*) and of the churning of the ocean (*Samudra-Manthana*). According to R. S. Pandit, Kalhana's references to flora and fauna of India which are not to be found in Kashmir—like the mango, the palm tree, the lion and the crocodile—show that he was steeped in the traditional learning of India and admired its technique.

A *Kavya* (a *Carita* or heroic poem) in form and conception, the *Rajatarangini* consists of about 8,000 verses classified under eight "*Tarangas*" (waves). It is, however, different from other *Caritas* because Kalhana has offered a connected narrative of the ruling dynasties of Kashmir from the earliest times down to his own. Possessing wide scholarship and enthused by the poetic grandeur and human interest in the epics, Kalhana undertook to narrate the history of his own country in the manner of celebrated masters. He adopted the metrical form advisedly, not merely as a form of expression but as a literary-cum-historical postulate of his time. He embellished the Chronicle with occasional elaborate rhetorical ornaments.

Mammata, the Kashmiri rhetorician, had said that one of the aims of *Kavya* or poetry was to teach the art of life (*Vyavaharavide*). *Kavya* was defined as "speech the soul of which is *Rasa* (sentiment)." About his characteristic *Rasa*, Kalhana tells us that it is *Santarasa* (the sentiment of resignation or inner calm) which dominates his work. He asks: "If a poet can realize with his genius things which everybody cannot comprehend, what other

indication is wanted that he has the divine sight ? ” He requests the reader not to pass judgment too soon. The didactic lesson of his work is : “ All mundane glory is transitory ; retribution inevitably follows departures from moral laws.” Four out of the eight books into which his work is divided conclude with observations of this kind. One of his profound thoughts in the last canto of the Chronicle is :—

Shadow is itself unrestrained in its path while sunshine, as an incident of its own nature, is pursued a hundredfold by nuance. Thus is sorrow from happiness a thing apart ; the scope of happiness, however, is hampered by the aches and hurts of endless sorrow.⁴

Kalhana mentions and reviews earlier chronicles. We learn from the *Rajatarangini* that that there had been long works of older days containing histories of the kings of Kashmir. In Kalhana’s time, however, these works no longer existed in a complete state. Kalhana ascribes their loss in part to the composition of Suvrata, who had condensed the earlier chronicles in a handbook. It is well known how in India the appearance of a handy abstract has contributed to the loss of earlier works on a subject. He had inspected “ eleven works of former scholars containing the chronicles of kings,” besides the *Nilamatapurana*—the latter is still extant. His own work Kalhana describes as an endeavour “ to give a connected account where the narrative of past events has become fragmentary in many respects.” Being also an antiquarian, Kalhana drew upon such original historical documents as Kashmir could furnish. From dedicatory inscriptions in temples he obtained exact data about the foundation of the temples and the origin of particular sacred images.

The legends and anecdotes, frequent in the beginning of his Chronicle, were taken by Kalhana from the traditional lore current in his own time. “ In some instances,” comments Sir A. Stein, “ we find Kalhana distinctly specifying popular traditions which differed from the accounts accepted by himself or the authorities he followed.” The detailed record of the history of Kashmir in Kalhana’s own time was based in the main on personal knowledge and on the narration of living witnesses. The high position of Kalhana’s family afforded him the facility of personal contacts with the leading men of his own day. This fact makes the rather lengthy narrative of the Eighth Book valuable to students of history.

KALHANA AS NARRATOR

In his Introduction to the Chronicle, from which we learn about his sources, Kalhana does not commit himself as to the relative value he attached to them. None of the earlier chronicles drawn upon by Kalhana are available for comparison. To evaluate Kalhana as a narrator we have to depend on internal evidence.

⁴ *The Rajatarangini* (R. S. Pandit’s illustrated translation), *Taranga VIII, Sloka* 1913. (The Indian Press, Ltd. Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1935. Rs. 18/-)

Stories of miracles and legends which formed the tradition of his day are related in a manner which shows that Kalhana shared the ingenuous credulity from which they had arisen. Kalhana's conception of the historical apparently excludes the critical spirit which is associated with the historian in modern times. As has been generally pointed out by Western writers, the Indian mind would not draw a line between mythology and legendary tradition on the one hand and history on the other.

There is the additional consideration of the historical isolation of the Himalayan Valley of Kashmir. The mighty mountain barriers contributed not only to continual immunity from foreign invasion but also to the preservation of a marked historical individuality. The distinctly local character of Kashmir's history has been faithfully mirrored in Kalhana's *Chronicle*. Because of the small mountain territory with well-defined boundaries bestowed by nature, it was comparatively the easier for Kalhana to acquire the thorough knowledge of the topography and of men and manners which makes his *Chronicle* the more valuable—barring the defects arising from narrow limits.

As a chronicler, Kalhana preserved independence of judgment. He did not hesitate to point out the errors and weaknesses of the kings under whom he wrote. His searching scrutiny into the hearts of men and women—their means and ends—shows him up as a modern. In the touching description of King Harsha's tragic end, where sentiment seems to rule supreme, Kalhana yet makes us feel the justice of the fate which overtook "the Nero of Kashmir history." Historical personages like Tunga, Sussala and Ananta are presented in their individual characters and not as mere types. Many a minor actor in the drama of history is presented in a lifelike profile.

Kalhana emphasizes striking examples of Kashmir history by references to similar instances narrated in the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*. At the same time, his (poet's) love of the Arcadian vale of Kashmir, abounding in nature's mysterious charms, is revealed in many an inspired passage. What is more, Kalhana presents to us what we want to know: what his contemporary men and women looked like, how they dressed and ate, what were their beliefs and what was their solution to the eternal problem of the relation between the sexes. We are thus able to realize, with a degree of accuracy rarely attainable in the case of any old Indian author, the political and social conditions in which Kalhana lived.

A prominent trait of the Kashmiri, a sense of humour, was possessed by Kalhana in ample measure. He is at his best in portraits that he touches up with a humour that becomes Rabelaisian at times. With humorous sarcasm he exposes the inborn cowardice and vain bragging of Kashmiri soldiery. He tells us about armies that flee the scene of battle at the sight or even the rumour of a determined, feared enemy. We read of rival forces which tremble in fear of each other! The military "valour" of his compatriots is contrasted with the

bravery of the "Rajaputras" and other mercenaries from the plains, who in Kalhana's own time, were evidently the mainstay of the kings. There are quite a few strictures on and caricatures of kings and priests, their morals and methods.

Kalhana does not hide his contempt for the priestly class whose ignorance was equal to its arrogance, and bitterly complains of their baneful influence on matters of state. In the humorous descriptions he freely ridicules their combined self-assertion and cowardice and shows scant respect for their sacred character.⁵

Proper dates are given by Kalhana from the death of Cippata-Jayapida (813 A.D.) onwards. He follows the calendar used in the Lankika era which had been used in Kashmir for many centuries. A dogma connected with the theory of the *Yugas* seems to have influenced Kalhana: according to it all spiritual and material things decay in the present Kali Yuga. Viewed from this standpoint the past assumes a peculiar grandeur. Belief in the power of Fate and Divine retribution is shared by Kalhana with the Hindus of his time.

Historical events are shown to illustrate political maxims and precepts of diplomacy. The passages in which Kalhana gives in brief the principles of government adapted to Kashmir are particularly interesting. This is given as King "Lalituditya's Code of Kashmiri Statecraft." The Machiavellian tinge of the precepts can be likened to that of *Niti-Sastra* works of India. In Kalhana's maxims there is, however, a distinctly local flavour which makes them valuable from a historical point of view.

The very first maxim is peculiarly Kashmiri. As Kashmir had no foreign enemies, because of its narrow geographical boundaries, the rulers are admonished to adopt positive measures in order to prevent internal dissensions. The inhabitants of the mountain tracts enclosing the Valley "should be punished even if they give no offence." Kalhana was thinking of the Khasas and other mountain clans who were given to plundering the Kashmiris during weak reigns. Likewise, he advised the sovereign not to leave more than one year's food supply with the villagers, to curb the power of the landed aristocracy represented by the Damaras. The recurring rebellions of these feudal landholders had caused civil strife in Kalhana's time and earlier. He shows positive aversion to them and repeatedly calls them *dasyu* (robbers). The political inconsistency of Kashmiris—who, great and small, would readily turn their coats with the changing reigns—is mentioned several times by Kalhana. There are graphic descriptions of idle, disaffected city crowds, who were callously indifferent to dynastic changes. Kalhana's pithy observations about his countrymen are such as only a man with a keen, observant and critical faculty could make.

Kalhana was thoroughly acquainted with the topography of Kashmir. His local references are clear and exact. "It is chiefly Kalhana's merit that we can

⁵ *Keys to Kashmir*, p. 198. (Lalla Rookh Publications, Srinagar. 1953)

restore the ancient topography of Kashmir *in fuller detail than perhaps that of any other Indian territory of similar extent.*" (Italics mine)

The form of *Kavya* chosen by Kalhana determined the style of his Chronicle. Metaphors, similes, puns and poetic figures revealing the artistry of a *Kavi* are abundantly scattered through the *Rajatarangini*. To suit the changing scene, the metres are changed at the beginning and end of the cantos. Kalhana's skill in embellished narrative is shown in descriptions like those of Yudhishtira's departure into exile, Chakravarman's or Sussala's triumphal entry into the Capital, Bhiksacara's last fight and Harsha's death.

The metaphors used are distinctly graphic and original. For this purpose Kalhana often inserts maxims and observations in the form of proverbs. Not a few of these maxims show poetic imagination of a high order even when the subject had been treated earlier by other writers. For their elegance and grace of language, old and modern anthologies of India's proverbs have accorded a prominent place to Kalhana's poetry.

THE FIRST THREE BOOKS

There is no doubt that the extant text of the Chronicle is in the main the very same as Kalhana left it. Kalhana tells us that he began his work in the Saka year 1070, corresponding to the year 4224 of the Lankika era (1148 A.D.) and he finished it in the year 4225 (1150 A.D.).

The record in the first three books covers an aggregate period of 3050 years and consists for the most part of bare dynastic lists of fifty-four reigns, in the midst of more or less legendary traditions and anecdotes. These and later dates have furnished the valuable key for opening up certain obscure chapters of Indian history. Thanks to the researches of Professor Bühler, the difficulties of comprehension of Kalhana's chronology were removed in the first quarter of this century. Professors Wilson and Lassen and General Cunningham also analyzed Kalhana's chronology critically.

The first historical name in the Chronicle is that of King Asoka—attested by Asoka's famous pillar inscriptions. Huska, Juska and Kanishka, three Kushan kings, are stated to have reigned simultaneously. With them we are on the *terra firma* of history. Kanishka, of course, is the Indo-Scythian ruler of Northwestern India of the Buddhist tradition and inscriptions. Kalhana's Mihirakula, the tyrant king of Kashmir tradition, is indubitably the same as the White Hun of that name. Kalhana refers to the settlements of Gandhara Brahmins which Mihirakula effected in Kashmir.

The historical existence of King Pravarasena, the founder of Srinagar, is borne out by his coins. He named the capital Pravarasenapura, which became Pravarapura—a name until recently current in Kashmiri Pandit usage. At the time of Hiuen Tsang's visit (631-633 A.D.) the capital Pravarapura was a

comparatively new city. According to Kalhana the capital owed its later name Srinagar to "Srinagari," the city founded by King Asoka. He mentions its landmarks: The Sarikaparbat (the fort-topped Hari Parbat) and the Gopa Hill (Gupkar), surmounted by the ancient temple of Jyestha Rudra, now known as Shankaracharya Hill or Takht-i-Suleiman. It is difficult to separate legendary lore from historical fact in the reigns of some kings that followed, till we reach the Karkota dynasty, whose list of kings can be checked up with coins or notices in foreign chronicles or foreign travellers' records. One of the kings, Chandrapida, was powerful enough to be recognized as king by the Emperor of China in 720 A.D. He was renowned for his piety and justice, which theme is illustrated by Kalhana in several stories.

Among the Karkota kings, Muktapida Lalitaditya (699-736 A.D.) shines forth as a very powerful monarch whose sway extended far beyond Kashmir and adjacent territories. He was eager for conquests and passed his life chiefly in expeditions. His feudatories held Jalandhara and Lohara, corresponding to the present Kangra and Poonch, and he is said to have attacked the distant states of Kanauj, Bengal, Orissa and the "Kambojas" (Afghanistan). But the most important of his expeditions was against Yasovarman; by that victory Lalitaditya not only made himself master of Kanauj but also acquired right of suzerainty over a vast area. He seems to have conquered Malwa and Gujarat and defeated the Arabs of Sindh.

Kashmiris credit their king with having been victorious over the Turks. Lalitaditya's later conquest of the Bhauttas or Tibetans has been verified through Chinese annals. These extensive conquests made the Kingdom of Kashmir, in Lalitaditya's time, the most powerful empire that India had known since the time of the Guptas. The ruins of the temple at Martanda, which the King had raised, still form the most impressive ancient monument of Kashmir. In Parihaspura, the town founded by Lalitaditya, Buddhist *viharas* stood side by side with Hindu temples: the remains of both still bear out the religious tolerance of Lalitaditya.

ILLUSTRIOUS MONARCHS

Kashmir celebrated Lalitaditya's⁶ victories for centuries and, with pardonable exaggeration, called him the universal monarch. He had his faults,

⁶ "There was not a township, no village, no river, no sea, no island where this king did not lay down a sacred foundation...."

"At some places befitting his exploits, at others in pursuance of convention that proud man usually assigned names to his foundations...."

"By fixing one magnet above which pulled upwards and another which in the same way exerted a pull downwards he put up without supports in Strirajya an image of Nrhari...."

"Having taken one crore he had marched forth for conquest up to the horizon; when he returned he offered eleven crores to Bhutesa for purification...."

none the less. In a fit of drunkenness he had the town of Pravarapura burnt down. Lalitaditya died about 736 A.D., after a reign of thirty-six years. His successors could not maintain the power and prestige of the Karkota dynasty.

Jayapida, fifth descendant of Lalitaditya, however, made a serious attempt to regain the lost supremacy of Kashmir. His romantic adventures took him to Bengal. He, too, set out for "the conquest of the earth." Folklore surrounds his exploits, like those of his grandparent. Towards the close of his reign Jayapida became avaricious and exacted high taxes from his subjects. To change his heart and his ways, Brahmins sought death by starvation (*prayopavesa*)—one of the earliest instances of non-violent methods of political struggle in India. Kalhana powerfully dramatizes the scene in which the wrath of the exasperated Brahmins brought about an accident, culminating in the death of the unyielding monarch. Thereafter, Kashmiri monarchs receded into the background of Indian history.

Jayapida's son, Lalitapida, was addicted to wine and women and neglected his royal duties. In the words of Kalhana, the kingdom was "divided by immorality." Lalitapida was succeeded by his brother, after whom usurpers came on the scene. Battles followed and puppets of the contending parties were enthroned. Stability was restored when the minister Sura raised Avantivarman of the Utpala dynasty to the throne.

With the accession of Avantivarman (855/6–883 A.D.), we enter that phase of Kashmir history of which the chronicler gives a truly historical record. The memory of Avantivarman is still kept green by the ruins of the temples at Avantipur—the town founded by the king which, "though not equal in size to Lalitaditya's structures, yet ranks among the most imposing monuments of ancient Kashmir architecture." His minister Sura wielded great power because of his part in having made Avantivarman the king. Sura vied with the king in acts of piety and great foundations. He honoured learned men by giving them a seat in the court of the king. He was one of the just and able statesman whose was a prominent rôle in Indian history as royal ministers.

Great river operations were carried out by the engineer Suyya in Avantivarman's peaceful reign; for the drainage of the Valley and irrigation of large tracts of land the course of Vitasta (the Jhelum) was changed. Immense benefits accrued to the people as the country was saved from disastrous floods. The manner of Avantivarman's death was characteristic of his life. A Vaishnava

"The munificent king built the marvellous temple of Martanda with massive stone walls inside encircling ramparts and a town which rejoiced in grape-wines. . . .

"He had used eighty-four thousand Tolakas of gold for the figure of Muktakesava. . . .

"The Holy Kavya Vihara which was a marvel was also founded by him where, in course of time, there arose the Bhiksu Sarvajnamitra who was comparable to Jina."

(R. S. Pandit's English translation of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, *Taranga IV*, lines 181–210)

at heart, he would worship Siva out of regard for his minister. This secret he revealed to Sura on his (the king's) deathbed. According to Kalhana, "Listening to the end to the recital of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and thinking of *Vaikuntha* or the residence of Vishnu, he cast off his earthly life with a cheerful mind."

With Avantivarman's son and successor, Sankaravarman (883-902 A.D.) begins the line of kings whose reigns are evidenced by an unbroken series of coins. Sankaravarman's reign is remarkable for his foreign expeditions. He recovered the southern hill tracts of Kashmir which had been lost during the last days of the Karkota dynasty. His greatest victory was against the King of Gurjara (between the Jhelum and the Chenab) in the Punjab, which extended his domain in that direction. But in his country Sankaravarman oppressed the people by "skilfully designed enactments." Kalhana bitterly describes the unhappy results of this régime "which favoured only the rapacious tribe of officials, and left men of learning unprovided with emoluments." Struggles of succession, with consequent sufferings of the people, followed his rule.

The Tantrin soldiers, the Prætorian Guard of Kashmir, became all-powerful during the first quarter of the tenth century of the Christian era. The kingdom was a scene of misery and calamities. The Tantrins made and unmade kings at their pleasure. The court was corrupt and dissolute. The Tantrins were defeated by Chakravarman who regained the throne for the third time. He married a low-caste Domba girl and proclaimed her the Chief Queen. His court matched him in licentious practices. He was assassinated in the chamber of the Domba Queen (937 A.D.).

The next king, Unmattavanti, or mad Avanti, was no less depraved and despotic. He starved his half-brothers to death and had his father Partha murdered. The old man was carried away from his weeping wife, dragged along the streets by the hair, and, in Kalhana's words, "then they killed him, unarmed as he was, emaciated by hunger and parched up, crying and naked." King Avanti laughed to see an officer strike the dead body of Partha. Unmattavanti died in 939 A.D.

After a revolt by the Commander-in-Chief Kamalavardhana against a pretender, an assembly of Brahmins elected a learned but poor Kashmiri, Yasaskara, to the throne. Yasaskara's benevolent rule of ten years was a boon to the Kashmiris after years of troubles. On Yasaskara's death his child-son became king in 948 A.D. but he was killed by the minister Parvagupta who usurped the throne (949 A.D.). Parvagupta died in 950 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Kshemagupta. Once again Kashmir had a rapacious and licentious monarch. He married Didda, daughter of Simharaja, the Chief of Lohara—and thereby changed the course of history of Kashmir.

Didda ruled—first as Queen-Mother and then as the Queen, after Kshemagupta's death. Driven by the lust of power, she ruled Kashmir with an iron hand for twenty-three years. Though cruel, unscrupulous and dissolute, she possessed statesmanlike sagacity and administrative ability. Brahmins staged *Prayopavesa* fasts to oust Tunga, Didda's paramour-minister, but her cunning diplomacy and bribes and Tunga's courage carried the day. She passed on the kingdom to her brother's son, Samgramaraja, in 1003 A.D. The House of Lohara was the new dynasty, which continued to hold Kashmir as well as its original home till the time of Kalhana and later.

THE LOHARA KINGS

In the reign of the new Lohara King, Prime Minister Tunga led an expedition to help the Sahi King, Trilochanapala—son of Anandapala—against Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Tunga obtained some successes, but was ultimately defeated.

Ananta ascended the throne in 1028 A.D. He not only quelled a revolt by feudal chiefs but also successfully repelled an invasion by the Dards and Muhammedans. His pious Queen, Suryamati, took a leading part in the affairs of state. Her administration proved strong and efficient. She persuaded the King to abdicate the throne in favour of her son Kalasa (1063 A.D.). Kalasa extended and consolidated the Kingdom of Kashmir.

His son, King Harsha (1089-1101 A.D.), is elaborately treated by Kalhana. A youth of exceptional prowess, Harsha was skilled in many sciences. He was a linguist and a poet in several languages. But he was a mixture of strange contrasts.

Cruelty and kind-heartedness, liberality and greed, violent self-willedness and reckless cupineness, cunning and want of thought—these and other apparently irreconcilable features, in turn display themselves in Harsha's chequered life.

Harsha introduced new fashions in his court and encouraged learning by attending meetings of scholars and poets in his assembly hall, which was illuminated by a thousand lamps. As mentioned earlier in connection with Kalhana's life, Harsha fell prey to the weakness of character which had ruined many of his predecessors.

About half of the Chronicle (comprising nearly 3,450 *slokas*) is devoted by Kalhana to the half of the twelfth century which lies between the downfall of Harsha and the date of the composition of the Chronicle. This lengthy treatment has the advantage that an authentic contemporary picture of the social, political and economic aspects of Kashmir is presented. Rebel Damaras disturbed the peace of the country. Pretenders rose and fell. The people of Srinagar suffered a desperate siege. Jayasimha ruled over Kashmir with "cunning diplomacy and unscrupulous intrigue." The concluding stanzas of the Chronicle are devoted to the praise of Jayasimha's Queen, Radda Devi

and their children. That takes us to the twenty-second year of Jayasimha's reign, 1149-50 A.D. Kalhana concludes the poem with a verse comparing his chronicle, the "River of Kings," with the swift current of the Godavari, a river of South India.

LESSONS

A point that can bear reiteration is that Kalhana's Chronicle is not without interest from the point of view of Indian history as a whole. The major part of Indian history is made up from history of the states. As only meagre details of any other provincial history are extant, Kalhana's history, being an exhaustive account of one of the states, serves as a type applicable to the remaining states.

According to Kalhana, history was not something to learn but something to make people understand life. Several lessons of note are brought out by Kalhana's Chronicle. Kingship in the early stages of the Vedic period was elective. Later, it became hereditary; the present and future of kingdoms came to depend largely upon the personality of the monarch. There was almost no body politic that would mould the shape of the state. The deeds of despotic kings were patiently watched by the populace. The rebellions arose from the class interests of feudal barons; these uprisings were rarely popular revolts. The living conditions of the people under Lalitaditya and strong monarchs like him could hardly be distinguished from those of serfdom. While the courtiers had "fried meats" and "delightful light wine cooled with ice and perfumed with flowers," the staple diet of the common people was rice—and *hakh*, a cheap vegetable.

Another striking lesson of the history of Kashmir is the malicious influence of the court intrigues and harem jealousies upon the sovereign as well as the people at large. It looks as though Kalhana intelligently watched the court and recorded what he saw, in the hope that posterity would benefit from his observations.

The incredible sensuality of the kings and queens of Kashmir, which brought untold sufferings upon the state, throws a lurid light on the manners and customs of the age, and gives a rude shock to the fond illusion of benevolent despotism of our ancient rulers.⁷

The same writer also observes: "There is hardly any consciousness of India as motherland, characterizing the actions of any of the Kashmir kings." This is rather a controversial remark. The isolated geographical position of Kashmir has given the appearance of insularity to the administration and manners of the people of Kashmir.

Kalhana's history, nevertheless, helps the research scholar to trace the growth of *Sati* (from the Sanskrit *Anugamana*, following to death). The

⁷ R. C. Majumdar. *Ancient India*: p. 386. (Motilal Banarsidas, Banaras. 1952)

custom grew out of a practice of the Scytho-Tartars. The vassals and liegemen of a Scytho-Tartar nobleman would commit suicide upon his death. During the age of chivalry the custom survived in Kashmir, as it did in the rest of India.

The gloomy picture typifying Indian states as a whole was offset by happy colours: despite the primitive political development the people as well as their sovereigns, good, bad and indifferent, cultivated the fine arts like music and the dance. Art and architecture in the best modes flourished. Religion, philosophy and science even evinced remarkable progress in many of their branches. But Kalhana's observations seem to suggest that the achievements of the great were simply answers to certain vital needs in society; success in different fields crowned the efforts of men because the time was ripe.

The careers of Queens like Didda, Sugamala, Suryamati and Kota and many minor ones showed the equal opportunity afforded to women in public life. Seclusion or veiling of women was unknown, for women had emerged from the domestic arena onto the political stage. In "Kalhana's book," according to Jawaharlal Nehru in his foreword to R. S. Pandit's translation of the *Rajatarangini*—"women seem to play quite an important part, not only behind the scenes but in the councils and the field as leaders and soldiers." The Queens had their own treasures and were actively associated with the administration. Neither sex nor caste (nor birth) was a bar to the holding of any civil or military post.

The Chronicle also reveals that some of the bravest generals were Brahmins—a healthy state of affairs revived later by the Marathas. Untouchability was unknown in Kashmir—perhaps it had almost ceased to exist during the dominance of Buddhism. Like King Chakravarman (923-937 A.D.) who married an untouchable Domba woman, other kings entered into matrimonial alliances with the ruling families not only in India and on the border, but also with the Turkish dynasty of Kabul.

The *Rajatarangini* is much more than an account of the reigns of the kings of Kashmir. Kalhana presents an authentic picture of his contemporary social and political life. The Chronicle is a vast mine of information about the past of Kashmir and the contiguous territories. It also contributes to the understanding of the chequered course of the history of Kashmir after Kalhana's day. The period between the time of Kalhana and the Mughal annexation of Kashmir (1588 A.D.) evinces a continuity in the historical conditions and trends that prevail in the latter portion of the *Rajatarangini*.

The scanty historical records of the later Sanskrit chronicles are better interpreted, thanks to the accurate information of Kalhana's Chronicle. Thus has Kalhana, the great poet-historian, not only saved the history and ancient culture of Kashmir from oblivion, but also helped the student of history to synthesize the disjointed accounts of later chroniclers. And, lastly, the student

of the history of Kashmir can intelligently converse with the past in a more satisfactory manner than is possible in any other state of India.

Shri Dhar brought out in answer to a question at the London Branch of the Institute that the Kashmiris had become timid only during the reigns of degenerate monarchs. In answer to another question he said that, though the carpet, silk and other industries might have been imported by Kashmir kings to gratify the taste and enhance the luxury of Court circles, they had greatly benefited the people down the centuries. Shri Dhar also mentioned the cultural contacts between Kashmiris and the peoples of Greece, Iran and Central Asian countries.

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