

THE  
**NĪLAMATA PURĀṆA**



# THE NILAMATA PURANA

## A BRIEF SURVEY

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## 1.0 THE NILAMATA PURANA

### A Brief Survey

by Dr. Ved Kumari Ghai

The Nilamata is a Kashmiri Purana referred to by Kalhana as one of the sources of the ancient history of Kasmira. Buhler, whom goes the credit of saving its manuscripts, states on page 41 of his Report, "It great value lies therein that it is a real mine of information regarding the sacred places of Kashmir and their legends which are required to explain the Rajatarangini and that it shows how Kalhana has used his sources". But as a matter of fact the Nilamata gives besides, the account of sacred places, a lot of information about the Kasmiri way of living. The picture of ancient 'Kasmira' presented by its study is not complete and compact, still it is significant for its value which is supplementary to that of the Rajatarangini. While the Rajatarangini acquaints us with kings, queens and ministers of 'Kasmira', the Nilamata generally speaks of common men in their homes, streets, gardens and temples. The life of the common people, the food and drinks they took, the amusements they resorted to, the currents of religious thoughts they followed and the rites and ceremonies they performed throughout the year are described therein. If the Rajatarangini is important from the point of view of the political history of 'Kasmira', the Nilamata is no less important for the cultural history of that part of the country.

#### Date

Kalhana (12th Century A.D.) refers to it as a work of great antiquity. The absence of the term 'avatara' and the use of the term 'Pradurbhava' for incarnation of gods, non-mention of Kalki, Krishna's consort Radha and the sacred leaf of Tulasi, mention of Buddha as an incarnation of Visnu in a spirit of catholicity and the incorporation of its various verses into the Brahma Purana long before the time of Laksmidhara (1104-1154 A.D.) further indicate its early date. The textual study of the work shows that some alterations and additions have been made in it after the ninth or tenth century A.D. in order to incorporate into it the monistic Saiva Philosophy of Kasmira. Had the Nilamata been composed after the ninth century A.D. there would have been no scope for such change. The lower limit of the date thus may be eighth century A. D. and the upper one about the sixth century A.D. as Buddha began to be regarded as an incarnation of Visnu from about 550 A.D.

#### Out-line of the contents

The Nilamata opens with Janamejaya's enquiry from Vaisampayana as to why the king of 'Kasmira' did not participate in the war of Mababharata although his kingdom was not less important than any other in the country. Vaisampayana states that some time before the Mababharata war was fought, king Gonanda of Kasmira had been invited by his relative Jarasandha to help him in a war against the yadavas. Gonanda complied with his request and was slain on the battle field by Krsna's brother, Bala. In order to avenge his father's death, Gonanda's son Damodara went to Gandhara to fight with Krsna who had gone there to attend a Svayamvara. Krsna killed Damodara in the fight but taking into consideration the high sanctity of Kasmira, he coronated his rival's pregnant widow Yasovati. Damodara's Posthumous son Bala Gonanda was a minor at the time of the great war, so he did not join either the Kauravas or the Pandavas.

Vaismpayana points out the importance of 'Kasmira' by referring to its numerous charms and its identification with Uma. He points out further that the valley was originally a lake known as Satisaras. This leads to the question about the origin of 'Kasmira' to which Vaisanipayana replies by relating a dialogue held previously between Gonanda and the sage Brahadasva.

Brahadasva gives at first the account of the divisions of time, the destruction of the world at the end of manvantara, the presevation of Manu and the seeds in a ship, the birth of the land and the lake, of Sati, the origin of various tribes from Kasyapa and Visnu's allotment of Satisaras to the Nagas. Then follows the story of the demon Jalodbbava born in the waters and reared by the Nagas. Having obtained boons from Brahma, the demon began to destroy the descendants of Manu dwelling in the lands of Darvabhisara, Gandbars Jubundura, the Sakas, the Khasas etc. Seeing this devastation, Nila the king of

the Nagas approached his father Kasyapa and prayed to him to intercede with the gods to punish the evil-doer and to save the innocent victims. He requested the gods, Brahma, Visnu and Siva to do the needful. Visnu followed by Brahma, Siva and various other deities, proceeded to Naubandhana to punish the demon. The demon was imperishable in the waters; so Visnu asked Ananta to make an outlet for the waters by breaking forth the mountain-barriers. He did accordingly. Visnu then cut off the demon's head with his disc. Now the dry land being available in the valley, Kasyapa expressed the desire that it should be inhabited by the Nagas as well as by the descendants of Manu. The Nagas, however, flatly refused to have Manavas as their co-habitants. Filled with rage Kasyapa cursed them to live with the Pisacas. At the request of Nila the curse was modified to the extent that the Pisacas would go every year for a period of six months to the sea of sand and the Manavas would live in the land jointly with the Nagas during that period. Visnu further assured the Nagas that the occupation of Kasmira valley by the Pisacas would last for four ages only.

After the passing away of the four ages, the Manavas, as usual, had gone out for six months. An old Brahmana, Candradeva did not accompany them. Troubled by the Pisacas he approached the Naga King Nila and begged of him to ordain that 'Kasmira' might henceforth be inhabited by Manavas without the fear of emigration. Nila complied with this request on the condition that the Manavas should follow his instructions revealed to him by Kesava. Candradeva lived for six months in the palace of Nila and was initiated into the mysteries of rites or ceremonies prescribed by Nila. In Caitra, when the emigrant population of 'Kasmira' came back, he related the whole incident to Virodaya - king of Manavas. The lengthy dialogue held between Nila and Candradeva describes sixty five rites, ceremonies and festivals many of which are similar to those mentioned in other Puranic works and observed in many parts of India, while a few are peculiar to Kasmira only. At Janamejaya's enquiry as to what Gonanda had asked after listening to the teachings, another dialogue between Gonanda and Brhadrasva follows. Gonanda expresses his desire to know the names of the principal Nagas dwelling in Kasmira and Brhadrasva enumerates not fewer than Sir hundred Nigas. He expresses his inability to enumerate all the Nagas, as their number was too great. He further refers to four Nagas, the guardians of directions and relates the story of the Naga Sadangula and the Naga Mahapadma.

Then follows Gonauda's enquiry about the sacred places of Kasmira and Brhadrasva's reply referring to various places dedicated to Siva and other deities. Two names Bhutesvara and Kapatesvara raise Gonanda's curiosity which leads Brhadrasva to relate Bhutesvara Mahatmya and Kapatesvara Mahatmya. Then follows the enumeration of the sacred places of Visnu and other tirthas situated in the valley of Kasmira. Thereafter is given the eulogy of the river Vitasta and the work ends with the remark that, as this treatise in the form of a dialogue between Janamejaya and Vaisampayana was not useful everywhere (i. e. was of local interest mainly), Vyasa did not include it in the Maha Bharata lest that should become too exhaustive.

### **Birth of 'Kasmira'**

The Nilamata legend of the origin of 'Kasmira' as a result of the draining off of the lake, occurs in Kalhana's Rajatarangini, and in a bit changed form, in the Mahavamsa, the Chinese Vinaya of the Mula Sarvastivadin sect and in the account of the travels of Hiuen Tsang. Whether it was the basin-like shape of the valley of 'Kasmira' which suggested this legend or the memory of some old age when the area of Kasmira under water was more than what it is now, was responsible for it, cannot be stated with certainty; but it is interesting to know that the geological observations made in recent times corroborate the assertion made in the Nilamata.

The lowest point in the valley with high mountain walls on all sides is 5200 feet high above the sea level, and the lowest pass in the Pirpancal range, forming its outer boundary, is 3000 feet above the valley. The only outlet for the drainage of the valley is the narrow rock-gorge at Baramula.

Now nearly half of the area of this basin-shaped valley is occupied by the Karewas (Flat-topped mounds composed of clay and silt with thin layers of greenish sand) and the present view to quote D. N. Wadia regards "the Karewas as the surviving remnants of deposits of a lake or series of lakes which once filled the whole valley basin from end to end". Of course it will be going too far to suggest that some geological tests were at the basis of this legend. The most plausible hypothesis is that the idea of the great lake was



suggested by the basin-like shape of the valley and after this, it was just one step more in the making of mythology to attribute the drainage of water through an outlet in sandstone wall of the western corner of the basin, to a divinity like Ananta.

### **Geography**

Like other puranic works, the Nilamata also deals with geography of the world and mentions seven Dvipas, namely Jambu, Saka, Kusa, Kraunca, Salmali, Gomeda and Puskara. Of these seven, Jambudvipa as nine Varsas namely Uttarakuru, Ramya, Hairanvata Badrasva, Ketumala, Ilavrita, Harivarsa, Kimpursa and the last one i. e. Bharataversa alone seems to present India proper. More significant is the information about the tirthas particularly of Kasmira, mentioned in four lists occurring in the later half of the work. These lists are of special interest for the geography of Kasmira but it also deserves to be noted that the reference being too brief it is not possible to identify most of the place-names, especially those which are not mentioned in Kalhana's Rajatarangini or some other work of geographical value. It is also interesting to note the similarity of the nomenclature of Kasmira as found in the Nilamata with that of other parts of India. It seems that the people who had come from various parts of India to inhabit the valley of Kashmir named its beautiful spots after the tirthas familiar to them, they thus recognized prayaga the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna in the confluence of the Vitasta and the Sindhu and regarded the area extending from Trikotisangama to Har and from the confluence of the Pavana and the Rajobinduvimala to Ciramocana, as holy as Varanasi. The names like Sarasvati Rsikulya, Ramahrada, Bhrgutunga, Mundaprastha, Citrakuta, Bharatagiri Kamatirtha of Kasmira are also names of various tirthas of other parts of India.

### **Tribes**

About the inhabitants of ancient Kashmir, the Nilamata has preserved highly valuable information. The original inhabitants of the valley were the Nagas; then came the Pisacas and the Manavas. Being the original occupants of Kashmir, the Nagas did not like introduction of the Pisacas or the Manavas into the valley, but the selection was to be made between these two, they preferred Manavas to the Pisacas. The other tribes which are described occupying the neighbouring countries are the Madras (inhabitants the modern Sialkot and the surrounding regions between the Irava and the Chandrabhaga) the Darvas (inhabitants of Darva identified with the districts of Jammu and Ballavar) the Abhisaras (inhabitants of modern Punch and the area near it) the Gandharas (inhabitants of Peshawar, Rawalpindi etc.), Juhundaras probably same as Jaguda (inhabitants of Afghanistan), the Sakas, the Khasas, the Tarigams, Mandavas, the Antargiris and the Bahirgiris. Indirect mention of Yavanas is also made in the Naga name Yavanapriya.

### **Social, Political and Economic Life**

Regarding social, economic and political life in Kashmir the Nilamata has brought to light a few interesting points. The Brahmanas, especially those who were "Itihasavidah" and "Kalavidah" were highly honoured, but the Sudras too were not considered degraded. The humane treatment meted out to the servants is a pleasant feature of social organisation of Kashmir revealed by the Nilamata. The Nilamata often includes the servants also in the list of the persons in whose company the householder feasts and enjoys. The artisans like weavers and carpenters etc. commanded so much respect in the society as to exchange gifts with the higher varnas during the Mahimana celebrations. The very fact that the Nilamata describes the Sudras as taking part in the coronation ceremony of the king indicates that they were not considered debased.

Another enlivening feature of the Kashmiri social life as seen in the Nilamata is the position of women. Nowhere is she considered "the living torch illuminating the way to hell", or the devourer of the intellect of men. There is no reference to any veil worn by her and she moves quite freely in the society emulating as it were the free moving sparkling waters of the springs of the country. In the moon-lit night of Kaumudi Mahotsava we find her sitting beside the sacred fire in the company of her husband, children, servants and husband's friends, although it is not clear as to whether she is merely a silent spectator or she takes active part in the musical and dramatic performances given during this night. She is present in the common feast which takes place on the next day. Not only in the festivals celebrated at home, but also in the outdoor festivals, she is seen enjoying herself. The peasant's wife is lucky enough to participate in the joyous festival celebrated in the refreshing open fields of nature in connection with the ploughing of the

fields and sowing of seed. The Nilamata does not deny water-sports to the ladies of Kasmira. The young maidens, it says, "should specially play in the waters" during the celebrations of Sravani festival. Playing with men folk is allowed to women. "The joyful ladies", it says "dressed in their best attire, perfumed with scents and decorated with ornaments should sport in the company of men on the last day of Mahimana celebrations." The ladies of the home are honoured on various occasions. On the full moon day of Margasirasa, the gift of a pair of red clothes is prescribed for a Brahmana lady, for the sister, for the paternal aunt and for the friend's wife. The mention of the presentation of gifts to friend's wife is quite significant as it could have been possible only in a free atmosphere where women were allowed to move freely with no restrictions on their receipt of gifts from their husband's friends.

As regards their place in the religious life, they are not only allowed to accompany their husbands in the performance of various rites and ceremonies but are also enjoined upon to perform singly some rites specially prescribed for them. The predominance of the Goddesses in the religion depicted in the Nilamata is another factor pointing to the high status of women. The very land of 'Kasmira' is a mother Goddess 'Kasmira', a form of Uma. Numerous references are made to courtesans in connection with the description of festivals. The use of a simile comparing 'Kasmira' with a temple due to the presence of tender ladies indicates the popularity of the institution of Devadasis or temple-dancers.

On the whole, the Nilamata offers a pleasant picture of women of 'Kasmira'. As a daughter she was trained in fine arts and was allowed to move freely in the society. By giving her in marriage, the father obtained religious merits. As a wife she was loved and honoured by her husband and as a mother she shone with her sons who revered her highly. A would be mother could even be installed on the throne on the demise of her son-less husband-king.

This unconventional account of the women of 'Kasmira' is quite different from the account available in other Puranas and so it gives a distinctive character of the Nilamata.

Entertaining of guests is another notable feature of the social life of Kasmira depicted in the Nilamata. Even the king is enjoined upon to honour the immigrants from all the quarters.

The people were fond of music, dancing, drama and other means of recreations, which indicates their general prosperity depending upon agriculture and trade. The general terms used for the musical instruments are Vadya, Vadyitra and Vadyabhanda. We find reference to Vina (the modern hundred stringed Santoor of 'Kasmira' is probably satatantrivina or Vana referred to in the Taittiriya Samhita), Venu (flute) Sankha ( conch), Pataha ( Drum ) and Muraja ( tambourine ). Dances were performed on religious occasions and in social gatherings held in honour of seasonal and agricultural festivals. The words "Preksa" mentioned in the Nilamata refers to the tricol performances. The Nilamata mentions also a peculiar Phrase "Preksadana" literally meaning "the gift of a dramatic performance". It seems to have denoted "a gift made for the arrangement of a dramatic show". There may have existed some dramatic clubs which have such shows on demand and the injunction of "Yathavidhi preksadana" i. e. the gift for the arrangement of a dramatic show made in the proper procedure, may have been made with reference to them.

As regards the art of image-making, the Nilamata refers to images made of stone, clay, gold, silver, copper, brass, wood, sand, straw and ghee. References are made to printings on the cloth, the wall and the ground. The people are directed to decorate the Caityas with beautiful paints on lord Buddha's birthday. A circular pattern is drawn on the ground on which a 'Kashmira' bridegroom had to stand before entering for his marriage the house of the bride. This is a direct descendant of bhumisodha mentioned in the Nilamata.

Of the items of dress, mention may be made of pravara which seems to be the same as pravara mentioned in the Mahabharata as a cloth offering protection against cold. Kashmiri pheran is most probably derived from pravara.

Meat seems to have been a popular item of diet otherwise there would have been no necessity of prohibiting strongly the eating of meat for five days dedicated to the worship of Visnu. Wine is recommended as a drink on new snow-fall day and Iraman Jari Pujana.

In the sphere of political thought, there existed a belief in the divinity of kingship along with the theory that law is superior to the king. It is stated in a verse that the king of 'Kasmira' is a part of Hara and should not be disobeyed. The same verse is quoted by Kalhana with the significant expression "even a wicked one" added to the king. Compared with Bhishma's statement in the Mahabharata that a virtuous king is truly a god, this difference of statement of the Rajatarangini from that of the Nilamata shows a gradual development of the theory of absolute monarchy. The survival of a few republican elements is also indicated by the terms pradhana and ganamukhya.

Concerning religious life it shows not only the other cults adopting the Naga deities but also the Naga cult bringing the deities of other cults into its fold. Bhava Mahadva and Sambhu which are names of Siva, Guha and Kumara which are names of Siva's son, Narayana and the four yuhas Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Anirudha and Pradyumna, the epic heroes Rama, Lakshmana and Yudhishthira all appear in the Naga list of the Nilamata. On the whole the Nilamata reveals the spirit of compromise and synthesis in the field of religion. The Brahmanic deities, the Nagas, the pisacas, the Buddha all receive their due share of worship from the inhabitants of 'Kasmira'. The followers of cults are stated to be free to worship their respective deities but the different deities are described as honouring one another and thus creating an atmosphere in which various cults are united.

In the field of philosophical thinking the Nilamata presents the same theistic samkhya which appears in the epics and other Puranas. It would be going too far to suggest that it contains the tenets of the Monistic Saiva philosophy of 'Kasmira'. It is clear that the cult of Visnu, Brahman, Siva, Surya, Durga, Nagas, Buddha etc. flourished side by side in the time of the Nilamata Vaisnavism no doubt occupies a prominent place in this work but there is no indication of the creator of the creator, illuminating Brahma. Uma is the mother antagonistic attitude towards other cults. In the field of philosophical thoughts the Nilamata presents also a compromise regarding the problem of creation; it uses the terminology of the Samkhya referring to Indriyas, Indriyarthas, Mababhutas Manas, Buddhi, Atma, Avyakta and Purusa; but it does not accept its atheistic metaphysics. The five gross physical elements-Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Ether - which may stand for the solid, liquid, gaseous, aerial and ethereal states of matter, are stated to be the supporters of the world, but behind these is seen the working of the force of the Supreme Spirit. The epithet "Cause of the causes of the world" applied to Visnu and Brahma indicates that along with the Supreme Spirit, the final cause, there is also Prakriti, the immediate cause of the world. At one place, Shiva's epithet "Saksivat sthitah" sounds like that Sankhya Purusa but unlike the latter He is regarded as the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the world. Three qualities of Rajas, Sattva and Tamas are also referred to and are associated with the power of creation, protection and destruction.

The theology of the Nilamata is replete with numerous gods and goddesses. The trinity of Brahma, Visnu and Siva plays due role but there are others like Indra, Varuna, Yama, Karttikeya, Baladeva; Asvina, Martits, Visvedevas, Vasus, Yaksas, Nagas, Gandharvas, Prthivi, Surabhi, Sita, Saci, Laksmi, Uma, Syama, Bharati, Prajna, Mati etc. The tendency of describing one deity as the highest among others at one time and transferring the same epithet to the other at another time is clearly perceptible in the praises of Brahma, Visnu, Siva, Nila and the goddesses Uma and Laksmi. At some places, Visnu is praised as the best amongst the gods, unfathomable, the highest, the eternal, the refuge of all gods, the lord of the gods, cause of the causes of the world, the lord of three worlds, worshipped by Siva, praised by Brahma, but at other places Brahma is described as the cause of the causes of the world, the lord of three worlds, the lord of the god of the gods, the lord of all, the omniscient, the real force behind all the elements, the preceptor of the world and the sustainer of the world. Siva is also eulogised as the preceptor of the world, the lord of world, the lord of the gods, the lord of the god of the gods, and the highest lord.

Even the Naga deity Nila is described as the lord of the gods, the creator of the creator, illuminating Brahma. Uma is the mother of all gods, higher than Sarva, and Laksmi is raised to the highest position by saying that all the goddesses are her forms.

The idea that the whole world is God or a manifestation of God is also present in the Nilamata. The whole earth is a form of the goddess Sati. The earth, the water, the air, the sky, the fire, the sun, the moon, and the sacrificer, all these are regarded as eight forms of Siva.

The doctrine of monism, according to which there exists only a single principle from which everything is evolved, is also found in the Nilamata, Brahma in the Nilamata seems to have been identified with the Brahma of the Upanisadas, for He is recognized as the only element in the universe except whom there exists nothing. He is the knower and the thing to be known, the body and the soul, the meditator, the object of meditation and the meditation itself.

He is also of unknown birth. In the eulogy of Nila there is a reference to Brahma in the Upanisadic style. This Brahma is indivisible, imperishable and the highest. Due to its minuteness it is called Ether. The statement that it is minute as well as great, uncreated as well as possessed of limbs reminds one of similar statements found in the Katha and the Svetasvatara Upanisads. Of course, the Nilamata does not give us clear-cut monism; it has just paved the way for the Monistic Saiva Philosophy of Kasmira.

## 2.0 THE NILAMATPURANAM AND KASHMIR

by M. M. Karmayogi J. L. K. Jalali

**WE** have to thank Prof. Ram Lal Kanjilal (my professor in the Shri Pratap College) and Prof. Jagaddhar Zadoo for their joint labour in compiling the present edition of Nilamatapuram, which was published as far back as 1924. When I used to see my Bengali Professor transcribing the Sanskrit text in Bengali script, so valued by the Bengalis, I was amused. Whenever he would copy out a Sanskrit book or document, he would transcribe it in Bengali. I could not then understand why he did so. Later after 40 years I could satisfy my curiosity, when I came in contact with the late renowned scholar, Prof. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya (or Chatterji) ; who would tell me that he used to recite Bhagavadgita in Sanskrit written in the Bengali script. Prof. Kanjilal and Prof. Zadoo's compilation is admirable although there are inexplicable lacunae in it, which could have been filled in, had a little more labour been put in or effort made to carefully go through the different portions of the Puranam. Though the Editors have themselves referred to such lacunae not all and most important, I as reader and student of the Puranam feel that the Research Department of the Jammu and Kashmir State should have taken it up again and made further search for MSS of the Puranam, which I believe may still be available and have not been known to the department by a non-Kashmiri, least of all by the foreign scholars, without knowing and studying the life, habits, customs, manners, rituals, etc. apart from a thorough knowledge of the land of NAGAS, called Kashmir. To write on metre employed, to infer how men and women lived, who the inhabitants in the past were, does not give the true content of Nilamatpuranam. It is a storehouse, which has to be swept of all excrescences and then made into a running story of historical value of Kashmiri's past of several thousand years, a past in which for more than a milliard it was a Saras (inland sea) bounded by high mountains and inhabited by people living on its shores and on the mountain slopes whom we know as Nagas, ruled over by a king called Nila with his Headquarters at NILAKUNDA (Vernag) fifty miles to the east of Srinagar of today.

Before I proceed further, I consider it proper and an act of gratitude to refer to Dr. Buhler who was responsible for delving the Puranam, out of practical neglect. In the edition of the Puranam, compiled by the two learned professors and followed by others, it appears that what Dr. Buhler has written about the Puranam has been taken for granted and no deeper research has been made. Nilamata is the basic history of Kashmir and the Kashmiris, and it was Dr. Buhler who was responsible for introducing the Paradise on Earth to the scholars and through them to the people of Germany, UK and the world. In Kashmir, occasionally as far as I remember, a learned Brahman for the matter of that, my own family priest, would mention the rites and rituals enjoined on the Kashmiris in the Puranam. I was too young. I could not easily follow what he would say, but my revered mother, Devamali, who though lot conversant with the 3 R'S would avidly try to digest whatever she heard and, repeat to her children during the evening hours after the day's chores had been finished and we were preparing for the warm bed of wintry night a night really reminiscent of the eight of the Pishachas who had been destroyed by the severe frost and snow after they were fought out of the Valley with the help of Vedic Aryans, invited by NILA at the behest of his father Kashyapa, from the plains of Bharat.

Along with this she would recite verses from Sanskrit and Persian too, and other stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata, especially the stories of Harischandra, Nala and Damayanti, Sati Savitri Ahalya, and others. This was responsible for my earnest desire to study what the foreigners called "Myths" and even today a great archaeologist would welcome me "to cherish my myths", perhaps thinking under an obsession that by post dating those "Myths" he could succeed in shaking my faith, or those of other citizens of India in the well established and well pronounced antiquity of my Shastras and scriptures far beyond the 4000 years B. C. creation of the Christian world.

Nilamatpuranam from its very composition does not appear to be a work of the Rishi begun and completed at one long sitting. It has been on the anvil for fears and the strokes of the hammer have not been uniform. So looseness, introducing of general theories, beliefs, stories and mythically imaginational rhapsodies, have found this valuable tome of important information. This has been responsible for some



confusion as well. If the Puranam were taken up and held in the hand and then shaken off all the superfluities, it would give an interesting story of Kashmir, its formation, its original inhabitants, intruders and their outlaw, and consequential inhabiting of the previous race of people called Kashmiris whose ancestors have been the NAGAS, it has clearly to be borne in mind that the author is one well versed in Sanskrit, saturated with Naga words, terms, idioms, expressions, and has a tradition of centuries, of ages, behind him in making this composition. Even the term NAGA itself need not be taken as a Sanskrit but as a Naga word adopted by the Sanskritists. One can never be sure whether the language employed originally has remained intact during the course of centuries to the time the composition has been actually recorded in black and white. These are the considerations which the present day reader has to keep in mind before he comes to a particular conclusion in a particular matter.

We have to be thankful to Dr. Buhler for his labour of love, and I bow to these German scholars first, and then to English and French savants who have made my Kashmir known throughout the world. After all foreign scholars, whatever their country, environments, surroundings, bring-up and outlook have been, born and bread up in an atmosphere different from that of mine, whenever they have come and had an urge to visit India and then my Kashmir, I and my People were not known to them, and they started comparing my land to Switzerland not Switzerland to Kashmir, or comparing me to a Jew and not a Jew to me a Kashmiri, for they had seen Switzerland and the Jews first. This 'liking' was not confined to land and the people only, but to the hoary scriptures, and other literary works and compositions and introduce Hoiner's Iliad or Odyssey to me rather than my Ramayana and Mahabharata to the people of Rome and Greece. It was but natural. And what our Indian authors, scholars and researchers learnt and then produced was nothing but investiture in the thinking of those 'Foreign Greats' because India was a dependency of Great Britain, and whatever the British Masters wanted the slaves to learn and practise was presented to them in the then "modernised" garb. And the wonder is that whenever I would study an Indian "modern" author, I had to learn what lie had copied from a foreign scholar or a foreign periodical, until Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Tagore, Malaviya, Jawaharlal, Das, Bose, Savarkar, Parmanand and others taught me I-ness and My-ness first to well understand You-ness and He-ness. It does not mean, no, never, that there is nothing worth learning from foreign scholars and researchers, authors and writers, saints and mystics or their ancient scriptures, philosophies and other thoughtful literature.

Dr. Buhler was not a Kashmiri. He and Dr. M. A. Stein did their best to learn and know about Kashmir through the medium of Kashmiris knowing Sanskrit (and Persian too in some cases). But this did not qualify them to be called Kashmiris for the purpose of fully understanding Kashmir as a Kashmiri would. All the same they have done a wonderful and unforgettable service to the Kashmiris for which they are and will be always remembered with a deep sense of gratefulness. Kalhana has mentioned in his memorable Rajatarangini the Nilamatpuranam in these words: "That land is Protected by Nila, the lord of all the Nagas, whose regal parasol is formed by the circular pond (of the Nilakunda) with the Vitasta's newly rising stream as its stick". And these two compositions of intrinsic worth and invaluable information form the base of Kashmir History, its Kings, and dynasties, its people, high and low, their customs and manners, their rites and rituals, their traditions and faiths, their economic condition and administrative structures, and so on. Kashmir was geographically an isolated realm accessible to the few interested either as invaders or as visitors (more political than sight-seers), intent upon knowing the people and their faith and everything concerning them as far as possible, and required for state purposes. The Nilamata has information in regard to the origin of Kashmir, its aboriginal, their beliefs, their mode of living, their general behaviour, occupation and the like. It will be a interesting to find in its hoary pages what the general trend and tone of descriptions is. The most dominant is Manes-worship, then comes worship of gods and goddesses. While dealing with and talking of ancestors (pitris) the author describes how shraddhas have to be performed, what offerings to make not without dakshina, (cash and kind) to priests performing the shraddhas. Even in shraddhas the ceremonies are prefaced with worship (puja) of specified deities & gods and goddesses a thing which throughout the Hindu (brahman) world continues even unto this day and will continue for ever. But there is a demarcation between shraddha functions, and other functions like weddings, birthdays, Mekhla (Yajnopavita) etc. If any shraddha ceremony falls on any of these functions, it is not performed; and nothing connected with shraddha is allowed to be done on that day. This is very important. Even though we never forget our manes and manes-worship, such festivals and functions of worldliness are not intermixed with shraddhas of one's pitris (ancestors). The festivity rules out shraddhas.

In the Nilamatpurana as edited by the two professors mentioned above, verses 804 to 808 describe what should be done in the form of Japa, Homa, shraddhas, austerity, charity etc. on Vaishakha Shukla 2nd and 3rd (dvitiya & tritiya) or lunar 2nd and 3rd of the month of Baisakh April and then slokas 817 to 821 give in detail what is to be done on the Purnima (15th lunar day of Vaishakha (April) in the form of worshipping Brahmans with sesame, of Homa (sacrificial offering) with sesame, shraddha, lights in temples with sesame and sesame is to be given to 5 or 7 Brahmanas with honey to eat, and so on. In between the two sets of slokas there appear slokas 809 to 816 which describe what should be done to celebrate the Birthday or Jayanti of Mahatma Buddha, which includes acting, dancing, but which is evidently a contradiction to the observance of tila shraddha, tila eating, tila sacrifice, etc. This contradiction without any doubt leads to the inference that the slokas 808 to 817 are an interpolation in the Puranam inserted to fall in line with the accepted belief in the incarnation (avatara-ship) of Buddha in the rest of India, made by some later interpolator, which has been responsible for the fixation of the date of 7th Century A.D. for the Puranam by Dr. Buhler, and this dating has been accepted by the joint editors of the Puranam, and now by other authors and scholars and writers who have dealt with or written upon this Purana. This is an interpolation and can in no case be taken as the evidence for establishing the date of composition of the NILMATA. On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence in the Purana itself which establishes beyond doubt that this Puranam must have been written several centuries before Christ, and the Nirvana of Buddha. And in support of that are the various rites and rituals, which are still observed at this time in the twentieth century.

As mentioned in the Puranam, there are very important landmarks which confirm that it is of a very old time and not of the 7th century as arbitrarily fixed by Dr. Buhler and followed by easygoing writers. For instance the Purnima of Shravana month (August) nowadays we celebrate as the day of Lord Shiva, and non-Kashmiri Hindus call it RAKHRI. It is the Purnima when the pilgrims to the Holy Cave at Swami Amarnath Ji have darshan of the Holy Lingam, led as they are by the Holy CHHARI every year there. The Chhari is not mentioned, nor the pilgrimage. What is mentioned in the Puranam is that at the junction of Vitasta and Sindhu rivers (which is now called Prayag at Shadipora) people should take a bath and then worship the god of gods "Sharangin" (the archer Vishnu). And how that should be done is described in slokas 853 to 856. It will be marked that it is the Naga custom that is followed viz. that of playing with girls in water. Why Sharangin is mentioned is as far as one can see attributable to the nature of the amorous play after the archer though said to be Lord Vishnu, but correctly speaking the Archer Cupid or Kamadeva is worshipped. And this playing with girls is to be done "Visheshena". This custom must have, been far older, even before Buddha was born, and his name and teachings and later philosophical invasion of Kashmir took place. In Kashmir, Shaivism was also preceded by Shaktism, and if we say that Kashmir is more the land of Shakti than Shiva, we are but within our proper bounds; because even now wherever you go you find the shrines of Devi (Shakti) spread over, these worshipped and maintained more than the temples of Shiva. If Vishnu is not worshipped here in Kashmir, it is because of the same Shakti Puja which the Vedic Aryan Rishi, the author of Nilamatapuranam harmonised with the introduction of 'SATI and SATI SAR' .... because one does not know what the Nagas called this inland sea in their tongue and making her responsible for the desiccation of this watery abode of Shakti, the Lake or inland Sea. Again, the custom of celebrating the festival of Chaitra Purnima and the day after, with dance, women, liquor, and Ira flowers indicative of cupidity; things which are of Naga origin and belong to Naga time, and have been faithfully recorded by the Rishi of Nilamata with his Aryan touch. When we come across the festival of celebration of the fall of First Snow, it is a very very old custom, and people are asked to celebrate it with songs, dances, liquor, and what is remarkable is that "shyama devi" is to be honoured or worshipped, which I would interpret as young, beautiful girls whom Shastras would call Shyama, decked in new clothes and adornments, and enjoy the festival with friends, servants, relations, and eat special dishes on snow covered with heavy cloth (I think it refers to the heavy woollen flooring like Lois). This markedly is to be celebrated with <verse> on this fall of snow. This is definitely a Naga custom of very olden times which has come down to us intact, though with the centuries of Buddhism that invaded in between this custom had lost its fervour, and it was only after the ouster of Buddhism that it regained some of its original charm. We keep it alive by "nav shin kharun" and asking the person tricked to entertain the "tricker" (the use of these two terms may be pardoned) on the occasion. This custom could not have been mentioned in the 6th or 7th century when Kashmir was under the influence of Buddhism

and it was a time when there was a struggle between the past and the present, and forces to usher in Lalitaditya and his halcyon days, day of glory for Kashmir, were to make themselves felt all rounds. In short, when we go through the Puranam and the rituals and customs mentioned very carefully, it becomes clear that the Puranam has an older, much older, chronology than ascribed to it. It is true there are some customs and rites which are not mentioned in the Puranam, those were not then observed, and have come into vogue later. It will be seen that the author of the Puranam does not mention the hill Gopadri, which was known so during the reign of king Gopaditya ( 369 B. C. ). So, the composition must have been made before that date. This Gopadri became known as Shankaracharya after the visit in the 8th century A. D. of Adi Shankaracharya Ji to Kashmir, when both Gopadri hill and the Jyeshtheshwar temple on it were given the new name in his honour. For fear of length, I content myself, and I hope my readers will also remain content with what has been recorded above, which undoubtedly establishes that the Nilamatapuram is of a date much earlier than Buddha, and that the mention of Buddha Jayanti is a later interpolation which does not fit in with what is written about Dvitiya or Tritiya and the Purnima of Vaishakha... KALOHAM (I AM TIME).



### 3.0 LIVING RITUALS OF NILMAT PURANA

by Prithvinath Bhat

**Puranas are a treasure house of knowledge of our past. They shed light on different customs and rituals that were observed by the Hindus at different places and different times of the year. Puranas are many in number and have been written in Sanskrit. There are eighteen Puranas and an equal number of up-Puranas.**

Purana means old. It also means a story of the ancient times. Puranas deal with the creation and destruction of the universe, with the lives of Saints and Sages, with the dynasties of Kings, with the importance of Gods and Goddesses, places of pilgrimage, rivers and rivulets, with festivals, customs and rituals etc, prevalent among the Hindus in olden times. So Puranas have a great religious and social significance. They are the explanation of Shastras.

Nilmat Puran is one of the famous Puranas that deals with the Valley of Kashmir in respect of its creation, its original inhabitants-Nagas, Pisachas and Brahmins, their style of living, religion, customs, festivals and topography. It peeps into the ancient history of Kashmir. It was written by some Kashmiri Brahman between 6th and 7th century A.D. In all there are 1453 verses in it. Some verses and parts thereof are missing with the passage of time. Kalhana, the great historian of Kashmir, has taken help from this document in tracing four Kings- Gonanda I, Damodar, Queen Yashovati and her son Gonanda II from it. Nilmat Puran is named after the King Nila of the Nagar dynasty that ruled Kashmir in the beginning. Puranas are written in the descriptive form wherein two persons converse in question and answer style and the story is narrated. In Nilmat Puran, King Janmejaya of the Kuru dynasty asks questions to Vaishampayan the son of Vyas of the Mahabharat times. The first question put to Vaishampayan was why the King of Kashmir did not participate in the Mahabharat war. Vaishampayan replies that Gonanda II was a child those days, so could not take part in the war. Janmejaya further asks how did the lake Satisar dry and how people settled there. The author has brought in two more persons in the Puran who also narrate the story in question- answer form, they are sage Brihdashva and King Gonanda of Kashmir. Thereafter starts the story of Kashmir. Jalodbhav demon lived in the waters of Satisar. He terrorised the people and killed them. King Nila of Kashmir approached his father Sage Kashyapa and requested him to get rid of the demon. Both approached God Vishnu who ordered Ananta to break the Himalaya with his plough. Ananta broke the mountain at Khadanyar. The waters of the lake gushed forth and its bed became visible. Vishnu caught hold of Jalodbhava and killed him with his chakra. He ordered Nagas and Pishachas to live in harmony. Brahmins and other castes of the plains lived as Gypsies in Kashmir. They stayed in the Valley for six months of the Summer and returned to the plains with the setting in of the Winter. One day Brahmin Chandradeva could not leave Kashmir due to old age and weakness. He was teased by Pishachas. He approached King Nila for protection who readily provided it. Then Nila narrated him the way of life of Nagas, their religion, customs, festivals, the places of worship, rivers and rivulets, hills and mountains and all about Kashmir. He also granted the Brahmins and others to settle permanently in Kashmir.

The King Nila described sixtyfive rituals and festivals which were celebrated by the Nagas, with great devotion, faith, pomp and show. Some of the rituals and festivals find mention in other Puranas also. Some of these are celebrated in Kashmir even today. Kaw Poonim and Yaksha Mavas are celebrated in Kashmir only.

Nilmat Puran describes in detail which rituals and festivals are to be celebrated on a particular day of the year. Both men and women participated in them. They kept fasts, prayed to Gods Vishnu, Shiv, Brahma and Goddesses Parvati, Laxmi and Saraswati. They sang and danced and enjoyed life to their best satisfaction. They were freedom loving and happy-go-merry people. The King also participated in the festivals with his subjects. He looked after the welfare of the people and provided them guidance. In fact the festivals and rituals were started by Nila for the prosperity, health and happiness of his people.

As mentioned above, there is a list of Sixty-five rituals and festivals in Nilmat Puran. Here we would make mention of only those rituals (religious practices) which are observed by the Kashmiri Pandits even today.

### **1. Sukhsuptika or Deepawali**

Sukhsuptika literally means sleep with happiness. On Kartika Amavasya all except the sick and the children keep fast. In the evening Laxmi, the Goddess of Wealth is worshipped. Lamps are placed in temples, on crossings of roads, cremation grounds, banks of rivers, streams and lakes, hills, houses, at the foot of trees, cow-sheds, courtyards and shops. Shops are decorated tastefully. Feast is arranged in the evening in which friends relatives, Brahmins and servants participate. On the next day people with new clothes on, gamble and listen to vocal and instrumental music.

This festival is celebrated now as Deepawali and not as Sukhsuptika. Now electric bulbs illuminate houses, temples, shops courtyards and trees etc. besides the lamps. Laxmi is worshipped in the evening. Sweets are distributed, crackers are burst and fire-works illumine the skies.

### **2. Margshirsha Poornima**

According to Nilmat Puran people kept fast on that day and broke it at night after worshipping the moon with white garlands, eatable offerings. Brahmins also were worshipped. The Brahmin lady, sisters and the wife of a friend each was to be honoured with a pair of red clothes.

Nowadays it is celebrated in a different way. Tahar-rice boiled with turmeric, mixed with oil and salt, is prepared. Pooja is performed, a little Tahar is kept in an earthen pot and placed on the roof or the uppermost storey of the house for the house-diet.

We call it MANJHOR TAHAR.

### **3. Tila Dwadashi**

This ritual was observed on the twelfth dark day of Magha. Shradha of the dead was performed with oil and sesame.

Now this ritual is performed on the eighth dark day of Phalgun. How this change occurred is not known. On this day Tarpan (Water oblation) is given with sesame to the dead and a lamp is also lit.

### **4. Magha Poornima**

Shradha with sesame was performed on this day and food was offered to the crows.

Not only food i.e. boiled rice is placed on Kawpatals (A plate woven of grass around two twigs placed one on the other at right angles) and is offered to the crows. Children celebrate this festival with gaiety as they play with Kawpatals after the boiled rice is eaten away by the crows.

### **5. Shivratri**

This festival is the most famous and important of all the festivals of Kashmir. It is celebrated on the dark thirteen of Phalguna. Shivlinga is worshipped with flowers, incense and milk. All members of the family except the sick and the children keep fast. Devotional songs are sung. On the 15th dark day, Shiva is worshipped again and sweet dishes are offered to worshippers and Brahmin.

This festival is celebrated with great devotion, faith and pomp and show now. On 12th dark day of Phalguna, Wagur (an earthen pot or steel pot now) is brought to the house. Food is placed into it and is placed on a small circular asana made of grass. It is supposed to be the Brahmin who has to perform the marriage ceremony of Shiva with Parvati. Some say that Wagur is Shiva's messenger to Himalaya for his daughter Parvati's marriage with Shiva. On the 13th dark day, Watak consisting of big earthen pitcher, two small earthen pitchers, two smaller earthen pitchers, one elephant trunk shaped figure, seven bowls are decorated with flowers garlands and sindoor. They represent Shiva Parvati, Ram Brahmin, Seven Rishis, Ganesa and some other rishis. Walnuts are washed and placed into the pitchers and seven bowls. Then these are filled with water, some milk is poured into each one of them. Mishri (Sugar) is also poured into them. Pooja is started at Pradosh Kala (Dusk). All the members of the family take part in it. It

continues with devotion and full faith till late in the night. Then fast is broken and boiled rice with a variety of cooked vegetables is taken. The worship continues, upto Amavasya and in the evening the Shivratri comes to a close. The walnuts in the pitchers are taken out and washed, Pooja is performed and the flowers and other pooja samagri used for worship is immersed into the river, walnuts are used as prashad and distributed among neighbours and all the relatives.

#### **6. Navsamvatsara (Navreh)**

This festival is celebrated on the first bright night of Chaitra. According to the lunar calendar, it is the first day of the New Year. It is also the first day of the creation of universe. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are worshipped on this day. It is also the beginning of Navratras. According to the custom, a plate (thali) is filled with rice. The following articles are also placed on the rice (i) milkpot (ii) flowers (iii) walnuts (iv) pen (v) inkpot (vi) coin or a currency note of any denomination (vii) Panchang of the new lunar calendar year (viii) boiled rice (ix) Sugar or mishri (x) salt (xi) ghee (xii) baked rice flour bread (xiii) wuy a root of some kind of grass that grows in water and (xiv) picture of Vishnu or Shiva-Parvati. This plate is filled on the eve of Navreh (Navsamvatsara). Early in the morning of Navreh, the grandmother or elder lady or mother gets up and brings this thali for darshan by every member of the family. It is considered a good omen for the new year. Tahar of the rice is cooked and served after Pooja. Goddess Sharika is worshipped at Hariparbat. Flowers and Tahar are offered there. Navratras are celebrated with great devotion and faith. Goddess Mother is worshipped in homes and temples. Wye and kernels of walnuts are taken by every member of the family before taking any other thing in the morning.

#### **7. Chaitra Navmi**

It is the ninth bright day of Chaitra. Goddess Bhadrakali is worshipped. Fast is also kept. Navratras come to an end on this day. It is celebrated in the whole of northern India as Rama Navami. Bhadrakali is a famous temple about eight kilometers to the west of Handwara (Dist. Kupwara) on a hilltop in a thick forest of Devdars. There is a statue of Bhadrakali which is worshipped on Chaitra Navmi.

#### **8. Vasta Pooja**

It was celebrated on the eleventh bright night of Chaitra. Grehdevta (House-deity) was worshipped and offerings were made to Him for the protection, prosperity and health of the family. Now this festival is celebrated only on Tuesday or Saturday of the dark night days of Pausa. Gadabatta (cooked fish with boiled rice) is offered to the house-deity after performing Pooja.

#### **9. Janmashtami**

Lord Krishna's birthday is celebrated on the eighth dark night day of Bhadrapada with great devotion and faith. Fast is kept and broken at the rise of the moon. Temples are decorated and people in large numbers go there to perform pooja.

#### **10. Shradha Paksha**

Dark half fortnight or Ashwin is celebrated as Pitra Paksha in memory of the dead ones of the family and maternal side. Fast is kept, shradha Kriya is performed. Brahmins are offered food, fruit and clothes etc. It is also known as Kambirpach.

#### **11. Mahanavmi**

In olden days, Goddess Durga was worshipped in the evening. Arms and weapons were also worshipped. Shanti was worshipped too. Now the practice of worshipping arms and ammunition has stopped. Only Goddess Durga is worshipped at Hariparbat, Durganag and Akingam.

#### **12. Ashokikashtami**

This day is celebrated on the eighth bright half of Bhadrapada. Goddess Uma (Parvati) and Ashoka tree are worshipped. Nowadays only Goddess Uma is worshipped. A Yagna is performed each year on this day at Umanagri (Utrasoo), Distt. Anantnag, where there is a famous temple of Uma. Fast is observed and prayers are offered.

### 13. Vitasta Utsava

This is observed on the thirteenth bright half of Bhadrapada as the birthday of the Vitasta river (Jhelum). After bathing in the river, the pilgrims worship Vitasta at Shadipora (confluence of Vitasta and Sindhu). Now this festival is observed at Vethvothur near Verinag (Dist: Anantnag) Pilgrims take bath in the holy spring of Vethvothur and worship the idols of Vitasta and Parvati. Fast is also kept. (Vethvothur is considered as the origin of the Vitasta.) The sixtyfive rituals and festivals have now shrunk to thirteen only. Navhimpatosava was also observed in the past on the first snowfall of the year.

The observance of rituals is incomplete without fasts, worship and offerings to gods and goddesses. From Nilmat Puran, we have learnt what food and eatables the people of Kashmir used to take in those ancient times. Khichri (rice, moong, pepper, turmeric, salt, ghee or edible oil; with water is cooked to form Khichri) barley, milk, curd, ghee, honey, grapes, meat, fish, bread, moong and masoor etc. were used as food items.

The observance of these rituals and festivals speaks of the highly civilized and cultured Kashmiri society. We are proud of being their progeny and we have tried to preserve our culture even after facing onslaughts of marauders of Central and West Asia. We should not give up our festivals and rituals even under the present trauma. We must not forget our language Kashmiri - because that gives us our identity. We must propagate it, learn it, speak it and write it in Devnagri script.

*Source:* Koshur Samachar

## 4.0 ART, CULTURE AND FOOD

by Dr. Ved Kumari

### Means of recreation

**Amusements - music, dancing, drama and other means of recreation - are the true mirror in which the unrestricted mind of Kashmiris is reflected. The Nilamata says that the land of Kasmira was thronged with ever-sportive and joyful people enjoying continuous festivities. Living amidst scenes of sylvan beauty they played, danced and sang to express their joys, to mitigate their pains, to please their gods and to appease their demons. One thing deserves to be noted at the outset that there being hardly any distinguishing line between the secular and the religious in India, the Nilamata describes all the forms of recreation in a religious setting.**

### (I) Music

No myth about the divine origin of music is found in the Nilamata, but the injunction for the worship of seven metres may be taken as suggestive of its divine origin. The tune of Samas - the hymns with the musical notes - is referred to and one verse suggests the association of music with the Gandharvas. On each and every festive occasion, whether it is purely religious like the Sleep and Awakening of god Visnu or semi-religious as the advent and the departure of Nikumbha, or seasonal like the New Snowfall day or agricultural like the day of sowing the seeds, the chief item of the celebrations is music - vocal as well as instrumental. The sound of the musical instruments is regarded as extremely sweet and heart-captivating.

### (i) Varieties of vocal music

We do not get reference to different varieties of the vocal music but the use of the terms 'vacana' 'prakirtana' and 'ghosa' [vacana is simple recitation, Prakirtana is singing in chorus and ghosa is the enchanting of vedic mantras or making some other loud sound.] in connection with Purana, Stotra and Brahma respectively, indicates that the mode of singing varied with different types of texts.

### (ii) Professional singers

The Nilamata refers to four classes of professional singers viz. Suta, Magada, Vandi and Carana who, according to the Dharmasastras, maintained themselves by lauding the deeds of others. Their mention in one and the same line indicates that some difference, may be minute, was believed to be existing in these different types of singers.

### (iii) Musical instruments

The general terms in the Nilamata for the musical instruments are vadya, vaditra and vadya-bhanda. As regards the different types, out of 'ghana' (cymbal), 'vitata' (percussion), 'tata' (stringed instruments), and 'susira' (wind instruments), made of brass, skin, strings and reed respectively and mentioned in the Visnudharmottara Pu. and Jayamangala commentary on the Kamasutra, only two namely, anaddha-vadya' (corresponding to 'vitata') and 'tantri-vadya' (corresponding to 'tata') have been mentioned in the Nilamata. Of the others we have venu and sankha belonging to 'susira' type and ghanta to 'ghana' type, though the terms 'susira' and 'ghana' are not mentioned. Here follows a historical account of all the musical instruments referred to in the Nilamata.

### (1) Vina

The Rgveda does not mention it. The Aitareya Aranyaka describes it in detail with its parts - siras (head), udara (cavity), ambhana (sounding board), tantra (string) and vadana (plectrum). The Epics, the Jatakas, the Samyutta Nikaya and the Arthasastra testify to its high popularity. Sangita Makaranda refers to its nineteen varieties. The Nilamata refers to it thrice only but if the references to Tantri-vadya be taken as referring to vina, it will yield that vina was resorted to most by the musicians of Kasmira. The modern hundred-stringed santoor of Kasmira is probably satatantrivina or vana referred to in the Taittiriya Samhita.

**(2) Venu**

The Rgveda does not mention it. A.C. Das's view that venu may be taken as a later corruption of vana is not sound, because vana is not a wind instrument like venu. Roth takes venu of R.V. VIII. 55.3 as a flute of reed but scholars do not agree on this point. The Jatakas and the Epics know it. The Nilamata refers to it once only in connection with the celebrations of the Awakening of god Visnu.

**(3) Sankha**

We find no mention of sankha in the Rgveda. The Epics mention it many a time in connection with the music of war. The Nilamata mentions it twice.

**(4) Pataha**

Pataha, a sort of drum, is mentioned neither in the Vedas nor in the Jatakas. The Mahabharata also refers to it rarely. The Ramayana mentions it many a time. The Nilamata refers to it twice in association with lute. Probably the drum was played upon generally in accompaniment to the lute.

**(5) Muraja**

Muraja is also not mentioned in the Vedic literature. Bharata groups it with percussion instruments and refers to its three varieties 'alinyā', 'urdhva' and 'ankika'. Originally different from 'mrdanga', it became later on identified with mrdanga.

**(II) Dancing**

Dancing, going hand in hand with music, is mentioned frequently in the Nilamata. There must have existed various types of dances in ancient Kasmira but as the Nilamata does not mention particular steps or movements characterizing different types, we may classify them on the basis of the occasions on which they were performed. Thus, the Nilamata speaks of dances performed on religious occasions, dances performed in social gatherings held in honour of seasons, and dances performed on agricultural festivals.

Dances are prescribed at the time of ripening of grapes, so horticulture, too, seems to have had some dances to its credit.

**(III) Popularity of music and dancing in Kasmira**

The earliest definite corroboration regarding the popularity of music and dancing in Kasmira is provided by archaeology. A tile from Harwan, with Kharosthi letters which cannot be later than 4th century A.D., shows three musicians. "The one to left plays a flute; the centre one, cymbals; the third, a pair of drums." Another tile represents a female musician playing on a drum. One more shows a female dancer. The statue of a female dancer was also obtained from the courtyard of Kotisar temple. As regards the literary evidence, Kalhana's Rajatarangini is full of references to 'gitanrta'. Music, we are informed, had become popular even with the Buddhist monks. Reference is made to two female musicians songs which expanded in one melodious tone in harmony. Further, Kalhana informs about the existence of the custom of dancing girls associated with temples. King Jalauka dedicated hundred ladies of his seraglio to the temple of Jyestharudra. The two dancing girls whom Lalitaditya met in a forest informed him that dancing at that particular place was an ancient custom of their family. Kalasa's liking for the dancing girls is well described by Kalhana. Harsa had gone so far as to instruct personally the dancing girls to act. Ksemendra sarcastically refers to a singer who sings the songs of departure at the time of invoking a god. Bilhana testifies to the high skill of ladies of Kasmira in dancing. Even the philosophical sutras of Vasugupta take similes from this art, comparing Atma with a dancer, Antaratma with theatre and Indriyas with spectators.

**(IV) Nature of music and dancing**

As regards the nature of music and dancing referred to in the Nilamata, the major part of the former belonged probably to the category of spontaneously flowing folk-music. Of dances, those which were performed on religious occasions depicted probably the life histories of the gods. Such dances have been quite popular with various nations of the world. Robertson has described how the dances in the neighbourhood of Kasmira, among the Kafirs of Hindukush, are accompanied by chants in praise of the



heroes in whose honour they are performed. The dim memories of such religious dances are still preserved by the Hindu ladies of Kasmira, who, at the time of Sivaratri-visarjana ceremony at the bank of some river, go round seven times with their hands lifted above their heads.

Coming to the agricultural dances, we find that these are confined to no race or country. Frazer describes such dances prevalent in various countries of Europe and Asia and regards them as "intended both to stimulate the growth of vegetation in spring and to expel demoniac or other evil influences". The dances performed at the great festival of the Bopfau or Barley Seed-sowing, in Hunza in the neighbourhood of Kasmira, have been regarded by Mrs. Lorimer as imitating the actual agricultural process. Similar dances might have been performed at the Seed-sowing ceremony referred to in the Nilamata. Of course, it is a mere speculation, though not an improbable one.

#### **(V) Theatrical performances**

The words 'Preksa' and 'Preksanaka' - mentioned in the Nilamata refer to theatrical performances. The terms have been used in this sense in the Sanskrit literature. The Nilamata mentions also a peculiar phrase "Preksadana". Literally meaning 'the gift of a dramatic performance', it seems to have denoted 'a gift made for the arrangement of a dramatic show.' there may have existed some dramatic clubs which gave such shows on demand and the injunction of 'Yathavidhi Preksadana' i.e. the gift for the arrangement of a dramatic show made in the proper procedure, may have been made with reference to them. These gifts of various types are not, however, defined separately. The Kasmiri poet Bilhana extols the ladies of his native land for the excellent dramatic performances which excelled the acting of heavenly damsels Rambha, Citralekha and Urvasi. The simultaneous use of the terms 'nartaka' and 'nata' in the Nilamata indicates the difference between the two: the former was used for a dancer, the latter for an actor. These people received honours from the public on various occasions and were not regarded as degraded.

The presence of theatre-halls in ancient Kasmira has been suggested on the basis of Damodaragupta's reference to a theatre-hall provided with cushioned couches, but we should not forget that the place referred to by him is Varanasi. Kalhana, on the other hand, compares the fleeing armies with people caught by a downpour while watching a theatrical performance. Most of the functions referred to in the Nilamata were performed either in the vicinity of bonfire outside the houses or in open fields. So it appears that the functions of the general public, in ancient Kasmira, were mostly held under the open sky.

#### **(VI) Other sports**

The Nilamata gives us an idea of other games and sports also resorted to by the people of Kasmira.

##### **(i) Garden-sports**

Garden-sports have been popular in India since early times. The Ramayana refers to girls going to the gardens in the evening for play. Panini - an inhabitant of Gandhara in the neighbourhood of Kasmira - was familiar with such sports. The land of Kasmira being full of gardens and parks, her people, naturally, accepted Nature's invitation to sing, dance and play in her company. The Nilamata points out their intimacy with Nature expressed in joyful dances performed at the arrival of Spring. Kasmiri women enriched their natural beauty on such occasions with garlands of Ira flowers. The Nilamata probably described a few garden-sports in connection with Asokikastami, but unfortunately the verses are lost now. The Harwan tiles showing ladies carrying flower-vases indicate Kasmiris love for flowers. The pose of the queen-mother in the scene of Siddhartha's birth, with her right hand holding a branch of the Asoka tree and the left placed on the shoulder of her sister Prajapati, is just a replica of a lady plucking flowers from a tree or just swinging with the help of a branch of a tree.

Special meals, taken in the gardens in the company of friends and the members of the family, were a part of such garden-sports. We have reference to such feasts in the Bhagavata Purana also.

##### **(ii) Water-sports**

The Nilamata prescribes water-sports for the maidens on Sravani festival. An idea of such sports can be had from the Kamasutra and Harivamsa.

**(iii) Wrestling**

Wrestlers are mentioned in the Nilamata as being honoured by the people and it is reasonable to suppose that the Kashmiris did enjoy the shows put forth by them.

**(iv) Gambling**

Chance plays a great part in human life and no wonder if man tried to gain some knowledge of future events through games of chance and also adopted them as means of recreation. Giving instances from many ancient and modern races, E. S. Hartland has rightly pointed out: "Gambling is a passion confined to no race or country, to no rank of society, to no plane of civilisation". Beginning from the famous hymn of the R. V., Indian literature provides innumerable instances of gambling. The Nilamata prescribes gambling on Dipavali, to know the goodness or otherwise of the coming year for the players. The belief still exists in various provinces of India but has gone away from Kasmira. The neighbouring land of Tibet has it in the form of annual gambling ceremony wherein the Grand Lama at Lhasa plays dice with the demon and by defeating him announces good luck for the coming year.

**(v) Hunting**

The Nilamata describes the land as filled with the sound of bow. On some Harwan tiles also we find huntsmen with bows and we may state on this basis that hunting was also an amusement for the Kashmiris.

**(vi) Playing with toys**

Playing with toys must have been a form of entertainment for children. Toy has been mentioned once in the Nilamata in connection with the worship of Skanda - the presiding deity of the children. Playing with birds tied to strings was another amusement for children.

**II Arts and Crafts**

The Nilamata contains some information about the different branches of art, namely, architecture, sculpture and painting, and refers to some handicrafts also.

**(I) Architecture**

The terms - bhavana, grha, nivesana, alaya, vesma, ayantana, attalaka etc. have been used in the Nilamata for buildings but it is not possible to distinguish between the significance of one term and the other. The place of Buddhist worship is mentioned as Caitya and the dwelling place of the Buddhist monks as Sakyavasa. As archaeology has revealed, the former consisted of a chamber surrounded by a circumambulatory passage and containing the object of worship, while the latter usually had cells surrounding an open courtyard. No example of the period of the Nilamata has been preserved. Of Brahmanical temples the Nilamata gives hundreds of names but architectural details of none are given therein. It may be inferred, however, from the ruins of the apsidal temple of Harwan that the temple of early Kasmira consisted of an antechamber (mandapa) with a cell (garbhagrha) behind.

The Nilamata says nothing about the building-materials. All that is known about the houses mentioned in the Nilamata is that those had doors and ventilators and were whitewashed. The decoration of houses with fruits, leaves and garlands of rice-plants is also referred to. About town-planning the Nilamata gives no information. There is reference to roads which were even and to catuspathas (squares where four roads meet). The Vitasta Mahatmya contained in the Nilamata refers to bridges over the Vitasta but does not elucidate their formation.

**(II) Image-making**

The Nilamata refers to images made of stone, earth, gold, silver, copper, brass, wood, sand, straw and ghee. Instructions for making Sayanamurti images of Visnu with his feet placed in the lap of Laksmi are given in vv. 409-10. Reference is also made to Caturmurti Visnu with four faces, four arms and Ayudhapurusas. The Visnudharmottara Pu. describes this form in detail and J. N. Banerjea rightly takes it as an illustration of the Vyuha doctrine of the Pancaratras.



### **(III) Painting**

The Nilamata testifies to the existence of the art of painting in ancient Kashmir. In connection with the celebrations of Buddha's birthday festival, the people are directed to decorate the Caityas with beautiful paintings. References are made to paintings painted on the cloth, the wall and the ground. Bhumisobha or decoration of the ground with paintings seems to have been a necessary item of most of the religious and secular functions. Viug - a circular pattern drawn on the ground on which a Kashmiri bridegroom has to stand before entering, for his marriage, the house of the bride - is a direct descendant of 'bhumisobha' mentioned in the Nilamata. Damodaragupta refers to courtesans practicing the art of painting for advertising their trade. Somadeva refers to portrait painters carrying out confidential missions of their masters.

### **(IV) Handicrafts**

Craftsmen and their tools are referred to in the Nilamata which enjoins upon the inhabitants of Kashmir the worship of Visvakarma - the originator of all crafts. The industries in which these craftsmen were engaged, have to be inferred only from the stray references to finished products. Thus, the articles of dress point to the art of spinning, weaving, dyeing and washing. The ornaments, the pitchers made of gold and silver and the silver-stools presuppose jewellery. Weapons of war, probably, made of iron or some other hard metal, indicate smithery. Similarly pottery, wood work and leather-work are pointed to by earthen-pitchers, wooden pitchers, wooden seats and leather shoes. Probably, wood was used also for structural purposes and for making kutagaras, umbrellas and walking sticks.

### **III Dress and Ornaments**

The terms used in the Nilamata for clothing in general are vastra, ambara, vasas, vasana and samvita. Cinamsuka is used for silk imported from China. Kambala is woollen blanket and pravarana - referred to in connection with the festival of the New Snow-fall - seems to be the same as pravara mentioned in the Mahabharata as a cloth offering protection against cold Panini also knows it. Kautilya mentions it as pravaraka and says that it is made of the wool of wild animals.

References to a pair of clothes worn by Visnu, a pair of clothes (one shining like the lightning and the other China-silk resembling the rays of the moon) worn by Nila, a pair of clothes to be offered to a Brahmani and a pair of clothes to be given in charity on Atyantamahati indicates that the male as well as the female dress in Kashmir comprised of two garments, the upper one and the lower one. Mention is made of white as well as coloured clothes. The term 'ahata' is used for new clothes. The word 'civara', which occurs often in Buddhist literature for a monk's robe, is used in this sense in the Nilamata. Bed-sheet is also referred to once.

As regards ornaments, we have reference to earrings, bracelets, diadem and jewels.

### **IV Cosmetics and other requisites of personal decoration**

Personal decoration is recommended often in the Nilamata. The garlands and perfumes which seem to have been necessary materials for the worship of the deities are no less essential for the worshippers who, too, are enjoined upon to be well-anointed and well-decorated at the time of worship. Reference is made to various sorts of scents, perfumes, unguents, flowers and garlands. Some processes of decoration like rubbing the body with emollient unguents (udvartana), anointing it with unguents (utsadana) and applying sandal-paste etc. after bath (anulepana) are referred to. Other requisites of personal decoration are collyrium, comb, staff and shoe-wear.

### **V Food and drinks**

Most of the references to the articles of diet occur in the Nilamata in connection with the offerings made to the gods but it is not difficult to infer from them the food and drink of the common people because "what a man eats his gods eat."

The term 'anna' from 'ad' to eat' used for food in the Nilamata, includes all sorts of eatables. 'Sasya' represents all cereals and pulses and 'saka' all green vegetables. References are made to cooked, dry and lasting food which in their turn suggest uncooked, watery and perishable food. Spices, sweetmeats, fruits, roots and medicinal herbs are also mentioned.

Meat also seems to have been a popular item of diet, otherwise there would have been no necessity of prohibiting strongly the eating of meat for five days dedicated to the worship of Visnu. Even Visnu's image at one place is stated to be worshipped with animal sacrifices. The offerings enjoined to be made to the Pisacas, Chandodeva and the goddess Bhadrakali include non-vegetarian dishes. Pana includes both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

*Excerpts: 'NILAMATA PURANA' by Dr. Ved Kumari*

## 5.0 POSITION OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT KASHMIR

by Dr. Ved Kumari

The most relieving feature of the family-life of Kasmira as seen in the Nilmata, is the position of women. Nowhere is she considered 'the living torch illuminating the way to hell' or 'the devourer of the intellect of men'. There is no reference to any veil worn by her and she moves quite freely in the society, emulating as it were the free-going sparkling waters of the springs of her country. The Nilmata allows her to participate in almost all the festivals and religious ceremonies. In the moonlit night of Kaumudi Mahotsava, we find her sitting beside the sacred fire in the company of her husband, children, servants and husband's friends. It is not clear, however, as whether she is merely a silent spectator or takes active part in the musical and dramatic performances performed during this night. She is present in the common feast which takes place on the next day.

Not only on the festivals celebrated at home but also in the outdoor festivals, she is seen freely enjoying herself. Thus, on the ceremonial day for ploughing the fields and sowing the seed, characterized by music, dancing and feasting, the peasant's wife is not behind the walls of her home. She is lucky enough to participate in the joyous festival celebrated in the refreshing open fields of Nature.

On the day of Iramanjari-pujana - a festival of flowers - the ladies are honoured with presents of flowers and garlands. In another verse we find reference to the women going to fruit-gardens to worship the fruit-giving trees.

In the happy valley of lakes, rivers and fountains, water-sports could bring the highest pleasures to the society and the Nilamata does not deny this means of merriment to the ladies of Kasmira. "The young maidens" it says, "should specially play in the waters" during the celebrations of Sravani festival. Playing with men is allowed to women. We find the joyful ladies dressed in their best attire, perfumed with scents and decorated with ornaments, sporting in the company of men on the last day of Mahimana celebrations.

The ladies of the house are honoured on various occasions. The householder is enjoined upon to honour them on the New Snow-fall day. The sisters etc. and the ladies whose husbands are alive are honoured on the 4th of the bright half of Magha. Similar honour is given to them on the 4th days of Asvayuj and Jyestha. On the full moon day of Margasirsa, the gift of a pair of red clothes is prescribed for a Brahmana lady whose husband and son are living. Sister, paternal aunt and friend's wife are also invited and given clothes. The mention of the presentation of gifts to friend's wife is quite significant as it could have been possible only in a free atmosphere where women were allowed to move freely with no restrictions on their receipt of gifts from their husband's friends.

On Madana Trayodasi - a festival in honour of the god of love - the wife receives bath with the sacred water from the hands of her husband as an indication of his love for her.

Wife is the charm of the decorated bedroom in the night of Dipamala (Sukha-suptika) festival. Charming beauty and the life-long happiness of married life are the things highly prized by the ladies of Kasmira. They are often asked to be well-dressed and decorated, the special term for such act being 'pratikarma'. As regards their place in the religious life, they are not only allowed to accompany their husbands in the performance of various rites and ceremonies but are also enjoined upon to perform singly some rites specially prescribed for them. Thus, the god Chandah is to be worshipped and rajasvala Kasmira is to be bathed by the women only. The triad of the 4th days (Caturthi-tritaya) is to be observed specially by ladies.

Another factor which points to the high position of women is the prominence of the goddesses in the religion depicted in the Nilamata. The gods are mentioned often with their consorts. Shakra plays with Shaci; Visnu's feet rest in the lap of Laksmi; Parvati accompanies Shiva; Sita is worshipped during the

celebrations of Rama's birth-day and Krsna's wife receives worship on the birth-day of her lord. The mothers of the gods are also referred to. Besides these we come across various other female deities. The goddesses Asokika, Syama, Durga, Sri, Karisini, Bhadrakali, I3heda, Kapinjali, Suresvari, Bhadresvari, Gautamesi, Kalasila, Udyogasri, Gavaksi, Candika, Gauri, Suvijaya, Sakuni, Brahmacarini, Chakresvari and Grhadevi form the shining galaxy of female deities worshipped by the people of Kasmira. The rivers of Kasmira are also personified as goddesses. Urna transforms herself into the Vitasta, Aditi becomes the Trikot, Shaci assumes the form of the Harspatha, Diti becomes the Candravati and Laksmi turns into the river Visoka. The very land of Kasmira is the mother goddess Kasmira - a form of Uma.

On the whole the Nilamata offers a pleasant picture of the woman of Kasmira. As a daughter she was trained in fine arts etc. and was allowed to move freely in the society. By giving her in marriage, the father obtained religious merit. As a wife she was loved and honoured by her husband and as a mother she shone with her sons who prized her highly. A would-be mother could even be installed on the throne on the demise of her sonless husband-king.

This account of the women of Kasmira - respected in the home and esteemed highly outside - is quite different from the account available in other Puranas and so gives distinctive character to the Nilmata. The other Puranas generally despise and deprecate the ladies as seducers of men. To quote R.C. Hazra "As a matter of fact, in the Puranas, women have not been allowed full freedom in the social and religious life under any circumstances and conjugal fidelity and devoted service to their husbands have been stressed as the highest duties for them. The statement, evidently, does not apply to the Nilamata which gives a somewhat different and unconventional picture of the female-life. The genuineness of the account given by the Nilmata is proved by the corroboration it receives from the works of many Kasmiri writers. Bilhana gives a testimony to the literary efficiency of the women of Kasmira who could fluently speak Sanskrit and Prakrit. Damodara Gupta in his Kuttanimata gives a list of the subjects which they learnt and Kalhana's Rajatarangini is full of instances showing the high status of women in the fields of religion and politics.

#### **WOMEN OUTSIDE MARRIAGE**

A few words may be now added about prostitutes and dancing girls attached to temples. The numerous references to courtesans in connection with the description of festivals indicated that prostitution was freely allowed in the society of the days of the Nilamata. The Nilmata does not decry the courtesans. The prominent ones of them, on the other hand, are enjoined upon to visit the king on his coronation day and take due part in the ceremonies - a fact proving evidently their high political status.

The use of a simile comparing Kasmira with a temple due to the presence of tender ladies, indicates the popularity of the institution of 'devadasis' or temple dancers, as then alone the hearers or readers of the Nilamata could have recognized the idea underlying the simile.

A significant and rather unusual point is that the Nilmata attaches importance to the singing and dancing of courtesans and not to the sexual intercourse with them, indicating thus less moral laxity among the people than what is shown in the works of Kalhana, Ksemendra and Somadava.

*Excerpts: 'NILAMATA PURANA' by Dr. Ved Kumari*