
Buddhism in Kashmir

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Since times immemorial, Buddhism is said to have played one of the most important roles in making, shaping, and directing Indian mind, culture, religion and civilization and its socio-economic life not only in few pockets but in the whole of the country. It is in this context the history of Buddhism in Kashmir is also not significantly different to its history in the rest of the country. Since it has very significantly influenced all the schools of Indian philosophy, Kashmir Shaivism could not remain uninfluenced. Though the history of Buddhism in Kashmiri is believed to be little known after downfall of Maurya dynasty yet it seemed to have been continuing in different walks of life. In fact it was through Kashmir that Buddhism spread to Ladakh and Tibet. Smrityakara Siddha, one of the eight main scholars of famous Buddhist Vihara, Vikramshila, was Kashmiri.

Even Chinese studies on different aspects of Buddhism are said to have recognized and believed that Madhyantik (Majhantik), disciple of famous Buddhist scholar Anand, introduced the forming and cultivation of world famous Kashmir saffron in the valley, thus giving birth to country side trade and commerce in Kashmir for such world known item. It is in this context, Buddhism, being a way of life and faith, has very long lasting roots in Kashmir pertaining to the evolution and growth of all its four schools of thought viz, Sarvastivada, Vijnanavada, Sautrantika and Madhyamika. Even on literary front, Buddhist logic of life figured to have shaped nature and design of several studies on Kashmir.

Post Mahanirvana period of Tathagata led to the emergence of various schools of thought of Buddhism, particularly originating from different interpretations of 'Vinaya' and 'Abhidharma', yet most of these theories do consider 'Moksha' to be the ultimate aim of life. Among all of these, Sarvastivada is seen as oldest, widely

accepted, and holiest philosophy of Buddhism. Different people have given different opinions as to who contributed to the origin and development of this concept of Buddhism. The various names quoted in this context are famous Tibetan scholar Rahul Bhadra, Uggupta of Mathura, and Madhyantik (Maghantik) of Kashmir. This philosophy might have been born in Tibet, Varanasi or Mathura but it was deeply rooted to Kashmir. 'Vaibhashika' – widely acclaimed as a detailed and authentic commentary of this philosophy is said to have been written in Kashmir only. So much so several famous Buddhist thinkers and followers found only Kashmir as a proper, safe and sustainably conducive palace to safeguard the original thinking of Sarvastivada and its growth. Its purest form i. e. the monumental creation viz. 'Vastvadi', 'Abhidharma's basic scripture supposedly in six volumes is said to have been completed only in Kashmir by Katyayani's son Vasubandhu. Even Ashvaghosh, famous Sanskrit poet of Saket (now popularly known as Ayodhya in UP) came to Kashmir on the invitation of Vasubandhu for preparing the literary work of 'Vibasha', known as '*Abhidharma Mahavtbbhashashastra*', which is believed to have been completed in ten lakh cantos within twelve years. Thus, there seems to be no exaggeration in saying that Kashmir is seen as birth place of many Buddhist scholars.

In fact strong foundation of Buddhism in Kashmir is said to have been laid by King Kanishka, particularly with the inspiration of Kashmiri King Sinha (Sudershana). Virtually Kanishka is seen in the history of Buddhism like great King Ashoka for strengthening this faith. For consolidating the fundamental Buddhist principles and getting a commentary of the same written in accordance with the 'Sarvastivadi' Buddhist thought, King Kanishka brought real breakthrough in the faith by organizing fourth (last) Buddhist council at Kundal Vanvihara under the chairmanship of Vasumitra and vice chairmanship of Ashvaghosha. For some of the people Kundal Vanvihara is present day Jullunder in Punjab and however for majority of the people it is Harwan in Kashmir. Maha Vibhasha Shastra (one of the three main treatise of Sarvastivadi), at present in existence in

China, is said to have been written in Kashmir during this time only. Moreover King Kanishka set up many Viharas and Stupas, besides raising the town of 'Kanishkapur', today known as 'Kanisapur' in Baramulla district. So much so King Kanishka donated Kashmir to 'Sangha'. However King Kanishka is also said to have been succeeded in Kashmir by two Buddhist Kings 'Hushaka' and 'Jushaka who are quite often quoted to have raised two cities viz. Hushakpura '(Ushkar' of Baramulla district of today) and 'Jushakpura' (now known as Zakura', a few kilometers away from Lal Chowk, Srinagar) respectively. Further 'Kushana' Kings were said to have been followed by Abhimaniyu. With the Nagarjuna's popular scholarship and preaching, Kashmir's Naga cult was completely washed away but 'Chandadeva' made tremendous efforts for the revival of Naga cult.

With the tremendous harassment and terrorism by Raja 'Nara' several Budhists including Nagarjuna ran away from Kashmir. Mihirkula (Mihirula), a terrorist king of Kashmir in sixth century A D, destroyed Budhist Viharas, Chaityas, Mathas etc. and killed Budhists mercilessly. However despite such a horrible terrorism in Kashmir against it Budhism continued. It will not be out of place to mention that famous Chinese traveler Huang Suang (631 - 633 A. D.) stayed as a state guest to study Budhist '*Sutras*', '*Sastras*' and '*Scriptures*'. So much so he was provided with all logistic support for the purpose by Raja Durlabhawardhana himself for such a job. Even the greatest Budhist scholars of that time considered Huang Suang as great Budhist scholar as per the principles and guidelines of Acharya Vasubandhu.

Though with the efforts of Jagatguru Shankaracharya, Budhism had almost disappeared from the entire country yet it got official support in Kashmir from King Lalitaditya Muktapeeda during seventh-eight century A D who used to treat and respect both Hindus and Budhists equally. However thereafter due to its inbuilt characteristics, Budhism in Kashmir started decaying. Kalhana is quoted to have mentioned that Raja Shankara Varmana's wife Sugandha was looked

after in Nishpalaka Vihara. However during 950-958 A D Maharaj Kshemgupta, a famous Shaivaite, brought down the Jaindera Vihara and with its material built a Shiva temple. Acharya Abhinavgupta, known as famous scholar of Indian literary criticism, made remarkable contribution to Kashmir Shaivism. Lohara dynasty did try to revive Buddhism in Kashmir. The literary writings of Kshemendra and Somadeva indicate as to how Buddhism in Kashmir gradually disappeared by the time of King Harshvardhan. Moreover Kalhan's history shows lot of positive efforts and respect for Buddhism. So much so, seeing the negative approach and hostile approach of Harshvardhana towards Buddhism, Kalhan called him 'Malech'.