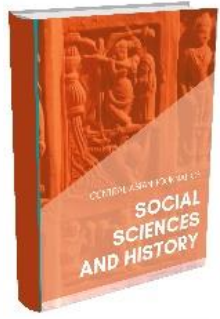




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## Evolution of Shaivaite Philosophic Tradition during Early Medieval Kashmir

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### Abstract:

Kashmir is known to the world as one of the most beautiful places of the world and an ideal place for the lovers of beauty and nature. The picturesque range of mountains with lofty snowcaps, the gushing sound of burbling stream along with its beautiful green pastures captivates the mind of any person irrespective of his taste in nature and aesthetics. But Kashmir in the past along with its scenic grandeur was also known to be as the great centre of art and learning. It was considered to be as the hub of learning and such was its hold as intellectual centre that poets from all over the country used to come in *Sharada* temple with their work in order to get blessings for their work and not only this, *Bana* in *Harshacharita* mentions that in the temple of *Devi Sharada* people used to keep their books for a night and next day if there were any mistakes in the work *Devi Sharada* used to reveal these mistakes to the poet and he used to rectify it. The story in itself is a testimony regarding the fact of Kashmir being the center-piece of literary studies. Kashmir was a literary hub during the early medieval period and we find enormous writings produced in this period by the authors like *Bhamaha*, *Vamana*, *Ruyyaka*, *Kshemagupta*, *Kshemendra*, *Abhinavagupta* and who can forget *Kalhana* who has written the first systematical historical work ever produced in India, i.e., *Rajatarangini*.

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Kashmir was known to India way back from ages and a certain tradition holds that *Panini*, author of *Ashtadhyayi*, one of the founders of Sanskrit grammar, was from a village in Kashmir. The Mauryan chronicles also support the fact that Kashmir was one of the major principalities during the entire Mauryan period. Ashoka was given the credit for laying the foundation stone of Srinagar-city of

spiritual as well as material wealth. Kalhana also refers to one “Surendra” to be an ancestor of *Ashoka* to rule Kashmir. *Jaluka*, who was son and successor of *Ashoka* also ruled in *Kashmir* and was the worshipper of Lord *Shiva*. Post-Mauryas there was a brief interregnum in Kashmir polity till the time of Kushanas and it was in this period that Kashmir was ruled by Indo-Greek kings. During the reign of *Kanishka*, Fourth Buddhist council was held in *Kundalvana* in Kashmir and *Vasumitra* was the president of this council.

### Spread of Buddhist Philosophy in Kashmir

*Ashoka*, as the students and scholars of history already know, was a great zealot, reformist and a great propagator of his faith and he sent *Majjhantika* to *Kashmir* in order to spread the word of Buddha and his own philosophy of *Dhamma*. *Majjhantika*'s arrival was dramatized by Buddhist scholars attributing magical powers to him in order to ward off evils. During this very time of *Ashoka*, an influential and distinctly conservative sect of Buddhism appeared in Kashmir- *Sravastivada*. *Sravastivadins* were of the opinion that not only things which belong to present matter but also those things matter which belongs to past and present but are also in continuity with the present. *Kanishka* also gave patronage to *Sravastivadins* and *Mahasravastivadins* (another branch of *Sravastivada* school of thought) in Kashmir. During the deliberations of Fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir scholars like *Parsva*, *Vasumitra*, *Ashvaghosh* and others compiled the tenets of Buddhism in accordance with the teachings of *Sravastivada* school. *Asanga* and *Vasubandhu* were two illustrious Buddhist scholars who also studied *Vibhasa Sashtra* in Kashmir. It is very pertinent of me to mention here that the language used in the writings of these Buddhist texts was Sanskrit which marked a tectonic shift from past where regional language was the focal point in writing. During the time of Lord *Buddha* and during the First Buddhist council stress was given to write in regional languages like Pali and Prakrit while during later period *Sravastivadins* wrote extensively in Sanskrit. The *Vaibhasika* branch of the *Sravastivada* School also used Sanskrit largely and *Vasubandhu* was the celebrated teacher of the school.

*Hieun-Tsang* provides a beautiful description of the prevalent Buddhist schools in Kashmir during his itinerary in Kashmir. He mentions about more than hundreds of Buddhist monasteries in Kashmir with five thousand monks and the inhabitants of the valley still remembered *Ashoka* and *Kanishka*. According to his own testimonies in *Si-Yu-Ki*, he mentions that he remained in Kashmir for two consecutive years, from 631 B.C to 633 B.C. He studied Buddhist philosophy there and also copied different books on the Buddhist traditions in order to take them home to China. He mentions that adherents of the Buddhist faith used to live peacefully there and they were the great savants and propagators of the Buddhist creed.

From the above discussion we can, at least, infer one point that philosophical tradition had already dug its roots deep in the soil of Kashmir. Prior to the beginning of Early Medieval period in Kashmir, we see that Buddhism was already flourishing in the valley and it has been authenticated by the memoirs and writings of different foreign travelers. Kashmir was the land where different sects of Buddhism flourished and great treatises on *Theravadins*, *Sravastivadins* and *Vaibhasika sastras* were written here but due to reasons unknown to us this vast voluminous literature was lost to next generations. Fortunately the memoirs of travelers and the discovery of manuscripts in the stone chambers which were build under the monasteries ion Gilgit throws an extensive opportunity for people interested in academia, philology, philosophy and history to understand the evolution and development of Buddhist philosophy in Kashmir.

## Emergence of the Shaivaite Philosophy in Kashmir

By the period of seventh century Buddhism had already spread its wings over Kashmir valley and it was to some extent able to give a blow to the indigenous faiths and somehow Brahmanism was able to not only prevail but also developed parallelly. We have also discussed previously the love of Mauryan emperors for Lord Shiva and their help in building the temples for their revered deity. Along with Shiva Lord Vishnu was also worshipped and many temples were built in his honor. Thus, we see that Kashmiri society was exposed to this binary enigma between Buddhist and Brahmanical faith but yet, we see, through the eyes of Nilmata Purana, that all these faiths used to co-exist peacefully. Nevertheless, by the end of seventh century B.C, Shaivism was able to mark a major stride and struck its root deepest in the soil of Kashmir.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Saivism flourished in the Early Medieval Kashmir also because of the political support it received from a stable political regime in Kashmir. The great exegetes in Kashmir were patronized by the kings and queens of *Karkota, Utpala and Lohara* dynasty. Prior to the advent Karkotas on the soil of Kashmir we hardly find any substantial Brahmanical philosophy being unfold in the region. But with the invasions of *Lalitaditya Muktapida* across Indian plains and sub-continent we find a new philosophy most profoundly Shaivaite philosophy, being evolved and developed how the kings of Kashmir gave patronage to exegetes can be illustrated by the fact, that the celebrated Kashmiri poet, *Jayanta*, who wrote *Nyaya-Manjari* says that his ancestors were Gaur Brahmins from Bengal. *Jayanta's* son *Abhinanda* wrote in his *Kadambari-Kathasara* that his father's great grand-father was minister in the court of *Karakaota* king *Lalitadiya Muktapida*. *Jayanta* was a follower of Shaivism and in his writings we find a critique of Buddhist philosophy. Not only this the celebrated author of *Tantrasara*, *Abhinavagupta* also says that his ancestors were from *Kanyakbhujia* or modern day *Kannauj* and they came in Kashmir on the request of Karkota Kings.

It can be fairly said that the issue of dominance between *Buddhist* philosophy and Shaivaite philosophy had initiated and finally it was the later that triumphed. Kashmiri *Shaivaite* philosophers took great pain in order to combat Buddhist Philosophical views. The fragility of these Saiva philosophers had its onus on the scarcity of documented canons. This they overcame by taking great pain in writing lengthy and elaborated Shaivaite philosophy. They also had the pulse of masses in their hands and knew that the major chunk of people was not interested in verbal diatribes so they composed Philosophical hymns which would be explained easily and after sometimes could be chanted effortlessly. These philosophers started criticizing the basic tenets of Buddhism, like their denial of the existence of the soul and their persistence on *Shunyawad*, that is, non-existence of the external world. *Jayanta*, a *Shaivaite* philosopher, criticized the Buddhist way of seeing the universe as binary of perception (*pratakshya*) and inference (*anuman*). He also criticized them for their refutation of soul and yet building *Chaityas* for attaining heaven.

Kashmir Shaivism in the earliest form of its evolution had two successive forms. Earlier it had its inclination towards *Pashupata* sect which was a dualistic sect. later on it was superseded by idealistic monism (*advaitvada*) which was propagated by exegetes of Shaiva philosophy in Kashmir. The monistic form of Shaivism was taken by them to the pinnacle of intellectual scholastic domains. They were able to pen down Trika agamas into three broad categories as:

1. *Agamashastra*
2. *Spandashastra*
3. *Pratyabhijnashastra*.

The *Shivasutras* are said to be the foundation of these *Trika Shastra* and the authorship the Sutras is attributed himself to The Lordship of Shiva who manifested himself tangibly in the dream of *Vasugupta* and revealed it to the sage. *Vasugupta* was advised by Lord Shiva to preach these sutras to the world and annihilate the darkness perpetuated on earth by illuminating the world through these Sutras.

### ***Agamshastra***

The philosophical discourse of Kashmir Shaivism had begun and different scholars tried to interpret the monistic side of Lord Shiva through the knowledge they attained from their seers, peers and their own personal experiences. The initial stage of *Agamicshastra* is shrouded in ambiguity and the general consensus is that these sastras were handed down from the generation of sages to their disciples in a continual phase. The main works which do belong to this *Tantra* are

1. *Malinivijaya*
2. *Svachhananda*
3. *VijnanaBhairava*
4. *Ucchasmabhairava*
5. *Annandabhairava* and many other works like these were written.

All of these works were written in a very complex language and as such warranted commentaries in order for common folks to comprehend them in a plain manner. These commentaries were written in the form of *vrittis* and some of them are also available today such as the *Vimarsini* of *Kshemraja* and the *Varttika* of *Bhaskara*. *Kshemraja* was one of the prominent Saiva philosopher and he also wrote some of the principal commentaries on these *Agamicshastra* and his major commentaries are *Udyata* based on *Svachhananda*, *Netra* and *VijnanaBhairava*.

### ***Spandashastra***

The term *Spanda* is said to have been founded by *Vasugupta* and its literal meaning in Vibration; this sastra is based on the *Spanda-Karika* and the *Karikas* are the commentaries on *Siva- Sutra*. *Bhatta Kallata* was the disciple of *Vasugupta* and he claimed that the gem of *Spanda* was floating deep in the ocean of *Siva –sutra* and it was *Vasugupta* who collected this hidden gem as nectar from the ocean. *Vasugupta* taught the laws of *Spanda* to his disciples and the chief disciple *Bhatta- kallata* built the philosophical base of *Spandasastra* through his work *Spanda-karika*. He further simplified *Spanda* in the form of his commentary on the same topic called as *Spanda –Sarvasva*. The principles of *Spanda* appeared approximately around 825 A.D and it culminated into *Spandakarika* around 850 A.D. *Utpala Vaishnav's* commentary on *Spandasastra* is considered to be the most scholarly interpretation of *Spandakarika*. *Bhatta Kallata* and *Kshemraja* were two such other scholars who wrote profoundly on the subject of *Spandashastra*.

### ***Pratyabhijnashastra***

*Pratyabhijna* means realization of self or self-recognition. According to *S.C. Banerjee*, “*Pratyabhijna*

is the *Shastra* that gives *Trika* the dignity of Philosophy.” This is the recognition of one’s own true self which is akin to the recognition of Shiva who has remained neglected and unnoticeable even though he is innate and dwells deep inside his being or consciousness. The chief proponent of the *Pratyabhijna* school of Philosophy was *Somananda* who is generally considered to be as the disciple of *Vasugupta* and the twentieth presiding teacher of the school of *Trayambaka*. He was the author of *Sivadrsti*, the first philosophical work written on Pratyabhijna shastra. *Sivadrsti* is said to have been composed of many portions or *Ahnikas* out of which only first three *ahnikas* and a part of fourth *ahnika* has survived. *Somananda* is also said to have been written a *Vritti* or commentary of his own work.

*Utpaldeva* was one of the chief disciples of *Somananda* and was the author of *Ishwarpratyabhijna*-by far the most important work of this School of thought. Such was the class of this work that with due course of time the philosophy of Pratyabhijna got associated with *Utpaldev’s Pratyabhijna* and not only this but commentaries of this school came to be known as *Pratyabhijnadarshana* and entire Kashmir Shaivaite philosophy was known by the same name outside the geographical domain of Kashmir. *Utpaldeva* himself wrote a commentary on *Ishwarpratyabhijna* and he is also credited with the authorship of *Ishwarsidhhi* and *Ajada pramara sidhhi*. *Abhinavagupta* himself wrote two commentaries on his coveted work which were *Pratyabhijnavimarsini* or *LaghuVritti* and *Pratyabhijnavivrtti Vimarsini*. Apart from these systems *Krama* and *Kaula* system of philosophy also flourished in Kashmir.

Kashmir Shaivism which had flourished during later phase of eighth century and ninth century reached its peak during the time of *Abhinavagupta*. He had born in great intellectual family and it is speculated that *Vasugupta* author of *Shivsutra* was also his relative. Prior to the advent of Shaivaite scholars in Kashmir poets in India hardly mentioned their whereabouts. They were usually silent over their place of birth and lineage but this practice was shunned by Kashmiri authors. *Abhinavagupta* gives a vivid description of his birth place and ancestors. He says that his ancestor *Atrigupta* came from *Kanyakbhuj* and served in the court of *Lalitaditya*. His grandfather was *Barahagupta* and his father was renowned Shaivaite scholar called *Narshimagupta* also known as *Chukulakha*.

*R.C. Majumdar* is of the opinion that the emergence of *Abhinavagupta* in the intellectual sphere of Indian History marks a watershed moment. His thirst for knowledge was so high that he wandered everywhere and had as many as thirteen teachers who were from distinct philosophical schools. He has as many as forty works to his credit and his commentator, *Jayaratha* lists most of his works. His commentary on *Natyashastra* of *Bharata Muni*, *Abhinavabharti*, is one of the monumental intellectual aesthetic interpretations and helps us to the ideas put forth by *Bharata Muni*. He synthesized Kashmir Shaivism as never before and he gave his *Vrittis* of variegated texts of *Agama Spanda* and *Pratyabhijna shastra*. Although he wrote on different subjects like dramaturgy, logic, philology, literary criticism and so on but he remains the final authority on both aspects of Kashmir Shaivism, theory and practice. He wrote extensive commentaries on *Sivadrsti* of *Somananda* and *Utpaldev’s Ishwarpratyabhijna* and holds the position of any author who systemized, interpreted and finalized colossally profound and mysterious tenets of Saiva philosophy which before his arrival was lying squandered in the vast scriptural literature of *Saiva agamas*.

By far, *Tantraloka* is the most important work of *Abhinavagupta* which contains the embodiment of all the canonical texts of monistic Shaivism. The book deals with the integral aspects of the *Trika Shastra* by a philosophic method and thus encompasses a finer theological study as well. This way, *Tantraloka*

becomes a distinctive work on the pragmatic side of spiritual philosophy and throws considerable light on many ambiguous and mysterious topics of *Shaivasadhana*. *Tantrasara* has also been written by him which is a summary of *Tantraloka* written in prose. Along with these some other works of author are *Malinivijayavarttika*, *Malinivartika*, *Bodhpanchdasika*, *Anubhava-Nivedna-Stotra*, *Bhairava stotra*, *Malinitantra*, *Annutarastika* and many others.

The *Shaivaite* philosophy that emerged in Kashmir was quite different from other schools of Shaivism that emerged in different parts of India. It was based on sensible approach towards all the philosophical issues whether theory or practical. It was neither idealistic as *Advaita Vedanta* and *Buddhism* nor it was closely realistic as *Sankhya* Philosophy. The universe according to this philosophy was not a mere façade or mirage as several *Advaitavadins* would like to make us believe but rather it is an absolute reality of the creation which is in the form of all eternal consciousness. It tries to have basic knowledge of self and the fundamental elements that are pertinent to understand that what constitutes this self. The self along with cosmos are relevant to each other as projected from the same source and to understand spiritual vision with a comprehension of unity of individual self and cosmos as whole and bring it to the unification at the core of man's inner being. It is also different from other Brahmanical texts because it doesn't accept the supremacy of Vedas and asserts inclusiveness. It is meant for one and all and has no caste or gender restrictions in it.

Kashmir Shaivism which started evolving towards the beginning of mid seventh century attained literary heights during the days of Abhinavagupta and Kshemaraja. It had brief struggle with already prevalent Buddhist conservatives in Kashmir but it was eventually successful in supplanting the. It can also be said that Kashmir Shaivism incorporated in itself all that was universal endurance of *Vedanta*, *Vinaya of Buddhism* and intellectual and emotional discipline of supreme love and devotion of *Vaishnava* and *Shakta* school respectively. Although it had taken bits and bytes of every school of thought but Kashmir *Shaivism* never lost its originality and essence. It refuted the idea of *Shankracharya* which claims "*Brahmam Satyam Jagat Mithya*" which means that only God is true whereas this world is an illusion, a mere mirage. The novelty of Kashmir philosophy lies in the fact that they even challenged this assertion of *Shankracharya* and claimed the world to be true because it is the manifestation of the ever-knowing, ubiquitous, eternal and ultimate Lord Shiva.