

KASHMIR: THE MYSETRY OF THE WORD

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Kashmir is not just a locale. It is a mystique too that inspires a deep sense of awe and mystery among its admirers and inhabitants alike. Its landscape looks like that of a distant fairyland that arouses curiosity and tempts one to embark on its visitation. Kashmir's unique cultural ethos has evolved over thousands of years and retained that indigenous and antiquarian flavor that is both exotic and axiomatic .its history intertwines with its immediate surroundings as well as far off places, trade roots and ancient centers of civilization. It is a point where myth and history intersect in such a way that gives birth to a beautiful pattern. If Kashmir is mystery so is its name. The word Kashmir is an enigma that has remained undeciphered even so far. It has been plurally interpreted from historical, linguistics and religious points of view. However, its meaning remains as elusive as ever.

Interestingly Kashmir has many variants in several countries. There is a place called "Kashmur" in China. China also has a place called "Kashghar", historically one of the oldest cities, in its northern Xingjiang province [1]. It is on this pattern that some poets like Iqbal have used the word "Kaashmar", in their verse to refer to Kashmir. Similarly there is place by the name of "Kashmorah" in Pakistan. There is a village in Hormozgam province of Iran also pronounced and spelled exactly as "Kashmir". Iran also has a place known as "Chah-e-Kashmir" (The well of Kashmir) in its Khorasan province. Afghanistan too has a tiny location which is called as Kashmir. Some central Asian republics too have similar sounding locales. Some scholars decode such names to consist of two parts "Kash" and something else. On the same analogue "Kashghar" is said to be consisting of "Kash" meaning "precious stone" and "Ghar" meaning "House". Therefore the meaning of Kashgar is given as "The house of precious stones"[2]. Kashmir is also said to be made up of two Sanskrit words "Ka" and "Samira" together meaning, the land from which water was drained by Ka or Prajapati (The Lord) [3].

Indigenously speaking, the name of Kashmir seems to form part of its creation myths. Kashmirs creation myths are deeply mired in religious lore, adding to its fabled origin stories. The Hindus of Kashmir believe Kashmir to have been a place which was originally inhabited by demons which were later exorcised by a same called Kashyap, after whom the place came to be called Kashmir. A Muslim version of its creation myth says that it was the Prophet Soloman who flew

above the inundated valley and got its water drained of through a mountain cleavage at Baramullah by Genie called Kashu and Fairy called Miran, after whom the place got identified with "Kashu-Miran" which finally ended up as Kashmir. Because of its biblical collection, the Persian chroniclers have always mentioned Kashmir as "Bagh-e- Sulaman" (The garden of Soloman). There is Buddhist version too which says that Kashmir was originally inhabited by its indigenous people Nagas. Once Mahatma Buddha flew above the valley during one of his proselytizing missions, said to Ananda, his disciple that Arhat Madhyantaka would establish his rule and spread his teachings here. It is believed that later Arhat Madhyantaka was once in meditation attracting the overseeing dragon of the valley who beseeched for his blessings. Arhat asked for space enough for two arms. The dragon conceded however Arhat through his spiritual powers inflated his body so much that he occupied the whole valley. As he kept on stretching himself, the water of the lake would dry up, giving birth to the Kashmir valley.

Ironically the natives of Kashmir refer to the valley simply as "Kashir" and not as "Kashmir". It is mostly in Sanskrit classics like Nilamat Purana and Persian historiography that we find Kashmir mentioned as "Kashmir" or "Kashmirah" or as "Mulk-I Kashmir". Otherwise the local reference to Kashmir is simply as "Kashir". Interestingly, the word "Kashmir" is masculine while the word "Kashir" used by its natives is feminine.

Though the word Kashmir is usually said to have originated from Sanskrit philology, there are scholars who have strong reservations against such opinions. Sir Aurel Stein, the author of *The Ancient Geography of Kashmir*, is one such scholar who believed in the word Kashmir to belong to the ancient Naga linguistic lore [4]. One of the foremost Kashmir experts and cultural critics, Mohammad Yousf Taing, while commenting on the etymological origins of the word Kashmir, says that the word must be linguistic vestige of the Nagas who were wiped of the valley by the invading Aryans far before the emergence of the Sanskrit language in the area [5]. He holds the opinion that the word pre-existed the recorded history of the place [6]. His theory of the native Kashmiris to have been the Dravidians who were driven down to the south of India has evoked quite an interest among the scholars and researchers in and outside Kashmir. He has come out with a series of more than six papers, trying to fill the gaps between the Kashmiri and the south Indian Dravidian languages. He also listed a number of words common in the two sets of languages [7]. He holds the opinion that like the Naga lore, the word "Kashmir" remains an enigma whose meaning is yet to be deciphered [8]. However, the word Kashmir continues to be a puzzle beyond and above these studies and will continue to intrigue the minds of likes of me.

REFERENCES

- [1] Paracha, Ajmal Sayeed. *Sooye Wadiye Kashghar*. Lahore:Alqamar enterprises, 1996. Page 91. Interestingly the book mentions a place called "Kara Kull" in the region

surrounding Kashghar, referring to the ancient and the silk route connection of “ Kara Kull” cap, popular in Kashmir.

- [2] Parancha, 101.
- [3] Ahmad Khalid Bashir. *Jhelum: The River Through My Backyard*. Srinagar: The Bookman Publishers, 2001. Pages 5.
- [4] Taing, Mohammad Yousf. *Heemal Nyagray* : Srinagar : J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages,1981. Page 23.
- [5] Taing, 23.
- [6] Taing, 23.
- [7] Refer to his books like *talaash*, *rasb*, *keashir kitaab*, etc.
- [8] Taing, 23.