

Kashmir Its Pre-Historic Period

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Kashmir is an extensive alluvial vale bounded on the west by Suliman Mountains, on the east, south-east by the River Sulej and on the north by the Himalayas. Whosoever is looking at the map of vast Himalayan region is sure to find many delightful valleys and picturesque spots. But among all these Kashmir is unique in her flora and fauna, history, culture and art. To be precise it is one of the most beautiful and fertile valleys in the world¹. It is situated at latitude 33⁰.15 and 34⁰.35 north and longitude 74⁰, 10 and 75⁰, 40 east covering an area of 84 miles by 25 miles in expanse with almost a uniform height of 1500-1800mts above sea level². The origin of the valley of Kashmir is told in several romantic legends and myths. The valley as per these legends was originally a mighty lake called "Satisar". The earliest work which has recorded the tradition, is the Nilmatpurana written by Kashmiri Brahmans in 6th, 7th century AD. It recorded Kashmir was originally a vast lake and continued for millions of years. How this lake dried up and the resultant bottom came to be known as Kashmir, possess two evidences (1) Legends (2) Scientific.

Legends:-As per legend in the "Satisar" lake there lived a demon Jaladhabhava, who caused a great distress to all neighboring regions by his devastations. The sage Kashyapa, the father of all Nags while on his pilgrimage in the north of India heard of this distress from his son Nila who lived in the valley. The sage determined to punish the evil doer proceeded to Brahma to implore his and other god's help for this purpose. All the gods by Brahma's command started for Satisar and took up their positions on the lofty peaks above KaunsarNaag. The demon refused to come forth from the lake. There upon Vishnu called on his brother Brahadra' to drain out the lake, which he did by making a breach at Baramulla, ultimately water receded and the lake dried up. Jaladhbhava was attacked by Vishnu and slain with his war disc. Kashyapa then settled the land. The land came to be known after the name of sage Kashyapa as Kashaypmar, which today is known as Kashmir³.

Scientific (Geological):-The scientific studies carried out by geologists, geochemists since 1864, produced a vast literature on the geological ages of Kashmir. They hold that the valley was formed out of a series of geological changes based on a huge geological material found in the valley which come down to us in shape of flat topped plateaus known in Kashmir as woudar (Karewas). After studying the structure and composition of these wudars the scientists are unanimous that Kashmir was a lake for millions of years⁴. It shifted towards the north and northern-eastside around 3500000 BC and ultimately started draining out about 83000BC their conclusions were mainly based on the structure and composition of the wudars (karewas). There are two types of karewas in Kashmir designated by the geologists as: -

- Lower karewas situating towards the south and south-west of Kashmir as represented by Hirpure formation in District Shopain.

- Upper karewas situating towards north and north-east of Kashmir as represented by Nagam formation in District Budgam.

The marked difference between the lower and upper karewas is seen in their thickness of Aeolian deposition of Loess. The loess thickness of lower karewas is 25-30mts with paloesols, while its thickness is 10meters with paloesols on the upper karewas. The same is visible at Shirpur, Pattan, Beerue, Budgam, Burzahome etc. This variation is the proof that the lake continued to be in force on the Himalayan flank until the late Ice Age and the loess started depositing on this side only after the lake was finally drained out. As per the Radio Carbon-14 dating of these loess deposits, the older loess that forms the ground surface in the north-western Kashmir dates back to 29000BC and the young loess which forms the ground surface in the north-eastern Kashmir is not older than 18000 years. Since then the valley floor was not yet desiccated. It is in this younger loess that the Neolithic man excavated his dwellings which have been encountered at Burzahome and Gufkral⁵. Such settlement pattern existed up to 200BC as all the early settlements have been found on the wudars (karewas).

Like other parts of the world in Kashmir too, man's march towards civilization started with the Paleolithic Age. The same may be highlighted as:

Paleolithic period:

The term "Paleolithic" is a Greek word "Paleo" means old and "Lithic" means stone. Therefore the term Paleolithic Age means "old stone Age". The period has been further divided into three periods on the basis of tools used by man and the climatic change which were as -

- Lower Paleolithic Age 500000 B.C to 100000
- Middle Paleolithic Age 100000 B.C to 40000 B.C
- Upper Paleolithic Age 40000 B.C to 10000 B.C

The people of the period were food gatherers and hunters, used stone tools to hunt animals for food. Until recent past, it was thought that the early man had not lived in Kashmir, but the archeological investigations in the Lidder valley in 1928 A.D by Grinlinton who recovered a 'handmade boulder established stone age culture in Kashmir on sound base. The subsequent investigations especially by H.D, Sankalia 1969 A.D in the area not only confirmed the earlier proposition. but on the basis of tools found .hold that man lived in Kashmir 500000 years ago later researchers considered the same as earliest in Asia.Further a few chopper type tools and scrapers were also recovered from Prang, Waswan (Sindh valley), Balpure in Shopian. But the culture at Somber was shown by a distinct blade and burin industry .More than 100 artifacts made from jasper and limestone have been collected .The tools like burins ,points and borers of the upper Paleolithic have been encountered at Kullader. Bhatchak ,Tapriballa ,and Huin in district Baramulla and khansahib and Habsahib in district Badgam.

No doubt the early Paleolithic tools were traced out from upper reaches of the Himalayas and Pir Panjal while the upper Paleolithic tools from plateaus. It is therefore, reasonable to conclude that Paleolithic man first lived on the upper reaches of the mountains and on plateaus, as the floor of the valley remained under water. The subsistence pattern of the early man too varied between lower and upper Paleolithic periods. In the lower period the tools appeared were big and massive, while in the upper period were small. From plateaus, numerous plants invertebrate and animal vertebrate fossils have been found. The fact indicates a rich assemblage of animals both of indigenous and foreign origin. Horse and elephant migrated to India from central Africa. The presence of burins, points and borers of upper Paleolithic period showed that man started stitching the animal hides to cover his body. Though archeologists had agreed that man during the period lived in caves as they encountered a few at Mansbal in Kashmir for dwelling.

Neolithic Period

The term “Neolithic” is a Greek word meaning, *Neo*-New and *Lithic*-Stone. So Neolithic means new stone age. By 3000_{BC} due to climatic change and influx of people from the neighboring areas armed with effective hunting techniques, the valley of Kashmir entered into the Neolithic Age (new stone age). The remains of which were found at different places in the valley. The main characteristics of the culture were domestication of plants and animals, manufacture of ground stone tools, emergence of village communities and introduction of pottery. No doubt dozens of sites have been identified in Kashmir of the period, but only two Burzahom and Gufkral have been excavated and highlighted so far. The findings obtained from their famous sites have been analyzed. The archeologists have accordingly divided the Neolithic culture of Kashmir into three phases:

- 2800BC To 2250BC
- 2250BC To 2000 BC
- 2000BC To 1500BC

During the first phase the economy of the people appears to have been based on farming, stock raising and hunting. Bones of bear, sheep, goat, wolf have been obtained. The people used tools and weapons of bone and stone. Of these tools points, needles harpoons and scrapers were found. The stone tools like axes, drills, picks, pistols were obtained. The cereals, grains of wheat, barley and lentils were recovered. The people lived in pits but the absence of hearths inside the pits indicate were used only for living, while plastered floors, hearths shallower pits too were recovered. Of these shallower pits with painted floors were used as storage bins.

In the second phase there was introduction of indigenous handmade pottery. The main pottery included long necked jar, bowls and basins. Besides the plants of the period witnessed the introduction of common pea. The remains of peach, walnut and apricots too were recovered from Burzahom.

The last phase of the period in Kashmir exhibits both continuity and change. Underground pit and chamber dwelling was abundant, rather on ground dwelling units of mud and brick were unearthed. Besides sheep goat bones of pig, fish, horse have been obtained. Along with cultivation of wheat, barley, lentil, pea there appeared introduction of some fruits viz. grapes vine and almonds. The tools of stone and bones continued, of which points, arrowhead, awls, harpoons etc were found. In addition terracotta bangles and cowry shells were obtained. Excavations at Burzahom have furnished evidence regarding burial practice. The burials were found within the settlements. These were oval in outline and were dug out either in house floor or compounds. The sides of these graves were found plastered with lime. Burials of some animals like dog, wolf was also found. The animal burials indicate that the burying of pet animals was a common feature of the period. The period was succeeded by Megalithic culture of which indications were found at Burzahom, Gufkral, Hariparigam, Begund, Pahalgam, Tarakpure, Somber, Pampore and Dadasara. The main feature of the period was Menhir type of large stones which was later on changed into tombs to commemorate the memory of their tribes. Since then the man's march of civilization extended its relations with neighboring territories, whose political, economic and cultural traditions changed the whole scenario of the valley and it passed from pre to proto historical period.