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A Study of Kushan rule in Kashmir

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Abstract

Evidently, during the period of Kanishka Kashmir attained unprecedented prosperity. This is evident from the Kushan art treasures with Buddhist themes found in different nooks of the valley. Some sites are so distantly located that even today only an adventurer can reach to them. The huge quantity of Kanishka's coins so far retrieved in Kashmir further attests to this fact. No less significant evidence of Kashmir's emergence as a famous place of Kushan empire is Kanishka's decision to choose Kashmir as a venue for the third world Buddhist Conference in preference to any other place of the vast Kushan empire that Vasishka is also called as Vajheshka in the contemporary record and it is quite probable that he was known by this name in Kashmir which till the time of Kalhana came to be reduced to Juska in the local environment. Significantly enough Rajatarangni of Kalhana makes a special mention of him as besides clubbing the building activities of the three Kushana rulers (Kanishka, Jushka and Huska) and the efflorescence of Buddhism during their rule, Rajatrangni writes exceptionally about Juska "That wise king Juska, who built Juskapura with its Vihara, was also the founder of Jayasvamipura."

Keywords: Kushan, Kashmir, Rajatarangni, Central Asia, Civilization etc

Introduction

As a matter of fact Kushan occupation of Kashmir paved the way for the influx of a culture which was an amalgam of Chinese, Central Asian, Iranian, Greek and Indian civilizations, which far-reachingly promoted Kashmir's technology, economy and culture besides giving it a cosmopolitan character. More importantly, Kashmir got integrated with the world market by giving the Kashmiri trader access to Silk Route which was under the control of the Kushans. That trade with the outside world was greatly promoted under the Kushans is substantiated by hoards of coins found on the trade routes between Kashmir and the neighbouring world.

The Kushan Civilization: A brief overview

Kushan or Kushano of the epigraphical and numismatic sources of India and Central Asia, and Kuei-shuang of the Chinese sources was the name of a tribe which together with other tribes formed a tribal confederacy of rather mixed origin. This tribal confederacy is known as the Yuch-chih in Chinese sources.

According to the available records the earliest habitat of the Yuch-chih lay to the east of Tun-huang in the modern province of Kansu in Chinese Central Asia. At that time (around 1st millennium B.C.) they had the same customs as Hsiung-nu (Huns). It appears from certain pre-Han texts that the Yuch-chi gradually annexed the fertile agriculture zone of Ordos plateau and a region between the Kun-lun range (to the south of the Tarim basin) and the Nan-shan. Lou-lan and Po-yang territories in the Tsaidam swamp area were also within the Yuch-chih kingdom. Thus by 3rd century B.C. Yuch-chih established a fairly big kingdom. The annexation of Ordos was triumph of a nomadic culture over a settled agricultural society. They also began to trade in zede, a greatly prized commodity. They became so strong that "their archers numbered more than a hundred thousand... and treated the Hsiung-nu with contempt." But ultimately sometime between 174 and 160 B.C, the greater portion of them were driven out of their territory by Hsiung-nu. They migrated towards the west and became known in history as Ta Yuch chih.

In course of their westward migration, the Yuch chih passed through Kucha to the region of Wen-su or Aksu and thence to the country of Sai (Sakas) in the vicinity of the Lake Issik-kol.

From the Lake Issik-kol area the Ta Yuch-chih migrated again and subjugated the north and south of Oxus.

For our immediate purpose, the subjugation of the south of Oxus is important as it comprised the territory called Ta-hsia which was divided among the five his-hou (yabgu) of the tribe called Kuei-shuang (K ushan) around 160 B.C and 130 B.C. The five his-hou, which were the five families of Yuch-chih gave their names to five territorial divisions of Ta-hsia, namely Hsiu-mi, Shuang-mi, Kuei-shuang, His-tun and Tu-mi.

Rise and fall of Kushan Rule in Kashmir

The literary and numismatic evidence testifies to the fact that Kashmir was incorporated with the Kushan Empire by its illustrious founder Kujala Kadphises sometime after his conquest of Kabul, parts of western Bactria and North-West India. The famous Chinese source, Hou Han-Shu (Annals of the Latter Han) compiled by Fan Yeh (A.D. 446), sums up this development in its well-known passage:

Formerly the Yue-chih were conquered by the Hiung-nu; they transferred themselves to Ta-hia and divided that kingdom between five hi-hou [minor chiefs], viz; those of Hiu-mi, Shuang-mi, Kuei-shang, Hi-tun and Tu-mi. More than a hundred years after this the hi-hou of the Kuei-shuang, Chiu-chu-chuch (also called K 'iu-tsiu-k'io) attacked the other four hi-hou, he styled himself king; the name of his kingdom was Kuei-shang. He invaded An-si and seized the territory of Kao-fu; moreover he triumphed over Pu-ta and Kipin and entirely possessed those kingdoms.

Chiu-chu chuch /Kiu-tsiu-k'io is unanimously identified with Kujala Kadphises;² and the Chinese treatise gives him the credit of not only founding the Kushana kingdom but also conquering Kao-fu (K abul) after defeating An-his (A racids), Pu-t'a (variously identified-Bactra by some and Pushkalavati by others) and Chi-pin.³ The scholars identify Chi-pin with Kashmir. It should, however, be mentioned that at that time, according to the information supplied by Chien Han-Shu and Hou Han-Shu, Kashmir empire included a portion of North-Western India.

Certainly, Kashmir and Gandhara are referred to as one political entity in the Buddhist records. Therefore, the doubt raised by some scholars that Ch'ipin is Gandhara and not Kashmir betrays only ignorance of a well-known historical fact.

The written evidence is sufficiently supported by numismatic evidence. Recently a hoard of copper coins of Kujala Kadphises has been found from the ancient site of Tarakpura on Sopore - Bandipore link road. It is worth noting that one of the main routes which linked Kashmir with Astor, Gilgit, Chitral, Yasin, Badakshan, Tibet and further to Central Asia and China was Bandipur route passing through Gurais. Moreover, there are one hundred and three coins of Kujala Kadphises housed in Sri Pratab Singh Museum, Srinagar - next only to Kanishka's in number. The recently established, Central Asian Museum of Kashmir University, also contains three coins belonging to Kujala Kadphises.

The non-conventional sources namely philology and surnames can perhaps help us in throwing additional light on the contribution of Kujala Kadphises to the foundation of Kushan rule in Kashmir. As we know

Kujala carried many titles namely, Kadphises, Kara, Kasa, Kavsa, and Kausa. The term Khadphench used in Kashmir

to denote an authority is perhaps the Kashmirized version of Kadphises. It is common-place in Kashmir to call a person after a ruler if he/she behaves in an authoritative manner. For example, in our contemporary history it is often heard people contemptuously calling their haughty, overbearing and authoritarian adversaries as Mahraja Hari Singh/ Shaikh Sahab/Indra Gandhi/Bakshi Sahib and the like. Since Kujala Kadphises not only ruled for a pretty long time but also founded a mighty Kushan empire, and that Kadphises continued to be the surname of his most illustrious successor at whose hands the empire reached to its zenith, the title Kadphises symbolized great power and authority, passing on from generation to generation through the word of mouth to become an established often-quoted term by all and sundry without being affected by the influx of substitute words in the wake of the repeated culture changes.

As Kara and Kausa were also the coveted titles of the founder of Kushan dynasty, it may perhaps be reasonable to infer that the famous surnames of Kashmir which continue till date, namely, Kar and Kawusa owe their origin to these titles of Kujala. Perhaps the Kushana nobles who were assigned the job of ruling over Kashmir on behalf of the Kushan king were either bestowed with these titles or they assumed them as local rulers just as subsequently we find the ruling class bestowed with titles like Raina and Malik which became their permanent surname. The families bearing the surname Kashu in Kashmir. Is this the derivative of Kushan? Perhaps, yes because the base of the word Kushana is Kusha. It may also be pertinent to mention here that almost all the families bearing the krams of Kar, Kawusa, and Kush were among the rich families of Kashmir till recently. The reason is simple if we consider that throughout the pre-modern history it was the general policy of all the rulers to own and patronize the vocal sections regardless of political changes. The only condition was that they had to agree to become a part of the supporting structure. This is the reason that the fortune of the "faithful" upper classes, though changed slightly, but they seldom witnessed fall, especially if they were traders simultaneously. The above mentioned upper classes have traditionally remained traders plus landed magnets. In Kashmir there is a surname (kram) called kanjwal. Is this the Kashmirized version of Kujala? We leave it open. While the conquest of Kashmir by Kujala Kadphises is established beyond doubt, it is, however, not clear when exactly Kujala's army marched towards Kashmir and took it over. Yet the indirect evidence weighs in favour of drawing the inference that it was only after the conquest of Kabul and the immediate North-West of India that Kashmir fell in the hands of Kushan army. It may be recalled that Hou Han Shu refers to the conquest of Kashmir by Kujala after he had captured Kao-fu and P 'u-ta." Secondly, the coins of Kujala so far found in Kashmir belong to his later period. This can be assumed on the basis of a careful comparison of the titles adopted by Kujala Kadphises on his various coin types. We can reconstruct the relative chronological sequence of the coins issued by him. Most probably the Hermaeus — Kujala Kadphises coins were the earliest issues of Kadphises I, the coins bearing the titles, Yavuga Kushana or only Kushana with the name of Kujala Kadphises can be regarded as earlier than those which show full-fledged imperial titles like Maharajasai and Rajatirajasa. And the coins bearing both the titles yavuga (chief or leader) and Maharajasa Rajatirajasa (supreme king or king of kings) should mark

the period of transition and thus come in between the coin types with title yavuga and those bearing the titles maharajasa Rajartirajasa. Thus the coins with the title Maharajasa Rajartirajasa should be placed last of all in this sequence. Following this scheme various coin types of Kujula Kadphises can be placed in chronological order as:

1. Hermaeus and Kujula type
2. Diademed head and enthroned king type, helmeted head and Macedonian soldier type, king seated and Zeus standing type.
3. Bust of king and Nike type, and
4. Bull and Bactrian camel type.

According to B.N. Puri Kujula Kadphises ruled between 45 A.D. and 78 A.D.;¹² and "in the year 122 of the old era = 64 A.D. He sets his foot in North-west India as a king (Maharaja) and for fourteen years he consolidated his hold and expanded his territory, as is evident from the use of higher appellations. Given this chronological construction, it would mean Kujula conquered Kashmir after 64 A.D. However, according to the advocates of 78 A.D. as New Saka year, Kushana conquest of Kashmir took place around 50 A.D.

Earlier it was believed that Kujula Kadphises was succeeded by Vima Kadphises, known in Chinese sources as Yen-Kao-Chen. However, startling discovery of the Rabatak inscription clearly demonstrates that Kujula Kadphises was succeeded by his son Vima Tak. Interestingly Rabatak inscription has also been helpful in solving the Soter Megas issue. In the light of Rabatak inscription it appears that it was Vima Tak [to] who issued the coins with Soter Megas titles. Significantly one coin with Soter Megas titles is preserved in S.P.S. Museum Srinagar, which indicates his presence in Kashmir.

According to Kalhana he built a town after his name and also constructed mathas and Chaityas elsewhere in the Valley. Clearly, he refers to the same Kanishka who is famous in history as a great patron of Buddhism. Hieun Tsang, who visited Kashmir in the early 7th century A.D. found local traditions regarding Kanishka's rule still fully alive in the Valley. And it appeared so true to the Chinese pilgrim that he faithfully recorded them in his travel account, particularly the holding of third great Buddhist Council by Kanishka. "The continued existence of a place called Kanishkapur in district Baramulla, described as a foundation of Kanishka, till present times, is a living evidence of Kanishka's rule in Kashmir. Vasishka was succeeded by Huvishka, who was perhaps the brother of Vasishka. His reign marks one of the brightest periods of Kushana history. He ruled for a long period of 34 years (between 28 and 62 of the Kanishka Era). His coins from Kapisa Bihar alludes to a vast Kushan empire inherited by him from his father which he certainly preserved. The variety of his coins in gold and copper are equally suggestive of the peace and prosperity in his time.

Huvishka's name figures among the three Kushana rulers mentioned by *Rajatarangini*, to have ruled Kashmir. He also credits him for having built a town Hushkapura (Huvishkapura) after his name. The town survives in modern Ushkur, a village about three kilometers to the south-east of Baramulla on the left bank of Vitasta (Jhelum). He also attributes to him and the other two Kushana rulers the construction of stupas and mathas at Suskaetra. Huvishka's rule in Kashmir is also corroborated by his gold coin found by chance somewhere in the valley.

Like his father (Kanishka), Huvishka's coins also portrayed the divinities drawn from different Pantheons, although in the Indian environment the tendency seems more towards the depiction of new Brahmanical deities. The solitary gold coin of Huvishka retrieved in Kashmir *inter alia* depicts ankusa, sun god and the legend Mioro. This undoubtedly alludes to syncretic religious system promoted by Kanishka and his successors.

Conclusion

Huvishka was succeeded by Vasudeva I, the last great ruler of the Kanishka group of rulers. And he was followed by Kanishka II, Kanishka and Vasudeva II. We have no information about the rule of these Kushana rulers in Kashmir. However, given the fact that upto Vasudeva II, Kushana's ruled the whole immediate neighbourhood of Kashmir, it is quite reasonable to conclude that the Valley of Kashmir would have also remained the part of Kushan empire at least until they lost the North West of India to the Sassanians around A.D 262. It may be mentioned that so far one gold coin of Vasudeva has been found in Kashmir. However, it still awaits a serious scholarly attention to ascertain whether it belongs to Vasudeva I or Vasudeva II. Besides, Ratarangini refers to the name of a ruler Abhimanyu, who by all means seems an independent ruler but the one who had Kushana affiliation. Kalhana refers to him as a true heir of Kushanas in that he was favourably disposed towards Buddhism.⁵⁰ After him Kalhana makes a mention of the revival of traditional Naga worship at the hands of a local ruling dynasty-Gonandas. If on the basis of the revival of Naga worship by Gonanda we presume that Kushanas ceased to rule Kashmir after Abhimanyu, it seems that Kushana rule ended at the most a few years after it came to an end in the Peshawar region which passed in the hands of Sassanians in 262 A.D. Kalhana refers to five local rulers who ruled between the death of Abhimanyu and Kinnare (Kidara). These five rulers might not have probably ruled for more than a century. As Kidarites occupied Kashmir around 410 A.D, probably Kushana rule came to an end there around 300 A.D or so.

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