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ASHVINI AGRAWAL

ŚAIVISM IN NORTH-WEST INDIA: SYNCHRONIZING
NUMISMATIC AND SIGILLOGRAPHIC DATA WITH
EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE
(C. 400-800 CE)

Abstract

The origin and development of Śaivism with its various off-shoots has been a matter of some speculation. The textual data belonging to early historic period presents a picture of its own. But for a balanced view and comprehensive picture, it is essential to take in to account the art, archaeological, sigillographic and epigraphic data along with literary texts.

There is a great dearth of epigraphic material belonging to the pre-Muslim period in the north-western parts of India due to large scale destruction in the history of almost continuous foreign invasions. An attempt has been made in the present paper to collect and study all possible epigraphic data (c. 400-800 CE) having some bearing on the position and development of Śaivism. It is further attempted to synchronize the epigraphic evidence with the art, archaeological and sigillographic material related to Śaivism from the region.

Key-Words: Śaivism, coins, seals and sealings, Śaiva-inscriptions from Kashmir, Himachal, Punjab and Haryana.

Introduction

In the entire Hindu pantheon no other deity is as widely worshipped as Śiva and that too with such singular devotion. He

is worshipped in aniconic, theriomorphic, as well as anthropomorphic form. The antiquity of the worship of Śiva in his various forms goes back to hoary past¹. There is archaeological evidence from the pre-Harappan period onwards to this effect and the literary references from the time of the *Ṛgveda* itself refer to Śiva by one name or the other, Rudra-Śiva being the earliest. Though his image as Paśupati on the Harappan seals and in the phallic forms are independently known from a very early date, his anthropomorphic form first appears during the historic period in the third-second century BCE and the sculptures still later. However, the literary references to the image of Śiva are contained in the *Gṛhasūtras*, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini and the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, indicating the prevalence of the image worship of Śiva at least from sixth century BCE. The images of other Śaiva deities like Pārvatī, Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa also came into existence simultaneously.

The north and north-western India, including Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, has remained the stronghold of Śaivism from the beginning. The Punjab and North Western Frontier Province of the present day Pakistan have also yielded evidence of the prevalence of the cults related to Śaivism from the earliest times. Śiva, as also his son Kārttikeya, was the tutelary deity of many a ruling house in the region.

Numismatic Evidence

The numismatic evidence indicates that Śiva and his family was worshipped not only by several indigenous ruling houses but was also venerated by many foreigners who ruled this part of India during and even prior to the period under discussion. The anthropomorphic image of a male carrying a trident and club on the coins of the Indo-Scythic king Maues has been

¹ For the antiquity of the worship of Śiva see R. G. Bhandarkar (1928); J. Gonda (1970); Stella Kramrisch (1984); C. Sivarammurti (1975); Mahadev Chakravarti (1986); etc.

identified as Śiva². The early Kuṣāṇa rulers Kujula Kadphises and Vima Kadphises expressed their faith in Śaivism in the beginning of the Common Era. The legends *dharmathidasa* (steadfast in faith) and *sacadharmathidasa* (steadfast in true faith) on the coins of the former may indicate his faith in Śaivism. Though this interpretation may be questioned as the name of deity or faith is not specified yet the occurrence of the legends *Íśvarasa* and *Mahīśvarasa* on the coins of the latter leave no scope for any scepticism about the deep faith of the Kuṣāṇas in Śaivism. The portrait of Śiva (Oesho) with or without his vehicle Nandi, the Bull, on the Kuṣāṇa coins from the time of Vima onwards vouch for the prevalence and popularity of the cult. Even the portraits of Skanda, Kumāra, Mahāsenā and Viśākha with their names inscribed on the Kuṣāṇa coins have been found³. Śaiva leanings of several tribes, both republican and monarchical, are well-known from their coins. The most prominent among these were the Yaudheyas who ruled in Haryana and Punjab in the pre as well as post-Kuṣāṇa period. Their devotion to Kārttikeya, whose image and name occurs on their coins, needs no explanation. However, their early coins (bull and camel type) have the portrait of bull indicating their Śaiva leanings⁴. Some copper coins of the third or fourth century CE bearing the image of Śiva with a trident and the inscription *Bhagavto Citreśvara Mahātmanah* are known for a long time. They were published by Alexander Cunningham who attributed them to the Kunindas⁵. Ajay Mitra Shastri⁶ published another variety of these coins with the tri-cephalous Śiva seated on *Apasmāra-Puruṣa*. He aptly pointed out that this is the earliest iconographic representation of the seated Śiva and also of *Apasmāra-Puruṣa* in North⁷ and observed that Citreśvara type coins “bear such a close

² J.N. Banerjea (1941), 169.

³ Cf. Savita Sharma (1999); Percy Gardner, (1886); R. Göbl, (1984); Savita Sharma and M N P Tiwari, (1983), 134-149.

⁴ Devendra Handa (2007), 254.

⁵ Alexander Cunningham (1891), 70-73 and (1878-79), 137-45.

⁶ Ajay Mitra Shastri (1984), 24 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

resemblance to the Yaudheya specie of Allan's Class III, particularly in regard to reverse devices, that one could as well be tempted to ascribe them to the Yaudheyas⁸. More recently they have been assigned to the Yaudheyas and placed them along with the Brahmanyadeva type coins of the latter⁹.

Coming to the period from the fourth century onwards, Śaiva symbols on the coins became very common. A large number of copper coins bearing a monogram *Kota* on the obverse have the image of Śiva standing with Nandi on the reverse. Many a time the trident is also depicted on these coins. They seem to have formed the popular currency in the entire north-western India in the post- Kuṣāṇa and the Gupta periods. The coinage of the Hūṇas also has Śaiva characteristics. The inscription on the coins of Mihirakula reads *Jayatu Vṛṣadhvajah* along with the image of standing bull¹⁰. The Puṣyabhūti king Harṣavardhana issued gold coins bearing the image of Śiva and Pārvatī seated on bull. They also bear the title Māheśvara for Harṣavardhana¹¹. The depiction of recumbent humped bull on the Sāmantadeva type of coins, initially started by the Hinduśāhis, continued up to the 13th century CE in the north and north-west India¹².

Sigillographic Evidence

The seals bearing the image of a three faced horned deity surrounded by several animals, with the undeciphered Harappan inscriptions, are generally identified as depicting Śiva as Paśupati¹³. The three faced deity here is shown surrounded by several animals. Some other Harappan seals have the image of humped bull. They form the earliest sigillographic evidence of the prevalence of Śaivism in the Indus Valley Civilization. A

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁹ Devendra Handa (2007), 245-256.

¹⁰ P. L. Gupta (1969), Plate XVI, No.170.

¹¹ K. D. Bajpai (1976), 155-157; P. L. Gupta (1969), 64.

¹² We have not referred to the coins from the Gangetic plains and eastern India bearing the Śaiva symbols and inscriptions.

¹³ E. Mackay (1935), 70-71; B.B. Lal (2002), 116-117.

large number of seals and sealings bearing Śaiva symbols and names have been discovered from the entire north-western region of the Indian sub-continent. Sanghol¹⁴ and Sunet in Punjab have yielded a very large number of seals and sealings besides some important finds from Ropar, Taxila, etc. They may be dated from circa second century BCE onwards till the end of the period under discussion. Devices like the image of two or four armed Śiva, bull (Nandi), trident, trident with axe, crescent, etc. are commonly depicted on them besides the Śaiva names like Śivadāsa, Śivarakṣita, Maheśvara, Rudrasoma, Bhavadeva, Rudraśarma, Kundeśvara, Rudradeva, Siddheśvara, Sthānu and Rudra¹⁵. Most of these are personal names of individuals. But the very fact that they have been named after various names of Śiva indicates the popularity of Śaivism. It may further be observed that most of the seals and sealings of individuals with Śaiva names also have Śaiva symbols on them and the persons having Vaiṣṇava names have Vaiṣṇava symbols like *cakra*, *śaṅkha*, *gadā*, etc. For instance a seal bearing the legend *Maheśvara* from Sunet has a trident with battleaxe on it and another with the name *Rudraśarma* from the same site has a trident above the inscription. Likewise, the sealing with the legend *Śri Nārāyaṇadevasya* from Sunet has a conch and discus on it. It may not be a mere co-incidence.

Some seals of the Gupta period have *īśvara* ending inscriptions like Śrī-Gomīśvarasya with symbols of conch and *nāgamudrā* and Śrī-Ratīśvarasya from Sanghol and Śrī-Kundeśvarasya with a trident and Śrī-Vyaumīśvarasya from Sunet. Since *īśvara* ending names are Śaiva in character, it has also been suggested that they may indicate their association with some Śaiva shrines that existed during the period¹⁶. Two more seals from Sunet have the inscriptions *Śrī-Atimuttakasa* with a trident above and *Śrī-Atimuttakasa* with a trident above and

¹⁴ The excavations at the site (Hathibara) conducted by Archaeological Survey of India in 1980s under the supervision of Dr. Margbandhu yielded a very large number of clay sealings of the Kuṣāna, Gupta and post-Gupta periods. We had a chance to see some of them but their detailed contents are unknown as they remain unpublished till date.

¹⁵ Devendra Handa (1985), 93 ff.; K. K. Thaplyal (1972); G.B. Sharma, (1986).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

Nandi to left. The inscription probably stands for *Avimuktaka*¹⁷ which is explained in the *Skanda Purāṇa*¹⁸ as a place or shrine that is never deserted by Śiva or is free from sin. A place called Avamukta finds mention in the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta where the latter is said to have defeated a king named Nīlarāja during his southern campaign. The existence of some such place associated with a Śaiva shrine in Punjab cannot be ruled out.

Some interesting sealings from Sunet have an inscription *Śrī Śaṅkara Nārāyaṇābhyām* on one side in the Gupta Brahmī characters and the name of some individual with a device or two like conch and trident on the other. These seals seem to have belonged to some religious shrine and used as offerings by the individuals whose names occur on them. They indicate complete religious harmony amongst the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects and also the development of the concept of Hari-Hara¹⁹. In this connection we may make a reference to the famous Nicolo seal published by Alexander Cunningham long ago. Cunningham identified the four-handed divine figure on the seal as that of Viṣṇu carrying a discus, mace, a globular object and a ring like object. He further identified the royal dwarfish figure in front of the deity as that of the Kuṣāṇa king Huiṣka assigning it to 2nd-3rd century CE. He could not read the inscription on the right side of the seal²⁰. R. Ghirshman was able to read the inscription written in old Tocharian script as names of Mihira, Viṣṇu and Śiva. He further identified the royal figure in front as that of an unknown Hephtalite Hūṇa king and rightly assigned it to the 5th-6th century CE²¹. J. N. Banerjea when discussing the iconography of the composite images has agreed with the view of Ghirshman²². There is plenty of other sigillographic evidence indicating that complete harmony prevailed between various religious sects during the period

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kāśī-Khaṇḍa, XXVI, 27. Also *Liṅga Purāṇa, Pūrvabhāga*, 92, 143.

¹⁹ K. K. Thaplyal (1972), 204-05.

²⁰ *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1893, 126-127.

²¹ R. Ghirshman (1948), 55-58.

²² J. N. Banerjea (2002), 123-125.

under discussion and it seems to have given rise to the idea of composite images and their worship. We do not get any evidence of competition or rivalry between various religious sects. It is attested by epigraphic evidence also as we shall discuss below.

Epigraphic Evidence

There is a great dearth of epigraphic material belonging to pre-Muslim period in the north-western parts of the Indian sub-continent, comprising the present day Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir in India and the Punjab and NWF Province in Pakistan due to large scale destruction in the history of almost continuous foreign invasions. Only a few inscriptions have survived either accidentally or due to their remote location beyond the reach of destruction. Still fewer have some reference to Śaivism and belong to the period under discussion. Yet a brief survey of these epigraphs when studied in the light of the numismatic, sigillographic and art evidence helps us to understand the position and development of Śaivism in the region.

We are not aware of any inscriptions from the North-Western region prior to the fourth century CE which may throw some light on the state of Śaivism. However, the Kharoshthī inscriptions edited by Sten Konow contain some names of individuals that have Śaiva bearing. For instance, we get the name Śivarakṣita in three inscriptions, one each from Shahdaur in the Agror Valley in Hazara region of the NWFP²³, the second from Bimran near Jalalabad²⁴ and the third from Taxila²⁵ respectively. He is an individual donor and the last inscription has the name alone. It is not possible to say whether the name is of one person or three different individuals. Next we have the name Īśvaraka as the donor from the Taxila Copper Ladle

²³ Sten Konow (1991), 16-17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

inscription²⁶. An *ācārya* named Bhava is mentioned in the Sui Vihar inscription of the year 11 of Kaniška's rule²⁷. A copper signet ring bearing the name of Kṣtrapa Śivasena is also known from the Taxila region²⁸. As in the case of seals and sealings discussed above these names at least indicate the prevalence of Śaivism in the North-West.

The earliest Śaiva inscription of our period comes from Shuddh Mahadev, a place of pilgrimage on the river Devikā, nine miles from the town of Chineni in Udhampur District of Jammu and Kashmir. The three line inscription engraved on a broken trident at the temple of Śiva has been assigned to the fourth century CE by Jagannath Agrawal who published it for the first time²⁹. It refers to the consecration of a *triśūla* by the son (name lost) of the illustrious king Vibhunāga in the year 5 of his rule. The learned editor has pointed out on the authority of Kalhana³⁰ that there existed a tradition in Kashmir of consecrating *triśūlas* of Śiva. He has further identified Vibhunāga of this inscription with the Nāga ruler of the same name whose copper coins have been found at Padmāvati. A copper seal of one Maheśvara Nāga from Lahore was published by J. F. Fleet in 1888³¹. In the present context, it not only has a Nāga ending name but also a synonym of Śiva as the first name. It may be added here that the Śaiva affiliations of the Nāga rulers of the Gangetic plains are well-known and the prince may have undertaken a pilgrimage to Shuddh Mahadev in Kashmir.

Only one more inscription from Kashmir within the period under discussion has a reference to Śiva though it is primarily an inscription dedicated to god Sun. The Martand Temple Stone inscription, now preserved in the Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar has been assigned to the 8th century CE on palaeographic considerations³². Badly mutilated epigraph

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁹ Jagannath Agrawal (1986), 4-5; *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, V, 1967.

³⁰ *Rājatarāṅginī*, VII.185.

³¹ J. F. Fleet (1888), 282-83.

³² Jagannath Agrawal (1999), 335-36.

written in Sanskrit verse refers to the installation of an image of Mārtaṇḍa (Sun) by an individual named Śrī- Śrīvarman³³. In the fourth verse of the inscription there is a reference to the violent dance of god Śiva. Again in the line seven it says that the Sun has relieved the three gods Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā of the toil of protecting the universe. The praise of the Sun whose image was installed in the temple is natural in the inscription but it does not see the other gods as rivals. Rather they are complimentary to each other, an idea embedded in the concept of Trinity in Hindu pantheon.

No Śaiva inscription datable to the period 400-800 CE is known from Punjab³⁴. However, a copper plate inscription of the Puṣyabhūti king Harṣavardhana, along with seal, was discovered sometime back from somewhere in Punjab and we had a chance to examine and photograph the inscription³⁵. We published it for the first time³⁶. Subsequently it was published by R. C. Sharma³⁷ and Shankar Goyal³⁸ also. Sharma has read the date in the inscription as 23 and he has been followed by Goyal³⁹. However, we have suggested its date as 8. The reference that qualifies this inscription to be included in the present discussion is the titles of Harṣavardhana. His predecessors were devout worshippers of god Sun (*Paramādityabhakta*) except for his elder brother Rājyavardhana who is called *parama-Saugataḥ*. However, Harṣa in this inscription, as also in his other inscriptions and seals⁴⁰, is called a devout worshipper of Śiva (*parama-*

³³ It has been rightly pointed out by Jagannath Agrawal that this is the name of an individual and not that of a king, as supposed by some earlier scholars. *Ibid*.

³⁴ Unfortunately we do not have the latest data from the Punjab and NWF Province of Pakistan and thus are unable to include it in our paper. We are told that some inscriptions from Kashmir Smast etc. are relevant to the topic but in absence of access to the material from across the border it has not been possible for us to include them in this paper.

³⁵ At present it is in the collection of Jnana Pravaha, Varanasi.

³⁶ Ashvini Agrawal (2003), 220-228.

³⁷ *Jnana Pravaha Research Journal*, No. 5, 2001-02, 223-232.

³⁸ *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol. XXXI, 2005, 136-46. He has called it Kurukshetra-Varanasi grant as he remains unaware of its original find from Punjab.

³⁹ His reading and translation is only a copy of R. C. Sharma's version.

⁴⁰ This includes his Copper Seal discovered from Sonipat in Haryana and published by J. F. Fleet (1888), 231 ff.

māheśvaraḥ Maheśvara iva). This reference becomes significant not only because it stands in contrast with the titles of the other Puṣyabhūti rulers but also because it indicates the royal patronage enjoyed by Śaivism during this period and that too under the king who is known to have strong Buddhist leanings as well.

Besides the Sonipat Seal of Harṣavardhana, which is similar to the one discussed above, that belongs to the first half of the seventh century CE and calls him as a devout worshipper of Śiva⁴¹ we have no Śaiva inscriptions from Haryana which may be strictly assigned to the period under discussion. From the eighth century CE Haryana seems to have come under the sway of the Gurjara-Pratihāras four of whose inscriptions are known from the state. The earliest dated in Śaka 717 (795 CE) belongs to the reign of Vatsarāja and records the construction of a temple of the divine Caṇḍikā⁴². In its first invocatory verse there is reference to the goddess as the one half of the Lord of Beings (Śiva). Again in verse 12 the goddess is invoked as “like Gaurī of the enemy of Dakṣa (Śiva)”. These references may appear to be insignificant but they definitely point towards the developed form of Śaivism towards the end of our period. The Pratihāra emperor Bhoja who ruled from c. 836 to 885 CE has two inscriptions in Haryana, one each from Pehowa and Sirsa. The first dated in Harṣa Era 276 (882 CE) has no bearing on the topic under discussion. But the fragmentary inscription from Sirsa written in ornate Sanskrit verse is purely Śaiva in character⁴³. It contains an eulogy of a Pāśupāta ascetic whose name is lost. He has been described as Śiva incarnate himself and was an expounder of Śaiva worship. His pupil, whose name is also lost, renounced this world. The latter’s pupil named Nīlakaṇṭha, who was obeyed by the kings, built a stone temple of Śiva, in place of an old one of bricks. This new temple touched the sky and bore the splendour of Kailāśa. This inscription throws welcome light on several aspects of Śaivism.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Edited by K. V. Ramesh and S. P. Tewari, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XLI, 49-57.

⁴³ Daya Ram Sahni, *EI*, XXI, 296ff.; Jagannath Agrawal (1999), 99-100.

It talks of the existence of Pāśupāta sect in the region where pupils of ascetics continued the tradition of their teachers and were patronized by the rulers. It also reveals the existence of the Śaiva shrines prior to the time of this inscription and their reconstruction and enlargement in subsequent periods. It leaves little doubt that Śaivism was not only prevalent but a popular sect in Haryana during this period.

Before we close this discussion on Śaiva inscriptions from Haryana, mention must be made of two records from the village of Morni in the Panchkula District of Haryana. A modern Śiva temple stands there on the bank of a lake called Morni-Ka-Tal, with numerous remains, including several Śaiva sculptures, of an old shrine, datable to circa 8th century CE, scattered all over the complex. During our field work we found two stone inscriptions here. The one consisting of eight or nine lines was so badly mutilated that nothing of it could be made out except that the script resembled Śāradā of 8th-9th century CE. The second fragmentary inscription is fixed in the outer wall of the temple and has been read for the first time by us as follows:

- L.1. (U)pendradevasya rājñī
L.2. (Śri) Akhileśvaramidam

We are not sure if *Akhileśvara* in the second line refers to the name of some individual or the deity but there is no doubt of its Śaiva character and the royal patronage it received⁴⁴.

Himachal Pradesh has yielded the largest number of inscriptions in the region. J. Ph. Vogel laboriously collected a large number of epigraphs from Chamba region and published them in a scholarly work entitled *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Volume I in 1911. He included as many as fifty pre-twelfth century inscriptions in it and listed some more from the regions of Kangra and Kullu. Of these only six fall within the period and scope of our discussion. The first two are short inscriptions engraved on a rock in Panali Nala near Gum in District Chamba. Written in Proto Śāradā script they have been assigned to the

⁴⁴ Ashvini Agrawal, (2001), 79-87.

seventh century CE both by Vogel⁴⁵ and Jagannath⁴⁶ on palaeographic grounds. The first simply reads *Om Namaḥ Śivāya* i.e. “Om Salutation to Śiva”. Though very short in content, the inscription clearly indicates the prevalence of Śaivism in the region. In the second inscription, which does not convey exact meaning, the name of the writer is given as Goradeva (Gaurīdeva). It too has clear Śaiva affiliation of the nomenclature.

The most important are the two inscriptions engraved on beautiful brass images of Gaṇeśa and Nandi at Brahmaur in District Chamba. Both the inscriptions were put up by the king Meruvarman of Chamba who belonged to the family of Ādityavarman of Pūṣaṇa⁴⁷ *gotra* of the Solar race. Written in acute-angled (*Kuṭila*) Brāhmī script they have been assigned to circa 700 CE⁴⁸.

The first one is a four line inscription engraved on the pedestal of the Gaṇeśa image. After the salutation to the deity, it refers to the installation of the image as a religious gift by the illustrious king of great kings (*Mahārājādhirāja*) Meruvarman, the great grandson of the illustrious Ādityavarman, grandson of the illustrious Balavarman and the son of the illustrious Divākaravarman. It was made by the artisan named Gugga.

The second inscription is engraved on the pedestal of a majestic brass-image of Nandi that stands *in situ*, facing the Śiva temple in front. The two line inscription refers to the installation of this image of ‘the bull, having plump cheeks and the body, and a well-knit breast and a hump, a lofty vehicle for

⁴⁵ J. Ph. Vogel (1911), 137.

⁴⁶ Jagannath Agrawal (1999), 157.

⁴⁷ The variable reading of the word is *Muṣūṇa*, *Moṣūṇa*, etc. which has been corrected by us to *Pūṣaṇa*. Cf. Ashvini Agrawal, (2003a), 217-23.

⁴⁸ Two more exquisitely carved brass images of the goddess Lakṣaṇā Devī (in the form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī) at Brahmaur and of Śakti Devī at Chatrarhi are under worship in their respective temples. The temple of Lakṣaṇā Devī is located in the same complex, called the Chaurāsī, at Brahmaur where the Nandi and Gaṇeśa images are located. Chatrarhi lies between Chamba and Brahmaur. Both the images are inscribed and were installed by Meruvarman. They were executed by the same artisan named Gugga. A third unscribed brass image of Narasimha also exists in the same complex at Brahmaur and is generally assigned to a later date in the 9th-10th century CE.

the divinity' after having constructed the temple resembling the mountain Meru, on the peak of the Himalaya by the illustrious Meruvarman, whose fame has spread to the four oceans, for the constant increase of his own religious merit and that of his parents. The second verse refers to the construction of a charming *Candraśāla* (a gabled chamber) 'with many adjacent apartments' (*prāgrīva*) and *maṇḍapas* (pavilions) adorned with pictorial drawings. Evidently it refers to the construction of a lofty Śiva temple in front of which the image of Nandi was installed. Though the present temple built on a huge platform in front of the image is assignable to a later date than the 7th century CE of the inscription, it appears that the original temple stood at the site and was rebuilt or renovated at a later date.

These inscriptions vouch for the prevalence and popularity of Śaivism in this remote region of Himachal Pradesh and also talk of the royal patronage received by the sect. The widespread following of Śaivism in the region continued through the ages as is attested by the existence of numerous Śaiva temples. It, however, never brought any sectarian conflict with other faiths for we find the same king Meruvarman installing two more images one each of the goddess Lakṣaṇā Devī in the form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī in the same complex at Brahmaur and another of Śakti Devī at Chatrarhi located between Chamba and Brahmaur. Yet another uninscribed brass image of Narasiṃha also exists in the same complex at Brahmaur and is generally assigned to a later date in the 9th-10th century CE.

An important Śaiva inscription from Chamba is the Sarahan Praśasti ascribable to the 9th-10th century CE. Presently preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, the stone-slab bearing the inscription was acquired from a small village named Sarahan, near Saho in District Chamba by J. Ph. Vogel in 1908⁴⁹. It records the construction of a temple dedicated to Śiva⁵⁰ by an individual called Sātyaki, son of Bhogaṭa and married to a lady of extraordinary beauty named Soma Prabhā. She belonged to a royal family. Vogel is of the view that the

⁴⁹ J. Ph. Vogel (1911), 152 ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, verse 21.

temple referred to in the inscription is Candraśekhara temple at Saho⁵¹. Though the tradition ascribes the construction of this Śiva temple to the king Sāhilavarman, the palaeography of the inscription and the style of the sculptures in temple point to a slightly early date for the both. We are inclined to place them in the beginning of the ninth century CE. The inscription starts with *jayati Śiva*, whose body is adorned by the lustre of the moon and whose affection is confined to half of his body which (consists of) Gaurī, in the invocatory verse 1. Most of the remaining inscription is an eulogy of the wife of the donor. Verse 21, as already pointed, refers to the construction of the temple of Śiva and closes with salutation to Śiva (*Himaraśmi Śekhara* i.e. whose diadem is the cool-rayed one). The inscription is an undisputed evidence of the prevalence and following of Śaivism in the region.

Before we close the present discussion, it is pertinent to briefly refer to another image inscription first published by J. Ph. Vogel⁵². The two line inscription is engraved on the pedestal of a brass image of Viṣṇu discovered from Fatehpur in the Kangra District. It refers to the installation of the image of a goddess (*Devī Mātā*) in the year 23 of an unspecified era by the wife and Śri Mahādeva. The image may be ascribed to the 7th-8th century CE on palaeographic as well as stylistic considerations. The inscription is quite enigmatic as it talks of the consecration of an image of the goddess but is written on the image of Viṣṇu. What is of our interest in the present context is the name of Śri Mahādeva and his wife. Vogel⁵³ was inclined to take this name as that of god Śiva and his wife i.e. Pārvatī. Jagannath Agrawal⁵⁴ also translated it in the same sense as “the wife (of Mahādeva) as also the illustrious god Mahādeva”. We beg to differ from the learned scholars as this translation does not make sense. Not only the style of calling a god (*Bhārya tathā Śri Mahādeva*) is unusual, it leaves out the fact as to who was the donor of the image. After discussing the whole question

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 154-55.

⁵² J. Ph. Vogel (1904-05) 109.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, 295.

in detail⁵⁵ we suggested that Śri Mahādeva is the name of an individual who donated this image along with his wife.

The above survey clearly establishes that Śaivism was popular in the North-West India from a very early date and continued to flourish during the period circa 400-800 CE. It received liberal patronage from the kings and individuals alike. There is no evidence of any sectarian conflicts and the people appear to have lived in complete religious harmony. On the other hand we have ample evidence of the simultaneous worship of several gods like Viṣṇu, Devī and Śiva by the same persons.

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⁵⁵ Ashvini Agrawal (2002), 209-14 and Plate.

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