

Earliest History Of Kashmir (Archaeological And Geological Perspective)

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Abstract: History of Kashmir has been written since the onset of historical period. Rajtarangini and Nilmat Puran like narratives are the oldest one in this regard. The available literary sources regarding Kashmir provide significant historical information from the 6th C.E onwards after the establishment of Kingdoms in Kashmir. The period from the earliest to early historical period finds little mention in the available narratives mostly due to absence of sources. Present paper is an attempt to know this remote past with the help of scientific sources like geological information and the archaeological sources. This paper will seem more hypothetical because of fragmentary information collected from the archaeological and geological sources that have been interpreted in a historical way. It leaves ample room for criticism and further research in this field.

Keywords: Kashmir, Archaeology, Geology, Aborigines, Agriculture, karewa, mythology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Present day Kashmir is the northernmost territory of the Indian Union located amidst a girdle of mountains of Great Himalayas and Pir Panjal. It is only a division of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is located at 33.45° N and 76.24° E. The habitants of Kashmir call it *Kasheer* and sometimes out of patriotic sentiments as *Moaj Kasheer* (Mother Kashmir). In rest of the world it is known by the name of Kashmir. Greeks used to call it *Kasperia*. The literary sources of Kashmir like Nilmatpura and Rajtarangini that fall in the category of indigenous sources, on the name of earliest history we find a description of its origin and earlier inhabitants which is a blend of more mythological and less historical traditions. In place of present day Kashmir which stretches from the southern district of Anantnag to the northern district of Baramulla, there was a lake known as Sati Sar. Presence of a lake is attested by the geological sources as well. Nilmatpuran goes towards mythology when it mentions that this lake was the abode of Jalodhbhava (Water borne demon) and the habitants were Nagas, Pisacas and Kulindas like subhuman creatures. It skips to the arrival of Manavas or

most probably Aryans and hence skips a gigantic time period of the history of Kashmir. Thanks to the efforts of the archaeologists like De Terra and Patterson (1935) and Dr. Sankalia, S.L Shali (1969-71) that we have been able to peep further into the earliest past of Kashmir. For this purpose, we need to analyse these aspects separately so that a proper analysis can be made to reach some historical conclusions based on facts.

A. GEOLOGICAL ASPECT

It is believed by the geologists across the world that the age of the earth based on the radiometric dating of meteorite material is around 4.54 ± 0.05 Billion years. It is also believed that the present day India was a part of the gigantic supercontinent Gondwanaland situated in the southern hemisphere of the earth. The movement of tectonic plates which led to the shaping of more recent shaping of present day topography began almost at the end of the Jurassic period about 144 MYBP. Geologists believe that the Himalayas came into being due to the collision of Indian subcontinent and the Eurasian continent. It was due to these tectonic upheavals that

the valley of Kashmir came into being. It went through certain geographical and morphological changes like the rise of Pir Panjal range on the South West which blocked the original drainage of the Himalayan network and resulted in the formation of a large lake without any outlet. This lake was perhaps the Sati Sar of Rajtarangini and Nilmatpuran.

The gigantic lake or Sati Sar occupying the whole valley is hence attested by both geological as well as literary sources. The draining of the lake is narrated by the literary source in an utterly mythological or divine nature. Rajtarangini gives the credit of draining the lake to a sage, Kasyapa which changes the whole course of Kashmir history even its name Kasyapa Mar which later came to be known as Kashmir.

In 1935 Hellmut De Terra and T.T Paterson minutely explored the plateau like structures called Karewas or Uddars. They found that karewas were formed during the lower and middle Pleistocene Epoch. They believed that these karewas came out of the water first due to the impact of four cold glacial stages followed by three warm stages which resulted in the shrinkage of the lake.

In 1980-89 a research project titled "Kashmir Palaeoclimatic Project" brought forward some incredible facts. As per the report of this project, after the formation of the valley due to tectonic upheavals, another upheaval took place around 200,00 YBP in Pir Panjal which resulted in its heightening and the tilting of the lake floor towards north and north east exposing all the sediments which accumulated towards the south and south west. This process added another layer to the already drained karewas. After this upheaval, the lake got a tilted position towards north and due to the enormous pressure of the water finally drained by making a gorge at Baramulla which marks the present day river channel of Jhelum.

It seems that the draining of the valley took place in two stages. Initially the upper Karewas were drained out due to the climatic changes which include a combination of four extremely cold glacial periods followed by three intermediate warm periods (De Terra, Paterson). This phase is significant from the perspective of the present study as the karewas came into being which ultimately became the sites of earliest habitations in Kashmir as attested by the archaeological sources. The final draining due to the extreme pressure of the water after the tilt towards north exposes the submerged land with lakes like Wular and Dal and a fine river system with Jhelum being the crucial one. It stands also important from the angle of present study as it could have initiated the permanent settlement of man with an agrarian economy.

B. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASPECT

It is often said that the Kashmir didn't witness a well-established Palaeolithic phase and hence the first appears during the Neolithic period in Kashmir. In 1935 CE, Hellmut De Terra and H.H Paterson found a well fossilised tusk fragment, a femur bone with marks of artificial cutting and flake implements near Pampore in the present day Pulwama district. They declared these things belong to Palaeolithic period after the required archaeological verification. In 1969-71, Prof. H.D Sankalia and S.L Shaly recovered a massive flake and a crude hand axe from Lidder valley in present day

Pahalgam of District Anantnag. These artefacts were recovered from well stratified deposits dating to 2nd Glacial and 2nd Inter Glacial periods respectively. Later on a team from Archaeological Survey of India under R.V Joshi recovered nine more tools from these deposits belonging to 2nd or 3rd glacial periods. Many other tools belonging to the Palaeolithic period were found from many other areas of the Kashmir from South to North like Prang, Waswan, Sonmarg, Gulmarg, Sombor, Balapur etc. It seems that the man was present in Kashmir ever since its formation. What seems interesting is that he only moved from upper reaches to downwards with the suitability of the climate and topography. It stretches back the earliest history of Kashmir to Palaeolithic period which creates a huge gap between the earliest habitation of the man in Kashmir and its attestation by the literary sources which bring it close to the early historical period.

It is quite possible that the earliest man in Kashmir lived as his contemporary fellows lived in other parts of the world with hunting gathering as the basic mode of livelihood. Though the climatic conditions could have made him to adapt a few different ways in order to survive the extremely cold spells which as per geological sources occurred in Kashmir. Even today, after the wrath of modernization on the natural environment, we find plenty of flora and fauna in the adjoining forests of the Kashmir. Another thing that is interesting to note is the presence of ample meadows which could have provided shelter to a variety of animals especially the game animals for the early man.

Mesolithic period is almost absent in the earliest history of Kashmir. We can't declare that there was not a Mesolithic period but we may say so due to lack of source material regarding the Mesolithic period. It is quite possible as in case of earliest past of India prior to the discovery of Harapan culture, that the Mesolithic culture of Kashmir may be waiting for some zealous explorers for discovery. The most conspicuous and archaeologically sound period in the earliest history of Kashmir is the Neolithic period.

C. NEOLITHIC PERIOD IN KASHMIR

The world famous Neolithic site of Burzhom was first explored by De Terra and Paterson in 1935 CE. Burzhom is located at 34° 10' 0" N, 73° 54' 0" E in the Srinagar district. This site was identified with the help of menhiris still standing there. Initially a limited excavation was conducted by De Terra and Paterson near the menhiris. It yielded the artefacts including some black polished ware BPW with incised designs, some bone and stone tools belonging to either a late or early phase of Indus civilization. It was in 1969-71, that Archaeological survey of India under the direction of T.N Khazanchi undertook a systematic excavation which brought into light four cultural periods, Period I and II to Neolithic, Period III to Megalithic and Period IV to early historical. In this manner the discovery of Neolithic site at Burzhom paved way for the reconstruction of the earliest history of Kashmir envisaging the three important phases of human development. We need to discuss these periods in a bit detailed manner.

a. PERIOD I

The peculiarity of this period at Burzhom is the Pit dwellings. These pits were both oval/circular and rectangular with varying dimensions. The dimensions hitherto highest is 2.74 m, 4.57 m and 3.95 m at top, base and depth respectively. The size of rectangular pit chambers also varies. One of these pit chambers measures 6.40 × 7 m in area with 1 m depth. Most of these pits have apparent depressions on the margins which most probably indicate the presence of postholes on the margins. It is the case with both the circular as well as the rectangular pits. According to John Hoffecker the oldest pit dwellings were discovered in Mezhyrich, Central Ukraine. Dating back 15,000 years to the Upper Palaeolithic age. Though these pit dwellings were made strong and habitable with the help of strong bones from mammoth like gigantic animals. The base of these pit dwellings was circular or oval as we find in case of Burzhom, 12 to 14 feet in diameter (4–6 m). Each dwelling had a hearth. In Burzhom we do notice the presence of hearths made of clay or rocks. Within the pit dwellings normally we encounter clay hearths while at the mouth we find the hearths of rocks. Ash, charcoal and potsherds have been found in these pits which attest that these pits were used for residential purpose and not utterly for storage. There was no dearth of timber in the said region as depicts the name Burzhom which means the abode of birch. It is possible that unlike their Ukrainian counterparts, the man of Kashmir used the strong branches of birch as posts and stretched a roof of birch bark as an insulator from rain, snow and biting cold. In addition some pottery was also used by these pit dwellers at Burzhom. This pottery is mostly crude, handmade, course in fabric and finish. Examples of such pottery are the vase, bowls, and stem. According to R.N Kaw, the photographer of the excavating team, the pottery found at Burzhom was still in one or other form used in Kashmir. The pottery often has the mat marks at the bottom which suggests that the pottery was kept on mats after making them, perhaps in sun for drying.

The tools found at Burzhom and belonging to the period I include both bone and stone tools. Among the bone tools are harpoons, needles with and without eyes, awls, spear points, arrow heads, daggers and scrappers. Tools were also made of antler horns after proper fashioning. Among the stone tools, axes chisels, adzes, pounders and mace heads are noteworthy. Another important artefact found at Burzhom is a stone quern in one of the pit dwellings. Though there is no indication of any cereals.

b. PERIOD II

This stage, if the report furnished by the Excavating team is believed, initiated the era of mud houses with use of extensive timber and bricks made of mud. The earlier pits were either abandoned or were filled up and applied a thin coat of ochre and used as floor. In one of the excavated trenches more than 45 well arranged post holes were noticed. It is possible that the Period II had witnessed increase in population and a community type life style. A few platforms of mud were also noticed during the excavation with partition walls on them.

Among the artefacts found at Burzhom belonging to Period II, a few copper arrow heads hold special position. It is believed that these copper arrow heads depict some sort of trade between the man at Burzhom with his contemporary fellows in some other region. It needs further research to reach some concrete conclusions. Pottery in this period is hand made. A burnished black ware of medium fabric type. It included the hollow stand dish, globular pot, jar, stem with triangular perforations and a funnel shaped vase. Towards the top layer of Neolithic strata, a wheel made red ware pot containing 950 beads was also found. These beads are of agate and carnelian with excellent craftsmanship.

Another peculiarity of this period is the burials. These burials were found within the settlements and the dead were buried in oval pits along with red ochre painted bones, pottery and sometimes either the bones or the animals as a whole were buried with the dead. Some trepanned skulls have also been found from these burials.

The tools are almost same with better finishing and addition of some other tools like rectangular harvesters with a curved cutting edge, double edged picks in stone, long needles and a borer like that of a cobbler's poker.

During this period we also find the efforts of man at art. A stone slab with its base 70cm wide was found half buried upside down in a pit at Burzhom. The engraved side was made smooth with proper polishing. Unfortunately, the upper most part of the stone is partially damaged resulting into the loss of the upper part of the engraved scene. The scene depicts five things, Two men, an antelope, a dog and two double layered circular objects with rays on outer wall like a sun. One man is standing at the rear end of the stag with a long rod like structure, most probably a spear in the right hand. The second man, shooting an arrow in the chest of the stag is at the front. His left leg is in air crouching back.

c. PERIOD III

Massive menhiris that can be still found at the site, gritty red ware wheel made Pottery, rubble structures and a few metallic objects were found belonging to this period of Megalithic culture.

d. PERIOD IV

This period, touching the periphery of the early historical period is marked by mud brick structures, extensive use of wheel made pottery and the use of metal for making tools and weapons.

II. ANALYSIS

With evidence from Palaeolithic to early historical period of existence of man in Kashmir from archaeological sources, it is possible to reconstruct the past of Kashmir though not on typical historical pattern. From geological sources, it is now proved that the Valley of Kashmir originated as a result of tectonic collision, became a vast lake and ultimately drained out due to the tilted position of the lake under tremendous hydro pressure. It seems that the earliest man who lived in

Kashmir used more or less the same way of living as his contemporary fellow men adopted in other regions of the world. His mode of subsistence seems to be hunting-gathering due to presence of a variety of flora and fauna. The topography of Kashmir with less dense forests and more open meadows could have provided him plenty of game for his hunting endeavours. As a way of progressive evolution, he may have switched to more developed way of living like his fellow men across the world is attested by the archaeological remains of such developed stages especially at Burzhom. It seems that the draining of the valley and the sedentary way of life could have been directly related to each other. The Palaeolithic tools were found in Lidder valley, which is a hilly area in Pahalgam. In contrast to it, the Neolithic, megalithic and early historical remains are found at Burzhom, which is a Karewa. It shows a downward movement of man from hills to plateaus. The excavation of harpoons and harvesting tools depict the versatility in the economic development. Fishing could have supplied the man more pretentious food in times of absence of game or the climate which checked him from gaming. Likewise, the discovery of food storage pits shows that there was surplus production which was stored to meet the spells of cold weather to sustain the life. It seems that the man exploited the sub karewa regions, filled with slit after it was drained out for the purpose of an exhaustive agriculture.

As in case of other civilizations, agriculture proved to be the backbone of economy and a causative factor in the development of the man. We do not have archaeological evidences like Harappa where ploughed tracts were found. We also do not have evidences of using of hoe and plough which could have strengthened our claim of an established agriculture in Kashmir. In such condition, we can assume two conditions. First of all, man harvested the wild food grains which could have grown on the sub karewa and karewa regions as they grow today. Second condition is that the man could have gone for agriculture and we have not been able to discover the tools used by him in the farming. It will be premature to conclude such things. Jhelum, the main river of the valley could have been decisive in the beginning of agriculture in Kashmir. It is notorious for devastating floods unlike the Euphrates which brings boon. But the floods bring fertile mineral based slit which could have made the low lying areas fertile and conducive for agriculture. It is possible that the residential areas were limited to Karewas which were safe during floods but acted as the main agricultural land which could have been exploited by the man for agricultural purposes.

Discover of pit houses with postholes depict a trend of camping or habitation. In present day Kashmir we do find a bit same structures which are built by Gujjars, Bakerwals and local shepherds on the fringes of meadows across the Kashmir. These structures are locally called Kothas (huts). These are built by digging about 3 feet deep pits of required size. At ground level stones, mud and timber is used to build walls mostly 3 to 4 feet high. Thatching is done by the strong branches of cedars and pine. Now they use polythene along with the natural roofing material. These structures are used during the summers from April to October till the onset of winters. These structures get dismantled during winters because of heavy snowfall and avalanches. The material is

cycled to build these structures repeatedly. At Burzhom, the excavators as per the reports of H.N.Kaw found, some pit dwellings which were not wholly abandoned but used as the base for construction of megalithic shelters by erection of mud brick walls around the existing pit.

Discovery of copper and fine pottery is sometimes believed to be result of trade links of Kashmir with other parts especially central Asia. A.K Sharma goes a step forward and believes that the earliest man in Kashmir was a migrant from Neolithic community of Central Asia and dates back him to 2920 BC. It is difficult to estimate that in lieu of these metallic and pottery articles what the man of Kashmir exchanged. A thorough research in this regard may someday provide answer to this query. But the presence of such metallic and fine pottery articles depicts a considerable growth in the life standard of the man in Kashmir. It seems that the excavated material at shows only a little portion of the past life of the man in Kashmir. May be there are many other sites which are waiting for excavation as ASI is very slow in Kashmir regarding the excavation mostly due to the turmoil going on in Kashmir from the last 70 years. We can only hope that a systematic and organised excavation programme can yield the fragments of the remote past of Kashmir history. At the moment only hypothetical comments can flow according to the available sources. As earlier mentioned that we do not find any agricultural tools except harvesters that too of bone or stone. The discovery of metallic arrow heads and spears suggests the importance of weapons may be either for hunting or for defence as we do find some trepanned skulls. Along with weapons we can expect some metallic tools as well which could have been used for an organised agricultural process.

The engraved rock slab which depicts the earliest art of man in Kashmir and belongs to the Period II of Burzhom. It is really interesting to see the animals both a stag and a dog with fertile masculine characters. The sex organs of both the animals is apparent. Further the two figures, as believed by Khazanichi to be sun, are close to animals than the man. The man at the rare end of the game animal, an antelope or stag is hitting the animal with the spear holding it in his right hand, the left hand is resting on the pelvis. In the same manner the left leg of the man shooting an arrow on the stag is relaxing his left leg in the air crouching it backwards. Such rock carvings are also found in the course of Indus in Ladakh where in place of Stag an Ibex or a Capra (Markhoor) is depicted. This art piece seems important from religious aspects as well. Throughout India we find the importance of fertility cult. The depiction of animals with fertile masculine characters certainly has something to do with the primitive religious beliefs of the man in Kashmir.

III. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it follows that Kashmir witnessed the existence of man from Palaeolithic period as per the hitherto available sources. He inhabited most probably permanently or temporarily on karewas like Burzhom and advanced in his life style. The pit dwellings show the tendency of sedentary way of living. Discovery of a range of tools including stone, bone and metallic suggest the changing trends

in the life of man in Kashmir. The existence of cereals stored in pits depicts the agricultural advances and a surplus production in the early history of Kashmir for which the topographical changes especially the drained out landmass could have provided plenty of space. According to Ajaz Ahmad Bandey, Burzhom site revealed evaluation of Kashmiri civilization. It revealed the remains of ancient settlements – the first Kashmiri man has lived when it was a food gathering stage and graduated to the food cultivation stage. The discovery of metallic arrow heads and spear heads shows the technological advances in defence system as well as in standard hunting ventures. It is often believed that metallic objects found in Kashmir were actually imported from central Asia and other regions like china. It may be possible, but till date we have not been able to prove such statements historically but these statements are based on generalizations. It is quite possible that the man in Kashmir could have discovered the metals as by his fellow men in Asia and other continents. The discovery of these standard and more effective weapons may also depict the on-going conflicts and a way of defence to the early organised living especially for animal wealth or a tendency to safe guard the social units like villages. The discovery of fine pottery especially globular shapes with inscribed motifs depicts a high standard of living style and also the mastery achieved in pottery making Though some scholars believe it to be foreign in nature but it is more hypothetical. For example the hair pin that we found at Gufkral actually originated in the Mediterranean world and spread to Persian Gulf, Caucasus to the Indus is the statement of Stuart Piggot. If this statement is believed to be historical, then certainly we need to find out the merchandise which was exchanged in lieu of imports. It is possible that the earliest man came to Kashmir from some other regions in course of his hunting gathering way of life, but skipping the habitation of Kashmir during the Palaeolithic period is surely something that changes the whole course of Kashmir history. Often scholars offer absence of Mesolithic period as an indication of cessation of human existence in Kashmir due to some climatic changes. On the basis of Burzhom Neolithic site, I think it is too naïve to generalise the absence of Mesolithic period in Kashmir. It is possible that we may have not able to explore such sites which could yield the artefacts of Mesolithic period. It was earlier believed that there was no Palaeolithic period in Kashmir and Neolithic culture began directly in Kashmir. For this purpose the Neolithic man came from other regions like central Asia or Soan valley of Punjab. It is often stated on the authority of Burzhom and Gufkral findings. But the discoveries made by De Terra and Prof. Sankalia regarding the existence of a Palaeolithic culture negated the earlier held view.

The burials found at Burzhom in Period II most probably show the religious beliefs of the early man in Kashmir. The burying of animals and tools with the man possibly depicts their belief in hereafter. The burials have been found within the houses which may indicate the belief of souls as guardians of the house. It is a cosmopolitan belief especially prior to the origin of monotheism.

The art depicted on a polished and smoothed stone slab depicts a hunting scene with two suns and animal with typical masculine features points towards some religious beliefs most

probably. On the name of religion we have no direct references from the material excavated from Burzhom or Gufkral. We are left to infer the religious beliefs from the burial practices and the art motifs. First interesting thing is that the burials have been found within the houses which may indicate the belief of souls as guardians of the house. It is a cosmopolitan belief especially prior to the origin of monotheism. The art depicted on a stone slab depicts two animals, an antelope or stag and a dog. Both the animals show conspicuous male characters. It may be an animistic way of religion as we find in the immediate vicinity of Kashmir in Ladakh where Bon Chos enjoyed much importance prior to the arrival of Buddhism. Naga cult seems to have been much later religion in Kashmir as it is vividly depicted in the literary sources especially Nilmatpuran.

The mention of Aryans as manavas as believed by the commentators of Rajtarangini and Nilmat Puran towards the beginning of the early historical phase shows to some extent the similar phenomenon as we find in the Indian context. Rajtarangini mentions the earliest settlers as sub human naming them Nagas, pisacas and kulindas. It is possible that the Aryans called them so because of their primitive living habits as they called the aborigines of India as Sudras. We may conclude that Rajtarangini, a Sanskrit chronicle written by a Brahman may have the bias based on superiority concept regarding the earliest settlers of Kashmir. In the light of archaeological and geological sources, we find the literary traditions of Kashmir a mix up of historical and mythological traditions which skips the importance of the earliest settlers who survived the hardships of evolutionary transitions to reach to the stage of food production from the stage of food gathering.

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