

## Kashmir Buddhism: Is It Still Prevailing in Ladhakh?

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Kashmir was once beautiful as well as peaceful but now it's only beautiful where its natural beauty can strike everyone's eyes just after one glance. The beauty of the valley is still prevalent but the political and social situation has compelled tourist and foreigners to withdraw their heart to visit the valley. I attempted to deal with the scenario of the Kashmir before the Mughal period largely focus on how Buddhism faced different waves of rising and fall till the advent of Mughal rulers and also the opposition faced from Nagas and Brahmins of Kashmir. It is very much evident that Buddhism does not survive in Kashmir also it is equally difficult to justify the paper about the growth of Buddhism in Kashmir. The influence of Kashmir was very marked especially in the task of the spread of Buddhism outside India (Hassnain 1973). Many authors have even mentioned that Buddhism existed in Kashmir even before the reign of Ashoka of Mauryan period. Let me try to deal with them periodically.

(Dutt 1876) in his translation work of Kahlana's historic work of 'Rajatarangini' mentioned that the Twelve thousand works on the history of kings were compiled by the great ascetic Helr&ja. No mention is made of fifty-two kings on account of their irreligion. Kahlana writes, "from Ashoka to Abhimanyu five kings have been named out of fifty-two." These fifty-two kings, whose histories have not been written because of their evil works, were contemporaneous with the Kauravas and the Kaunteyas of the "Kali Tuga". Kahlana further wrote Buddhism was prevalent in Kashmir at the time of the native King Surrendra who ruled sometime after the Gautama Buddha but before Ashoka. Starting from Gondana I, who ruled about 1260 B.C and defeated in the battle over Mathura invasion and his son Damodara I tried to bring back the glory but again defeated. Ganhar acknowledges that "since Kashmir had intimate relations with Magadha in Mid-India from remote antiquity it is reasonable to assume that a number of Buddhist monks had found their way into Kashmir long before the arrival of Ashoka and his missionaries and had succeeded in establishing Buddhism as one of the living faith in the

valley". After Gondana I, Surender was the first Buddhist ruler of Kashmir, who erected the first Vihara in Kashmir. (Ganhar 1956) acknowledges that at any rate, Surrendra was the first royal patron of the new faith in the valley and his ways of life was wondrous and he "kept himself from sinfulness" as mentioned by historian Kalhana.

Afterwards, Buddhism and Shaivism both flourished side by side in Kashmir during Ashoka's periods and received the royal patronage in equal measure. Kalhana recorded Ashoka built two Shiva temples at the shrine of Vijayeshvara and in Vitastatra (Vethavutur) and Shuslaetra (Hukhalitar) and he built a number of Viharas and Stupas. (Khosla 1972) notes that Buddhism had become popular in the 3rd century B.C due to Ashoka's efforts and gained great importance in the days of Kanishka who convened a Buddhist Council in the valley. Ashoka also deputed Madhyantika<sup>1</sup> for the propagation of Buddhism in Kashmir and Gandhara, who brought many Bikhsus for settlement in Kashmir and remained in the valley for nearly 20 years. Buddhist monks living in Kashmir have been specially invited by the Buddhist Council at Patliputra called by Ashoka to reconcile all the monks of the different school of thoughts of Buddhism. Although missionaries of Ashoka has been deputed monks not only to Kashmir but also Turkistan, China, Tibet and reached Ladakh. Buddhism suffered temporary eclipse during the reign of Ashoka's successors Jaloka and Damodara. (Khosla 1972) Jaloka was not favourable to Buddhism in the beginning and later his attitude was modified at request of Kritya and built one Vihara called 'Kriyasrama'<sup>2</sup>. Kalhana in 'Rajatarangini' stated that a large number of Buddhist scholars were vanquished in debates with Jaloka's guru Avadhuta, and hence traditional observances were slowly revived. With the coming of Kushana, Buddhism started to boom again, as Ganhar states it witnessed a great resurgence of Buddhism during their time and the 4th Buddhist Council<sup>3</sup> in Kashmir was convened by Kanishka but it is difficult to locate the correct place of the Council being held due to the different position of the historians. But certainly, the Buddhist council

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<sup>1</sup> Madhyantika was a Buddhist monk of Varanasi (Banaras) who is credited in the Buddhist text with the performance of a number of miracles in Kashmir.

<sup>2</sup> In Rajatarangi text I, 131, once Jaloka was going to Vijayeshvara temple and met a women called Kritya who assumed a witch shape and asked for human flesh and he offered his flesh. Then she refereed Jaloka as bodhisattvas' and a great Buddha. So she requested Jaloka to build a Buddhist Vihara at the very place of their meeting to atone for his sin of persecuting Buddhist.

<sup>3</sup> The council was sat for six months where all teachings and welcomed commentaries on Vinaya, Abhidharma, and Sutras. Tibetan text adds that council was attended by five hundred Arhats, five hundred Bodhisattvas, and five hundred Pandits.

made Kashmir a significant centre for learning of Buddhism. 'Rajatarangini' author does not have any mention about this council otherwise the location of the Council could possibly settle down. There was possibility of Arya Nagarjuna present in the council along with leading Arhats like Vasumitra, Ashvagosha, and Parshva as noted by (Ganhara 1956) .Arya Nagarjuna was one living scholar in Kashmir at the time of Hushka, Jushka, Kanishka and their successor Abhimanyu, a great Buddhist philosopher dwelt at Shadarhadvana<sup>4</sup>.

Again, the downfall of Buddhism happened during the reign of Abhimanyu where he gave royal patronage to Shaivism. (Khosla 1972), the Nagas tradition seemed to have ended by Nagarjuna's effort which enraged the Nagas and brought destruction to Buddhism and recover their lost tradition and faith. Then Buddhism received a great setback during the era of King Nara (Khosla 1972) where he burnt thousands of Viharas and confiscated Buddhist lands. On the same note the King Mihirukula who was a strong prosecutor of Buddhism who brought down Buddhist monasteries and massacred Buddhist monks. Kalhana describes him as 'enemy of mankind, with no pity for children or compassion for women or respect for the aged'. King Mihirukula who was a great enemy of Buddhism, therefore Kalhana for his atrocities says, he was like Yama, God of Death.

Later, Kashmir was ruled by Buddhist favoured kings like Meghavahana and have a soft corner for even animals and had always practiced non-violence as Kalhana noted he prohibited the slaughter of animals even in the sacrifices. Then Buddhism continued to survive during Pravarasena II till Ksemgupta (950-958). Kholsa states King Ksemgupta was great Shiva worshipper and he destroyed Buddha's image and used stones of Jayendra Vihara to built Shiva temple. Later under Lohara I Dynasty, Buddhism degenerated and lost royal patronage. The internal cause of the decline of Buddhism was lack of moral discipline in the Sangha during 6th century A.D and become less attracted to the people. Whereas under Lohara II dynasty Buddhism was again revived where King Uccala and his queen named Navamatha built many Viharas and were quite dedicated.

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<sup>4</sup> Ganhar p.36 - Shadarhadvana means 'the grove of six Arhats' (today's village Harwan) situated two miles from Shalimar garden on the Dal Lake.

Kashmir has been the birthplace of many Buddhist scholars among whom the eight main scholars of famous Buddhist Vihara, Vikramashila, was Smrityakara Siddha, who was Kashmiri. The Madhyamika, ' Satyashidi ' and Nirvana forms of Buddhism in China was taught by Kashmiri Pt. Kumar Vijaya. Kashmir was also one of such place where Buddhist monks accept the challenges and hardship to maintain the doctrine alive and risked their lives to carry to neighbors nation like China, Tibet, and Central Asia. There is a long list of Kashmiri scholars who were connected with Buddhism like Jayanta Bhatta, Vamana Bhatta, Damodaragupta, Vasugupta, Bhatta Kalata, Kayyata, Abhinavagupta, Kalhana, and Yogaraja. Kashmir contribution to Buddhism in Tibet also acts as an eye opener about the Kashmir pundits teachers at Vikramashila University who were occasionally invited by King of Tibet Thrisong Gampo till the advent of the Muslim rule in Kashmir.

Lastly, the due advent of Islam, with its political dominance became the powerful cause for the fall of Buddhism and was never revived. (Khosla 1972) notes that Shah Mirza was the first Muslim King of Kashmir in 1339 A.D and his later rulers who never showed any sympathy towards Buddhism and (Dutt 1876) King Haider Shah (1470-72 A.D) is remembered with horror in Kashmir where he cut the Arms and noses of Ajara, Amara Buddha.

The emigration of monks in Ladakh also happened after the destruction of the Nalanda University in Bihar due to which the Kashmir Buddhist lost their ground of authentication. Then the monks went by spreading in the northern Himalayas where they propagated and started teaching Buddhist texts. Buddhism does not live longer in Kashmir valley. Kashmir Buddhism travelled into Ladakh where it still continues to profess and practice by half of the population. (Ganhar & Ganhar,1956). Ladakh is located in the northwestern part of India between Kashmir in the west and Tibet on the east. Ladakh Kings was timely guided by the great monks of Kashmir like Lama Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo and Lama Gistan Gompo and Acharya Atisha, who helped the Kings to lay people faith grounded at their hearts. Lama Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo (985-1055) the famous Kashmir Buddhist monk settled in Ladakh and played a major role during his time for reviving Buddhism in India. In Ladakh, he went to Zangskar where he built Karsha monastery than other monasteries at Sumda, Piling, Alchi and Mangyu monastery. The Alchi monastery has played an important role in displaying the hardship of Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo in constructing and bringing the Kashmir Arts and murals. Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo who may have

inspired the two wealthy members of the Dro- family to built the Alchi Monastery (Pal 1983). As from the biography of the Rinchen Zangpo, he brought several artists from Kashmir and brought manuscripts and bronzes all the way from Kashmir to western Tibet (Pal 1983), including the 'Sumstek' and 'Dukhang' are in Kashmir style. Although, the paintings have been facing serious damage due to continues flash used by the photographers instead of having the board 'No flash or No cameras'. The murals of the Buddhist monasteries of the western Himalayans, including Alchi are the only means of learning about the school of Kashmir paintings (Pal 1983). The last year 2016, my visit to Alchi monastery has able me to share some images of this historic monastery.



*Figure 1: Image of Great Translator Lama Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo*

*Figure 2: Image of outside Dukhang where photography is prohibited inside (Alchi monastery)*

*Figure 3: Lotsava Dhukang (Alchi Monastery) named after Lama Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo.*

The Kings of Ladakh is an old branch of the Tibetan royal dynasty which marched to Ladakh after 1000 A.D called 'Lha Chen' then the 'Namgail' dynasty. Both successfully built all the present famous monasteries, Viharas, palace, castle and Buddhist scriptures. Over the centuries, the Kings of Ladakh established themselves as protectors of Buddhism and as a ritual guarantors' of security and prosperity (Ribbach 1886, Schwieger 1997). On the similar ground, Luciano (1977) acknowledges that the priest-patron relationship of Kings of Ladakh with the monks from Bhutan, Tibet, and Kashmir resulted in the existence of all forms Buddhist sects but did not let to complete ascendance of authority by one sect in Ladakh. Ladakh King was called the descendant of Nya Khri Tsanpo who was the first king of Tibet from 200 or 300 B.C whose ancestor was from central Tibet dynasty called 'Langdarma' who is called the 'Julian the Apostate of Buddhism' (Petech 1977). His great-grandson was King Lha Chen Ngorub (1300-1325) who use novices going to Central Tibet then Lhasa becomes the epicenter for learning of Buddhist philosophy replacing Kashmir. The unharmed base of Buddhism was hampered when Ali Mir (vassal king) attacked and burned Buddhist religion texts during the era of King

Jamyang Namgail major ruins are Nyizlapung monastery at Saspol, Kaoche monastery at Spituk and Lingshed castle and many other small monasteries. Historians (Francke 1937) (Petech 1977) noted that the King Singye Namgail (1590-1620) invited Lama Stag-Tsang-Ras Pa to Ladakh and they together created an awesome landmark and contributed for the construction of Hemis, Chemdey, Tashigong and Hanle monastery along with it Leh castle, Maitreya monastery at Basgo. Another setback was witnessed at the time of the king Delex Namgail (1640-1680) who asked for military help from Kashmir province of Mughal when threaten for war from Tibet- Mongol. In return, Delex Namgail have to accept his new name Akabal Mohammed Khan and he was compelled to build a mosque in Leh city and carried settlement of Balistan at Chushod village as well as the business of raw wool to be exported from Ladakh to Kashmir for the making of carpet which is still alive to present date.

(Pirie 2006) the kings established a small endogamous upper class whose members acted as their Political administration and they were given responsibility for collecting taxes from the villages and mobilizing the population for war, but their main duties were to support the administration of the king's household, lands, and armies. Later In 1843, the Ladakhi kingdom submitted to the power of Dogras, then rulers of Kashmir and the region was incorporated into the British Empire in 1846. Today, three lamaist sects play a major role in chronological order we have Drigung Pa School (Red Hat), Gelugs-Pa School (Yellow Hat), Druk-pa School (Subset of Dri-gun). Nyingma-pa and Sakya-pa sect exist in small number and has ever exerted any political influences (Franke, 1937). Presently, there are more than 36 major monasteries in Ladakh and most of them are affiliated to specific sects. Pieper (1997) highlighted the power and the position of the yellow hat monastery with its monastic hierarchy. Monasteries in Ladakh were equipped with special privilege, which secures for them the actual rule over the land. The monastic estates continue to grow so the influence of the monasteries on people is equal. The Red hat monasteries along with Yellow Hat monasteries hold the key for a large number of community facts. Ladakhis are under the sway of the monks of the monasteries who acts as their guide, teacher, liberators, advisors or philosophers

After becoming part of India, the young head of Lama Known as Khushok Bakula Rimpoche was selected up by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India in July 1949 for political leadership in Ladakh. Khushok Bakula saved the ancient monasteries which were



targeted by Kashmir government through Big Estates Abolition Act. According to (Kaul & Kaul 1992:189), he saved all the monasteries, the soul of Buddhist culture and religion by taking gracious help of P.M Nehru when Kashmir government did not care to listen. Inside Ladakh, the onset of the problem of a deep internal division has emerged in Ladakh society.(Smith,2009) acknowledges that the Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Ladakh which is articulated at the site of the body and geopolitical strategies impinge on the personal decision like marriages especially on women. Aengst (2013) also dealt with the relation between the politics, reproduction, fertility, and religion in Ladakh. The fertility behaviour of the Muslim and Buddhist women is shaped by religious interpretation, political mobilization, and cultural loyalty. So, fertility is no longer a women choice and counted on religion strength and warrants especially among Buddhist women to remain excluded from the national population policy of India as Buddhist population has been weakened. Also, the fact of Ladakh being 'Buddhist majority' is now slowly changing into a myth, as the weakening Buddhist population is witnessing which have a thin majority of 51% Buddhist and 49% Muslims in Leh District.

Lastly, one more recent point to add is that idea of modernity which is one of the most debated subjects of today's time. Buddhism seems not rigid to modernity and do not condemn outside forces of globalization. The globalized world has probably transformed Buddhism into a market economy and as Oerberg in 2016 acknowledges that in antique shops, Buddha images are used as decoration pots, frame, and t-shirt which shows lack of knowledge and respect for Buddhism. The rich cultural heritage of the monasteries draws the attention of western scholars studying Buddhism including photographers, archaeological scholars, and filmmakers. In Ladakh, Buddhist monasteries and Stupas plays a major role in pulling tourist same as weather and natural beauty. So, display of Buddhism is in trend in Ladakh which somehow indicate less emphasis on pure teachings of Buddhism. The statues and monasteries built by our ancient king have been the core of historical values. Each king within their own capabilities and time has proven to propagate Buddhism irrespective of the different sects. The essence and motive of the dynasty were to uphold Buddha Dharma be it in any form of the sect of Buddhism. The specific kings like Bum Lde, Singee Namgail, Jamyang Namgail and Deldan Namgail who dedicated their life more towards building more monasteries and hold close ties with the great lamas from other countries. Other kings like Tsetan Namagil or Tsepal Namgail gave up their luxurious and powerful title and choose a life of an ascetic. Today, thanks to their effort that somehow people

profess Buddhism and gained curiosity after visiting monasteries. The external force of uncontrollable visit by the tourists has made them busy in other factors of Buddhism while its significance has been understood by educated Buddhist and the monks relate the rituals and society morals functioning with the religious perspectives.

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