

The Realm of Buddhism across the Hindukush

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Abstract

Situated in the heart of Asia, the landscape of the Hindukush Mountain is a unique landscape of the world. It has incredible diversity, both physically and culturally. Geographically, it exists at the convergence of different geographical and cultural regions. In its present political configuration, this region is spread over Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Since the antiquity, it was geographical and cultural neighbourhood of Hindustan. Although living in different geographies both the regions have collective memories and shared experiences. Memories of the shared historical past reveals that the area encapsulated by mountains were everything but isolated. The contours of topography had porous boundaries, geographically and even culturally. Thus, the continuous space (physical and cultural) became a region of the contact and confluence. Even, the religions and ethnicities transcended natural boundaries. It recreated a distinct cultural geography of the region.

The expressions of the cultural contact and cultural influence are inscribed on the cultural landscapes of the region. It shares common historical memories. It represents a collective identity. Together with the history (or the memory of history) it presents different geography; cultural and historical geography.

Bamiyan Buddha was (is) the expressions of the shared past. It is uniquely real and uniquely authentic. Evidences of civilizational acquaintance of Hindustan with Afghanistan are abundant. It represents a cultural geography created by shared culture. This article attempts to transcend the geographical boundaries and recreate the cultural boundaries of the Buddhist cultural realm that was spread over the Hindukush region. It is an attempt to identify the expression of the cultural landscape of Hindukush and its cultural neighbourhoods.

Key Words; Buddhism, Hindukush, Bamiyan Buddha, Cultural Landscape, Cultural Neighbourhood, Diffusion of Buddhism,

Introduction;

The mountainous land beyond Indus valley has been known by many names, the Hindukush, Hindu Kush or Hindoo Koosh. There are various explanations of its precise meaning. One interpretation of Hindukush, Hindu Kush or Hindoo Koosh may be the mountains that challenge the aggressors due to its ruggedness and inaccessibility. The formidable land of Hindukush must have been reorganized for its difficult topographical resistance.

The name of the mountainous region probably existed since ages. Thousands of years ago the ancient Iranians called this range the 'upairisaena', the mountains high above in the sky. The name must have been based on the description of the landform. The origin of the name Hindukush is still uncertain.

The name of the remote highlands must have been based on the location of the mountain. Sanskrit documents refer to the Hindukush as Hind kshetra. The word kshetra may have degraded to Kash; that is synonym of frontier, therefore, the literal meaning if Hindukush or Hindu kush may be the frontier land of Hind. The mountain range of Hindukush is spread over Afghanistan parts of Pakistan. (the historical frontier of Hind) It is the Paropamisus of the Greeks which represents Indian Caucasus or Hindukush. The literal meaning of Hindukush may be Mountains of India or Mountains of the Indus. Obviously, these mountains were Indian Mountains for the people from beyond, who were of alien in origin. (Boleslaw Chwascinski, 1966)

The Hindukush was first recorded by the Arabian historian and geographer, Ibn Battuta. He traversed the region in 1333 A.D. Major James Rennell, the first Surveyor General of India, writing in 1793, refers to the range as the Hindoo Kho or Hindoo Kush; It is believed that the name derives from the Persian word the Hindukush. There is no doubt that Hindu meaning Indian and Kush or kuh meaning mountains (kuh the Persian word for mountain). (Boleslaw Chwascinski, 1966) One interpretation of Hindukush may be the mountains of Hindu (Hindustan).

From the Pamir the ranges splay out east and west; the Tian Shan, Kunlun, Karakorum and the Alai Hindukush respectively. (Spate, 1967) It abuts the northwest extension of the Himalayas. The Hindukush covers the mountainous regions of Afghanistan and north Pakistan (Di Cristofaro J, and others 2013) Similar to other mountain regions the Hindukush is a distinct geographical region. It is a geographical boundary that separates the Central Asian plains from the Indian subcontinent.

Different Geographies;

The whole landscape in the north of Sindhu (Indus) is mountainous. The regional topography is composed of the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram and the Himalayas. Close by are also other important mountain ranges such as the Kunlun, Tien San and Altai. All these mountains extend out of the Pamir Plateau.

The Hindu Kush consist of a series of mountains running roughly parallel to each other. These mountains are separated by deep rivers fed mostly by mountain glaciers. It is among the least known mountain systems of the world. But what is known, it is one of the most diverse physical and cultural landscapes in the world. The region has experiences and impressions of both continental as well as cultural collisions.

The Hindukush is a land of diversity. It has great physical and cultural diversity. Despite its diversity it has a strong identity i.e. the Hindukush. It is a living space and a region of interaction. It has witnessed the movement of nomads and international migration. And, it has witnessed the movement of traders, pilgrims and missionaries. It has witnessed the imperial conquests and periodic conflict. And, it has witnessed economic interactions and cultural exchange (or cultural borrowings). It has also witnessed the spread of religions.

Different Geographies; physical and cultural

Physical Geography

- It is an extremely mountainous landscape. The whole region consists of a series of ranges separated by mountain rivers.
- These mountain ranges were formidable but not inaccessible. The remote highlands had isolated valleys but not cut off from the rest of the world.
- Physically these mountains stand apart from lowlands. But, the forbidden and inaccessible areas with bleak and brown landscape have vibrant valleys.
- The dissected topography and divided political history of these mountain valleys have witnessed the collusion of continents and convergence of civilisations.

Cultural Geography

- It was a region on the 'crossroads of cultures' where the civilizations of the Near East, Central Asia, South Asia and China interacted over centuries. (Di Cristofaro J, and others 2013)
- The isolation of mountain valleys was broken by migrants, invaders, traders or missionaries.
- The region has witnessed many invasions. The region has hosted many civilizations.
- Since antiquity commerce and conquests shaped and reshaped the cultural geography of the isolated mountain valleys.
- This long history of contacts and conquest gave rise to some of the most important cultural treasures of the world heritage.

Hypothesis;

In general, the inaccessible mountains had permeable geographical boundaries and sifting political and cultural boundaries. This paper presents the cultural history of one such mountain landscape. It is Hindukush and the Buddhist cultural landscape of Hindukush.

The present research is based on the following hypothesis;

- The nearness (Proximity) to large cultural centre influenced the culture of the region. Buddhism developed due to cultural diffusion from neighbouring cultural centre (Gandhara).
- The smaller centres continued to prosper due to favoured location. These centres even benefited from their location on the ancient trade route.
- Cultural expansion of Gandhara led to rapid growth of new cultural centres in Greater Gandhara. It became one cultural realm i.e. Buddhist cultural realm.

Research Methodology;

The Buddhist culture centres of Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh are known from references in Indian literary sources and from the accounts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuan Zang. Using historical accounts of different historians and travel records of Chinese pilgrim, this paper examines the Buddhist cultural landscape of Hindukush. The present study will also review some of the available archaeological reports and then reinforce it on the cultural history of the region. The research method employed in this study is descriptive and analytical.

As history of a region cannot be understood without the knowledge of its geography. Therefore, the study of cultural and historical geography must precede the discussion on cultural history of the Hindukush region.

Again, since the significance of cultural history cannot be properly understood without referring to the contemporary political geography. Therefore, we must draw on the political geography and political history of the Hindukush region before reconstructing the cultural history and cultural geography of the period under review. (the period of existence of buddha in the Hindukush region)

Source or Evidences;

The travel accounts of Faxian and Xuan Zang present a sketch of the social, political, economic and religious conditions of the region. These sources provide reasonable information for the reconstruction of the political history and cultural geography of the region.

Research Findings;

This study explores different facets of the Buddhist culture centres of Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh. The findings reveal the unique characteristics of the cultural landscape of the Hindukush region. It also reveals the history and heritage of the Hindukush region. Thus, it provided a deeper understanding of the Buddhist cultural landscape of the Hindukush region.

Historical Geography and Cultural History;

The region owes its history to its geography. Due to its location, it was never a simple existence. Situated in the heart of Asia, the landscape of the Hindukush has remained at the

crossroads of civilizations. Geographically, it exists at the convergence of different geographical and cultural regions. It remained the land of conquest and conflict for thousands of years. Since the antiquity, it was geographical and cultural neighbourhood of Hindustan. It served as the frontier of India in the ancient past. Although living in different geographies both the regions have collective memories and shared experiences.

Memories of the shared historical past reveals that the Kapisa was an ancient cultural region. The first references to Kapisa appear in the writings of 5th century BC. in the writings of Indian scholar Panini. He refers it to the Kapisa kingdom. During the period of Buddha, Kapisa seems to have been part of a kingdom ruled by a Buddhist king.

The contours of topography had porous boundaries, geographically and even culturally. Thus, the continuous space (physical and cultural) became a region of the contact and confluence. Even, the religions and ethnicities transcended natural boundaries. The western influence reached the Hindukush region more than two thousand years ago. The region came under Persian (Iranian) influence in 550 BC. and remained so until 331 BC. The eastern satrapies of the Persian Empire consisted of Bactria/Balkh, Araeia/Herat, Arachosia /Kandahar, and Drangiana/Seistan. (Gil Stein, 2015)

Subsequently, in 328 BC. the army of Alexander crossed the Hindukush through the Khavak Pass to enter in to Gandhara. In 329 B.C., Alexander entered Kandahar, where he founded the Greek city Alexandria of Arachosia. The kingdom stretched from the Hindu Kush to Bamiyan in the north and Kandahar in the south west and Nagarahara in the east. At one point, Bagram was the capital of the kingdom.

Alexander brought Greek cultural influences to the region. It recreated a distinct cultural geography of the region. Shortly thereafter, the Mauryan Empire gained control over the lands west of Indus. The Magadha Empire under Asoka extended up to the foots of Hindukush. (Hemchanra Raychaudhary, 1923) During that period Mauryan Empire became one of the most important mediators between India and Central Asia. The assimilation of culture had started to evolve across the Hindukush since the period of Ashoka. He got edicts (proclamation) inscribed on the stone pillars and installed them throughout his kingdom. Buddhism entered in to the territories of Hindukush during the reign of Ashoka.

In the 4th - 2nd centuries B.C. the region became colonies of Alexander the Great, the Seleucid Empire, and the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms. (Gil Stein, 2015)

According to the Greek geographer Ptolemy Nagara was situated was situated midway between Kabura (Kabul) and the Indus. He has given reference of both the bearing and distance of Nagara. Nagarahara was drained by the nine rivers. (the name still signifies 'the nine rivers'). the name may also be Sanskrit derivation, Nau Vihara, 'the nine monasteries. it was a flourishing centre of Buddhism.

Nagarahara was drained by the nine rivers. (the name still signifies 'the nine rivers'). the name may also be Sanskrit derivation, Nau Vihara, 'the nine monasteries. It was a flourishing centre of Buddhism. The land was connected by the Jagdalak Pass on the west, the Khybar Pass on the east. It was referred as Na-kie Faxian. Xuan Zang refers it with the name Na-ki-lo-ho. Nagarahara was ruled by the king of Kapisa during the period of Xuan Zang.

The region witnessed many more invasions in the subsequent years. Thereafter, Kushana came in to this region. Kushans established an empire that existed for more than three centuries (60s–375 AD).

During the Kushan period the region across the Hindukush enjoyed the common cultural interactions. It affected cultural character of the Hindukush. During that period Merchants and monks travelled through Gandhara to Kapisi. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2006) Buddhist centres developed in Hadda and Bamiyan. (Romila Thapar, 2003) Buddhist monasteries and stupas even proliferated in the interiors of Afghanistan as well as Central Asia.

The Kushans however continued to rule in the Kabul valley up to the sixth century. In the sixth century the Kushans had to fight hard against the Huns. Finally, the region of Hindukush was occupied by the Huns. Their capital was Kabul. During all these centuries significant developments took place in the social, economic, religious and cultural history of the regions. Contrary to popular belief Huns were not aversive to Buddhism. The Buddhist cultural centres, monasteries and stupa flourished in Tokharistan and other areas during their rule. (Litvinsky, 1996) Together with the history (or the memory of history) it presents different geography; cultural and historical geography.

After Kushanas Turks came in to this region. During that period the centre of power shifted to Kabul. The Hindukush region came in contact with Islam in 870 AD. Arab rules gave way to the Persians, who controlled the area until it was conquered by the Turkic Ghaznavids in 998. Following Mahmud Ghaznavi, it again became the region of territorial conflict. Mongol led by Genghis Khan invaded this region in 1219. later in the 14th century Tamerlane incorporated it into his vast empire. Tamerlane was followed by Babur in 1526 AD. The empires came, remained there and disappeared but the Bamiyan Buddha remain there to witness all the changes.

The Existence of Buddhism in the Cultural Landscape of Hindukush;

The expressions of the cultural contact with India and its cultural influences are inscribed on the cultural landscapes of the Hindukush region. Both the regions share common historical memories. It represents a collective identity. It is the identity of the Buddhist cultural realm. It is uniquely real and uniquely authentic.

The landscape of Hindukush (a Muslim dominated region) had stupas and monasteries. This is a remarkable dichotomy but this is true. Buddha arrived in the valley of Bamiyan before the advent of Islam in the region.

Islam has a long history in the Hindukush region; but the Hindukush has an even longer history before the advent of Islam. The cultures of Hinduism along with Buddhism once stretched across the borders of the Hindukush during the ancient past. (Spate, 1967) Thus it has shared history and identity; together with ancient Hindustan.

Buddhist Cultural Landscape of Hindukush

Nagarahara;

Nagarahara was an important cultural centre of the Buddhist cultural landscape of Hindukush. Monasteries and stupas (stupas containing sacred relics) were scattered all over the region. there was a famous relic shrine of the Bowl of Buddha. The cave of Shadow of the Buddha was also of great cultural and religious significance. It was believed that Buddha left his shadow on the wall of the cave. It was enshrined in a cave in Nagarahara. In the early fifth century Faxian actually worshipped the figure of the Buddha in the cave of Nagarahara. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2002) Xuan Zang also visited the cave that contained the shadow of Buddha. (Chan Khoon San, 2002)

These shrines had high value for Buddhist pilgrims. During the fifth century Chinese pilgrims of travelled to Nagarahara to worship at the relic shrines of the Bowl of Buddha enshrined there.

The town of Hadda (Hilo) was located near the boundary between ancient Nagarahara and Gandhara. Buddhist monastery complex of Hadda had some of the earliest depictions of the Buddha. Hadda was also celebrated in history for its relic shrine. The location of the relic shrines in Hadda was also attested by Faxian. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2006)

Nagarahara had immediate cultural ties with Gandhara. It developed as were major sources of Buddhist sculptures. It was also an important centre of textual production. Sites around Hadda has yielded first century Gandhari Buddhist manuscripts. These were birch-bark scrolls.

Buddhist cultural enclaves at Bimaran, Chahar Bagh were other important cultural centres of Nagarahara.

During the 7th century AD. the influence of Buddhism in the region of Nagarahara and Hadda was on the decline. During the visit of Xuan Zang, there were many monasteries but few monks and the stupas were desolate and ruined. (Chan Khoon San, 2002)

Kapisa;

Kapisa was an old Kingdome. It was situated on the river Panjshir, a tributary of the Kabul river. geographically was located at the gateway to the Hindukush and Bamiyan. Since antiquity it had high economic (commercial) and cultural significance. It was under Indian influence but at the same time fully exposed to outside influences.

The word Kapisa or Kapisi is used to denote both a city and a country. It was drained by the northern tributaries of the Kabul river. (Hemchanra Raychaudhary, 1923) Historically Kapisa was a prosperous country. The city of Kapisa was the capital city of this area during the Kushana period. Gandhara has been one of the subject states of Kapisa during the of Xuan Zang.

Geographically it commanded the main routes between India and High Asia. It was a necessary transit place for travellers crossing the mountains. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2006) Due to its geographical location and economic prosperity it developed as a major centre for interregional trade.

Kapisa also benefited from the nearness to Gandhara. The cultural contact with India affected the socio cultural and religious life of Kapisa. It also affected the economic as well as political conditions of the region.

Kushana royal palace, which was located at Kapisa, also played a critical role in the expansion of Buddhist institutions in this region. There was also a relic shrine in Kapisa. The king of Kapisa and his ministers were also use to worship at the relic shrine. In the historical past Kapisa became a meeting places of Buddhist faith. According to Xuan Zang, it had one about hundred monasteries with six thousand monks. (Chan Khoon San, 2002) There were also some Hindu temples.

The archaeological remains of Buddhist stupas attest the existence of great Buddhist centre at Kapisa. Many Ivory sculptures have been found from the archaeological remains of Kapisa.

Bamiyan;

Bamiyan was situated in the greater Bamiyan Valley in central Afghanistan. The route to Bamiyan was 'the true highway of another time'. It connected the Amu Daraya region and Indus region. Better connectivity to the Bamiyan valley was provided by the Kara Kotal, Dandan Shikan, Ak Robot and Shibar passes across the Hindukush.

Bamiyan was a particularly important place for traders and other travellers. Perhaps the devotional need to make religious offerings before attempting or immediately after completing difficult journeys over dangerous mountain passes stimulated the growth of pilgrimage to Bamiyan. (Jason Neelis, 2011)

The colossal standing Buddhas and a Mahaparinirvana Buddha were remarkable landmarks of Bamiyan valley. (Litvinsky, 1996) The statues of Bamiyan Buddha were the classic representation of Gandhara art. It existed for fifteen hundred years. These statues were destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001. (Pierre Centlivres, 2008)

For Bamiyan it is said that 'Mountain is a Buddha and Buddha is a Mountain. Xuan Zang visited Bamiyan in 629 AD. According to Xuan Zang, [...] 'on the side of the mountain, there is a stone statue of the standing Buddha [...] when

merchants coming and going happen to witness visions of heavenly deities, ... they worship the deities to pray for blessedness'. (Josan Neelis, 2014, Mahmud ibn Wali, 2016)

The Buddhist cultural centre of Bamiyan existed since the beginning in the second or third century AD. The nodal position of Bamiyan within a network of routes across the Hindukush attracted patrons, pilgrims and merchants in large number.

Several thousand fragments of Buddhist manuscripts reported to have come from the area of Bamiyan. Although the great majority of these texts are written in Sanskrit and in various Brahmi scripts, there are some 250 fragments of palm-leaf manuscripts in Kharosthi script. (Richard Salomon, 2006)

The Buddhist manuscript fragments from Bamiyan demonstrates that both artistic and literary cultures existed there for several centuries. Buddhist activities at Bamiyan flourished till the middle of the sixth century AD.

Bactria;

Balkh was an ancient city. It was known to the ancient Greeks as Bactra. It was holy place to many; Zoroaster and Buddhists. (Arezou Azad, 2013)

It lay between the Hindukush and the Amu Daraya. It was a fertile region well provided with natural resources. It had control over the main routes from Gandhara to Central Asia. (Romila Thapar, 2003) Balkh was important centres of trade and commerce. The proverbial 'thousand cities of Bactria' referred to the hinterland and the heartland of Bactria by Strabo indicate that this region was known for its prosperity.

During the ancient period strong connection existed even between Bactria and the Kashmir valley. (Dominik Wujastyk, 2016) During late antiquity, merchants came with Buddhist monks. They came to Balkh with preaching of new religion. Probably due to its central position on trade routes, it was destined to play an important role in the spread of Buddhism.

The religion had royal patronage. The Bactrian royal family had founded many Buddhist sacred places. (Dominik Wujastyk, 2016) Thus, Balkh became a Buddhism centre of worship and learning. It was famous for its temples and monasteries. Later on, it became a global centre of Buddhism. The city of Naw Bahar, had a famous Buddhist temple and monastery. (Arezou Azad, 2013)

By the time the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang passed through Balkh the glory days of Buddhism were over. Even then a hundred Buddhist temples and monasteries testified to the continued vitality of Buddhism. By that time, the city had become part of the Sasanian empire. It was followed Arabs, Persians and Turkic rulers. Thus, the city and sacked more than once.

By the tenth century, Balkh became a centre of Islamic learning and Sufism. (Arezou Azad, 2013) Thus, all the glories and calamities go to the credit of Balkh.

after (Jason Neelis, 2011)

Value Assessment of the Cultural Centres of Hindukush;

Spatial Significance; All the cultural centres, Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh were located on important trade routes. They had good accessibility and connectivity. These centres were also connected to Jibin (Gandhara). Many Buddhist monks either came from China to the north western frontiers of India or travelled through this region on their overland journeys to Central Asia and China.

Cultural Significance; Stupas and monasteries were scattered all over the region. Cultural centres of Nagarahara, Hadda had important relic shrines. These shrines had high value for pilgrims. These centres were also important centres of learning and scholarship. Nagarahara was native land of the great Buddhist monk Buddha Bhadra. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2002) Nagarahara and Hadda had developed as the most important pilgrimage sites for practising Buddhists.

Economic Significance; All the cultural centres, Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh were also important trade centres since historical past. Kabul is situated in the heart of the Hindukush. For centuries it was an important entrepot on the Silk Road. Since ancient times trade played an important role in the cultural and religious exchanges between frontier land of India and the countries of Hindukush. Due to increase in commercial and cultural contact the religion gradually spread in to land of Hindukush.

Political Significance; All the cultural centres, Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh have also remained centre of political power at different period in the history. Buddhism had in general political patronage and support. According to Xuan Zang the kings of Kapisa and Balkh were devout followers of Buddhism. They used to offer donations to the shrines. The kings of Kapisa was also very fond of holding religious assemblies.

The Spread of Religion in the Hindukush region;

There were many factors working in combination to facilitate the spread of religion in the Hindukush region.

Accessibility and Connectivity; Numerous high passes (kotal) transect the mountains. These mountain passes formed important transit routes for merchants and monks. The most famous passes include the Khyber Pass and the Kotal e Lataband. Other passes include Kotal e Salang, Wakhjir, Baroghil, Kachin, Hajigak and Unai. These passes provided major routes carrying commercial trade and religious movements to the different parts of the region.

From Chinese Buddhist sources; such as the biographies of eminent monks and the narratives of pilgrims, there were two main routes for crossing the Hindukush and connecting Central Asia with India. One such route was located at the eastern end of the Hindukush and the other at the western fringe of the mountain. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2006) Along with merchants, monks travelled to countries and cities such as Bamiyan, Balkh and Sogdiana. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2006)

Role of Gandhara; The region may have remained insulated by state borders, it never remained strangers to the neighbours. Hindukush region was situated in the cultural neighbourhood of Gandhara. The cultural centres across the Hindukush was closely linked to neighbouring regions. Due to the influence of neighbourhood the Hindukush region also witnessed cultural change. Several diverse factors, like development of Gandhara, economic prosperity in Gandhara (Greater Gandhara) under the Kushana rule, flourishing international trade, royal patronage and support to the religion etc. led to the development of Buddhist cultural centres which gradually paved the way towards greater religious and cultural diffusion. It also affected the cultural landscape of the Hindukush region.

Trade Relations and cultural Contacts; The role of trade was really significant in the spread of religion. It led to the religious and cultural interaction between a vast geographical area. During the 2nd - 3rd centuries AD. the ancient cultural centres of Hindukush formed important node on the Silk Road trade route. It was linked the Roman empire and the Middle East, with India and Han Dynasty of China. During this period, Afghanistan was the route by which the Buddhist religion spread from India to China. (Gil Stein, 2015) The merchants and monks helped in diffusion of Buddhism in different areas of the Hindukush. The growth of trade and commerce brought prosperity in this region. With the support of merchants Buddhist monasteries proliferated in different part of the Hindukush.

Urbanisation and the Spread of Religion; The spread of Buddhist monasteries was intimately connected with the development of urban settlements along the trade routes. The distribution of monastic sites during the 1st to 3rd century AD. closely follows the trade routes and urban centres. Monastic sites of Hadda and Kapisi (Begram) were significant urban settlements situated on trade routes. The same, incidentally, is true for other cultural centres.

Buddhism started to spread in this part of the world from the 1st century AD. A close contact between Gandhara and areas (cultural centres of Hadda and Kapisi) helped the religion gradually to enter deeper into the isolated and remote territories. It also helped the religion to take strong roots in the landscape of the Hindukush.

Royal Patronage to Buddhism; Kingdome of Kushanas spread up to the Afghanistan and Central Asia. This unification as well as the commercial exchanges led to the cultural exchange throughout the region. The royal patronage to Buddhism was an important factor in the diffusion of Buddhism. Xuan Zang visited Bamiyan in 629 AD. As he describes, the royal city of Bamiyan was located on a precipitous cliff across the Bamiyan valleys. As described by

Xuan Zang the statue Buddha was located to the close to the royal city of Bamiyan. (Shoshin Kuwayama, 2002)

Decline of Trade and Loss to the Cultural Centres;

The eastern Hindukush route, connected Gandhara with Tokharistan to the northwest and the Tarim Basin to the northeast. This route flourished for several centuries and brought continuous prosperity to urban centres of the Hindukush region and its Buddhist activities. These sites even flourished during the period of Turkic domination of this region. The change in the political environment at the turn of the seventh century brought a radical change in the trade routes running through the Hindukush. Significance of Gandhara also declined by virtue of its negative effect. It also affected the urban centres of Tokharistan. Buddhism suffered most from loss of trade routes going through the region. Among the causes of the decline of Buddhism in this area may be the loss of royal patronage and decline of trade. No religion can prosper and remain alive without the active support and patronage of merchants and monarchs.

Conclusion;

The advent of buddha was an important landmark in the history of the regions. The present research gives an insight into the cultural history of the Hindukush and the geography of Buddhism.

The journey 'on another path' brought great cultural changes in the valleys of Hindukush. The expressions of the cultural contact with India and its cultural influences are inscribed on the cultural landscapes of the Hindukush region.

The Buddhist cultural realm of the ancient past transcended the geographical boundaries and recreated the cultural boundaries. The expression of this cultural realm was spread across the Hindukush region.

The spatial diffusion of Buddhism was the result of the neighbourhood effect of Gandhara. It was dependent on accessibility and connectivity across the mountainous terrain of the Hindukush. The accessibility and connectivity across the mountains led to the emergence of new cultural centres in Nagarahara, Hadda, Kapisi, Bamiyan and Balkh.

Buddhism flourished in this region and survived for long. In this long history, the religion got strongly rooted in landscape of Hindukush. Still the ruins of Bamiyan Buddha reveals the (same) shared history.

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