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Pervaiz Ahmed Jaral

Ph.D., Department of
Buddhist Studies, Nava
Nalanda Mahavihara,
Nalanda, Bihar, India

Buddhist ruins of Kashmir a historical study

Pervaiz Ahmed Jaral

Abstract

Following Gautama Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, his disciples and followers began paying homage to his memory. Initially, they made no images or idols because the Buddha forbade idolatry. Over time, the followers of Gautama Buddha began building stupas and chaityas to express their reverence for him. These religious structures functioned as religious memorials, and after his death, his physical remains, known as Udesika, served as a memorial or object used by the Buddha. Eight stupas were built on the corporeal remains of the Buddha in Rajgirah, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Vethadipa Pava, and Kusinagar in addition to those built by the Brahman Drone and Maurya of Pipalavana. Sacrificed pots, holy trees, and the like were first worshiped. King Asoka is said to have erected 84000 stupas, Chinese travellers from the seventh century onwards have recorded in their travelogues about the umteen stupas and chaityas and viharas in Kashmir which are now in rubbish dust only a few of them are visible but they too are in ruins.

Keywords: Buddhism, history, architecture, monuments

Introduction

The Buddhist sources preserved in every tradition i.e. of Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan Unanimously states Kashmir as an eminent center of Buddhism. The history of Buddhism in Kashmir starts with the third Buddhist council when Arya Mjjhantika who was also a disciple of Ananda was dispatched there as a religious missionary who is supposed to propagate the Buddhist faith in the region. Another major event that happened there was the fourth Buddhist council in which Sanskrit was used for the first time in the history of the religion as a language in which the interpretations made on the texts i.e. Mahabhasya and compiled. The unsurpassed classic of Milindpanho is yet again a major example of strong Buddhist influence in Kashmir around c. 1st to 3rd century C.E. The accounts of Chinese travellers became a major source of inspiration for the Buddhist archaeological findings in the Himalayan state.

The Buddhist importance of Kashmir can also be assessed from the Chinese historical chronicles in which many eminent monks from Kashmir travelled to China and played a significantly important role in the course of Buddhism being an established religion in our eastern neighbouring country. The many Buddhist remains of Jammu and Kashmir are the main concern of this study.

Amritabhavana vihara

Amritaprabha was a princess of Pragjyotishpur the ancient name of Assam. She was the daughter of the king of Pragjyotishpur Raja Balavarman. Meghavahana, a prince from the Gonanda dynasty of Kashmir, attended her swayamvara ceremony, where she chose him as her husband ^[1]. The swayamavara of Megavahavana and Amritaprabha finds description in several historical records including Rajatarangani. The queen built a loft vihara in Kashmir for the benefit of foreign monks, this vihara is known as "Amritabhavan". Ou Kong Chinese traveller mention it as Ngo-mi-to-po-wan transcribed as amitabhavan. This vihara is in flourishing condition during the visit of Ou Kong. This vihara has been identified at Antabhavan Vichara Nag to the north of Srinagar. Remains of a vihara have been found at this place ^[2].

Harwana

Harwana was a small village located 3km from the Shalimar garden and 21km from the Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir, it is a well-known historical place and many remains of the past have been found there during excavations.

Corresponding Author:

Pervaiz Ahmed Jaral

Ph.D., Department of
Buddhist Studies, Nava
Nalanda Mahavihara,
Nalanda, Bihar, India

The specialty of Harwana monuments is that the Harwana is the only site in India that represents the ancient features of the mysterious people of Kashmir.

A large number of the broken fingers and toes of terracotta figures and terracotta curls of the Buddha image are found at the excavated site. The terracotta objects found at the sites depict the high influences of the Gandhara school art in the Kashmir valley. The bodily limbs of Lord Buddha and bodhisattva in terracotta and their art besides the isolated plague represent the replica of the miniature stupa. The depiction of the stupa on the terracotta rubble style. Among the buildings constructed in this style are a triple base of a medium-sized stupa and a set of rooms that might have served as a chapel or for residence purposes. The stupa was built in the centre in a rectangular shape facing north. In this piece of evidence, it was inferred that the diaper rubble stupa could not possible earlier than the 5th century A.D. [3]

Krtyasramvihara

Jaluka was the successor of King Asoka, He was a staunch follower of Shaivism. He built Shiva temple and Buddhist Viharas. The most famous was Krtyasrama vihara. it was identified with the village Kishtom near Baramulla, Ou Kong Chinese traveler mentioned this vihara as Kiteche. Rajatarangni narrates the story behind the establishment of the vihara "Once upon a time when the king was proceeding to Vijayesvara, a woman whom he met midway on the road begged food for him when he had promised to give her such food as she should desire she changed her from and disclosed a desire for human flesh. when he who had renounced the killings of living beings gave her permission to please herself with flesh from his own body she thus addressed him, O king you must be a Bodhisattva, whose observance of vows is supported by absolute goodness (sattva) since you show open-minded one such deep compassion with living creatures, then the king who is the worshipper of the Siva did not understand the Bauddhas way of expression asked her O fair one who is bodhisattva from whom you know me. Again she spoke to the king listen to my case I have been sent forth by the Bauddhas whom in your anger you have injured. We witches (krtyakah) living by the side of Mount Lakaloka which divides light and darkness, belong to darkness sin. Putting our whole trust in the bodhisattvas we long for liberation from the darkness, knowing that the bodhisattvas are certain beings who since the coming of the blessed lord of the worlds (Buddha) have freed themselves in this world from the five afflictions.

They being bent on supporting all beings do not feel anger even towards the sinner but in patience render him kindness and are bound to bring about their own final enlightenment (Bodhi), when you had lately kept from sleep by the noise of the music of a vihara you had at the instigation of a wicked person caused in your anger the destruction of the vihara. The excited buddhas thought of me and sent me forth to kill you. But then the bodhisattva called me and gave me the following direction, the king is great Sakya (Mahasakya) you cannot hurt him but in his presence O good one you will obtain liberation from darkness (sin). In our name, you shall exhort him who has been led into guilt by wicked people to give up his hoarded gold and build a vihara. If he does so no misfortune shall befall him in consequence of the destruction of vihara and atonement shall thus be made for him and his instigators. Therefore I

have tested in that former disguise your abundant goodness, today I have been freed from sin Farwell I depart. After she had made the king promise to build a vihara the divine Sorceress (krtya) disappeared with eyes beaming with joy. Thereupon the king built the Krtyasrama vihara and worshipped there the divine sorceress who had been freed from the darkness [4].

Jayendra vihara

Several viharas or Buddhist Monastic institutions were founded by eclectic rulers of Kashmir from time to time and their number must have been pretty large at the time when Buddhism enjoyed considerable popularity in the valley. Unfortunately, all these are now in ruins including the extant remains of a chapel, corridors, and cell courtyard bears an eloquent testimony to the great literary and educational activity that was once going on there. Buddhist viharas like Uskhar, Parishaspur, Harwan, and Jayendra Vihar all are most famous in a different field, the monastery at Parihasapur modern paraspor famous for the colossal image of Buddha was built by King Lalit Aditya of Kashmir also contains a separate cell for priest, Harwan called as Shardarhadavan which ancient seat of learning. One of Kashmir's most significant urban learning institutions, Jayendra Vihara was well-known both inside and outside of India. Numerous academics from Tibet, China, and Central Asia arrived here; two well-known figures among them are Hiuen Tsang and Kumarjiva.

In the seventh century CE, Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, adventurer, and translator, travelled to India. He had a desire to amass Buddhist texts and understand more about Buddhism. He studied and worked as a teacher at the renowned Jayendra Vihar monastery in Kashmir for two years. Here, he received assistance from a few monks from Kashmir in performing an offering and having spiritual talks. In this vihara, he studied various Buddhist texts including works of Acharya Nagarjuna from venerable monks aged seventy, the most learned teacher explained to him all the difficult passages in sacred texts. It did have a big library and the king provided twenty assistants to help the Hiuen Tsang in copying the Buddhist scripture, five other men were his attendants. Jayendra Vihara was a famous Buddhist monastery in Kashmir, where many scholars and pilgrims came to study and practice Mahayana Buddhism [5].

Dharmanaranyavihara

Maruyan king Asoka has a great relationship with Kashmir. He founded the city of Srinagar with not less than ninety-six lakhs of beautiful houses. Who sent a Buddhist monk (Majjhantika) to Kashmir to introduce Buddhism in Kashmir King Asoka built 84000 stupas including in Kashmir also. King Asoka built a vihar known as Dharamaranyavihara near the source of Jhelum was so loft that eyes could not see the extent of his height. Some ancient relics are found at varying springs, besides this he also built a vihara at Huklitar (Budgam) where a few statues of Buddha were found [6].

Parishaspur Rajavihar

The forgotten Buddhist capital of Parishpur was built by Lalitaditya Muktapida (695–731) of the Karkota dynasty. He moved his capital from Srinagar to Parihaspur. Now only ruins in the form of large boulders, some ornately

carved, and in situ carved footings are left of the old city, and the place is commonly known as "Kani Shahar" (City of Stones) to local residents.

Parihaspura is situated approximately 25 kilometers from Srinagar^[7]. The plateau is dotted with mounds of ruins, some of which were excavated in the 1980s. These sites share large limestone blocks for their construction, smooth dressing, and well-joined joints as common architectural elements. We must travel the Srinagar–Baramulla Highway and a connection road that is connected to the Parihaspura archaeological site in order to get to Parihaspura. The location is completely enclosed by wires and fences on all sides. The ruins of Chaitya Hall are visible when we enter through the main gate on the left. The remnants of Vihara can be seen on the left side, following Chaitya once more. Far away, directly across from the entrance, is a massive stupa with steps. The stupa is so large that it takes minutes to complete a circuit on the circumambulation route.

Parishaspur vihara

The Rajavihara, also known as the royal monastery, is a big square building situated south of the stupa. It is a cellular quadrangle with 26 round cells and a porch supported by columns that front an open rectangular courtyard (also known as the chatuhsala design). The courtyard was originally paved with flagstones, some of which are still in place

Cankunavihara

Lalituditya Muktapida of the Karkota dynasty rose to power in (724 -761) CE. He was the fifth ruler of the Karkota Dynasty who ascended the throne after Tarapida. Lalituditya was the greatest king among the Karkota rulers, who lifted the country of Kashmir to the pinnacle of fame. Lalituditya faced many challenges immediately upon ascending the throne of Kashmir. Around this time, the Arab invaders from the West had started pushing towards Asia and had occupied the provinces of Swat, Multan, Peshawar, and the kingdom of Sindh to the South Lalituditya faced many challenges immediately upon ascending the throne of Kashmir. Around this time, the Arab invaders from the West had started pushing towards Asia and had occupied the provinces of Swat, Multan, Peshawar, and the kingdom of Sindh to the South. Mohamad Bin Qasim, the Arab General who had captured Sindh in 712 CE, was now eyeing the Kingdom of Kashmir and through it, he intended to expand his territories to Central Asia The Lalit Aditya believed in Vaishnavism and constructed several Vishnu shrines in their dominions-and also allowed Buddhism to flourish under his reign. Stupa, Chaitya, and Vihara can be found in the ruins of his capital city.

During the period of Lalit Aditya period, Cankuna built a vihara in which he placed a golden statue of Buddha. Cankuna was a Turkish minister in the court of King Lalituditya According to Kalhana, Lalituditya brought Chankuna to Kashmir from the Tuhkhara land (Tokharistan)^[8]. "Chankuna" is believed to be a Sanskrit transcription of the Chinese title *jiangjun* ("military general"). Goetz considered the Tokharian origin of Lalituditya's minister Chankuna (Çankuna) as evidence of the Kashmiri hegemony over the Turkic kingdoms. According to Kalhana, Lalituditya brought Chankuna to Kashmir from the Tuhkhara land (Tokharistan). In Kalhana's words: "The Tuhkara Cankuna, the founder of the Cankuna Vihara,

founded a Stupa, lofty like the king's mind as well as gold images of the Jñānas. 16 Cankuna vihara with monastery mentioned by Ou Kong as le monaster du general (tsiang kuin Senapati this vihara was built by him in Srinagar.

Pandrethan

Pandrethan, located three miles southeast of Srinagar on the Jhelum River, symbolizes the ancient capital Puranadhistan, which is thought to have been established by Asoka under the name Srinagar.^[9]

Excavation at these vague ruins found two severely crumbling stone stupas in addition to a debris enclosure that was likely the monastery's remnants. The compound walls encompass both of these stupas.

We found standing Buddha Padmani, seated Bodhistavas, lokashvaras, and other Buddha images from Pandrethan, among other Buddhist sculptures that exhibit grace and elegance. S.L. Shahi claims that these pictures demonstrate both the Hellenistic art of Gandhara and the imperial art of the Guptas.

Ahan

This is one of the other significant Buddhist sites in Kashmir, located beside the Ahansar River. When some locals inadvertently uncovered terracotta tiles at the site, famous historian Prof. Fida Mohammad Hassnain was the first to pinpoint the site. In 1962, he discovered a crumbling stupa, some pebble-style walls, and a pavement embellished with terracotta tiles that bore a resemblance to those located in Harwan. Situated in the rice fields on the eastern end of the village, the archaeological site is surrounded by apple orchards. On the eastern edge of the site lies a mound known as Ahan Baal^[10].

SkandBhavana vihara

A little to the north of the sixth bridge lies the mollaha known as by named SkandBhavana, a foundation of Skandagupta whom Kalhan mentioned among the ministers Pravarasena II, a successor of Yudhisthira. The sites of the vihara have been traced in the close vicinity of Ziarat of Pir Mohammad Basur. Certain ancient remains there were locally known and worshipped till the middle of the present century as a tirtha scared to Skanda.Rajatarangni mentioned it as vihara built by skandagupta^[11].

Conclusion

It was because of these thriving Buddhist centers that scholars came to the valley to study the Buddhist texts first-hand. Asanga, Vasubandhu, Kumarajiva, Buddhahadra, and Dharmakshema are among the scholars who have visited Kashmir at various points in history. In addition to studying and teaching in the valley, these academics promoted Buddhism throughout China, Tibet, and Central Asia.

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