

KALHANA: A HISTORIAN OF ANCIENT INDIA(PART-1)

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INTRODUCTION

Kalhana is an important historian in Indian history. Probably, the best known history of India was produced by Kalhana, a Brahmana of Kashmir. He was the *son of Kanpaka, a minister of King Harsha of Kashmir*. Kanpaka is referred in Rajatarangini as *dvarapati* or the Lord of the Gates; commander of the frontier troops. Kalhana was born in Parihaspura now known as Paraspore in the Baramulla district of Jammu & Kashmir.

The 12th century A.D. this Kashmiri poet, wrote '*Rajatarangini*'- the river of kings which has been of great value for the study of the history of Kashmir. He started his work in 1148 A.D. and completed it within two years.

HIS WORK-RAJATARANGINI

For this work he used different sources.

His access to minute details of contemporary court intrigues was almost direct: his father and uncle were both in the Kashmir court.

- ◉ Regarding the events of the past, Kalhana's search for material was truly fastidious. He delved deep into such model works as the *Harshacharita* and the *Brihat-samhita* epics and used with commendable familiarity the local *rajakathas* (royal chronicles) and such previous works on Kashmir as *Nripavali* by Kshemendra, *Parthivavali* by Helaraja, and *Nilamatapurana*. He made a critical study of the earlier works on the history of Kashmir.
- ◉ He displayed surprisingly advanced technical expertise for the time in his concern for unconventional sources.

HIS WORK-RAJATARANGINI

He looked up a variety of epigraphic sources relating to royal eulogies, construction of temples, and land grants; he studied coins, monumental remains, family records, and local traditions.

- He had used information about temples and other records. His use of records as reason based sources of history was indeed an important contribution to history. But he was not clear about the dates. Besides this regionalism was apparent in his writing. He had included all the famous kings (i.e. Maurya kings) as the rulers of Kashmir.

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- ◉ Despite these minor aberrations, his writing is really unique in every sense and no other contemporary historian can be compared with him as far as his importance and minute observation is concerned.

Thus he gives us a glimpse of historiography which fully shows that he understood the fundamental principles of modern historiography. This is evident from the fact that Kalhana tells us that while composing *Rajatarangini* he studied not only the eleven existing historical books on Kashmir but also corrected errors on them by 'inspection of ordinance of former kings and laudatory inscriptions as well as written records'. Kalhana held the view that a true

HIS WORK-RAJATARANGINI

historian should recount the events of the past after having discarded bias as well as prejudice. Another outstanding characteristic of Kalhana is that he gives his narrative in proper chronological order but also offers judgments on the various events recorded.

- ◉ Commenting on the role of a true historian Kalhana himself observed in the preamble of the Rajatarangini:

"In general, the poet alone is worthy of praise whose word like that of a judge, keeps free from love and hatred in relating the facts of the past".

He not only set down these principles but also lived upon them.

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- Soon after he writes:

What is the skill required in order that men of a later time should supplement the narrative of events in the works of those who died after composing each the history of those kings whose contemporaries they were ? Hence my endeavor is to give a connected account where the narrative of past events has become fragmentary in many respects.

Rajatarangini, which consists of 7,826 verses, is divided into eight books.

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◉ Book I

Attempts to weave imaginary tales of Kashmir kings into epic legends. Gonanda was the first king and a contemporary and enemy of the Hindu deity Krishna. Traces of genuine history are also found, however, in references to the Mauryan emperors Ashoka and Jalauka; the Buddhist kushan kings Hushka (Huviska), Jushka (Vajheska), and Kanishka (Kaniska); and Mihirakula, a Huna king.

◉ Book II

Introduces a new line of kings not mentioned in any other authentic source, starting with Pratapaditya I and ending with Aryaraja.

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◉ Book III

Starts with an account of the reign of Meghavahana of the restored line of Gonanda and refers to the brief reign of Matrigupta, a supposed contemporary of Vikramaditya Harsha of Malwa. There too, legend is mixed with reality, and Toramana Huna is incorporated into the line of Meghavahana. The book closes with the establishment of the Karkota Naga dynasty by Durlabhaka Pratapaditya II.

◉ Book IV

And it is from Book IV on that *Rajatarangini* takes on the character of a dependable historical narrative. The Karkota line came to a close with the usurpation of the throne by Avantivarman, who started the Utpala dynasty in 855.

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- ◉ **Books V and VI**

The history of the dynasty continues to 1003, when the kingdom of Kashmir passed on to a new dynasty, the Lohara.

- ◉ **Book VII**

Brings the narrative to the death of King Harsha (1101)

- ◉ **Book VIII**

Deals with the stormy events between the death of Harsha and the stabilization of authority under Kalhana's contemporary Jayasimha (reigned 1128–49).

(To be continued)