

Tracing the Growth of Shaivism in Jammu

Kuljeet Singh

PhD Research Scholar, Department of History, University of Jammu, Jammu & Kashmir, India

ABSTRACT

Within the larger pantheon of Hinduism, Shaivism is one of the major religious sects that worship Shiva as the Supreme Being. It is the one of the old religions of the east and is also known as one of the prominent religious cults of India. The doctrine which centers on the philosophical aspect of Rudra Shiva goes back through ages and it developed and flourished with time. Shaivism is not a single cult but a mixture of different cults. From prehistoric times down to the early centuries of the Christian era the annals of this cult was unluckily not prominent. The history of this cult may be traced to the beginnings of human civilization on earth, like the cult of mother Goddess. Both emerged from the fertility cult. The earliest historical record to the worship of Shiva was given by Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador, at Pataliputra about 300B.C. Dionysus and Herakles, two deities generally identified with Siva and Krishna respectively were described by him. In the *Mahabhashya*, Patanjali gave the reference to the Shiva-bhagavatas and also describes the images of Shiva and Skanda being sold by Mauryas to raise money in the time of crisis during second century B.C. This shows the popularity of this cult. In this paper we would try to understand the evolution of Shaiva religion in the ambits of Jammu region.

KEYWORDS: *Hinduism, Shaivism, Shivabhagwatas, Skanda, Dionysus, Herakles, Megasthenes etc*

The first sedentary settlement in Jammu region is said to be of the people who were called as Pisachas. A reference occurs in Puranas quoting Rishi Vashisht that inhabitants of the area line between river Ravi (ancient Iravati) and Chenab (Chanderbhaga) were the worshippers of phallus. Later Nagas, Yakshas and Khasas also inhabited this belt now called Jammu. But ultimately they were defeated by the Aryans who entered this belt from different sides, most probably via Punjab and Shivalik range of hills. With the advent of Aryans, local tribes accepted the dominance of the invaders and this way the religion, culture and the way of life of the local tribals was changed. Later, several shrines of Aryan's God were also built. Thus the worship of Phallus is related to God Shiva. Shiva is popularly worshipped in Phallus or Linga form. As already mentioned *Linga* is the universal emblem of Shiva worship.

... The river Devika holds a very prominent place in this region and is considered to be as holy as river Ganga. We find the mention of Devika in classical Vedic literature and it is quoted by many great seers and sages. There is a reference in Puranic literature

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which acclaims that Rishi Vashisht said that the sphere or area between river Iravati (M. Ravi), and Chandarbhaga (M. Chenab) was of those inhabitants which were the worshippers of phallus or Lingam. The area was latter frequented by different tribes and there was an intermingling of the people of different origins here and subsequently Nagas, Yakshas and Khasas became the inhabitants of this place which we call as Jammu as of now. But during the latter phase when Aryan hordes came here and these tribes had to fight with them for their survival but penultimately they had to give up and accept the Aryan dominance in every sphere of their life. After the arrival of the Aryans and their victory here the local culture gave way to the dominant one and the lifestyle of the local tribes changed. Consequently, shrines of Vedic deities were made and local Gods were kind of pushed back and relegated. But the phallus worship which was the trait of pre-aryan people here still found prominence and a very honorable place in the new regime. As we already know that phallus worship is associated with Lord Shiva and even with changing rule it did not lost its momentum and was still revered as it is revered today.

The large number of Siva shrines in the area reflected the development of Saivism in the region. As the early myths disclose, Siva worship seems to have been the ancient doctrine of the people of Jammu. Shiva was worshipped both in his anthropomorphic and Linga (phallus) form but Linga worship is popular in Jammu. The two chief god of the Hindu Pantheon which were worshipped by the people of Jammu are Shiva and Vishnu, around whom faith in several minor gods, goddesses and household deities was woven. The oldest cave shrine of the Jammu is Pir Khoh, which is dedicated to lord Shiva. It is believed that this cave remained Jamawant's abode since he left Ayodhya. Thus this cave is as old as Ramayana because Jamawant belonged to this period. There are many legends related to the cave. According to them Jamawant came to this part of Himalaya's to live rest of his life and choosed this cave for meditation. He established a Shivlingam inside the cave. Sudh Mahadev and Buddha Amarnth of Mandi (Punch) are the most ancient temples found in this region and these shrines are also devoted to god Shiva. Svayambhu Siva-lingam, a black marble image of lord Siva and his consort Parvati, mounted on their Nandi bull and huge trishul of iron was found at Sudh Mahadev. On that trident, a Sanskrit inscription is found which disclosed that the Trident belonged to the time of Naga rulers. These Naga rulers were contemporary of Guptas and may be these inscriptions and temple belonged to fifth or sixth century A.D. Buddha Amarnath in Punch has its great importance, those people who were unable to go to Amarnath shrine in Kashmir satisfy their desire by visiting this temple. Hari-Hara temple which is also known as Mahabilakesvara temple is another ancient temple made of stone, housing a Linga inside. The temple also contained a number of images of other gods also.

Another ancient temple complex like those of Krimachi and Babor has yielded temples of Siva. All these belonged to a period between the 9th, 10th or 11th century A.D. The next group of temples like Panchvaktar may belong to the period around 14th and 15th century A.D. At present the temples of Purmandal and Uttarbani on the bank of Devika River, were constructed by Dogras rulers too attract the devotees. These are famous for the Linga shrine. The famous Ranbiesvaram temple of 19th century A.D. has huge sphatic and crystal Lingas. The temple has figure of Siva in human form and his family. The anthropomorphic form of Shiva is also popular in this region. From the most of the temples of this region icons of Siva in human form have been found. Siva iconography in Jammu region represents all his well-liked form like Siva Parvati and Bhairava in

anthropomorphic form and icon of Nandi is always accompanied in Linga form.

NATH CULT IN JAMMU

Nath cult, one of the most important doctrines in this region is another variant of Saivism. *"The followers of Gorakhnath are known as Yogi, as Gorakhnathi, and as Darsani, but most distinctively as Kanphatas. The first of these names refers to their traditional practice of the Hatha yoga, the second to the name of their reputed founder, the third to the huge ear-rings which are one of their distinctive marks, and fourth to their unique practice of having the cartilage of their ears split for the insertion of the ear-rings"*. This esoteric cult, affirmed by the split-ear yogi mendicants, practicing hathyoga and wearing kundala (earrings), throughout northern, central and western India is now called as the Nath cult. The term Nath meaning master and women who belongs to this sect are similarly called Nathni. The origin of this cult on the basis of material available was north –east Bengal. From this area Nath cult spread to other parts of the country. The well known master of the cult is Machhandar Nath and Gorakh Nath. They have many sub-sects and elected their 'mahantas' who ruled over different monasteries. The term Yogis is used for the lay followers of this cult in this region who formed a separate caste. Their main occupation was bardic, singing bars or ballads of various legends of local mystics or heroes or heroines, satis and martyrs. They were commemorated in the form of thanas or small shrines to which they were associated. And these yogis collect alms from various villages in the name of the thanas to which they were faithful.

Nath cult is generally assumed as a Shaiva faith. The use of triple mark of ash on their forehead and use of rudraksha (berries of *eleocarpus geniturs*) rosaries by the follower of this cult may be cited in support of this view. They celebrate yearly festival Shivratri, which became the major festival of this cult and they also association with a snake cult all these conformed their association to shiva.

This cult popular in Jammu region during the 15th century A.D. Pirkhoh shrine of the Nath pantha became the centre of this cult during Ajeo Dev's region (1423-1454). Yogi Garib Das who came to this region probably during the rule of Ajeo Dev's successor Bairam Dev resided at Pir Khoh. In Indian dialect Khoh means a cave. This cave bearing a Shiva Linga and also known as Jamwant Khoh (cave). This cave is situated on the bank of river Tawi at Jammu. During the month of Phagan on Shivratri day many Hindus visit in this cave for the darshan of Mahadev and they carry with them lighted lamp. Another event which happened during the time of Raja Biram Dev

was that a certain Siddh Gauriya came to the village Swankh. He lived in the house of a Brahman and lived a life full of miracles. People raised a smadhi after his death on his ashes, which still exist in the village, which became famous as Siddha Swankha because of his association. Thus it was during second half of eighth century that the Nath cult fully established in this region.

From all the data given above it can be claimed that Shaivism had its roots in this region from ancient times. There is a scarcity of historical documents which can provide us with any hint regarding the beginning of Shiva worship in Jammu but one can trace it through different shrines dedicated to him. We have seen that the original inhabitants of the lands, Paisachas, were the lay devotees of Lord Shiva and worshipped him in his phallus form. There is mention of different rivers which are also associated with the worship of Shiva, one among them is Devika. Devika emerges from Gourikund in SudhMahadev and after flowing for some distance it submerges in a land mass and the finally emerges in Udhampur and following the same route it appears once again in a place called Uttarvaini in Purmanadal. This river is associated with Shiva and his consort Parvati and in every place where this river emerges there is a web of Shiva temples around it and the cities on the bank of this river are considered to be as holy. The Pir-Khoh temple is another evidence which substantiates the

point that worship of Shiva was prevalent in Jammu from times immemorial. There are ample number of shrines scattered in different places of Jammu province which are vestige of the Shaivism in its developed form. The relics that we have found from the ancient shrines of Bhabor, Billawar, Krimchi and others clearly helps us in understanding the origin and development of this cult. Apart from these shrines there is a rich source of oral traditions, in the forms of ballads songs and stories which help us in filling several gaps which are not traceable and they present a layer of truth regarding the beginning of Shiva worship in the place but the truth is covered by a layer of the exaggerations put forth by lay devotees.

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