

BUDDHISM IN KASHMIR

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Abstract

Buddhist art and Architecture seems to have obtained a footing in Kashmir Valley during the 3rd century B.C. From 3rd Century B.C to 13 Century A.D. Kashmir was ruled by the rulers of Mouryan, Kushan, Gonanda, Hun, Karkota, Utpala, Lohra and Dev Dynasties. During Mauryan times Buddhist Monks were sent to Kashmir to spread Buddhism in Kashmir. During Kushan period there was tremendous development in Kashmir Buddhism. The Kushan King Kanishka held fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir at Kundalvan. It is the first time in the history of Buddhism that commentaries were written on copper plates after the council. And were deposited in a Stupa by the order of Kanishka. During Kushan period they held fourth Buddhist council at Kashmir near Kundavan. In this Council various eminent Scholars like Ashavaghosha participated. The Council was under the president ship of Vasumitra. Kanishka council is also known as Sanskrit Buddhism because the commentaries were written in Sanskrit languages. Kanishka council marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Buddhism. The council gave an official and a superior status to the Mahayanist doctrine which may; rightly be said to have been and developed in Kashmir. The name most definitely connected with the early promulgation of Mahayana is that of Nagarjuna. A preponderance of Chinese traditions makes him the second patriarch after Ashavaghosha and this agrees with the Rajatarangini. As a result of Kanishka's council there burst forth an enthusiastic missionary spirit among the Kashmiris who carried this religion to China across difficult passes and thus produced a great fermentation and controversy in China thought. One has only to compare the China of the Hans with the China of the Tangs to see how great the change was wrought by this faith. The diffusion of the Indian influence was due to the activities of these missionaries who were exclusively Buddhist and the preponderating number came from Kashmir. After the Council Buddhist missionaries were sent to other countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Taiwan.

Keyword: Development, Architecture, Commentaries Buddhist art and liberal patronage.

Introduction

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Contribution of Kushans in the Development of Kashmiri Buddhism besides being a great conqueror Kanishka is known to have been a liberal patron of arts and letters. His court was adorned by some of the greatest intellects of the age.. Kanishka wanted them to meet and deliberate somewhere in Gandhara but the place was objected to on account of its 'heat and dampness'. Then he suggested Rajagriha where a similar Council had been held previous. But the place was contended that the presence of large numbers of heretical teachers there was likely to lead to unnecessary controversy and useless discussion. Finally on the suggestion of Parshva and with the approval of the other assembled monks it was decided to hold the Council in Kashmir where it was pointed out 'the land is guarded on every side by mountains, the soil is rich and productive and it is well provided with food'. The king himself accompanied the selected monks to the happy valley where he founded a monastery for them. According to the Chinese pilgrim only arhats were admitted the Council. The Kashmir historian adds that during the glorious period of their regime the kingdom of Kashmir was for the most part an appendage of the Buddhists who had acquired luster by renunciation. It was in his time and by reason of this Council that Kashmir became a great centre of Buddhist learning. For it was then that the valley was visited by many eminent Buddhist savants and scholars some of whom made this paradisiacal land their dwelling for long.¹

Nalinaksha Dutt mentions in his book Mahayana Buddhism that the kingdom appears in our ancient records as a part and parcel of Gandhara. In the list of sixteen mahajanapadas, Kashmir-Gandhara is indicated as one janapada, indicating thereby that two Countries formed one Political unit in the pre-Ashoka days². With the development of the Kushan horde, however, Gandhara came under their sway when Kadphise II overthrew the last Greek monarch, Hermaeus. The Kushans gradually reduced to subjection the various petty Greek, Parthian and Saka kingdoms and built up an extensive empire under Kanishka. The important role that Kashmir played politically and culturally under Kanishka has already been dealt with. The Hellenised art of Gandhara appealed to the Kushans and under Kanishka it flourished travelling to far off places in India and Central Asia. Long before Greeks penetrated to this region, Gandhara had close Political relations with the kingdom of Kashmir. Kalhana lays the first scenes of his immortal Rajatarangni there. Subsequently, we find references to Gandhara and its

¹ Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh by J.N. Ganhar and P.N. Ganhar pp.29-36

² Mahayana Buddhism by Nalinaksha Dutt, p.6.

Brahmins.³ It is regarded that Mihirkula the Epthalite Hun king of Kashmir settled thousands of Gandhara Brahmins in Kashmir. He also tells us that the young warriors of Gandhara were in great demand for army of Kashmir''.⁴ The abundance in which the coins of Indo-Greek, Parthian and Saka kings of north-western India were found till recently in Kashmir points to the existence of considerable commercial intercourse, if not actual political connection, between the Valley and the Principalities of Peshawar and Kabul in the last two centuries BC and the first century AD''.⁵ Kanishka's Buddhist council: Kanishka convened the Buddhist council to revise and determine the Buddhist faith. He was greatly exercised over conflicting interpretations of the Buddha's teachings and he wished to know as to which interpretation was the most authentic. According to tradition Kanishka became a Buddhist on account of his association with king Sinha of Kashmir. It is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of this statement. But there is no difficulty in accepting.

Dr.H.C.Roychaudhuri's view that Kanishka must have embraced Buddhism quite early in his reign or even before it. He convened a Buddhist council in Kashmir. It is not possible to locate with certainty the place where this council was held. But is almost certain that it must have been held either in Kashmir itself or in its vicinity. Yuan-Chwang who visited the Valley in 7th century A.D, is definite on the point. Evidently this tradition must have lingered and Yuan-Chwang must have heard about it. Moreover, the fact that such a basic and vast Buddhist literature as Mahavibhasa of Sarvastivadin school was produced in Kashmir shows that this region must have had the benefit of being the venue of the gathering of learned scholars of the age.⁶ Kanishka's council gave a powerful fillip to the growth of Buddhist learning in Kashmir. This council is now regarded as the fourth great Buddhist council, three others have been held earlier.⁷ Kanishka's council is an important landmark in the history of Buddhism. It represents the rise of what may be called Sanskrit Buddhism. From now onwards Sanskrit became the language of Buddhist thought and discussion all over the north. As has already been noticed, the canonical texts and the commentaries on them drawn up at the council were in Sanskrit. These were written by eminent Sanskrit scholars like Ashvaghosha and Parshva. Inevitably all subsequent discussion on them was also in Sanskrit. The emergence of Sanskrit as the language of Buddhism had far-reaching consequences.⁸ According to the Buddhist tradition, Kanishka held the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir. Hence forth Kashmir became the headquarters of the Sarvastivadin school of Buddhism. These doctrines penetrated into Kabul, Gandhara, Central Asia and Tibet. Kanishka patronized such activities and even made gift of Kashmir to the sangha. It has further

³ Rajatarangini, I-66, 68, 307, II-145

⁴ R.S. Pandit, River of Kings, p. 615

⁵ R.C. Kak, Ancient Monuments in Kashmir, p. 52.

⁶ History of Buddhism in Kashmir by Dr. Sarla Khosla pp. 44-45

⁷ Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh by J.N. Ganhar and P.N. Ganhar p. 58.

⁸ Ibid p. 61

been given by the Chinese source that the final decisions of the Council were engraved on copper plates and deposited in a stupa, under orders of the king. Excavation done at Harwan, Ushkur and Ahan have revealed existence of the Buddhist relics but on traces of these copper plates have been found and this problem still engages attention of scholars throughout the world.⁹

Conclusion

There was a great Contributions of Kushans in the spreading of Kashmir Buddhism: .It goes to According to the Buddhist traditions, Kanishka the Kushan emperor, held his Buddhist council in Kashmir. He was advised by parsva to call all the monks ,for collection of sacred texts,and to prepare commentaries of the sutras,the Vinaya and the Abhidharma.This council was held at Kudalwan in Kashmir .It has been termed as Kien-the-lo in the Chinese geography.Besides the large audience,this council was attended to by 500 Arhats,500 Budhisattvas and 500 panditas. Ashvaghosha the celebrated author of Buddhacarita,the Saundrananda and the sariputra-prakarana,attended this council the credit of this council that commentaries on all the Buddhist texts were compiled into two treatises known as Upadesha-shastras and vibhasha shastras.the later is known as Kashmirshi in Chinese.It also goes to the credit of this council that for the first time in the history of Buddhism ,freedom of thought and expression was recognized and it was declared that texts of all the 18 schools of thought in Buddhism were correct for all of them contained the word of the master. It is mentioned in Chinese sources that the final decisions of the council were engraved on copper plates and deposited in a Stupa under the order of the King.

⁹ Historic Kashmir by Fida Mohd Khan Hassnain p.224