

## “Kashmir As It Was”

Kashmir is very much in the news these days. Hardly a day passes without newspapers prominently displaying reports of atrocities committed on innocent people residing in the valley. Recently a meeting was held at Agra (July 14-16) between the President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of India to sort out differences and usher in a new era of peace in that region. Hopes were raised that something significant would emerge out of the discussions. As ill luck would have it, the talks which started in an atmosphere of goodwill and friendship ended abruptly without achieving any positive result. Obviously the fifty-year old dispute could not be solved so quickly and more time is needed to heal the wounds and restore peace in the valley.

Recently the library of the Society acquired a book ‘Kashmir As It Was’, authored by Francis Younghusband. This is an old book published as far back as in 1908 and recently reprinted by Rupa & Co. in 2000. Younghusband was a remarkable man – ‘an imperialist, journalist, spy, philosopher, geographer, travel-writer and explorer – all-in-one.’ He is credited with discovering a new overland route from India to China, masterminding the invasion of Tibet in 1904 and is presumed to have died as a spy in the Pamirs. The book ‘Kashmir As It Was’ makes fascinating reading giving us a picture of Kashmir at the start of the century.

Most travelers who visited Kashmir in the past praised it in superlative terms:

‘The Kingdom surpasses in beauty all that warmest imagination had anticipated’. There is no place other than Kashmir where one can see wide sweep of snow clad mountains – a region of stupendous mountains surpassing every other in the world.

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‘The whole panorama may be vibrating with beauties man has not yet the soul to see... And in the long centuries to come may we not develop a soul for beauties unthought of now? ..... And often in reverie on the mountains I have tried to imagine what still further loveliness they may yet possess for men.....’

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‘The most beautiful time in Gulmarg is in September, when the rains are over and the first fresh autumn nip is in the air. Then from the summerhouse in our garden, in the early morning, to feast my eyes on Nanga Parbat was a perpetual delight. It was the very emblem of purity, dignity and repose. Day after day it would appear as a vision of soft pure white in a gauze-like haze of delicate blue. Too light and too ethereal for earth, but seemingly a part of heaven; a vision which was a religion in itself, which diffused its beauty throughout one’s being and evoked from it all that was most pure and lovely.’

Concluding his account of Kashmir, Younghusband says:

‘Who can but be impressed by such ages and such forces? Who that looks on those lovely Kashmir mountains, and on the mighty peaks which rise behind, and

has learnt their long eventful history, can help being impressed by the immensity of time their structure betokens by the magnitude of the movements unceasingly at work within, and by the dignity with which they yet present a front so impressive and so sublime.....'

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'..... If Nanga Parbat rose not more than one inch in a month, it would have taken only 26,000 years to rise from the sea level, and this is but a moment in the vast epochs with which we are dealing. Nature has worked without haste and without violence. Slowly, relentlessly and uninterruptedly her work has progressed till the great final result stands before us in all its impressive majesty.'

How very unfortunate that this lovely Kashmir valley which has been described as a veritable paradise on earth is now riddled with ugly barricades and armed men at every corner. How is it people on both sides of the frontier looking at the same sky, breathing the same air, eating the same food and drinking the same water, nurse such hatred towards each other and have gone to the extent of killing innocent people ruthlessly and indulging in a deadly dance of death and destruction.

#### *Kashmir – History in brief*

Most of us are not aware of the past history of this Himalayan terrain the unravelling of which should prove to be an inspiring task. Historically Kashmir formed part of the empire of Ashoka which extended right up to Afghanistan and remains of Buddhist temples and statues and ruins of cities founded by him are to be seen all over the State. The city of Srinagar itself is believed to have been founded by Ashoka while another event in the history of Kashmir is the rule by Kanishka (AD 40) when Buddhism was in the ascendant. Six centuries passed before Hinduism under Sankaracharya asserted itself and practically drove out Buddhism from India. Later came Lalitaditya in whose time, 699-736 AD, Kashmir became a separate kingdom and a centre of culture. The next famous ruler was Avantivarma (885-883 AD) after whom the town of Avantipur is named and the most imposing monuments of ancient Kashmir belong to this period. Those were the palmy days of Kashmir, more than 1200 years ago which were followed by a long succession of struggles between the rulers and usurping uncles, brothers, cousins and military factions. The Muslim invasion started with Mahmud of Ghazni in 1015 AD and the Mughals had established themselves in the Kashmir valley by 1586 AD about 500 years later.

Kashmir became part of the domain of the great Akbar, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth of England whose rule was just and enlightened. French traveller Bernier, who visited India at that time, speaks of Kashmir as a terrestrial paradise. Akbar's successor Jahangir was devoted to Kashmir and built the far-famed Shalimar and Nishat Bagh gardens. This period of calm, however, did not last long and by 1759 it came under the oppressive rule of the Afghans, noted for their tyranny and cruelty. Ranjit Singh, the famous Sikh ruler of the Panjab defeated the Afghans in 1819 and annexed Kashmir to his domain. Sikh rule was also oppressive and people were subjected to every kind of extortion and oppression by its officers. After the death of Ranjit Singh, living conditions became

even worse until the British defeated the Sikh army and occupied Lahore in 1846. A separate treaty was concluded with Gulab Singh, who ruled the hilly territory and made Kashmir a separate State. A century later Kashmir became part of independent India, after partition of the sub-continent, when the then ruler, Hari Singh, signed the instrument of accession on October 7, 1947.

Unfortunately, Kashmiris who formerly lived in amicable unity, have since partition faced each other in bloody and often mortal conflict, causing immense social damage and material loss. To end this conflict is a *sine qua non* for the peace and prosperity of both India and Pakistan.

### *Geology of Kashmir*

Kashmir should be of interest to us because of its geology. A good part of the Kashmir and Simla Himalaya is made up of Fundamental Gneiss forming the core of the Dauladhar, Zaskar and Ladakh ranges. A considerable part of the crystalline complex is Precambrian in age, consisting of schistose rocks intruded by granites of later periods. A continuous and conformable Palaeozoic succession of all the principal stratigraphic systems – Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous and Permian – are present and a whole range of fossiliferous strata are well exposed in continuous succession in the Lidder valley. Over 2400 m of volcanic rocks composed of bedded tuffs, slates, ash beds, andesitic and basaltic lava flows (Panjal trap) have been identified. The association of marine Gondwana (Zewan Series) with fluvial deposits adds to our interest. The Trias of Kashmir is of great magnitude with a superb development of limestone and dolomites exposed in a series of picturesque escarpments, the Jurassic of Ladakh and Banihal being exposed in a series of bare cliffs, in the Amarnath valley. Cretaceous rocks are present in distant unfrequented parts of Kashmir in the great Himalayan ranges. Another interesting group of volcanic rocks – laminated ash beds, tuffs, agglomerates, bedded basaltic lava flows associated with marine Cretaceous limestones intruded by varied group of acid and basic plutonic intrusives – granite, porphyry, gabbro and peridotite – are exposed in North Kashmir (Dras volcanics).

The Karewa – the Pleistocene ice age deposit – is unique, occupying half the area of the valley. It is considered to be the surviving remnant of material deposited in a great lake which filled the valley, covering an area of 7800 sq. miles at the termination of Pleistocene glaciation.

The entire stratigraphic record from Archaean to Recent is therefore present and no other region in India can claim such unique geological history. It has the potential of becoming the best known section of the Himalaya with the Western Himalayan Syntaxis (sharp bends in the orogenic belt accompanied by a fraying into several strands).

A comparison of Kashmir, as described by Younghusband and others, with the present-day reality is a graphic commentary on man's inhumanity to man. Cruelty, intolerance, hatred, partisan politics and cynical nationalism have impoverished the Kashmir State and its people bringing both to a parlous condition. It is high time that their suffering be ended.

To achieve this, statesmanship of the highest order is required, assisted by creative and original minds, able and willing to face and defeat the forces of disunity, disruption and deceit that have brought Kashmir and Kashmiris so much suffering for so long.

The need of the hour is such leadership and our prayer should be that 'men of stature', to tower over mere politicians as our mountains tower over the plains, will be found before much further damage is done to Kashmir, Kashmiris and the sub-continent.

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the noted agricultural scientist, receiving the Lokamanya Tilak Award in Pune on 1 August 2001 recalled the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his address to the US Congress on January 6, 1941. These words are of profound significance to us today.

“In the future days, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression, everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his/her own way everywhere in the world. The third is the freedom from want, which, translated into action, means economic security at the household level. The fourth is the freedom from fear, which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour, anywhere in the world.”

These may appear as impossible goals in the world of today, but if held constantly before our mind may exercise a refining influence and help to restore peace to the State of Kashmir.

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