

Cultural Dynamics of the Khasa Tribe: Tracing Historical Evolution in Jammu Region

DR. ANIL KUMAR¹, NIKESH SHARMA²

¹Assistant Professor, Cluster University of Jammu

²Assistant Professor, Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala, Kerala

Abstract- *The Jammu region has a rich historical and cultural heritage shaped by various tribes and their interactions with Aryan civilization. The Rig Vedic hymns highlight the primitive concept of territory among Aryans, emphasizing the importance of cattle and rivers for sustenance. The Mahabharata describes tribes like the Madras as non-Brahmanical, with derogatory remarks due to their customs. Various tribes, such as the Nagas, Pisacas and Khasas were mentioned in texts like the Nilamata, reflecting the region's diverse tribal makeup. The Khasa tribe is identified as one of the most prominent groups in Jammu's early history. Scholars debate whether the Khasas were the original inhabitants or migrated from East Central Asia around 4,000 years ago. The Khasas displaced earlier tribes like the Audumbaras, and their distinctive features—tall, fair complexions—set them apart. The tribe was known for gold mining and trade with Tibet, and they are frequently mentioned in texts like the Mahabharata, Markandeya Purana, and Rajatarangini. Over time, the Khasas were assimilated into the Brahmanical social system, adopting the title of Thakur and contributing to the region's social and economic development. The region of Jammu, particularly areas like Poonch, Rajouri, and Kishtwar, is considered the ancestral home of the Khasas. Their transition from fierce mountain tribes to respected warriors and agriculturists played a significant role in shaping the region's history and culture. The legacy of the Khasas and other tribes continues to influence the social structure of Jammu today.*

Indexed Terms- *Tribe, madra, Khasas, Puranas, Rajatarangini, Jammu*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Rig Vedic hymns provides the earliest account of Aryan people and it suggests that their concept of territory was in a primitive form. Besides people there are only references to things which were important for their cattle, the chief source of their economy. So we find the references of rivers in the Rig Vedic verses, which provide pasture land and water to cattle.^[1] In the Mahabharata text certain verses presented the Madra people with evil character and used some derogatory remarks for their women. The stain on their character according to the epic writers was due to the tribal admixture of the Madra people and the non Brahmanical practices observed by them, which were uncommon among the members of Brahmanical society of those days.^[2] There were differences in the accepted practices and norms between the orthodox later Vedic eastern social system and liberal early Vedic outlook.^[3] The tribes mentioned in Nilamata are the Nagas, the Pisacas, the Darvas, the Abhisaras, the Khasas, the Madras, the Tanganas, the Mandavas, the Antagiris and the Bahagiris.^[4] The first two are described as occupying Kasmira, and the rest, the neighbouring countries.

Remains of early and mature Harappan culture have also been found on both sides of the Chandrabhaga river in the Jammu region, which shows that human settlements had been established in this area near the banks of rivers four to five thousand years ago^[5] and the founders of these settlements can be considered to be the original inhabitants of Jammu region. Different scholars have different opinions about the original inhabitants of Jammu region. Many scholars have considered the Nagas to be the original inhabitants of this region, while many are of the opinion that the Kirats were the tribals of this area. Like the Nagas, the pre-historic tribes such as Yaksha-Pisacha etc. also resided in this area.^[6] The Republican states flourish

long in the Panjab and the hilly areas near it but after getting a last stroke from the Gupta imperialism, almost all of them disappeared by the end of the fifth century CE. A few expressions, however, occurring in the *Nilamata*, suggest the existence of some republican elements in some parts of Kasmira, even after that period.^[7] Hayagriva, who is presented as a demon in Indian literature, had an association with the hilly tribes. He was originally a deity of these tribes, which were initially hostile to the Aryans but were later on assimilated into Hinduism. Buddhism also adopted Hayagriva as a deity in their pantheon.^[8]

In the historical perspective, the original tribes of Jammu region that has been discussed the most is the Khasa tribe. Dr. Sukhdev Singh Charak is of the opinion that the Audumbaras had become the inhabitants of this region before Khasas, Shalavas and Madras.^[9] If this is true then it has to be assumed that after the Khasas made their debut in this region, the people of Audumbar, Shalav and Madra tribes were driven out or subjugated by them. Audumbaras were one of the six sub-group of the famous warrior Shalvas. They considered themselves a descendant of Vishwamitra.^[10] The main center of this tribe was Gurdaspur. Their coins have been found from Pathankot, Nurpur and Hammirpur. There is no historical evidence that Audumbar had ever come to the west of the Ravi river. Similarly, the area of Shalvas has also been outside the Jammu region. It is possible that they may have tried to come to this side sometime, but they could not stay here.^[11] The major part of Dharmsala and Syalsui in Jammu region were inhabited by Thakar Rajputs, been of chief importance here, their houses were built of stone on the tops of the hills. These houses were built in the shape of forts and bear the name Kot, a word used for fort in the hills.

The historians are of one opinion in the answer to this question whether Khasa people are the original inhabitants of Jammu region or came from outside. They believe that the original habitat of the Khasas was East Central Asia and these people came to the Himalayan region about four thousand years ago from today crossing the mountains.^[12] They were from cold regions. So they settled at the foot of the mountains. The height of Khasas was long, the body was compact, the complexion was fair with sharp eyes. Their women were also tall, thin and beautiful. These some inertia

and flexibility was often lacking in them. As soon as they entered the Jammu region, they snatched the settlements of the local people like Kirat, Koli etc. and drove the natives from their area.^[13]

In a remarkable passage of the Mahabharata we have a reference to the lumps of gold sent by the northern tribes to king Yudhisthira. Among them, mention is made of the Khasas and other Himalayan tribes. The Khasas traded in gold dust with the ancient miners in Tibet. In the Mahabharata epic, they are mentioned at many passages as semi-civilized tribe living outside the boundary of India.^[14]

The *Mahabharata* gives a list of hill tribes including the Khasas, Darvas and Abhisaras. These tribes were powerful, fierce and ferocious. They had been defeated by the Bharatas.^[15] The epic further counts the Khasas among the kings of the neighbouring countries, who presented various gifts to Yudhisthira on his coronation ceremony.^[16] The *Markandeya Purana* describes the Khasas as a mountainous tribe (parvatasrayinah) along with other hill tribes i.e. Gurgans and Nihars.^[17] The conquest of the Khasas by the Aryan king Sagar is mentioned in the *Brahmanda Purana*, *Matsya Purana* and *Vayu Purana*.^[18] Brihat Samhita mentions them along with the Kulutas, the Tangas and Kashmiras.^[19] In the Harivamsa Purana, they are referred to as mlecchas. In Manu's work, they are described to as a fallen warrior class.^[20] We find the inscriptional reference of the Khasa country of Sapadalaksa hills. The Khasas are also called the people of Kunaha or modern Kunwar valley of the Satluj. The proximity of Kunawar was the home of the Khasas, who were the gold diggers. The epic cited Tanganas and the paratanganas as neighbours of the Khasas. Pargiter says that they were intermixed with other mountain tribes.^[21]

Khasas are also mentioned many times in Kalhana's Rajatarangini. Kalhana places the Khasas between the middle course of the river Vitasta in the west and Kastavata in the east occupying the south and west valleys of the Pir Pantisal range. The rulers of Rajapuri are referred to as Khasa lords in the Rajatarangini and their soldiers as Khasas.^[22] In the Rajatarangini, it is mentioned that Tunga, a resident of the village of Badddivasa in Parnotsa, was the son of Bana, a Khasa.^[23] Badddivasa is identified with Budil, an early

village settlement situated on a tributary of the Ans river, to the south of the Pir Panjal.^[24] Budil was a stronghold of the Khasa tribe. A route for Kashmir valley passed through Budil. A mountain pass over the territory of the Khasas has been named after Budil. It was once a much frequented mountain route for travelling Kashmir valley.^[25] Similarly, the mention of Khasa lord^[26] is made in relation with Bhagika, who ruled from the castle of Banasala (Banihal) is considered the abode of Khasas in the Rajatarangini.^[27] Bhiksachara was killed in this Khasa fortress.^[28] The description of the Khasa tribe in the Rajatarangini shows them to be living outside the Kashmir Valley along with the Pir-Panchal mountain range. The region of Poonch and Rajouri were the main centres of the Khasas and from the hills of Udampur to the entire Doda and Kishtwar, the Khasas had settlements. Even today, up to the river Jehlam and Ravi, which is the hilly region of Jammu is considered the abode of the Khasas.^[29]

Amongst the early tribes which settled in the region of Kishtwar along the border of Kashmir valley in a semicircular shape from Chingam to Singpur was Khasa tribe. In the succeeding times they got assimilated in the Brahmanical social structure and obtained the title of the Thakur clan and became agriculturists.^[30] They also excelled in warfare. Kalhana has mentioned this area as Khashalya in Rajatarangni and has often spoken about the Thakurs of Chandra Bhaga.^[31] Later on it was named as Khasal or Khashal. Khasas were peace loving people and always extended a helping hand to the fugitives from Kashmir who came here as suppliants from time to time.^[32]

In Kalhana's time, the whole belt of the Pir Panjal pass from Bansala pass to the vitasta valley in the west is believed to have been inhabited by the Khasa people.^[33] Later they extended their domination over the whole Shiwalik range from the Siwalik foothills of Jammu in the west to Kumaon hills in the east. The geographical entity of the Siwalik range is still known as Kasali, an abode of Khasas.^[34] Kalhana in Rajatarangini mentions the peculiar restless ways and predatory habits of the Khasas. Kalhana also mentions the region beyond marbal pass as Khashala, where he mentions it as Khasali or Khasalaya.^[35] The traces of the settlements of these people are found in the valley

of Chandrabhaga and Vitasta, Khasalaya and Rajapuri.^[36] The chronicle mentions that Khasas rose to power when the city of Nara was burnt by the wrath of Nagas.^[37] In present times the Khasa settlements are prevalent in the whole lower Pir-Panjal valley and Shiwalik foothills on the western bank of river Chandrabhaga. Although they have become part of the brahmanical varna system, they still carry some ethnographic traits that differentiates them from the Brahmanical beliefs and practices.

CONCLUSION

The present work outlines the rich and diverse history of the Jammu region, emphasizing the significance of tribal cultures, their influence on the social structure, and their eventual integration into the broader Hindu framework. The story of the Khasas is particularly central, showcasing their migration, conflicts, and ultimate assimilation into the region's social and political fabric.

REFERENCES

- [1] Singh, Y.B., From Glory to Gloom: The Case of the Madra Jana, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 151
- [2] Prakash, B., The Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab, p. 114.
- [3] Singh, Y.B., *Op. Cit*, p. 150
- [4] Ghai. Ved Kumari., *Nilamatapurana Op. Cit.*, , p. 46.
- [5] Indian Archaeology 1976-77, A Review, p. 19.
- [6] Nirmohi. Shiv, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- [7] Ghai. Ved Kumari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- [9] Charak, S.D.S., History and Culture of Himalayan States, vol. II, p. 19.
- [10] Singh, M.R., A Critical study of the Geographical Data in the Early Puranas, p. 366.
- [11] Nirmohi Shiv., *Duggar Ka Itihas*, p. 10.
- [12] Nirmohi Shiv, *Duggar Ki Jatiyan* p. 11.
- [13] *Ibid.*
- [14] Chaudhari, Shashi. Bhushan., Ethnic settlement in ancient India, General Printers And Publishers, Calcutta, 1955, p. 120.

- [15] Shastri Jagdish Lal, *Brahmand Purana*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49, 67.
- [16] Tripathi, Rampratap, *Vayu Purana* (Hindi Trans.), Hindi Sahitya Sammelana, Prayaga, V. I, 45, 13, 5.
- [17] Charak. S. D. S, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- [18] Thakur, Laxman S., The Khasas: An Early Indian Tribe, In K. K. Kusuman (ed.). A Panorama of Indian Culture, PP. 285-293.
- [19] Sastri, bhushana. Subrahmanya., *Brihat Samhita*, M.B.D. Electric Printing works, Bangalore City, 1946, Adhyaye- X. 12, p. 121.
- [20] Vasu Sudhindranatha., *Sukraniti* (Translated & Edited) chapter IV, sec V, line 98, the Indian Press, Allahabad, 1914.
- [21] Roy, P. C, *Mahabharata*, *Op. Cit.*, VI. 9.6.
- [22] Ghai, Ved. Kumari, *Op. Cit*, p. 74.
- [23] Stein, M.A., *Rajatarangini*, VI, v-318-320.
- [24] Ibid.
- [25] Drew. F, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 137, 524.
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] Stein, M.A., *Rajatarangini*, VIII, v. 1665-66, p. 131.
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Nirmohi. Shiv, *Duggar Ka Itihas*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.
- [30] Sharma, D. C., History of Kishtwar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.
- [31] Stein, M.A., *Rajatarangini*, VII, v-399.
- [32] Nirmohi. Shiv, *Op. Cit*, p. 11.
- [33] Saklani, Dinesh. Prasad, Ancient communities of the Himalaya, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 71-72.
- [34] Sharma, D. C, *Op. Cit*, p. 28.
- [35] Stein, M.A, *Rajatarangini*, VII, v-399.
- [36] Stein, M.A, *Rajatarangini*, I, v-317.
- [37] Ibid.