Rinchen shah of ladakh and kashmir history essay

Rinchen Shah (1320-23) was a prince in Ladakh, called rgyalbu Rinchen, rgyalbu means “ prince” (King’s son). His father was Lha-chen dnos-grub (1300-1325) who ruled Ladakh. Not much has been written about rgyalbu Rinchen’s early life. Unlike others he did not succeed his father, and the exact reason has not been mentioned anywhere. According to Walter R. Lawrence, Rinchen Shah came as an adventurer to the Valley after having quarrelled with his father[2]. According to Wazir Hashmatullah Khan, Rinchen Shah could not become king in Ladakh due to some political conflicts with his king father and he was compelled to migrate to Kashmir in the beginning of the 14th century along with some Ladakhi traders[3]. Whatever the reasons Rinchen Shah was an ambitious and very far sighted prince. He came to Kashmir along with his friends including Ladakhi traders and became the first Muslim king of Kashmir. It seems he came to Kashmir via Zojila and settled down somewhere in north Kashmir[4]. According to M. L. Kapoor he settled down in Gagangir, a village in the Lar valley[5].

Situation in Kashmir during the time

In 1320 Kashmir was ruled by the king Suhadeva. He was a very weak king. It was during this time that the Kashmir was invaded by Dulacha, a general of the Mongol king of Khwarezm with a huge army consisting of 17, 000 calvary and few thousand of foot soldiers[6]. According to Rajatarangini of Jonaraja Dulacha brought with him sixty thousand mounted forces consisted of Turks and Mongols[7]. He entered Kashmir through western gate of Baramulla. On the way he did not received any major resistance and difficulty, as the passes and the gate ware not properly guarded. The king Suhadeva and his government were weak and got paralysed with fear. Under

such circumstances the King ordered collection of a special tax from all castes including the Brahmans in order to buy off the Mongol invader[8]. The Brahmans, who considered themselves superior to other castes, opposed the ordered[9]. But the king could succeed to stop the invader and the Dulchana and his army continue to advance into Kashmir. Suhadeva sought safety and ran away to Kishtwar and his commander in chief Ramachandra shut himself up in his castle of Lar[10]. At this time, Dulchana entered into the valley and harassed the people. Rajatarangini of Jonaraja mentioned that ‘ Dulchana, like a fire brand, harassed the country, and the people of Kashmir became like insects in that fire’[11]. The towns and villages suffered tremendous horrors of vandalism. After spending about eight months in the valley the Mongols decided to leave due to apprehension of approaching winter and they took the Shopian route, which was shorter[12]. When Duchana and his army reached Pir Panchal range, it snowed. And all of them were destroyed in snow storm near Tarabala pass[13].

Accession of King Rinchen Shan

The Mongol invasion was a turning point in the history of Kashmir. The condition of the country at that time presented a very good opportunity to anyone who had the will and strength to establish his authority[14]. Suhadeva having fled to Kishtawar, the throne of Kashmir remained vacant. There were several warlords trying to sit on it, including Rinchen Shah, Shamamira and Langar Chak. Ramachandra who had shut himself in the fort at Lar, thought himself the rightful contender to the throne of Kashmir[15]. According to Fida Hassnain; Ramachandra proclaimed himself the king Kashmir in the place of Suhadeva, who fled from Kashmir[16]. Meanwhile the

Abhiharas clan, also known as the Khasha tribe, rose to fish in the trouble waters. Ramachandra managed to obtain the allegiance of Shamamira and Rinchen Shah against Abhiharas[17]. He deputed Rinchen Shah with a substantial army to drive out the raiders[18], who had reached very close to the capital. It was the first real challenge to Rinchen Shah to show is ability and strength. He succeeded in driving out the Abhisara. In this campaign, Shamamira assisted him. Rinchen Shah, as the defender of the kingdom not only defeated the invaders but also made them captives. Whatever treasures he obtained from this war; he sent these to Ramachandra. Instead of honouring Rinchen Shah, Ramachandra became apprehensive of rising power of Rinchen Shah. And the king tried to win over Shamamira towards his side to destroy Rinchen Shah but failed. Now Rinchen Shah decided to remove Ramachandra, who was the only obstacle left to become the King of Kashmir. Rinchen Shah sent his followers disguised as cloth merchants to the town of Lar, and one day they were able to gain entrance into the fort with their weapons concealed[19]. They surprised Ramachandra's men from within and Rinchen Shah himself attacked from outside. Consequently, Ramachandra's men were defeated[20]. The Rajatarangini of Jonaraja described:

(Sic) Ricchana deceitfully sent a few Bhottas every day who come into the fort of

Lahara under the pretence of selling clothes. And when Bhotta people had

thus entered Lahara, Rinchana caused their weapons to drink the honey like

blood of Ramachandra[21].

Rinchen Shah elevated himself to the status of Sultan or king. Rajatarangini of Jonaraja further described the event as follows:

(Sic)The country was weary of troubles and disorder, and Shri Rinchana

Suratrana gave it rest under the shalter of his arm. When the dark

days disappeared, the people of Kashmira witnessed again all the

festivities which they had beheld under their former kings[22].

He appointed Ravachandra, the eldest son of Ramachandra, as his councillor and granted the principalities of Lar to him[23]. Besides, at his coronation he married Kota Devi, the daughter of Ramachandra[24]. She was granted the titled of Rani or queen, and henceforth was to be called Kota Rani instead of Kota Devi.

Rinchen and Bulbul Shah

At this time it would appear that there was much confusion in the matter of religion in Kashmir, and Rinchen Shah who had no strong convictions found it necessary to adopt the religion of his subjects to further strengthening his position. He approached Devaswami, the head of the Brahmanas to admit him into their fold. His request was rejected because none of the Hindu castes would admit him to their brotherhood[25]. The Rajatarangini of Jonaraja described the event as follows:

(Sic)The king asked Shri Devasvmi to initiate him in the mantras of Shiva, but

as he was a Bhotta, Devasvmi feared that the king was unworthy of such

initiation, and did not favour him[26].

Thus, he could not become Hindu so he determined to leave his religion to chance. He decided to accept the religion of the person, whom he would see first in the morning. And in the morning he saw Bulbul Shah Qalandar at his prayers and admiring that form of devotion he decided to adopt Islam taking the name of Sadr-ud-din[27]. According to Fida Hassnain the after the king becoming Muslim, his councillors, his Ladakhi retainers and body guards, his Kashmiri nobles and officers of the government became Muslims at the hands of Bulbul Shah Qalandar[28]. The Rajatarangini of Jonaraja gives the title of Suratrana to Rinchen, which is equivalent to a Sultan in Persian terminology[29]. Thus, he came to be known as Sultan Rinchen Shah, the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir.

His Contributions

One of the most important achievements of Rinchen Shah was stability and peace. He defeated and brought most of the war-lords and tribes under his control. To substantiate to this fact the Rajatarangini of Jonaraja mentioned that Rinchen Shah has brought the festivities and peace to the people of Kashmir again[30]. The other most important contributions were his administration of justice to the people, irrespective of caste or status. The example of his dispensed justice impartiality has mentioned in the Jajatarangini of Jonaraja that the son of a powerful lord, named Timi, who had forcibly taken milk from a maid and drank it[31]. The milk woman instantly complained to the King who ordered Timi’s stomach to be cut to ascertain the truth[32]. He was also a great builder. He founded the town of ‘ Rinchanapur’ now part of Srinagar city[33]. He built a mosque in Kashmir. He

also built the great Shrine of Bulbul Shah,[34]known still as Bulbul Lankar. It is said that initially it was a public charity kitchen, at Ali Kadal in Srinagar and later on it came to known as Bulbul Lankar after the great saint, Bulbul Shah[35].

During his end of three years ruled a rebellion was raised by some feudal lords headed by Tuka, his former prime minister[36]. Through his courage and presence of mind he succeeded in putting it down, but in this fight, he received a severe wound on his head. And Rinchen Shah the first Muslim kings died in 1323 due to the wound[37]. He was buried in the compound of the Khanqah Bulbul Shah in Bulbul Lankar[38]. After the dead of Rinchen Shah, his son, Haider, who was an infant, did not succeed him. Kota Rani assumed power but only for a short period[39].