

ISSN 0971-9318

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# HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

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(JOURNAL OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION)  
NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC, United Nations

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Vol. 21 No. 1

January-March 2017

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## CULTURAL HERITAGE

### CULTURAL HERITAGE OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

*Sunita Dwivedi*

### BAMIYAN BUDDHAS DEMOLITION: CHALLENGE TO WORLD HERITAGE

*K. Warikoo*

### SHRINES AND PILGRIMAGES OF KASHMIR

*K. Warikoo*

### RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL THOUGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT INDIA, CENTRAL ASIA AND IRAN

*Rano T. Urazova*

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## HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

**Editor : K. WARIKOO**

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<b>SUBSCRIPTION</b>			
<b>IN INDIA</b>			
Single Copy (Individual)	:	Rs.	500.00
Annual (Individual)	:	Rs.	1000.00
Institutions & Libraries (Annual)	:	Rs.	1400.00
<b>OVERSEAS (AIRMAIL)</b>			
Single Copy	:	US \$	30.00
		UK £	20.00
Annual (Individual)	:	US \$	60.00
		UK £	40.00
Institutions & Libraries (Annual)	:	US \$	100.00
		UK £	70.00

*Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*  
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is included and abstracted in *Worldwide Political Science*  
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**HIMALAYAN RESEARCH AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION,**  
*B-6/86, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi - 110029 (India)*

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Printed and published by Prof. K. Warikoo on behalf of the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, B-6/86, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110029. Distributed by Anamika Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd, 4697/3, 21-A, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002. Printed at Nagri Printers, Delhi-110032.

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**HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES** is a quarterly Journal published by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, which is a non-governmental, non-profit research, cultural and development facilitative organisation. The Journal is devoted to the study of various issues pertaining to the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan region in South and Central Asia or parts thereof, connected with its environment, resources, history, art and culture, language and literature, demography, social structures, communication, tourism, regional development, governance, human rights, geopolitics etc.

While the principal concern of the Journal is on its focal area, i.e., from Afghanistan to Myanmar including the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Himalayan States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and North East states; papers with a broad sweep addressing environmental, social, cultural, economic, geopolitical and human rights issues are also welcomed.

The objective is to make a scientific appraisal of the issues confronting the Himalayan and adjoining region in South and Central Asia or parts thereof, and to make specific policy oriented studies and need based recommendations as the means to promote the human, educational and economic advancement of the peoples of the region besides preserving and enriching their ethno-cultural, literary and historical heritage. Promotion of human rights, social justice, peace, harmony and national integration are the other key areas in which the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation has been active.

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## *Editor's Page*

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts such as buildings, monuments, books, manuscripts, works of art etc.; intangible heritage such as folklore, traditions, beliefs, oral history, language etc. and natural heritage including culturally significant landscapes and biodiversity. Cultures and civilizations can coexist in harmony and even complement each other, by building economic and cultural bridges. Culture and cultural heritage binds different peoples, communities, groups thus diluting the divisive factors based on religion, class, creed, language, region etc. Recurring incidents of systematic attacks on indigenous cultural heritage in various parts of Asia and Africa pose a grave threat to peace and security.

Over the past two decades, there have been organised attacks by the extremist militant groups like the Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban, Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Toiba and of late the Daesh and Islamic State to destroy the indigenous and composite cultural heritage, value system and way of life, which were retained with remarkable continuity through long history of over 2,000 years. Taking the case of Kashmir, the Islamist groups like *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* have focused on eliminating the traditional social and religious practices prevalent among the Kashmiri Muslims. These Islamist groups exhort the Kashmiri Muslims to banish such un-Islamic practices as visiting ancient holy shrines of Sufis and Rishis. The people of Srinagar even resisted the attempts by some militant groups to stop the celebration of annual *Urs* at Batmol Rishi.<sup>1</sup> Then followed the burning down of a part of Baba Rishi shrine near Tangmarg. In Aish Muqam, there was a bloody clash in which a few people got killed, when "militants tried to prevent the local villagers from celebrating the *Urs* of Baba Zainuddin Rishi".<sup>2</sup> And on May 11, 1995 the Islamist mercenaries from Aghanistan and Pakistan led by Mast Gul, destroyed the ancient holy shrine of Sheikh Nooruddin Rishi at Charar-e-Sharif, 35 kms. from Srinagar.<sup>3</sup> This shrine had been a centre of pilgrimage for millions of devotees both Hindus and Muslims, over the past six hundred years. In early July 1998 the terrorists made an abortive attempt to blow up the nearly 700 years old shrine of Naqshband Sahib in

Srinagar.<sup>4</sup> In June 2012, over 200 years old khanqah of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani, popularly known as Dastgeer Saheb was gutted in mysterious circumstances. Soon after in October 2012, some miscreants tried to set another Sufi shrine of Hazrat Baba Reshi in Dabrana village on fire.<sup>5</sup> Similarly *Hizbul Mujahideen* and other such militant groups in Kashmir have been holding out public threats against participation by Hindu pilgrims to the annual pilgrimage to the holy Amar Nath cave. They even resorted to mine blasts and firing upon the Hindu pilgrims on numerous occasions. Hindu temples have been destroyed or vandalized and their landed properties encroached upon. The Jammu and Kashmir government in its written reply to the State Assembly admitted that "of the 438 temples in the Valley, 208 had been damaged." However, Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti disputed the government figures and stated that around 550 temples were damaged and 50,000 kanals of land encroached upon.<sup>6</sup> Raising the issue of demolition of temples in Kashmir in Indian parliament in December 2015, Bhartruhari Mahtab, Member of Paliament of Biju Janata Dal (BJD) pointed out that at least 80 temples were missing now, as there were 436 temples in Kashmir before 1989.<sup>7</sup> These holy shrines and Hindu places of worship in Kashmir have been targeted by the Islamist terrorists and mercenaries in order to obliterate the indigenous ethno-cultural and spiritual heritage of Kashmir and the traditional ethos of religious tolerance, harmony and peaceful co-existence, and to usher in the fundamentalist and radical Islamic practices. Even the Valley's first all Muslim girls rock band was forced to stop performing, after a fatwa was issued against the three Kashmiri Muslim girls - Noma Nazir, Farah Deeba and Aneeka Khalid in early 2013, who went into hiding after receiving a threat of social boyciott from the militant women's outfit *Dukhtaran-e-Millat*.<sup>8</sup>

In early 2001, the Taliban rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread international condemnation, not only went ahead with the destruction of the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan, but even made a public demonstration of their savage acts. By destroying the rich and composite historical cultural heritage of Afghanistan, the Taliban sought to reaffirm Afghanistan's lead role as a puritan Islamist state in South and Central Asia and also to set an agenda for radical Islamist forces.

Inside Pakistan, the extremist militants bombed in early 2009, the famous shrine of 17<sup>th</sup> century Sufi Rehman Baba, the most widely read Pashto poet on both sides of the Durand Line. On 28 May 2010 two mosques belonging to the Ahmadi sect in Lahore were attacked killing 93

persons. At least 42 persons were killed and over 200 injured in blasts at the popular Data Darbar shrine in Lahore on 2 July 2010.<sup>9</sup> On 7 October 2010, two suicide bombers struck at the sufi shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi - the patron saint of Karachi on Thursday, when it was packed with thousands of devotees, killing at least 16 persons and wounding over 60 others. On 25 October 2010 shrine of Baba Farid Shakar Ganj, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi saint in Punjab was bombed, killing 6 persons and injuring scores of others. Two powerful blasts ripped through the shrine of 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi saint Ahmed Sultan, popularly known as Sakhi Sarwar in Dera Ghazi Khan district of Punjab province killing 41 persons on 3 April 2011, when thousands of devotees were attending the celebrations to mark the saint's anniversary.<sup>10</sup> The silent majority of traditional, moderate and liberal Muslims, who practice Islam in accordance with the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination, need to shun their silence and assert and organise themselves against the extremist Islamists. On their part, the governments and secular societies need to help in preserving, restoring and emphasising the indigenous, traditional and diverse Islamic practices and institutions, as have been prevalent in different parts of the world.

Ever since the Islamic State took control of Mosul and adjoining areas, home to thousands of archeological sites, it started the orgy of organised destruction of the rich and historical cultural heritage. The IS claims that "Whenever we take control of an area, we remove the symbols of polytheism and spread monotheism there". Hatra, 110 kms southeast of Mosul, founded in 300 BC, a Silk Route centre with Greek and Roman architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1985, was occupied by the IS in mid-2014, when it started demolishing the historic ruins. In February 2015, the IS blew up with explosives Mosul's nearly a century old Central Public Library, along with thousands of ancient manuscripts and books. In Mosul the IS vandalized the museum having 173 antiquities and also razed the tomb and mosque of Biblical prophet Jonah. In March 2015, IS bulldozed the ancient Assyrian city and its priceless artifacts (founded in 1250 BC) in Nineveh province, 30 kms south of Mosul.

In August 2015, Islamic State blew up three ancient funeral towers including that of Elahbel built 103 AD, in the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria. The militants also beheaded Khaled-al-Assad, the 82 year old archeologist and guardian of Palmyra's ancient heritage, after he refused to cooperate with the IS. Syrian antiquities chief Maamoun Abdul Karim informs that he had urged Khaled-al-Assad to leave Palmyra, but he had refused saying that "I am from Palmyra and I will stay here even if they

kill me".<sup>11</sup> UNESCO condemned the Islamic State's action as war crime, wiping out evidence of Syria's diverse cultural history.<sup>12</sup> A week later the IS destroyed about 2,000 years old temple of Baal and temple of Baalshamin, also in Palmyra, which were the source of pride for Syrians.<sup>13</sup> In another instance, they attacked the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC citadel of Assyrian king Sargon II at Khorasabad, 10 miles north-west of Mosul in Iraq. In this manner, the rich art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, a symbol of diversity of Syrian identity and history, has been destroyed in a determined bid to erase this great culture from our memory.

That heritage is the essential source of identity of peoples, the foundation and lifeblood of their communities and a source of development, is universally recognised. The legacy of shared values and cultural heritage provides a sound basis for sustaining harmonious relations among different countries. An awareness of a shared language, ethnicity, history, religion, and landscape represents the building blocks of culture which needs to be preserved and promoted to achieve enduring peace and harmony. Time has come for the international community to pay attention to the problem of destruction of the historical-cultural heritage, which is being done deliberately to obliterate the indigenous heritage and cultural basis of the identity and self-understanding of various peoples. Some concrete steps at local, national regional and international levels need to be taken for this purpose. UNESCO should take the lead in this regard:

- 1) Safeguarding world heritage and promoting cultural pluralism, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to promote understanding and peaceful co-existence.
- 2) Preserving and restoring all kinds of traditional and popular knowledge, languages, oral traditions, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture and monuments.
- 3) Developing appropriate legal standards to deal with such cultural crimes and to evolve mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring safety of world heritage sites.
- 4) Preparing a register of tangible cultural property in the form of monuments of art, architecture, history, shrines and religious places, archeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, libraries, museums, objects or buildings of artistic, historical, architectural and cultural importance.

**K. Warikoo**

## NOTES

1. Riyaz Punjabi, Charar-e-Sharif Tragedy : The Ideological Complicities. *Bulletin of Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation*, Spring 1996, pp.16-18.
2. *Ibid.*
3. A Pakistan mercenary, Abdul Rahman confirmed in an article in *Urdu Digest* of Lahore that the shrine of Charar-e-Sharif was destroyed by Pakistani mercenaries led by Mast Gul. Cited in *The Hindu* and *Indian Express*, 2 March 1998.
4. *The Hindu*, 12 July 1998.
5. Arson bid at shrine sparks J&K protests. *Indian Express* 13 October 2012.
6. Peerzada Ashiq, 208 temples damaged in Kashmir in last two decades. *Hindustan Times* 4 October 2012.
7. 80 Temples vanished in J&K since 2009, claims BJD MP. *Times of India* 12 December 2015.
8. M.Saleem Pandit, Fatwa against Kashmir's all-girl band. *Times of India* 4 February 2013. p 13.  
Ahmad Ali Fayaz, Rock band girls go into hiding after social boycott threat. *The Hindu* 5 February 2013. p 12.
9. Bloodbath at Sufi shrine in Lahore. *Times of India* 3 July 2010. p 20.
10. See Omar Farooq Khan, "Taliban strike Sufi shrine in Pak during festival", *Times of India*, 4 April 2011.
11. Khaled-al-Assad refused to lead the militants to hidden antiquities. *The Hindu* 20 August 2015. p 14.
12. Kinda Makieh, IS blows up tower tombs in Syria's Palmyra. *Indian Express* 5 September 2015. p 16.
13. Kenneth Rosen, IS damages Temple of Baal in Syria's Palmyra. *Indian Express* 1 September 2015. p 16.





## CULTURAL HERITAGE OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA\*

SUNITA DWIVEDI

As a modern traveller along international highways in the five republics of Central Asia, Afghanistan and countries of South Asia from Pakistan to Bangladesh, I have often wondered how and why the Buddha and Buddhist deities came on the art and cultural scene of this vast region. I have witnessed with amazement the artistic representation of the events in Buddha's life in these faraway lands. Representation of the Great Decease or the *Mahaparinirvana* of the Buddha at Kushinagar in India can be witnessed in the village of Krasnaya Rechka near Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, at Adjina Tepe on the Vakhsh river in Tajikistan, at Penjikent in Tajikistan.

How the first image of the 'Fasting Siddharth' at Bodhgaya took sculptural shape at a remote Sikri village in Mardan district of Pakistan; how the first stupa with the hair and nail relics of the Buddha was built at Balkh in Afghanistan during the life of the Buddha himself; how the 'Miracle of Sravasti' in India found expression in stone and stucco art of Afghanistan; the *Jataka* or stories of Buddha's previous life became an interesting theme in stucco and terracotta art of Turkmenistan; the Bodhisattva came alive in the land of Kuva, Varaksha and Dalverzintepe in Uzbekistan and at Tamgaly Tas near Almaty in Kazakhstan. Buddhist texts were found in the Pamirs, Tien Shan, the Oxus and Syr Darya; written on rocks along the Ili river and Kara gorges of Kazakhstan and in the Chuy Valley of Kyrgyzstan.

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\* This article is based on author's travels to various museums and cities of Central Asia and extracts from her book *Buddha in Central Asia- A Travelogue*, Delhi, Rupa 2014; *The Cities and Routes of the Great Silk Road* by Y.F. Buryakov, K.M. Baipakov, K.H. Tashbaeva, Y. Yakubov. Tashkent, Sharg, 1995. *Buddhism in Central Asia* by B.N. Puri, New Delhi, Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers, 2000.

In order to study the Buddhist heritage of Central Asia and South Asia it is necessary to explore some important highways that run through Central and South Asia binding the regions in a cultural cohesiveness dating back to over three thousand years. These metalled and modernised highways of present times that have evolved over the years were laid over ancient routes that acted as conduits not only for trade and technology but also for new ideas, art and scholarship, faith and religion.

According to historian- archaeologist T. Shirinov, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent in the III-II millennium BC were closer in 'trade and culture' than they are described by many contemporary researchers.<sup>1</sup> This was possible due to direct contact of populations of India and Central Asia as Indian goods were transported into the region of Central Asia through the north-west regions.

The fact that such highways were alive and kicking since the first millennium BC or even earlier is evidenced by written records. That Central Asia was closely in contact with India for over five thousand years, is amply borne out by the antiquities dug out from the burial sites in the proto-urban settlement of Sarazm on the road from Samarkand to Penjikent. The heritage site of ancient Sarazm, covering an area about 100 acres and dated between 3,500 BC to 2,000 BC, was discovered in 1976 and investigated by archaeologist A. I. Isakov (1977-1982). Bangles made of sea shells from the Indian Ocean region were found decorating a female corpse in a graveyard.

Items of Indian origin, especially those made of ivory were discovered during archaeological researches at the Dushanbe township pointing to the fact that the town served as an international trade centre having ties with India.<sup>2</sup> We learn of merchants from Balkh travelling on the *Uttarapath* or the Northern Highroad running through the Indian sub-continent in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Two such traders named Trapassu and Bhallika were thus able to meet the Buddha at Bodhgaya; that the Macedonian armies led by Alexander could overrun the whole of Central Asia and Northwest India in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE; and the great Mauryan emperor Asoka's *Dhammadutas* were able to lead missionary teams to the various Greek kingdoms and Central Asia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.

These highways and trade routes were also cultural routes used for importing cultural achievements, advanced ideas and technological innovations.<sup>3</sup> Some of the modern highways that approximate to the ancient trade routes that linked the Indian sub-continent with Central Asia are the M-39 Highway which is the backbone of Central Asia and

reaching upto the borders of China in Xinjiang province, the Karakoram Highway-KKH which links Pakistan with entire Central Asia through Kashgar, the Grand Trunk Road which links Afghanistan-Pakistan-India-Bangladesh. We can see how the Grand Trunk Road that evolved from the ancient Mauryan highway-the *Uttarapath* in combination with the M-39 passing through Uzbekistan and M-37 of Turkmenistan formed the colossal Asian Circuit of Central and South Asia.

According to scholars, the proximity of India with Central Asia through ancient routes encouraged exchange of goods, ideas and faith. During the construction of the Karakoram Highway, it was found that the ancient route, branches of the ancient Silk Road, linked the Upper Indus through the Hunza Valley to the route going towards Tashkurgan, Yarkand and Samarkand. Inscriptions in Kharoshti, Brahmi and Bactrian and engravings of Buddhist images and themes along the ancient route date to the start of the Christian era. According to historian Romila Thapar, the occasional depiction of horses suggests an early trade of Ferghanian 'blood-sweating horses' with India.<sup>4</sup>

Once the trade routes dropped down from Kashgar over the Karakoram or coming from Kabul via the Khyber to Taxila, they could lead all over India through the main arteries of the *Uttarapath* and the *Dakshinapath* which existed even at the time of the Mauryan emperor Asoka. On the *Uttarapath* that evolved into the Grand Trunk Road, lay the numerous Buddhist sites of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Branch roads from this highway ran towards Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra where several Buddhist sites were located. The important Buddhist sites in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar along the northern highway are associated with the life of Buddha himself. These are the sites of Kapilvastu, Kushinagar, Kaushambi, Sarnath, Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Vaishali etc. The high road from Kolkata ran upto Sonargaon near Dhaka, the present capital city of Bangladesh. This highway extended upto the port of Chittagong towards the south-east and towards Rajshahi in the north. Important Buddhist monuments lay on this north-south route in Bangladesh.

It was the great legacy of this ancient Asian Circuit that facilitated the spread of faith through the activities of the travelling traders, scholars and monks. Along these highways many Indian and Central Asian scholars and monks undertook perilous journeys to spread the message of the Buddha in the early centuries of the Christian era. We learn of Sogdian pilgrims/ merchants, natives of Maimargh near Samarkand and Chach

(modern Tashkent), among the numerous visitors on way to worship Buddhist sacred places in India or by way of trade in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, as is proved by inscriptions near the Karakoram Highway on the upper reaches of the Indus at Shatial Bridge.<sup>5</sup> Spread of Buddhism in Central Asia was also aided by the presence of Indian colonies on the trade routes and also due to the atmosphere of cultural integration prevailing on the routes.

The Brahmi and Kharoshti inscriptions on monastic ceramic wares are some of the written sources that point to the cultural integration of Central and South Asia. A clay pot with an inscription in Brahmi, at Afrasiab in Samarkand is a case in point. According to linguists and scholars, one of the most important results of India's cultural influence on East and West Turkestan was the dissemination of ancient forms of Indian writing - Brahmi and Kharoshti although confined to a Buddhist context.<sup>6</sup>

According to Charles Eliot, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Buddhism had not only become a great Indian religion but had begun to send forth missionaries to foreign countries and the great landmark in the early history of Buddhism is the reign of Asoka in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>7</sup> His empire covered vast regions from Afghanistan to the mouth of the Ganges. It was Asoka who was convinced that *Dhamma* must spread over the whole world.<sup>8</sup>

It is said that the second biggest contribution to the spread of Buddhism outside India – especially in Central Asia and China, is that of the Kushan empire founded by Kujula Kadphises by 136 CE and its spread on both sides of the Hindukush.<sup>9</sup> During the time of the great Kushan monarch Kanishka, Buddhism made considerable progress in Central Asia spreading across the Hindukush along the trade route to China.<sup>10</sup> In the Syr Darya region, the Western Turkic Khagnate is believed to have been mainly responsible (apart from the Greco-Bactrians and the Kushans) for the growing influence of Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> Archaeological sources and monuments of material culture in Central Asia provide clear evidence of this process of cultural integration with India and the region of South Asia.

#### MONASTIC ESTABLISHMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

A traveller to Afghanistan can today see the ruins of monastic establishments dotting the landscape and mountain caves that once held huge images of the Buddha in rock cut niches and had their walls painted with beautiful murals depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha. Those

that are lost to nature and vandalism have revealed from their deep recesses objects of antiquity that form a major collection of the National Museum of Afghanistan at Kabul. For example the beautiful Maitreya image from Kunduz monastic centre can today be seen at the National Museum. The monastery known for its scholastic achievements is stated to have been seen by the great Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The ancient *Uttarapath*,<sup>12</sup> or the Mauryan Highway from Tamluk to Taxila and onwards to Bamiyan and Balkh was in ancient times the main route from India into Central Asia. It was along this highway that the message of the Buddha reached the territory of Afghanistan during the period of Asoka in 3rd century BCE, and where it flourished in huge monastic establishments. As a result Asokan inscriptions have been found in Afghanistan. One written in Aramaic was found in Jalalabad district. Two bilingual inscriptions written in Greek and Aramaic were found at Shar-i-kona near Kandahar. Four Asokan edicts were found in the province of Lamghan.<sup>13</sup>

It was in the region of Gandhara comprising the region of eastern Afganistan and north-western Pakistan, that Buddhist art is said to have originated in the second or the first century BC and gradually spread northwards into Bactria and Sogdiana regions of Central Asia and onwards to China.<sup>14</sup> This author visited the village of Aibak, in Samangan, close to Balkh and saw two Buddhist sites of Takht-e-Rustam and Top-e-Rustam. It is in the ruins of these monastic settlements that scholars have traced the existence of the ancient Naubahar monastery which Huen Tsiang mentioned in his travelogues. The stupa of Takht-e-Rustam is said to have been built in the 2nd century A.D. The edges of the stupa are smooth and spherical. The base that is embedded in the rocky soil has long grooves leading into underground water tanks. It is said that the grooves were meant to divert melting ice water into the tanks to be used for drinking. The stupa seems to have been cut out of a huge cliff.

The *pradakshina* path (circumambulatory corridor) is hemmed in between the stupa and the rock wall. The main entrance to the stupa is a wide path along both sides of which lie deep and large caves with windows. The visitors can explore a few caves, but many more interconnected hidden caves also lie within the rocks surrounding the stupa. The natural caves have low roofs but are wide enough for a dozen worshippers to be have been seated. Another hill stands close to the stupa and houses a monastery. Inside, lie massive rectangular and circular halls, courtyards, and galleries

whose walls have been decorated with floral motifs. There are deep-arched niches and on the floor are water bodies cut into the rocks. The interconnected galleries, halls and walls were certainly carved by humans. After crossing an open courtyard, one comes to an almost circular cave where a *kund* (cool water body) has been cut into the floor. Perhaps some stream was led into the tank and the water was stored for drinking purposes. On the walls are vestiges of floral carvings. There are huge niches in the rock walls where large images of the Buddha once stood.

### *Cave Monasteries of Bamiyan*

Buddhist monks are believed to have settled in the Bamiyan Valley during the Kushan period or even earlier, turning it into a major monastic centre. Itinerant monks from the Buddhist centres of India could have settled there during the time of the Mauryan emperor Asoka's *Dhamma* missions outside India. Two immense rock statues of the Buddha, believed to represent 'Lokottara', the 'Lord of the World'<sup>15</sup> once dominated the Buddhist complex. Thousands of cave shrines, assembly halls and residences for monks were carved out of cliffs between the two giant Buddhas and were decorated with paintings. The Buddha colossi were dated between the 3rd and the 4th centuries.<sup>16</sup> Today these are represented by dark empty niches standing like tall shadows in the face of the beautiful Bamiyan mountains.

The nearby Kakrak Valley is renowned for its pictorial art. Some paintings of 'mystic mandala' found in the caves of the Kakrak Valley have been displayed at the National Museum, Kabul. The mandalas depict the central image of the Buddha believed to be 'Vairochana', surrounded by a galaxy of smaller Buddhas. An outstanding painting from the Kakrak Valley is the *Hunter King* showcased at the National Museum of Afghanistan at Kabul.

A third centre of Buddhist art is situated in the Foladi Valley at the western entrance of the Bamiyan caves. The caves present an excellent example of stone carvings and mural paintings. The walls and roof of the rooms were richly decorated with paintings, whose colours were made by grinding local mineral rock stones like malachite, azurite, lapis, cinnabar etc.

### *Kapisa / Begram*

We learn that in Kapisa there were some 100 monasteries with 6,000 priests.<sup>17</sup> Renowned scholars of Buddhism lived here. Congregations were

held where important questions regarding the Buddhist doctrine were discussed and debated.

The theme of the 'Miracle of Sravasti' was famous in the art of Afghanistan, especially at Kapisa and region of Kabul from where several Buddha images were recovered depicting Buddha performing the great miracle. A life size Buddha image from Shotorak site, a few kilometres north of the old Begram city overlooking the Panjshir river, can today be seen at the National Museum at Kabul.

Another life size Buddha image, found at Kham-i-Zargar site and dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century AD is also prominently displayed at the museum. The Buddhist complex was found near Gulbahar at the foot of Kuh-i- Kham-i-Zargar. The image bears the title 'Miracle of Sravasti'.

### *Lamghan, Nagarhara, Hadda*

The region of eastern Afghanistan was important to any pilgrim coming to India. The Silk Route passed through here onto the Khyber Pass into Peshawar and onwards to Taxila. Besides, some of the most important Buddhist establishments were located here, viz. of Lamghan, Nagarhara and Hadda. These were famous throughout the Buddhist world as important relics of the Buddha were kept here.

A stucco panel found at a monastery in Nagarhara, shows a royal procession led by the Buddhist king of the city. The king is accompanied by monks carrying the relics of the Buddha on an elephant. The panel displayed at the National Museum recreates the scene of the Buddhist period of Afghanistan when royal processions were organised. Valuable Buddhist scrolls in the 'Gandhari Prakrit in Kharoshthi script' on birch-bark packed into earthen pots were found in the library of a monastery in Gandhara, believed to be a monastery in Hadda.<sup>18</sup>

### *MesAynak in Logar*

It is believed that two millenia ago, the city of MesAynak<sup>19</sup> was part of the flourishing kingdom of Gandhara, ruled by a Buddhist king. According to Afghan scholars, large-scale construction of monasteries and shrines at MesAynak began as early as in the first century, when the site was ruled by the Kushans. The Afghan Institute of Archaeology has identified the remains of the Buddhist city as belonging to the Kushan period up to the late Shahi period (1<sup>st</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century CE). The site lay on the main trade route to India and the great wealth derived from its silver and copper mines and international trade on the Silk Road financed the wealthy

decorations of the monastery.

The huge number of artifacts excavated from the site and displayed in a special hall of the National Museum shed light on the Buddhist art of the Kabul region. Archaeologists have discovered two large monastic centres, namely the Gol Hamid and Kafiriat Tepe. Within the centres are monk cells with domed ceilings and richly ornamented shrines in courtyards. Hundreds of painted clay statues of the Buddha, Boshisattvas and donors have been discovered. Painted representations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas have also been found on the walls.

### *Tepe-Sardar in Ghazni*

It is believed that Buddhism was in a flourishing state in the province of Ghazni in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD when the Arab Islamic armies attacked Ghazni. One of the monastic centres was located at Tepe-Sardar here. It was also known as Tepe-yi-Nagara, according to the National Museum Notice at Kabul. The monastery was located on a hill east of the Ghazni river. The Buddhist complex consisted of stupas, chapels and monk cells and was richly decorated. According to the museum notice, although Buddhism had spread in the Ghazni area since the time of Asoka (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) this particular complex whose main stupa was the largest in Afghanistan was built in 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and thrived for nearly six centuries until after the arrival of the Arabs. The large Buddha head dated between 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century AD from Tepe-Sardar, Ghazni displayed in the museum upper hall shows that it must have adorned a life size image of the Buddha in Dhyana Mudra. It is made of clay.

### LARGEST RECLINING BUDDHA IN TAJIKISTAN

Several routes led from Afghanistan across the rivers Oxus and Pyanj into south Tajikistan at Arytam, Aivaz, Dusti and Kharog. Today ruins of Buddhist establishments dating from the Kushan times and upto the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE can be seen dotting the modern highways that have been built over the ancient trade routes in Tajikistan. Along the river and land routes,<sup>20</sup> Buddhism flourished in a big way. There were Buddhist institutes where Buddhist texts were studied, translated and disseminated by scholars and preachers who were continuously moving from this region to other areas of Central Asia and China. Travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsiang mentions monastic sites in southern Tajikistan.

Excavations in Southern Tajikistan point to the fact that the region



was a large Buddhist centre in the first half of the first millennium AD. Several Buddhist monuments have been revealed at the site of Ajina Tepe, Kalai Kafirnigan, Kafirkala, Khistepe, Ushtur Mullo etc. With the discovery of the monastic settlements, historians and archaeologists are certain that flourishing Buddhist communities had settled in the land beyond the Oxus. The religious iconography recovered from the Sogdian city of Penjikent has shown that both Buddhism and Hinduism prevailed in Tajikistan. According to S.P.Gupta, along with Hinduism, Buddhism too flourished in a big way in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan where several monasteries were excavated dating back to the first century BC-AD.<sup>21</sup>

This author during her travels along the river and land routes in Tajikistan came across the ruins of several monasteries from where Buddhist antiquities were recovered during excavations and which have now been displayed at the National Museum at Dushanbe and at the site museums locally. In an enormous upper hall of the National Museum of Antiquities at Dushanbe, the Buddha of Ajina Tepe lies peacefully. The giant image of the 'Buddha in Nirvana', over 12 metres in length, was lying in the traditional posture of the 'Sleeping Lion', clad in red *sanghati* (robes), on his right side. This famed image of Central Asia was recovered from a corridor or a 'pradikshana path' of the Ajina Tepe monastery, dated sometime between the 7th-8th century AD. Several Buddha and Bodhisattva images were found from niches in the monastery wall and corridors surrounding monastic courtyards. More amazing is the terraced stupa found on a high mound in a part of the settlement.

The ruins of Ajina Tepe monastery dating from the 7th-8th century A.D. lie along the lower stream of the Vakhsh river in a valley surrounded by mountains on three sides. Only a small part of the ancient site has been excavated by scientists but what was found at the site surpassed anything obtained so far from any Buddhist site except Krasnaya Rechka, near Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and Kusinagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh in eastern India. According to B.A. Litvinsky and T. I. Zeimal<sup>22</sup> the period during which the monument could be in use, ranges from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The antiquities displayed in the Buddha Hall of the National Museum of Antiquities at Dushanbe and the paintings found at the Buddhist sites have been reproduced and described in the works by B.A. Litvinsky and T.I. Zeimal.<sup>23</sup> It is seen that the theme of the *Thousand Buddha* images was a popular Buddhist iconography in both India and Central Asia. The painters created the 'Heaven of the Buddha' on the

ceiling of corridors. The dark sky filled with the brightly coloured images of the 'Thousand Buddhas' formed the *pradikshana* path through which the devout walked.<sup>24</sup>

### BUDDHIST DEVOTEES OF KAFIRNIHON VALLEY

There were Buddhist settlements along the Kafirnihon Valley. The name itself suggests that the population of the valley was 'kafirs' or non-believers, a term used to denote Hindus or Buddhists. One of the renowned settlements was the site of Kalai Kafirnigan, dated to 7th/8th century CE and lying about 80 kms. south-west from Dushanbe city near the village of Isanboy (Esambai) on the highway to Shartuz. According to the National Museum the materials from the site of Kalai Kafirnigan, revealed more memorials connected with Buddhism. The excavations were done in 1974-1980 under the supervision of B.A. Litvinsky.<sup>25</sup> Here a building was excavated that had a small Buddhist temple situated in its northern part. There was a sanctuary from where a sculpture of the sitting Buddha was found in a bay set in one of the walls. There was also a pedestal with the statue of the sitting Buddha in the corridor.<sup>26</sup>

The walls and arches were covered with paintings. A section of a two part painting has been preserved in the National Museum. The upper section featured the sitting Buddha with two figures standing on either side of him and the lower section featured the ceremonial procession moving to the right.<sup>27</sup> One famous polychromous painting from the shrine corridor (now in the upper hall of the National Museum) portrays a scene of circumambulating female devotees.

#### *Stupa of Ushtur Mullo*

This author also had the opportunity to look for the nearly lost Buddhist site of Ushtur Mullo on the hills outlying the Shonkh town near Aivaz along the confluence of the Amu Darya river and the Kafirnigan river. It has been dated to the Kushan times. Although there exist little remains of this site, museum records<sup>28</sup> inform us that during excavations a stupa was found that was faced with stone slabs carrying reliefs. Inside, the monastery was decorated with paintings.

#### *Bodhisattva from Kafir Kala*

Excavations at the Buddhist monastery of Kafir Kala at Kholkhozabad revealed a Buddhist monastery in the southeast corner of the citadel. It

was dated to the 5th-6th century CE. The Buddhist *vihara* was characterised by a central cella (main sanctuary) encircled by a four column corridor. Today there remain only fragments of polychrome wall paintings with the depiction of the Buddha, lotuses and ornaments. Some fragments have been displayed at the site museum in the Central Park at Kholkhozabad. A polychromous painting that hung on the walls of the Kafir Kala museum, although badly faded, portrayed the Buddha with his disciples. Another painting from Kafir Kala, once polychromous, has now changed colour to dark brown and black. Only a part of the Buddha's head could be seen against the darkened backdrop.

### *Buddhist Tablets from Khisht Tepe*

At Khisht Tepe in the Hovaling district of Tajikistan in the region of Khuttal (dated to the early medieval times), was found monumental structure of an early medieval Buddhist monastery with more than twenty rooms.<sup>29</sup> Votive stupas numbering about 60 were found from the shrine chamber. Tablets stamped with Buddhist formulae *yeh dharmaha hetu, prabhavahetu—tathagataprabhavahetu—cha yonirodhaevamvadimahaarama*—were also found.<sup>30</sup> According to M. Mullokandov, the excavations of 1985-88 have shown that Khisht Tepe had concealed a monumental structure, namely an early medieval Buddhist monastery.

## KANDAHAR-HERAT ROUTE TO TURKMENISTAN

South Asian traders who wished to reach Turkmenistan in the southern Caspian region took the route through Kandahar and then westwards through Seistan and Herat (in Afghanistan) northwards into Merv. They could also take the *Uttarapath* upto Kabul and turn westwards through Herat into the territory of Turkmenistan. Here an ancient caravan route ran through Girkania along the Caspian coast linking the oasis cities of Dehistan, Nisa, Abiverd and Merv. Today we see the modernised route as the M-37 highway running West to East in southern Turkmenistan and joining the M-39 of Uzbekistan across the city of Chardzhou/Turkmenabat.<sup>31</sup>

## BUDDHA OF ANCIENT MERV

The Buddhist cities of Erk kala, Gyaaur kala and Sultan kala in the deserts of Ancient Merv in Turkmenistan, although lost to the fury of nature and

the greed of humans, have revealed antiquities that can now be seen in the museums at Ashgabat and Mary. The objects are perhaps the only link to the country's Buddhist past, when the Buddha's *Dhamma* had flourished in the deserts of the Karakum.

Ancient Merv is believed to have been a large Buddhist centre in the first half of the first millennium AD. This was confirmed when two Buddhist monuments were revealed at the site of Gyaur Kala- a large monastery and a Buddhist stupa built just outside the city wall. The most amazing discoveries are that of a large Buddha head which could have been part of an immense statue, several other images of the Buddha of slate and gilt, a large beautifully painted vase depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha and birch bark manuscripts of the *Lotus Sutra*. The immense Buddha head and other antiquities dug out at the Buddhist site of Gyaur Kala, including several small images of the Buddha, are on display at the National Museum at Ashgabat and the State Museum at Mary. A copy of the birch bark manuscript of the *Lotus Sutra* was displayed by the Bharat Soka Gakkai at an exhibition in Delhi.

The discovery of the Gyaur Kala monastery and stupa in the Merv oasis dated to the 2nd/3rd century confirmed that a flourishing Buddhist community had settled in the deserts of Merv. Further, that Buddhist institutes, where Buddhist texts were not only studied but also translated and commented upon were also set up in Merv. This is clear from the manuscripts that were unearthed from the painted vase. Scholars and preachers were continuously moving from Merv to other areas of Central Asia and China to spread the faith. With renewed excavations along the Silk Road going westwards towards the Caspian, the archaeologists may locate other areas where Buddhist communities were set up in Turkmenistan.

M.I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya mentions the discovery of temples and a number of stupas in the Buddhist centre of Merv. He draws our attention to two stupas- one in Merv and the other in Bairam Ali, near Mary from which two Buddhist manuscripts were found. Both were written in Sanskrit in Brahmi characters and inscribed on birch bark. One of them is said to have been restored and preserved at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg and the other is undergoing restoration in Moscow.<sup>32</sup> The same author mentions at another place in the same source about some sheets of a manuscript found in Bairam Ali dating between 3rd/4th centuries. At yet another place he mentions the recovery of a synopsis of a collection of *Jatakas* and *Avadanas* from Bairam Ali in

manuscripts of the 3rd/4th centuries.<sup>33</sup> Whether they were the same manuscripts, it is difficult to tell but the fact remains that the manuscripts prove the importance of Merv as a great Buddhist centre.

I had the opportunity to see the *Lotus Sutra* manuscript copy recovered from Bairam Ali. It was on display at an exhibition organised by the Bharat Soka Gakkai at the Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts in Delhi in 2009. The manuscript on birch bark, was an excerpt from the canon of *Sarvastavadins* copied in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Brahmi script. The birch bark seemed to have been painted in a reddish brown colour over which letters had been hand written in black ink. Other antiquities unearthed in Merv include Buddhist statuary, bronze bells, script on terracotta, masks, parts of a Buddhist sanctuary.

It is believed by scholars that the propagation of Buddhism in the Merv oasis could have taken place during the time it was part of the Seleucid kingdom by Asoka's missionaries, some of whom according to Pali sources (*Mahavamsa*) were Greek Buddhist monks.<sup>34</sup> According to G.A Koshelenko, at the end of the Parthian and during the Sassanian era, Buddhism had greatly spread along the territory of Merv.<sup>35</sup> We are informed that people who practised Buddhism had already been living in Margiana since 2nd century AD and belonged to different classes of society, among them being a prince (An shih Kao) of the local dynasty and a merchant (An Huan).<sup>36</sup> He informs that by the first century AD, the Parthians had already reached the borders of India and the representatives of the Indo-Parthian dynasty were ruling those regions of India where Buddhism was already widespread.

It is believed that in the southern suburbs of the Sultan Kala too lay a Buddhist temple. This is evidenced by the antiquities that were recovered from Sultan Kala in the form of bronze bells and ceramic masks stamped with the image of the Buddha and pressed terracotta with zoomorphic figures displayed at the State Museum at Mary.

#### AT THE MARY MUSEUM

At Mary State Museum Buddhist antiquities from the kalas of Merv, namely Sultankala and Gyaur kala are on display. These included numerous bronze bells stamped with images of the Buddha recovered from Sultankala. The bells must have once decorated the Buddhist shrine and were perhaps brought as offerings by the devotees. The museum also displayed Buddha figures stamped on terracotta and

ceramics. One terracotta fragment was engraved with the image of the sitting Buddha and below the engraving were a few lines inscribed in Brahmi.

Many stamped terracottas reminded of the tales from the Buddhist stories of the *Jatakas*. A terracotta fragment from the monastery of Merv, probably a piece from a big jar, depicted a monkey sitting beside a human figure holding a bird. The bird is believed to symbolise the famous Sibi Jataka in which the Bodhisattva was born as King Sibi or Sivi (Bodhisattva) and was reputed for his goodness and virtue.<sup>37</sup> The image of the monkey on terracotta lamps and other wares too has been related to the *Jataka* tale (*Mahakapijataka*) and to the episodes from the life of the Buddha himself.<sup>38</sup>

During a visit to the National Museum at Ashgabat, one can see many more antiquities from Gyaur kala. There are Buddhist statuary in stone depicting the 'Sitting Buddhas' in the posture of *dhyānmudra* (meditation). A halo surrounds the head and the face appears soft and serene. The Buddhas sit on lotus pedestal and the folds of their garments are clearly visible. Another statuary appears to have been a part of the pillar base or wall decoration of a temple in which deities are emerging from behind acanthus leaves. It resembles the Ayrtaf frieze found at the temple at village Ayrtaf near Termez in South Uzbekistan and now preserved at the Termez Museum.

A beautiful ceramic jar displays paintings depicting the events in the life of the Buddha. The unique painted vase was used for storing Buddhist manuscripts written in the Indian Brahmi script dating back to the 5th century AD.<sup>39</sup> This text, according to A. Gubaev, is a part of the Buddhist canon containing the rules determining the life of monks in the Buddhist monastery, the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

#### IDOL WORSHIPPERS OF UZBEKISTAN

The international highway M-39 running through Tashkent, Samarkand and Termez crosses south into Afghanistan. Goods from South Asia apart from taking this land route also preferred the Oxus route that took them right upto Khorezm and further into the territories of Khazaria, Russia and Europe.<sup>40</sup> It is believed that pre-Islamic Uzbekistan was home to Buddhists, Zoroastrians and Christians. There were temples where images of the Buddha were installed, palace paintings which portrayed the prince (*Bodhisattva*) and common peoples' house gates engraved with idols

announced their religious preferences. The name of the city of Bukhara itself is believed to have come from the Sanskrit *Vihara* meaning Buddhist temple and monastery. The famous historian of Bukhara, Narshakhi wrote about the predominance of Buddhism in Bukhara before being supplanted by Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>41</sup>

We can get an idea of the extent of Buddhism preached and practised in the whole of Sogdiana from the records of Chinese pilgrims, foreign travellers like Ibn Batuta and Marco Polo, Alexander Burnes, Sino Platonic Papers, Saroj Chaudhuri's book *Lives of Early Buddhist Monks*, ancient records found in Dunhuang and Turfan regions and from the antiquities discovered in and around Samarkand. When Hieun Tsiang passed through the region of Samarkand,<sup>42</sup> the King of Samarkand did not believe in the law of the Buddha but was so impressed by the discourses on the Buddhist faith delivered by Hieun Tsiang that he requested to be ordained as a disciple. The inhabitants of Samarkand also sought instructions in the Buddhist faith. An Assembly was called and the inhabitants were received into priesthood and were established in the convents.<sup>43</sup> The convents perhaps today lie in the debris of Afrasiab.

Uzbek historian-archaeologist Kazim Abdullaev has written about a Buddhist image stamped on an earthenware terracotta plate in Samarkand which was discovered at Sattapaad joining house no 118.<sup>44</sup> Abdullaev described it as being similar to the image of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or a representation of goddess Tara.

Dalverzintepe near Termez was an important town on the Great Silk Road situated along the Termez-Dushanbe road not very far from Denau. The town is said to have been founded during the Greek-Bactrian time and reached its glory in the Kushan epoch.<sup>45</sup> Two 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century Buddhist temples were found inside the territory of the town from where a huge Buddha statue and massive gold hoard was discovered. The antiquities dug out at Dalverzintepe indicate the volume of trade between India and Central Asia. The gold treasure found in Dalverzin had Indian inscription in Kharoshti which indicated the weight measures of the bars. Among the adornments, were delicate necklaces and inlaid badges. The travellers are said to have carried huge amount of gold as currency for trading with their counterparts in Central Asia.<sup>46</sup> It is also possible that the hoard was an offering to the Buddhist deities in the temples of the Dalverzintepe town.

### BUDDHIST SITES OF OLD TERMEZ

In Old Termez lie the Buddhist sites of Kara Tepe and Fayaz Tepe belonging to the early centuries of our era. The old city of Termez was the largest city of the upper Amu Darya. Fayaz Tepe is the site of 3<sup>rd</sup> century Buddhist monastery of Fayaz Tepe. Discovered in 1968, it was restored and partially rebuilt with support from UNESCO. The huge dome that we see outside is actually a protective covering within which the ancient brick stupa lies for over 1,700 years. The Fayaz Tepe site along the banks of the Amu Darya seems to consist of three parts. While the stupa appears as a separate, independent entity now, once upon a time it must have been in the same enclosure as the monastic complex.

The Fayaz-tepe complex was adorned with beautiful paintings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas and portrayed processions of the laity and the monks. The paintings are now displayed at the History Museum of Tashkent. According to the museum notices, some Fayaz Tepe paintings portray scenes of conversion of the local populace to Buddhism. A sculpture of Buddha flanked by two worshippers chiseled out of white limestone was found here and is now displayed in the Tashkent Museum of History.

Standing within the monastic complex one can see a massive square yard in which once existed a Buddhist shrine. Numerous rooms with separate entrances surround the courtyard. Along the walls of the yard runs a *sufa* (raised platform). There are remains of the base of columns on which once stood pillars which supported the roof over the corridor and the raised platforms. Near the entrance to this shrine were found paintings of the Buddha, monks and laymen. A great number of pottery pieces with inscriptions in Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Bactrian were also found. In the debris were found coins of the Kushan rulers, Vima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva.<sup>47</sup> To the north-east from the temple stands the large stupa and a smaller round stupa bricked-up inside believed to date back from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C to 4th century AD.

### CAVES OF KARA TEPE

The 2nd century Kara Tepe caves constituted the seven monastic complexes of the Kara Tepe hills. One cave that led from a massive courtyard outside the hill into a large arched entrance is built of mud bricks and plastered with clay. I was able to trace several high-roofed galleries coming out of one hill and entering another. Even a very tall person could walk upright



into the labyrinth of the dark caves. There were small openings in between the hills in the roof for day light. Small niches in the walls were the places where lamps were lit for lighting up the dark caves in the evening. Along the galleries lay small arched rooms that were the shrines of the Buddha.

The walls of the caves exhibited remnants of red, white and black pigments giving evidence of paintings that once adorned the caves. One wall with large patches of red and black paint has life-sized human figures, all looking towards their right to a point where sat another diffused image resembling the Buddha. Numerous inscriptions can still be seen on the temple walls perhaps written by foreign pilgrims and monks.

### SRI DEVI OF KUVA

The extensive archaeological diggings that took place at Kuva in Ferghana found antiquarian remains of a Buddhist settlement belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. In 1979, archaeologists excavated a religious complex, including a Buddha temple. Images of the Buddha were found buried here. The unique sculpture of Buddha modelled in clay on a wooden frame and a sculpture of Sri Devi along with other pre-Islamic Turkic gods were recovered from the centre of the temple. A large number of utensils and clay pots were also recovered. It is believed that Ferghana was a centre for Vajrayana<sup>48</sup> where the goddess Sri Devi was worshipped along with the Buddha- Avalokitesvara.

### PAMIR ROUTES INTO KYRGYZSTAN

Travellers from India generally took the Pamir route to enter the territory of Kyrgyzstan. They followed the northern foot of the Kun Lun mountains to reach Kashgar from where they crossed the snow covered Pamirs via passes on the Kyrgyz- China border at Torugart or Irkeshtam and reached the Ferghana Valley through the city of Osh.<sup>49</sup> The State Historical Museum at Bishkek showcases the gallery of the Buddha and Buddhist deities recovered from the ancient monasteries along the Chuy River valley by Kyrgyz and Russian scientists which is also called the Valley of the Buddha where lie some of the historic cities of Krasnayarechka, Novopokrovka, Suyab and Balasagun. Krasnayarechka became famous with the discovery of the Great Reclining Buddha image from the corridor of a shrine. Excavations at Novopokrovka site brought to light Buddhist figurines and structures from what could possibly have been a monastery. The cities

flourished as great Buddhist centres in the heart of Central Asia. The sacred valley of the Chu river was also the place where the *Ekdasa-mukha* (eleven-headed) Avalokitesvara was worshipped.

During the middle of the 6th century, the Western Turks are said to have been in control of the rich Chuy Valley and where they set up their capital at Suyab. Most importantly, the Silk Road passed through the Chuy Valley and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD the Western Turks controlled the traffic of goods passing through their capital cities. All caravans coming from China in the east passed through the Chuy Valley in order to move to the Caspian or the Aral Sea regions and to enter the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean regions. Caravans from India had a choice of routes into the Chuy Valley: they could join the Kashgar route through the Pamirs or take the Yarkand route into Kashgar. They could alternatively join the Balkh route through Termez, Samarkand and Tashkent and through Shymkent eastwards into the Talas and the Chu river Valleys.

Margit Koves gives us detailed information about the spread of Buddhism among the Turks. It is said that the Khan of the Turks, Topo Khagan (572-581 AD), son of Bumyn came under the influence of Buddhist monk Hui-lin of North Ts'ou. We also learn that the Gandharan monk Jinagupta stayed for sometime with Topo Khagan and, along with some lamas, translated the sutras for him. There followed a spate of monastery building in the land of the Turks and translation of Buddhist sutras into Turki.<sup>50</sup> There was inflow of Buddhism into the land of the Turks during the period of Chinese -Turkish alliance, when much intermingling and intermarriages took place between the Turks and the Chinese. The Turks were also in alliance with the Tibetans during the first quarter of the 8th century, when the Tibetans wrested control of the Chinese trade routes<sup>51</sup> of the Tarim Basin.

It is said that in the monasteries and settlements of Central Asia (including those in the Chu Valley), Sanskrit texts were translated into Chinese, Khotanese, Tokharian, Sogdian and Tibetan.<sup>52</sup> The *Nirvana-sutra* and *Suvarnaprabhasa-sutra* were some of the famous sutras that were translated by scholar monks in these monasteries. According to Margit Koves, not only were the monks and nuns supposed to know Sanskrit and recite their confessions in Sanskrit, but the laymen were also expected to know enough Sanskrit so that the titles of holy works and certain Buddhist terms did not become corrupted.<sup>53</sup>

*Reclining Buddha from Krasnayarechka*

In ancient times, this Silk Road settlement belonged to the Sogdians and was called Navekat. It was a flourishing trade centre founded during the 6<sup>th</sup> century and was one of the largest settlements and one of the most important urban centres of the Chu valley.<sup>54</sup> Archaeological explorations in the area revealed two Buddhist temples. In the Buddhist temple were found the remains of a monumental clay Reclining Buddha. Some images of Bodhisattvas were discovered in another corridor of the temple. The Reclining Buddha statue is at present preserved at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.<sup>55</sup> Dated to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, the statue, found on a ten-metre long pedestal, is said to have been originally painted in red, as was the surface of the pedestal. Fragments of a manuscript on birch bark in Brahmi and Sanskrit script were also found along with gilded bronze statuettes of Bodhisattvas.<sup>56</sup>

Archaeologists from the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and the Russian Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg also unearthed another massive clay sculpture of the Buddha at Krasnaya Rechka village. This Sitting Buddha, measuring between 1.5 to 2 metres high and found in the sitting Lotus position, has been dated between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The site is believed to be the remains of a Buddhist monastic complex. The site is located in the east of the Chuy valley, 30 kms from Bishkek where excavations were being carried out by a joint team of Kyrgyz and Russian archaeologists led by V.A. Kolchenko and A.I. Torgoyev. On both sides of the central niche where the image of the Sitting Buddha was found, there were figures of standing Bodhisattvas of smaller sizes found in a bad state of preservation.<sup>57</sup>

*The Monastic Site of Ak Beshim/Suyab*

A Buddhist shrine dated to the end of 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> century AD was unearthed at Ak Beshim/Suyab by L.R. Kyzlasov, historian-archaeologist (Moscow State University).<sup>58</sup> Located some 250 metres east of the first shrine, another Buddhist shrine was discovered by L.P. Zyablin, archaeologist and explorer of the Ak Beshim site.<sup>59</sup> The finds included large statues of the seated Buddha, a stele with the image of the Buddha and medallions of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Most of the rooms were found decorated with wall paintings, tiny fragments of which show traces of gold,<sup>60</sup> perhaps pasted by pilgrims. Even today pilgrims to Buddhist temples paste gold foil on the images.

A beautiful *Crowned Buddha* made of bronze, depicted somewhat in

the posture of a dancing Shiva, was recovered from the Suyab site and now adorns the State Historical Museum. The Buddha has been dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century AD. According to Goryacheva, the image could have belonged to some home sanctuary. The Buddha in the *tribhargasana*<sup>61</sup> posture, resembling a dancer, was found to be decorated with silver and copper.

The eleven-headed Avalokitesvara was unearthed in the Chuy valley. The beautiful image of an eleven-headed Avalokitesvara cast in bronze with gilding, dating between 12th and 14th century CE is now displayed at the State Historical Museum, Bishkek.

#### BUDDHA ON THE ILI RIVER VALLEY ROUTE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Although Kazakhstan lay far north of the Indian sub-continent it was closely connected through southern routes passing through the Mozart Pass that linked the Ili river valley with the Tarim Basin. This brought Kulja close to Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan where direct northern routes of India coming through the Karakoram pass joined. We learn about the Mozart Pass link in Thomas Watters' *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*.

Thus traders, monks and scholars from India took the Kashmir route to Yarkand and onwards to Kashgar where routes dropped from southern Kazakhstan and the Semirechye region through several mountain passes on its borders with the Xinjiang province of China.<sup>62</sup> Today we find evidence of Kazakhstan's close links with India along the cities of the Ili river and its tributaries as witnessed by the author during her travels along the Silk Road in southern and western Kazakhstan. It is said that since early times Tamgaly Tas near Lake Capshagai on Highway A 350 in Kazakhstan was a crossing on the river Ili. On a high cliff facing the river one can see today Buddhist petroglyphs, dating back to the 8th century. It seems as the Buddha and other Buddhist deities are all guarding the river route to and from China. Below the carved images of Buddhist deities are inscriptions in Tibetan reading *Om Mani Padme Hum* meaning 'Hail the Jewel within the Lotus'.

The drawings on rock depicting the Buddha and the inscriptions in Tibetan, Pali, and Mongolian relate to Lamaism that had become popular in the Semirechye region and southern Kazakhstan.<sup>63</sup> These were magic mantras chanted by the pilgrims in praise of the Buddha. Three images hewn on stone portrayed the 'All Compassionate and Merciful' Avalokitesvara, flanked on either side by the Enlightened Buddha sitting

under the Bodhi tree and the Healing Buddha or the 'Buddha of Medicine'.<sup>64</sup> In the nature reserve of the Altyn Emel National Park at the village of Taygak, one can again find Buddhist inscription *Om Mani Padme Hum* written along high cliffs of river gorges.

Beyond the Charyn Canyon north of Kegen, I learnt about the famous but completely destroyed monastery of Sumbe which, not far away in antiquity (mid-19th century CE) was resounding with the chime of bronze bells decorating its entrance and having beautiful idols of the Buddha and other Buddhist deities. Kazakh explorer C.C. Valikhonov visited the beautiful monastery in 1854, a few years before it was burnt. He found as many as 30 monks living at the monastery.<sup>65</sup>

Another city with Buddhist antecedents is Talgar where in the village of Talkhiz archaeologists have found a rare carved image of the Buddha on ivory.<sup>66</sup> Ivory, obtained from the tusks of elephants, was not available in Central Asia but was found only in India and other African and South Asian countries. Talgar craftsmen obtained ivory from India through trade caravans on the Silk Routes passing through the Semirechiye or the 'Seven Rivers' region of south and south-east Kazakhstan on their way to China. The Semirechiye route is believed to have been one of the most favoured routes for caravans going to China.<sup>67</sup> Itinerant monks and Buddhist scholars too travelled on the routes passing through Talgar. Monks, believers and preachers, halted at Talgar. Many of them lived in cave dwellings, several of which are yet to be explored.

It is said that Talgar was one of the largest cities of the Ili Valley, situated just 25 kms from Almaty. According to archaeologist and Director of the Margulan institute of Archaeology, Prof. K.M. Baipakov an ivory figure of the Buddha was found in the layer dating to the 13th century, when there was a revival of Buddhism in Central Asia. The figure was badly damaged with broken head and arms. Two figures stood beside the Buddha. One was presumably a drummer and the other was a figure holding a shaft,<sup>68</sup> perhaps a *chhatra* or an umbrella. Significantly murals of royal or religious processions painted on the walls of Ajanta caves too depict drummers and *chhatra* holders leading the march and the image appears to have been carved keeping this ritual in sight.

#### TEMPLE OF KAYALIK

It is said that in the summer of 1253, Rubruk, the French envoy, halted at Kayalik and left an extremely informative and fascinating account of his

travels and description of the Buddhist temple. According to Prof. K.M. Baipakov, Head of the A. Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology, and Dr. D.A. Voyakin, Head of the Archaeological Expedition Scientific Committee, conducting the excavations at Kayalik, the remnants of this Buddhist temple were excavated during the archaeological researches, conducted in the Antonovka old site (locality named Kayalik lying in the valley of the river Lepsi).<sup>69</sup> This author travelled to Kayalik and saw the ruined temple that was built of adobe bricks. Massive half towers at the corners of the temple are still visible. At the centre of the temple stand remnants of a square hall – once a sanctuary with Buddhist idols and surrounded on all sides by corridors. Probably the chest or an altar that Rubruk saw in the temple must have been inside such a central hall or sanctuary. Behind the chest, Rubruk informs us, was an image with wings. It was here that he heard the chants of *Om Mani Padme Hum*

#### STUPA OF TEKELI

The stupa of Tekeli is a massive piece of rock carving of a Buddhist pagoda near Karatal. No one knows where and when this stupa came from. Some believe, it must have fallen from the towering mountains amidst which the village of Karatal lies along the Kara Gorge. For several kilometres all around the stupa, this author saw no other structure of which the stupa could have been a part. It is possible that some passing Buddhist pilgrim settled in the area, carved out the stupa from the massive piece of rock that had fallen off the mountains in some remote antiquity.

We also learn of the close connection between south and western Kazakhstan region including Sauran and Otrar and the Indian sub-continent. At Sauran, Indian labour is recorded to have been employed by rich land owners. While writing about the existence of *karez* (underground water channels) near Sauran, the 15th century Tajik historian Makhmud Zainaddin Wasifi mentioned in his *Amazing Events* about two wonderful *karez* at Sauran, built with the help of 200 Indian slaves.<sup>70</sup>

Otrar is believed to have emerged as early as the first century BC and was one of the largest centres of trade, agriculture, science and education in the middle Syr Darya region of Central Asia. That it had cultural links with India following extensive trade has been proved by excavations at several sites in the region. Nearly 2,000 years ago, numerous settlements emerged in this fertile oasis of the present city of Otrar, of which only mounds now remain. The largest and the most important settlement is

said to have been the high mound of Otrar-tobe.<sup>71</sup> Excavations led by eminent archaeologist, Prof. Karl Baipakov were carried out in the region of Otrar and important antiquities that show links with India have been preserved at the Al-Farabi Museum at Shauldar village.<sup>72</sup>

At Kuiryk Tobe town a temple has been excavated where images of sirens have been unearthed that resemble the *kinnaras and kinnaris* (nymphs) found in the decorative art of the Buddhist sites of India. This town has been identified as Keder which was the main town of the Otrar oasis, dated between the 7th-9th century AD.<sup>73</sup> In the *Parade Hall* of the citadel were found carved wooden panels (now displayed at the Otrar Museum) that decorated the walls of a temple and having magnificent images of the gods and goddesses, the royal couple, sirens on wooden beams and fantastic animals.

According to Baipakov the image of sirens was widespread in ancient and medieval art. He found the Kuiryk Tobe sirens to be similar to images of sirens depicted on the stupas of Sanchi and Bharut, in the grottoes of Bamyan and on the carved ivory items of Begram. These mythical creatures represented the *Kynara* and *Kynari* in Hindu and Buddhist texts, says Baipakov.<sup>74</sup> On one of the boards are the images in frieze of a couple of idols sitting on 'zoomorphic' thrones and worshippers at the foot of the thrones; the image holds the sun and the moon in raised hands. As auspicious symbols depicted frequently on the top of Buddhist tantric paintings, the sun and moon signify the protective function of the deity.

### CONCLUSION

It becomes clear, Central Asia and South Asia have shared a common heritage for nearly 5,000 years and have been the closest of neighbours. The heritage of Buddha and Buddhist art can be witnessed all along the Asian Circuit that encompasses every part of Central and South Asia from Kazakhstan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. This is the combined wealth of Asia and should be preserved and built upon by all. Keeping in view the world's growing interest in Buddhist tourism, Central Asia must give a thought to collaborating with countries of South Asia for an integrated scheme to efficiently tap the tourism potential along the Buddhist corridor. By opening the Buddhist sites of Asia to world tourism, the economy of the entire region will gain immensely.

It is noteworthy to mention that archeological researches and development work in South Asian countries like Pakistan, India and

SUNITA DWIVEDI

Bangladesh will get a fillip if the ancient corridor running between Central Asia and South Asia is opened for Buddhist tourism. It will prompt the governments to go for increased development work in order to preserve the important cultural heritage sites of their country.



A SEVEN-PETALLED LOTUS LAMP EXCAVATED AT BUDDHIST SITE OF KAUSHAMBI



A STAR LAMP EXCAVATED AT THE BUDDHIST SITE OF KAYALYK, KAZAKHSTAN

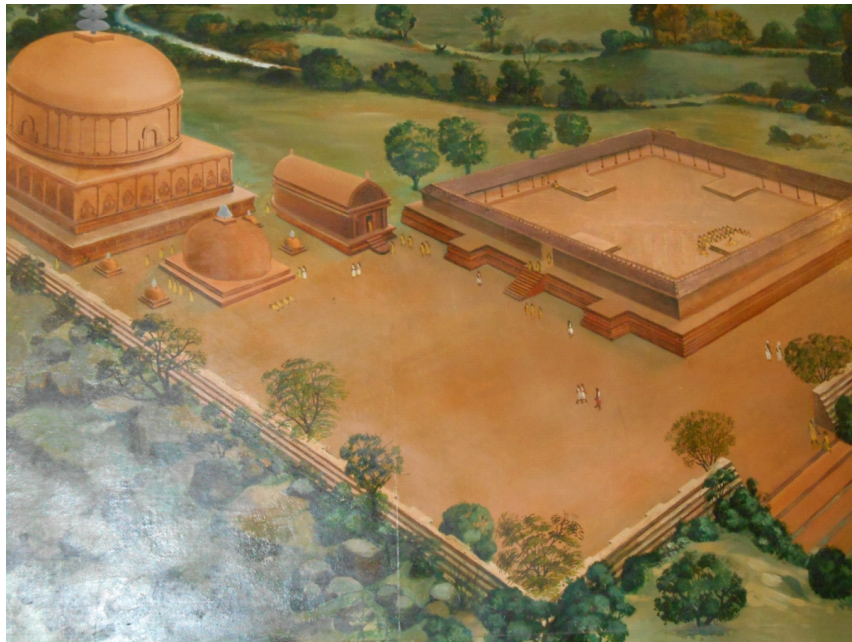




BEJEWELLED AVALOKITESVARA OF CHUY VALLEY, KYRGYZSTAN



BEJEWELLED AVALOKITESVARA OF KHAMBALIDA, GUJARAT



MONASTIC PLAN OF DEVNI MORI, GUJARAT





MONASTIC PLAN OF FAYAZTEPE, TERMEZ



RECLINING BUDDHA OF AJINATEPE, TAJIKISTAN (AUTHOR STANDING)



**RECLINING BUDDHA OF KUSHINAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH**

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## BAMIYAN BUDDHAS DEMOLITION

### *Challenge to World Heritage*

K. WARIKOO

Due to its geographical position straddling the trade routes between Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia and the Indian sub-continent, Afghanistan has throughout its history been a cultural, ethnic and linguistic crossroads. Diverse cultural influences – Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Indian, Central Asian and Mongol have all contributed to the rich and variegated cultural heritage of Afghanistan. That not only the Afghan rulers but the Afghans themselves respected and protected their cultural heritage for the past 1500 years, speaks volumes about their love and pride of this composite cultural heritage. The destruction of 2000 years old Bamiyan Buddha by the Taliban in 2001 caused irreversible loss to the heritage of the Afghan people and also to world heritage.

That heritage is the essential source of identity of peoples, the foundation and lifeblood of their communities and a source of development, is universally recognised. The Bamiyan demolition and the inability of international community to stop this irreversible loss, shocked artists, historians, writers, academics and cultural personalities the world over.

Bamiyan, situated about 250 kms. north-west of Kabul, is one of the most important historical sites in Afghanistan. Nestled between the mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush and Koh-i-baba, at an altitude of about 2,850 metres, the Valley, with its lush green tableland, presents a quaint scenic contrast to the surrounding rugged scarps of mountains. The site offered an ideal camping place for the merchandise-laden caravans that travelled in ancient times along the Silk Route that linked India with Central Asia and China. Later the Valley developed into a major centre of Buddhism, with two gigantic statues and hundreds of shrines scooped out of rock, to which devotees flocked to meditate and worship.



Located at the entrance to a pass on the foot of the Hindu Kush linking Kabul with the Silk Route at Balkh, Bamiyan was the foremost symbol of the civilisational link between India and Afghanistan. Buddhism was introduced to the region first by Ashoka and subsequently by the Kushans. In the 3rd century, the city of Bamiyan became an administrative centre, a caravan stop and the location of a great monastery. It became famous when the Buddhist monks settled into the rock caves built into the great cliff to the north. Other nearby valleys, like Kakrak (in the southeast) and Foladi (in the southwest) were also monastic centres. The world's largest Buddha statues, towering at the height of 175 feet and 120 feet, were carved out of the mountain cliffs perhaps during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The honey-comb of rock cut sanctuaries on the mountain cliffs and the colossal images of the Buddhas at Bamiyan were the glory of classical Afghanistan. They represented splendour, stability and prosperity of the region in harmony with neighbouring kingdoms. A Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hien who passed through Bamiyan in around 400 AD, spoke of over a thousand monks in attendance there, describing the assembly of monks held with great ceremony. Another Chinese traveller, Hsuan Tsang who visited Bamiyan in around 630 AD, found it a thriving Buddhist centre, with many hundreds of monks living in the caves dotted around the statues. A Korean monk, Hui-Chao who passed through the Hindu Kush in around 827 AD, found the king of Bamiyan to be a Buddhist, having considerable power.

Before their destruction by the fanatic and obscurantist Taliban, the two imposing Buddha colossi at Bamiyan withstood the vicissitudes of time and nature for more than a millennium and a half, as a testimony to the splendour of history and the devotion of pilgrims at their feet. In a land that was a veritable melting pot of various religions, and where the prevailing Buddhist art-forms were metamorphosed by influences as diverse as Achaemenian, Indian and Hellenistic, the tallest standing Buddha statues of the world endured like the grand apotheosis of timeless composite art.

The Kushan Empire of the early Christian era saw the emergence of the Gandhara School whose stamp on the Bamiyan landscape was unmistakable. It was ideologically affiliated to the *Sarvastivadins* and the *Mahasanghikas* – sects which defined the Lord through images. The two images were regarded as supernatural, an effect reinforced by the depiction of the Sun-god, the Lord's heavenly prototype, prominently above the head of the Small Buddha on the ceiling of its vaulted niche. The statue of

the Small Buddha was carved out of the rock on three sides in the manner of alto-relievo, the wavy folds on the garment reproduced in mud-plaster and painted in bronze. The heavy proportions of the body, the schematic drapery and the posture of standing with the right hand in *abhayamudra* (protection) recalled Gandhara style, while the Sun-god iconography revealed Hellenistic and Sassanian influence. The ceiling paintings and the architecture of the shrines were also phenomenally rich. The worshipping families with offerings flanking the Buddha images in the ceiling, some of them inspired by the cave paintings of the Bodhisattvas in Ajanta, followed the Gupta idiom. The Lord, depicted against a circular blue background simulating the cosmos, and surrounded by eight smaller figures of Buddha, presented a marked resemblance to the early Vedic conception of eight Adityas forming the universe. Similarly, in the stucco decorations on the ceiling of some shrines, figures of beheaded Cyclops donning the typical workman's cap and Mithra with Phrygian headgear mingled with Buddha, blending the distant with the indigenous in a delightful display of assimilation. As for architecture, the circular shrines in outline imitated the Stupas of Western India, with niches in the wall for images, as shown on the outer face of the drum of the Stupa. Those squarish in plan were provided with squinches at the corners, a base on which to raise the dome. There were also octagonal shrines, especially those adjoining the Big Buddha shrine, on seven sides of which were niches to hold images, the eighth being used as entrance. The semi-circular ceiling of a shrine to the east of the Big Buddha shrine was covered with a network of polygonal and trapezoidal compartments with the Buddha and Mithra conveying the sense of resplendent bodies in a star-spangled sky.

The site seems to have fallen into desuetude from the 9th century onwards. Earthquake shocks in the highly seismic zone of Afghanistan took its toll on the statues, dislodging portions of the shrine walls. The cold and arid conditions of the rock conglomerate in which the shrines were carved caused extensive weathering. Snow deposits in the crevices in winter turned to ice and widened the cracks; subsequent melting and water run-off in summer made deep scars, each reinforcing the other. The paintings on the walls suffered considerably from both physical and chemical weathering, the pigments coming off at places. The faces of the images were mutilated. The ceilings and the walls were blackened with smoke and soot, caused by burning of firewood inside the shrine. No preservation work had been done at the Bamiyan monuments till a team of experts from the Archaeological Survey of India arrived in 1969 for a

project that was to last for the next seven years. The remedial measures they adopted included, *inter alia*, a drainage system on the rock-roof of the niche to discharge snow-water, a buttress wall, trimmed and treated to match the profile of the rock surface, to reduce natural wear and tear, and the restoration of the stairs. As for the images, the emphasis was on preventing their further disintegration and not on reproducing the missing portions, although damaged legs were stabilized and broken edges filleted. The preservation of paintings necessitated elaborate physical and chemical cleaning, plastering and consolidation of the surface. At the end of the long restoration operation, Bamiyan retrieved much of its former glory.

Bamiyan was not the only major centre of Buddhism in Afghanistan. In Hadda, visited by both Fa-hien and Hsuan-Tsang, archeologists unearthed the ruins of more than five hundred stupas and many examples of sculpture in the Gandhara style. Digs in the Kushan summer capital of Bagram, Ali Khanum, Tillya Tepe etc. unearthed a wealth of artefacts and objects, which was housed in the Kabul Museum, the principal treasure house of Afghanistan's history and culture. A massive Kushan city at Delbarjin, north of Balkh and a number of gold ornaments near Sheberghan, west of Balkh were also excavated.

Sculptures, artefacts and carvings of the Gandhara period had survived more than 1,000 year Muslim rule in Afghanistan. The museums at Bamiyan, Kabul and Hadda near Jalalabad contained the largest collection of exquisite sculptures and carvings of the Gandhara school. Their systematic destruction started as the Taliban gained ascendancy in Afghanistan from 1996 onwards. The open air museum of Gandhara art forms at Hadda was destroyed by the Taliban gunfire. The Kabul Museum, has also been vandalised and destroyed, with its precious objects having been plundered and sold into markets in Pakistan. The rich testimony for the important role of Afghanistan whose unique cultural heritage was witness to the exceptional dialogue between civilisations, stands destroyed.

The Taliban rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread international condemnation, not only went ahead with the destruction of the standing Buddhas of Bamiyan, but even made a public demonstration of their savage acts. By destroying the rich and composite historical cultural heritage of Afghanistan, the Taliban sought to reaffirm Afghanistan's lead role as a puritan Islamist state in South and Central Asia and also to set an agenda for radical Islamist forces. Though the international community could do little to prevent the Taliban from its savagery, the curse of Bamiyan Buddhas soon brought upon them the

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divine retribution. Taliban are vanquished now which has opened up new opportunity of reconstruction and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Time has come for the international community to restore the historico-cultural heritage of Afghanistan, so that the Afghans get back the cultural basis of their identity and self-understanding.

The Bamiyan demolition brought into focus the need for safeguarding world heritage and for promoting cultural pluralism, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to promote understanding and peaceful co-existence. Though Afghanistan became a party in 1979 to the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and National Heritage, 1972, this Convention was not respected. Even the Hague Protocol (adopted on 26 March 1999) on Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which reaffirms the “immunity of cultural property” in times of war and allows individual responsibility and trial before international tribunals, was not enforced.

The Bamiyan demolition which evoked universal condemnation, triggered general mobilisation for preserving, restoring and even recreating such cultural objects. It highlighted the need to preserve and restore all kinds of traditional and popular knowledge, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture and monuments. It also underscored the need to develop appropriate legal standards to deal with such cultural crimes and to evolve mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring safety of world heritage sites.



The giant Buddha, 175 feet high, about 1800 years old, under first attack





The small statue, 120 feet high, 1700 years old





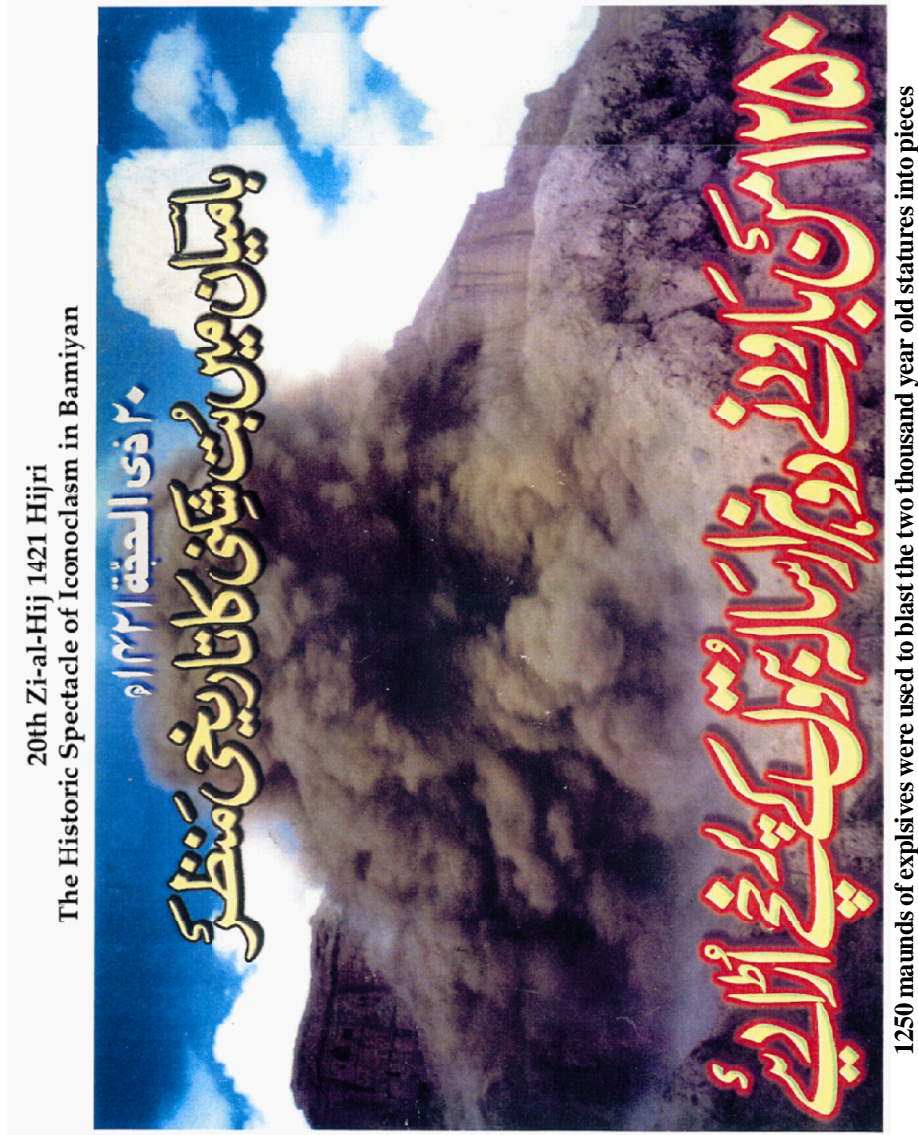
After 3 explosive attempts, now ready for fourth and final explosion





After the fourth and final destruction of giant Buddha





20th Zi-al-Hij 1421 Hijri  
The Historic Spectacle of Iconoclasm in Bamiyan

بامیان میں ۲۰ ویں سالگرہ کا تاریخی منظر

۱۲۵۰ ماوند باروت کے پتے اڑائے

1250 maunds of explosives were used to blast the two thousand year old statues into pieces

## ۲۰ ذی الحجۃ ۱۴۲۱ھ

# بامیان میں بُت شکنی کا تاریخی منظر

## ۱۲۵۰ من برونے دیوار اساتذت کے پرچے اُڑاپے

## اسلامی کیلنڈر ۱۴۲۲ھ

بمیان میں برونے دیوار اساتذت کے پرچے اُڑاپے

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بمیان میں برونے دیوار اساتذت کے پرچے اُڑاپے

Iconoclastic Calendar, 1422 A.H.



## SHRINES AND PILGRIMAGES OF KASHMIR

K. WARIKOO

Kashmir has been aptly described as paradise on earth, as nature has bestowed it with all its bounties of beauty and splendour. Kashmir holds a unique position owing to its rich heritage and centuries old tradition of composite culture and harmonious co-existence. The divine sacred places that abound in every nook and corner of Kashmir are living examples of its deep civilisational roots. Divinity flows from its lakes, waterfalls, springs, snow-clad mountains, flowers and majestic chinars. The pious and sacred places of pilgrimage have deep roots in the socio-religious traditions of Kashmiris. Kashmir has been a cradle of spiritual and cultural rejuvenation since time immemorial. The shrines and holy pilgrimage centres dotting the valley are places of devotion and reverence for everyone. These are not only a great source of spiritual inspiration but also the main strength of faith and devotion of the masses. These form an inseparable part of the cultural heritage of Kashmir.

Hari Parbat is the most representative of all divine places in Kashmir as it has three sacred shrines located in close vicinity of each other, which are revered by the followers of three major religions of Kashmir – Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. These three sacred shrines are goddess Sharika's abode inside the complex, Shri Chakreshwar Temple, Ganesh Temple, Makhdoom Sahib's shrine and Chhatti Padshahi, the gurudwara built to mark the visit of the sixth Guru of Sikhs to Kashmir. Hari Parbat fort lies on the northeast of Srinagar on Sharika hillock. The boundary wall of this fort was built by the Mughal emperor Akbar in late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Built inside the fort, the abode of Goddess Sharika is also known as the Siddha Peetha. There are many traditional beliefs about this holy shrine prevalent among the masses. Goddess Sharika is regarded as the Presiding Deity of Srinagar city. In the shrine Goddess Sharika is represented by a *Swayambhu* Shri Chakra, also called Mahashriyantra, which consists of

naturally formed circular mystic impressions and triangular patterns with a bindu at the centre, on a rock. The mystic Shri Chakra engraved on a vertical holy rock is located at the middle of western face of Hari Parbat. To worship the Supreme Goddess, the devotees would go to Hari Parbat regularly and reach the shrine of Chakreshwar to be at the holy feet of the Divine Mother in the wee hours of the morning. Phagun Krishna Paksh Ashtami and Ashad Shukla Paksh Saptami, Ashtami and Navami are the auspicious days for the devotional congregational prayers at the Sharika-peeth Chakreshwar. A splendid view of the entire city of Srinagar can be had from the stairs of this shrine. In between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, King Pravara Sen II founded the city of Shrinagari on the foothills of Sharika hill. When Huen Tsang visited Kashmir in 631 AD, the city of Srinagar was just coming up. The city was named Shrinagri which in due course of time came to be known as Srinagar. The city was then a part of the Maurya Empire, one of the largest empires of the Indian subcontinent. It was a tradition among the Pandits and Muslims not very long ago to walk on foot early every morning from Habba Kadal and other localities of the city, through Fateh Kadal, to Hari Parbat to pay obeisance at the shrines of Goddess Sharika and Makhdoom Sahib. Hari Parbat is believed to be the abode of 250 million gods and goddesses.

The holy shrine of the Sultan Aarfeen Hazrat Makhdoom Sahib is also located in the Hari Parbat complex towards the southern side of Hari Parbat hill. The shrine nestles just below the imposing Hari Parbat Fort. It is one of the most sacred shrines in Kashmir. This double storied, many-pillared structure displays a remarkable architectural style. The inner sanctum has exquisite woodwork, embroidered cloth coverings and marble work. The chandeliers are of a mixed quality, though. There are two graves inside, that of Makhdoom Saheb, and of Baba Dawood Khaqi. This shrine is visited not only by Muslims but by people of all faiths, throughout the year. Makhdoom Sahib, also called Hazrat Sultan, was a Sufi saint. Baba Dawood Khaki has written that Hazrat Makhdoom Sahib spent every night in his life in his devotion to the praise of Allah. That is why he came to be known as Sultan-ul-Aarifeen, the king of all devotees of Allah. Makhdoom Sahib himself is believed to have stated that "I have received the orders to devote my life to the praise of Allah". His childhood, as also his youth, were spent in rigorous prayers which resulted in his sainthood early in life. Thousands of devotees throng his shrine with the belief that all their desires would be fulfilled by Makhdoom Sahib.

In the summer of 1620 A.D. Guru Hargovind Saheb visited Kashmir.

A Manji or the seat of Sikh mission was established at Srinagar in Guru Amar Das's time. The contemporary incumbent in charge of the Manji at that time was Sewa Das. His old mother, Mai Bhagbhari had sewn a gown for the Guru, with her own hands. She cherished a wish that the Guru should wear it in front of her eyes. It was the magnetism of Mai Bhagbhari which drew Guru Hargovind Saheb to Kashmir. On reaching Srinagar, the Guru met Sewa Das and many more Kashmiri devotees. They received him with great love and devotion. The mother of Sewa Das touched the feet of the Guru. The Guru asked her to bring the gown she had made for him. The joy of Mai Bhagbhari knew no bounds, when the Guru put on the gown. The Guru stayed at Srinagar for nearly three months. He held congregations, delivered discourses and left the place only after he had supervised the last rites of Mata Bhagbhari and thus immortalised her. The place where Guru Hargovind Saheb stayed during his sojourn in Kashmir was later converted into a Gurudwara and has come to be known as Chhatti Padshahi. The notes of *Gurbani* float in the air from this Gurudwara every morning and make the atmosphere pure and sacred.

There is a shrine devoted to Lord Ganesha simply called Ganeshun located on the south-western corner of Hari Parbat where the devotees on their way to the abode of goddess Sharika would first pay their obeisance. Inside the shrine, the Deity is represented by a huge 'shila', smeared with lead-oxide or red lead (*sindhoo*). The principal Devta Ganesha is also known by the names of Ganpati Vinayak, Heramba, Ekadanta, Lambodara, Vignasha, Vighna-Hari and Gajanana. Universally believed to be kind, generous and god of wisdom, Lord Ganesha is always invoked before starting any auspicious event or religious ceremony. Ganpati is worshipped both in the form of an image and yantra. The Shiv Lingam here is witness to many turns in the history of Kashmir. It reminds one of the golden period of Kashmir's past when Shaivism was the dominant philosophical thought in this beautiful valley.

The ancient shrine of Pokhribal today stands neglected and forgotten. However, its past grandeur can still be gauged in its shadows in turbulent waters. History tells us that when King Pravara Sen II laid the foundations of Srinagar city, he built several shrines around the Hari Parbat hill, this temple being one of those shrines. Although time has considerably erased the glory of these shrines, yet they still stand as reminders of our glorious past. This shrine of the Mother Ragnya is on the parikrama route of Hari Parbat. There is a holy spring inside the temple complex. In the past a

'yagnya' used to be performed here in honour of the Goddess Ragnya especially on Shuklapaksh Ashtamis and other auspicious days.

The shrine of Dastgir Sahib is revered by people belonging to all faiths in Kashmir. Abdul Qadir Geelani Dastgir truly came to the rescue of all Kashmiris in the times of their spiritual and emotional turbulence. Dastgir Sahib was a great Islamic scholar and would consider mutual love as his religion. Even today people of all faiths pay their obeisance at the holy shrine of Dastagir Sahib and pray for eternal peace in Kashmir valley. Dastagir Sahib preached the idea of mutual brotherhood and co-existence which are the essence of Kashmiriyat. Being about 250 years old, this is a very important shrine in Kashmir as it contains the relics of the revered Muslim Saint Pir Dastgir. The shrine has a beautiful papier mache decorated interior.

From a few kilometers from Srinagar city, now almost merged with the city itself, is the historical locality of Soura. Here we can see a Muslim shrine built on the pattern of Islamic architecture. This shrine of Jenab Saheb is historically very important as it represents an era when the Islamic architecture overshadowed the pagoda style of shrines built under the Buddhist influence in Kashmir.

Located on the banks of Dal Lake stands tall the white marble complex of Hazratbal shrine which attracts millions of pilgrims every year. This shrine is a great example of Islamic architecture. Hazratbal-also called Madinat-us-Sani, Dargah Sharif, and Dargah-enshrines the Moi-e-Muqqadas, a hair of the Prophet's beard. The sacred relic is believed to have been brought to India by a keeper of the Ka'aba in 1635 AD and it came into the hands of a trader. It was then placed in the Naqashband shrine in central Srinagar. Hazratbal was then known as Sadiqabad after its builder Sadiq Khan, Shah Jehan's subedar. The Moi-e-Muqqadas was shifted here when the Naqashband dargah proved too small for the number of devotees increased day by day. Being the most important Muslim shrine of Kashmir, Hazratbal commands the reverence of the people beyond measure. The construction of the present marble structure was started in 1968 and completed in 1979. The Moi-e-Muqaddas is displayed on various occasions each year.

A magnificent Shiva temple is situated atop the Gopadari Hill on the south east of Srinagar. The Temple is named after the great philosopher Shankaracharya who visited the Valley about ten centuries ago. The temple is built on a high octagonal plinth approached by a flight of steps. Some opine that the temple at the top was originally built by King Sandiman in

between 2629 and 2564 B.C. There were 300 golden and silver images in it.

Whether it is a temple, a Dargah or a pilgrimage, everything in Kashmir draws its inspiration and strength from divinity and nature spreading the aura and ambience in their immediate and distant surroundings. In the midst of Zabarvan mountains near Chashma Shahi, is located the shrine of Jyeshtha Devi. Every year on all Thursdays during Jyeshtha month of Hindu Calendar devotees throng this shrine in large numbers. They come early in the morning to have the Darshan of Mata Jyeshtha Devi.

Ten kilometers from the centre of Srinagar city lies the historic place of Vicharnag. This place is a living testimony to the times when Nagas and Pishachas lived together in Kashmir. Even today the Shiva temple and water springs, known as *Nags* in Sanskrit, remind one of the times when there was peace and harmony in Kashmir. History tells us that it was this place where famous physician Shri Bhat, responsible for the change of heart of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, later known as Budshah, the Great Monarch, lived. Another important personality in the spiritual treasure of Kashmir, Hazrat Sheikh-ul-Alam also stayed here for some time. An annual festival used to be held here on the last day of the Kashmiri calendar i. e. Chaitra Amavasya. Therefore, this place is quite important from historical as well as spiritual point of view.

Traditionally, most of the Hindu shrines in Srinagar have been located on the banks of Vitasta. Today the very existence of these shrines is endangered. There was a time when the shining and tall golden Kalashas of these shrines spread the aura of divinity in Kashmir but cataclysm of time has brought these shrines to such a pass where a question mark hangs precariously on the very survival of these abodes of divinity.

Bhagwan Gopi Nath is considered to be the most revered among the saints of the 20th century in Kashmir. Bhagwan Gopi Nath was born on 3rd July 1898 in Bhana Mohalla, Srinagar (Kashmir) and he passed away in Chandpura, Srinagar on 28th of May 1968. He stayed put in Kashmir throughout his life. Born in a respectable family of Kashmir Pandits he took to spiritual pursuits at an early age and from 1925 onwards plunged headlong in his quest for self-realisation. Though he lived with his near relatives, he remained a celibate. He knew Sanskrit well and had mastery over Persian and Urdu. He spoke little and shrouded himself in a cloak of anonymity. Only those who were fortunate enough, came in contact with him and had glimpses of his greatness. It was in the later years of his life

that his fame began to spread and Sadhus and saints from outside Kashmir started visiting him. Gopi Nath shunned publicity and lived in close communion with unseen forces. He was compassionate towards the needy and those in distress always helping and blessing them. The Ashram of Bhagwan Gopi Nath is wearing a deserted look today, though some devotees take care of Ashram. There was a time when the sound of Aarti used to reverberate in the atmosphere all around this place. Today there is silence everywhere.

Most of the temples on the banks of Vitasta are in a state of decay and ruin, posing serious threat to the centuries old tradition of harmonious co-existence in Kashmir. The ancient temple of goddess Kali near the shrine of Shah Hamdan is a living testimony. It is believed that the water spring of Kali temple still silently bubbles in the basement of the shrine of Shah Hamdan holding close to its chest the secrets of historical events that took place in this place. Shah Hamdan arrived in Kashmir at a time when Hinduism was prevalent in the valley. He is credited with spreading Islam in Kashmir. Since the people were reluctant to give up the rituals associated with Hinduism after embracing Islam, Shah Hamdan integrated many facets of popular culture in the Islamic practices in Kashmir. This makes Islam, as it is practiced in Kashmir, distinctively different from the way it is practiced in rest of the world. Shah Hamdan first came to Kashmir in the year 774 Hijri as per the Islamic calendar, then in 781 Hijri and lastly in the year 785 Hijri. During this time he converted 1.400 holy men to the ways of Islam.

The Shah Hamdan shrine, also known as Khanqah-e-Moella, was originally built in 1395 AD during the reign of Sultan Qutub-ud-Din and is one of the best examples of Kashmiri wooden architecture. Like the other old shrines of Kashmir, it has the distinctive spire and beautifully carved eaves. It is also a striking specimen of papier mache decoration and some of its walls and ceilings are quite ornate. Located in the heart of old Srinagar on the bank of the Jhelum near Fateh Kadal, its beautiful spire dominates the skyline of the riverfront. Shah Hamadan was a multi-dimensional personality. He was a social reformer besides being a preacher.

Swami Lakshman Joo's Ashram at Ishber has been the centre of Shaivite thought at one time where a lot of work was done on the Trika philosophy of Kashmir. Swami Lakshman Joo was a great yogi. He embodied a rare unity of a mystic and a Pandit, being well-versed in Sanskrit and in the texts of the non-dualistic tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. He was also called the Abhinavagupta of the 20th century, being the last



authority on Kashmir Shaivism, who was teaching scholars and guiding seekers on the spiritual path. He edited several Sanskrit texts and published Hindi translations and commentaries. Pilgrims and students of theology and Shaivism from all parts of the world used to visit this place for learning not very long ago. Today this Ashram is also engulfed in silence. History bears testimony to the fact that many attempts have been made to strangulate the great traditions of learning in Kashmir. But it is because of the resilience and strength of Kashmiriyat that it has survived numerous attacks of religious zealots and this land has remained, and hopefully, will continue to remain, the land of Rishis and Sufis.

Awantipur was founded by King Awantivarman who reigned Kashmir from 855 to 883 AD. Situated at a distance of 18 miles from Srinagar on the Anantnag road, the site has two temples. The larger one, Shiva-Awantishvara, is marked by massive walls some half a mile beneath the town on the outskirts of village Jaubror. The subsidiary shrines are to the rear corner of the courtyard. But the complex has, over the years, lost its grandeur and has been reduced to ruins, though it is still visited by the devout. These ruins are a clear pointer towards the fact this place has had a glorious past and has seen prosperity and progress at one time. These ruins also point out very clearly that art and architecture in Kashmir was at its pinnacle during the times of King Awantivarman.

Just opposite the Awantipur temple is the shrine of Syed Hassan Muntaqi on the National Highway between Jammu and Srinagar. All the travellers between Jammu and Srinagar stop at this place to pray at this shrine and seek his blessings for a safe journey.

Among all districts of Kashmir Division of J&K State, district Anantnag is quite well known for its tourist spots as well as for its places of religious significance. Of these, Bijbehara is historically the most significant. Many centuries ago there was a famous university located at this place where students would come from far and wide to learn at the feet of some of the most respected scholars of the time. The town of Bijbehara or Vijbror is 28 miles from Srinagar and two and a half miles from district headquarters, Anantnag. Vijbhor is derived from Vijayeshwar and it was the site of an ancient sacred shrine of Shiva Vijayeshvara. The site was one of the famous tirthas of Kashmir. The place has a hoary past and king Ashoka, as per the account of Kalhana, replaced the stuccoes enclosure of the Shiva Vijayeshvara temple with that of stone. The king built two temples within this enclosure called Ashokeshvara. The temple and the ancient linga of Vijayeshvara were completely destroyed by Sultan

Sikander. The temple is made up of stone and stands on an 8 feet high adhistana. Instead of the pyramidal roof, the stylized ancient architecture of Kashmir, it has a curvilinear roof, which was adopted by the Dogras from the temple architecture of north Indian plains. Three golden Kalshas and a pointed spire surmount the temple. The temple has a circumambulatory path. Inside the temple there is a pitha having eleven lingas called Ekadash Rudr, which is the main pitha for worship. Besides it, there is an idol of Ganesha, which is 2-ft high.

On the route to Pahalgam, Mattan is an important pilgrimage place of the Hindus. A huge spring gushes out here from the base of a hill. Thousands of fish frolicking in the crystal clear waters of its sacred spring have been attracting pilgrims since ancient times. Both Hindus and Muslims of the valley tenaciously observe the old tradition of not disturbing or catching these fish which are considered to be sacred. Mattan is also an important place for the pilgrims headed towards Amarnath cave. Its importance is also due to the fact that the members of the Kashmir Pandit community used to perform the *Shraadhha* ceremony of their forefathers at this place. However, nowadays this place wears a deserted look. Vagaries of time have forced the original inhabitants of this sacred spot to leave the land of their forefathers for the sake of their safety. Most of their houses stand burnt and destroyed. Deathly calm now prevails in this place which was once full of a vibrant population of Kashmiri Pandits. Vagaries of time have given this place a haunted look. There is no movement inside these once chirpy houses and no lamps are now lit on the door steps. Silence has ensnared this small town in its deadly grip.

The Sufi shrine at Aishmuqam is another shining example of the Rishi cult in Kashmir. This shrine, associated with the name of Sheikh Zain-ud-Din Rehmatullah Allah is a centre of reverence for people belonging to all religions and beliefs. Sheikh Zain-ud-Din was one of the important disciples of Sheikh Nur-ud-Din Noorani. He belonged to Kishtwar but had chosen this spot for meditation. The local inhabitants believed that Zain-ud-din meditated for a long time in village Mandjan of Tehsil Sopore where he attained spiritual perfection. It was at this stage that Sheikh Nur-ud-Din advised him to shift to the cave at Aishmuqam and to meditate there for the remaining period of his life. Today this shrine is thronged by thousands of devotees every year who believe in the healing powers of this pious saint. Even today the tradition of offering *bibhuti* as prasad to devotees is followed by the Muslim custodians/Pirs of this shrine.

Kashmir has been a centre of Shaivite philosophy from time

immemorial and there is hardly a place in Kashmir which does not have a shivalingam. Shiva is the presiding deity of Kashmir and His presence can be felt in all man made as well as natural spots of religious significance. Every year in the month of Shravan of the Hindu Calendar lakhs of holy men and pilgrims commence their journey towards the Amarnath cave from the Dashnami Akhara in Srinagar. They move on foot towards the holy cave and after many days of tortuous journey have the darshan of the ice Lingam that is formed naturally inside the Amarnath cave. Legend has it that Shiva recounted to Parvati the secret of creation in the Amarnath cave. Unknown to them, a pair of pigeons eavesdropped on this conversation and having learnt the secret, are reborn again and again, and have made the cave their eternal abode. According to local legend, there was once a Muslim shepherd named Buta Malik who was given a sack of coal by a sadhu. Upon reaching home he discovered that the sack, in fact, contained gold. Overjoyed and overcome, Buta Malik rushed back to look for the sadhu and thank him, but on the spot of their meeting he discovered a cave, and eventually this became a place of pilgrimage for all believers. To date, a percentage of the donations made by pilgrims are given to the descendants of Malik, and the remaining goes to the trust which manages the shrine. About the ethereal experience of having Darshan of the ice lingam inside the Amarnath cave, Swami Vivekananda has said that "I have not seen such a beautiful and sacred sight in my whole life".

Khrew, a small town in district Pulwama is located 26 Kms from Srinagar city. In this town is located the holy shrine of Jwalaji. Perched on a hill, this shrine has remained a place of reverence for all Kashmiri Pandits since many centuries. Most Kashmiri Pandits have a presiding deity in their family and it is either Ragnya Bhagwati of Khir Bhawani at Tula Mulla or Jwala Bhagwati at Khrew. Not long ago, on the day of Jwala Chaturdashi a large number of devotees used to congregate at this place in order to offer their prayers at this holy shrine. The eternal flame or Jwala used to remain lit at all times at this spot 24 hours a day, 365 days in a year. But now this flame remains extinguished for most of the time, engulfing the surrounding areas, as also the surrounding Kashmir valley in darkness.

The village Balhama named after the Goddess Bala Devi is thirteen kilometers from Srinagar and is surrounded by village Wuyan in the east, Khanmoh and Zewan in the north and Pampore in the west. Around the shrine of Bala Devi are twelve brick pillars covered with galvanised iron

sheets. The space in between the pillars is fenced with grills. Around the five sacred devdar trees in the shrine are twenty stone idols of gods and goddesses. Painted with vermillion, these idols are of old times. There is also a Shiv Lingam in the shrine. There is a spring on the foothill which has a number of small temples surrounding it. Bala Devi is the presiding deity of the erstwhile Dogra rulers of J&K State. Prior to 1990, hordes of pilgrims would visit this shrine and seek the benevolence of the Devi. The idols inside the shrine are well known for their distinctive geometrical design, which is as old as the tradition of Hindu architecture in Kashmir, the influences of which can be seen in all Sufi shrines, Hindu shrines and even the old mosques of Kashmir.

Nestled in the lap of mountains of Gulmarg is the holy shrine of Hazrat Payam-ud-Din who is better known among Kashmiris by the name of Baba Rishi. The popular name itself suggests the dominance of Rishi cult in Kashmir both among Hindus as well as Muslims. The pagoda style of structure of this shrine is influenced by Buddhist architecture. Hazrat Payam-ud-Din was born in Laar and one day in sheer wanderlust he came to this place. On this spot he saw thousands of ants carrying foodgrains inside the earth in order to last them through the winter months. The Rishi thought that even if the ants are making efforts for saving foodgrains for the winter months what am I, a human being, doing that would come to my rescue on the day of reckoning. It was this thought that prompted him to give up his worldly ways and devote himself to the service of the God almighty. This shrine holds a significant place among the shrines of Kashmir. People come here along with their young children for their first hair cut and pray for the long and healthy life of these young ones. The fire place where Hazrat Payam-ud-Din used to cook his food is still intact. It is believed that if one spots fire in this fire place nowadays, it is a bad omen.

The sacred traditions of Kashmir have been promoted and propagated by the Rishis and the saints of this holy land. Even Islam had to take the support of this Rishi cult in order to spread its message among the common masses in Kashmir. The Rishi cult is deeply embedded in the psyche of the people of Kashmir. 14th century is considered to be a significant period in the history of Rishi cult in Kashmir. Lal Ded, also known as Lalleshwari, was born in this century in the village Padmanpur. And it was also during this period that Hazrat Sheikh-ul-Alam, who is also known as Nund Rishi and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali Rehmatullah Aleh was born in Jogipur. His ancestors belonged to the Sanz family of

Kishtwar. It is said about the birth of Nund Rishi that the baby refused to feed until the third day of his birth, when saint and poetess Lal Ded came to the house, fed him from her own breast, and anointed him her spiritual heir. Nund Rishi renounced the world at the age of 30 and became a disciple of Lal Ded. Both Lal Ded and Nund Rishi taught social equality and the oneness of God, to Hindus and Muslims alike. Nund Rishi propagated the brand of Muslim Sufism which permeates the Valley even today. The historians have a differing opinion about the year of his birth. While some historians believe that he was born in 779 Hijri, others contend that his year of birth was 757 Hijri. However, there are no two opinions about the fact that Nund Rishi is the founding father of Rishi order in Kashmir. Sheikh-ul-Alam is the epitome of spirituality in Kashmir. Sheikh-ul-Alam meditated inside a cave for 12 years and during that period survived only on vegetables and fruits available in the forest. He spent a number of years at Vicharnag and ultimately came to Charar-i-Shrief and settled down here. His holy shrine is located here. A place of reverence for all Kashmiris irrespective of class, creed or colour, this shrine was desecrated by religious bigots from across the border in the year 1995. Mast Gul set this holiest of holy shrines on fire in a bid to wean away Kashmiris from their centuries old tradition of praying at holy shrines, in a bid to spread the extremist Wahabi brand of Islam by force.

Charar-i-Sharif has been rebuilt and it holds the same exalted place among Kashmiri masses that it used to have before its desecration by terrorists. Built in a pagoda style, the shrine has a large crystal chandelier hanging over a curtained glass room enclosing the grave. There is fine, typically Kashmiri woodwork called *khatambandh* adorning the interiors of the shrine. Thousands of hands are raised in prayers every day even today in this shrine, seeking the blessings of the revered saint. It is believed that the benevolence of Sheikh-ul-Alam reaches every devotee. There are many beliefs and fables associated with the name of Sheikh-ul-Alam. Sheikh-ul-Alam was a great poet and in order to convey his message to the common masses he would compose his religious thoughts and sermons in verses which are popularly known as *Shrukya*. Sheikh-ul-Alam had firm belief in God in whose service he devoted his entire self.

The temple of Goddess Maharagnya, known as Ksheer-Bhawani, is situated about 14 miles away from Srinagar at village Tulamula in the famous Sindh valley. More than half of the population of Kashmiri Pandits has Ragnya Bhagwati as their presiding deity. On the occasion of Jyeshtha Ashtami, a huge congregation is held at this place. Devotees from far and

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wide come to this place and first cleanse themselves by taking a bath in the rivulet within the shrine complex and then offer their prayers at the sanctum sanctorum. A beautiful marble temple was got constructed in the centre of the 'Kunda' by Maharaja Partap Singh in 1912 and later it was got renovated by Maharaja Hari Singh. This spring water changes colours and is shaped as "OM" in Sharada script. It is believed that when the colour of the water of this spring turns black, it is a sign of bad days to come in Kashmir. Swami Vivekananda and many other sages have meditated at this holy place. Surrounded by magnificent Chinar trees, this holy shrine is a living example of the continuous and uninterrupted spiritual quest of the people of Kashmir.

No discussion on the holy shrines and pilgrimages of Kashmir can be considered complete without mentioning the sacred shrine of Sharda. The remains of this once magnificent shrine in Kishan Ganga valley in the part of Kashmir that is presently under the illegal occupation of Pakistan reveal a sad story of religious intolerance. There was a time when this was an important place of civilizational and cultural significance. This is considered as a *Siddha Peetha* like Sharika Chakreshwar temple at Hari Parbat. It was also a place of learning comparable to Nalanda and Taxila and students as well as scholars from far off places used to come here. Even today hundreds of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits rever this shrine, longing to visit this place.

In this spiritual and divine quest, one hopes that the shrines of Kashmir will regain the glory that was once associated with these sacred spaces. It is hoped that in a not too distant future, the dark clouds that have engulfed Kashmir in their vice like grip will give way to enlightenment and the shrines and pilgrimages of Kashmir will once again glow in the eternal light of spirituality, imparting solace and peace to the devotees.

# RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL THOUGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT INDIA, CENTRAL ASIA AND IRAN

RA‘NO‘T.URAZOVA

## ABSTRACT

*This article makes a comparative analysis of social relations of ancient Indian and Zoroastrian communities of Central Asia and Iran on the basis of such age-old kindred sources – Rig-Veda and Avesta, which share similar backgrounds. Mythological origins of Rig-Veda and Avesta gradually moved to the level of religious ideology with a complicated theological system.*

**Keywords:** *Aryan, Indo-Aryan, Avesta, Rig-Veda, Zoroastrianism, proto-Turkic, khanjamana, sanjamana, Arta, Yashta, Yazat, Daive, Mitra, ArdviSura, Sarasvati, civilization, primitive tribal relations, early class society.*

*Avesta*, the vault of sacred religious texts of Zoroastrianism and the general religion of the people of Central Asia and Iran before the arrival of Islam, developed in the first quarter of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. It was the time when religious thoughts of the Indian people reflected in Veda and Vedic literature had been formed in full. Veda was in four parts and Avesta initially consisted of thirty books. Its first records in the Aramaic letter, as believed by the majority of researchers, were made in 7<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. However, during the conquests of Greek-Macedonian conquerors, by Alexander the Great's order copies of *Avesta* had been burnt. Later, in Parthian period (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC - the first quarter of 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) attempts had been made to revive *Avesta* from the memory of Zoroastrian clerics. During the Sassanid epoch of Iran (226 BC - 651 AD) when Zoroastrianism became the state religion, some attempts to restore *Avesta* were undertaken. Finally, during the reign of Husrav I Naushirvan (531-579 AD) *Avesta* had been restored in the form of 21 books. It is stated in the book *Denkard*, the original encyclopedia of Zoroastrianism created in

9<sup>th</sup> century AD in response to oppressions of Islam. Since the Arabian invasion, one fifth part of *Avesta* has been preserved thanks to Zoroastrian communities still living in some cities of Iran, in Mumbai and Gujarat, (India).

*Avesta* became known in Europe only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the scientific traditions of the East this book was known in the early Middle Ages. So, in Sogdian text p.13 stored in the Parisian library, there is a fragment of Avestan plot about the legendary hero Rustam who entered a fight with *daivas*, creatures of Ahriman, the embodiment of all malicious forces against good creatures of Supreme Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda.

The great thinker, scientist-encyclopaedist Abu Raykhan Biruni, in his work called *Monuments of the past generations* provided data about the *Avesta* based on research of calendars and calendar ceremonies of the people of various regions of the world including India and Central Asia in 10<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, Biruni in his book *India* considered the questions of Vedic literature, which is a great heritage of the Indian people. Even in those days the first steps of comparative research of *Veda* and *Avesta* had been made. There are a number of purely common features in Vedic and Avestan pantheons.

Migration processes of the Aryan tribes in 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. through the territories of Central Asia played a crucial role in further ethnic and cultural development of the vast Turan-Iranian-Indian region. Thus, Indo-Aryan community migrating throughout the territory of Turan, partly spread to the Iranian plateau and to the northern part of the Hindustan sub-continent. Also, the foundations of commonness of the civilizational processes of Central Asian and Indian nations had been laid. Some of the Indo-Aryan migrants began to settle down in the territory of historical Turan, who subsequently mixed with indigenous proto-Turkic communities of this area. As a result of this process, historical bases were laid for further syncretisation of the civilization of Turan-Iranian and Indian nations in the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

First Indo-European, later Indo-Aryan common roots of the migrants stated above were reflected in their mythological system, the basis of which later saturated the ideological system of many Central Asian, Iran and South Asian nations, where the dominance of Indian, Iranian and Turkic nations with common historical and cultural traditions could be seen for thousands of years. However, a specific chronological line must be drawn between the level of development of these traditions in Indian and Central Asian branches. What draws our attention is that Indian branch of these



traditions was isolated from Central Asian ones after their establishment in the Hindustan peninsula, which preserved their relations at tribal level and was reflected in *Rig Veda*. Regarding Central Asian and Iranian (Middle East) nations, they exerted impulsive influence in religious and philosophical relations from the transition of bronze epoch to early iron age, according to which they created their mythological systems to be used in their theological view. Meanwhile, a number of elements of common Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, Aryan and Iranian stages got new interpretations.

For example, in *Avesta* we do not meet a series of Vedic characters. If, say, *asuras* were rejected in Veda, they turn to the highest concept as a part of the name of Supreme god Ahura Mazda in *Avesta*. Actions of Mitra in Rig Veda differ from actions of the same Mitra in *Avesta*, where its powers are rather wide etc. It is discussed in detail below.

Assuming that Vedic and Zoroastrian traditions have, on the one hand, the common and wide differences in respect of levels of public attitudes reflected in their sacred books of line, which demand the attentive comparative analysis to reveal tendencies of development of civilizations of two historical regions - Central Asia and India.

*Avesta* is not only the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, but it also remains as a source of the history of the social, cultural and spiritual life of the Central Asian and Middle Eastern nations of the first millennium BC. With its abstract nature, it remains a source that has not been completely understood for many years. At early stages of European Avestology, majority of scientists considered this source to correspond to the historical realities of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, even though dating of various facts was subject to controversy. For instance, J. Darmestater and S. d'Arlei held different opinions on historical correlation of Avestan facts to real life events stated in Greek and other sources. In many cases, authors intentionally leveled the borders between historicity and personal interpretation on the basis of priori conditions. That is to say, something happened that has to be considered as the very truth of *Avesta*. On the basis of the facts taken from *Avesta*, they hypothesized social relations, economy, and spiritual life of Zoroastrian community.<sup>1</sup> As for the authors of English school of Avestology and Zoroastrian scholars of Parsi tradition, they have a tendency to interpret *Avesta* as reflection of real history.

Avestology saw a new period of its development in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with different views of J. Darmestater, S. d'Arlei, M. Breal and K. Helbner.<sup>2</sup> It was during this period when relationships

between historical reality and mythological layers of *Avesta* were put in the order of the day. Especially, Darmestater believed in the historicity of *Avetsa*. S. d'Arlei, H. Hubsman and K. Heldner assessed this source with its preserved social images. These sources enable us to compare *Avesta* with Vedic literature and reveal periodical and historical differences between them. To illustrate, Darmestater's works *Ormuzd and Ahriman* and *Notes sur l'Avesta* state that Rig Veda's chronological bounds reveal the history of social relations in *Avesta*. Also, he compared materials of *Avesta* with Greek mythology. He points out, that the objective reality reflected in *Avesta* showed a newer stage than *Rig Veda* and Greek mythology. In his book *Ormuzd and Ahriman*, the author reveals dualistic essence of Zoroastrianism and compares it to polytheistic characteristics of *Rig Veda*. One can draw conclusions that the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists definition of the social level of Zoroastrianism was the result of strong class division in the period of monotheistic essence of *Ahura Mazda*. Rig Vedic materials prove that it was at the level of primitive relations in this regard.

For example, in *Avesta* Mitra mediated in a dualistic drama of life as a master-manager of legal and social-political spheres. Mitra, judging from Yashts of *Avesta*, initially acts as god of the agreement. Thus the concept "agreement" belongs to different spheres of life in a society: the spiritual aspect of the agreement is bound to the attitude between the person and the highest creature, that is, Ahura Mazda. The social aspect of the agreement controlled by Mitra, had already acquired terrestrial character. It means that Mitra punishes for infringement of the agreement between people of different social strata, where parties of the agreement can be all beings, beginning from the believer to those adherents of different faith, from supporters of wrong to the supporters of right. Mitra requires to fully keep any promise, to be responsible for the pledged word regardless of whom this word was given to. In *Rig Veda* such functions of Mitra are not observed. In Yashtas of *Avesta* this aspect of Mitra's function is expressed in many stanzas of the hymn devoted to this character. For example, in the chapter of *Mitra Yasht* it is repeatedly stated that Mitra is not to be deceived. Evil, in the embodiment of 'LIE' is its main enemy. In one of the stanzas it is said that Mitra destroys traitors of the agreement who are also destructors of the country. Mitra's militancy is distributed to the spheres of spiritual life of the society, guarding the world from infidels disobeying laws of the good declared by Zarathustra.

Some experts consider Mitra's character as a mythological concept

of high antiquity. Thus, in his monograph called *Mitra and Arjaman*, P.Thieme drew a parallel between functions of Mitra and a deity from a pantheon of *Rig Veda* and comes to conclusion on their similarity. P. Thieme thus searches for a typological parallel to this phenomenon and finds a certain generality with functions of Hittite-Mitanni deity.<sup>3</sup> He deduces the following opinion from these judgments: historical roots of Mitra including Arjamana, go back to the epoch of Indo-Aryan community. Hence, Mitra is more ancient than the time of allocation of Ahura Mazda in the rank of the highest deity.<sup>4</sup>

A number of scientists carried out researches comparing Yasht with its polytheistic ideas with *Gathas* of *Avesta*. In particular, analyzing Mitra Yasht and Tishtiria Yasht songs, Barron noted that they were not present in *Gathas*. However, in *Rig Veda* Mitra was regarded as one of the numerous gods of Hinduism belonging to primitive tribal relations. Mitra and his brothers were considered to be the generation of Varuna Brahma. They were one of the 12 sons born to Diti Aditi, who in turn was one of the 50 daughters born to Daksha and Virina. The latter, in turn, came into being from the left and right first fingers of Brahma.

Mitra and Varuna were the eldest and the most powerful of them. These two met a beautiful deity Urvashi in the heavenly garden of Nandana and both Aditians fell in love with her. Mitra was with Urvashi, but she loved Varuna. Mitra and Urvashi had two wise sons Agastia and Vasishtha. It was unknown whether these sons were born to Mitra or Varuna. On knowing her unfaithfulness, Mitra banishes Urvashi to the earth.<sup>5</sup> Such mythological plots cannot be found in *Avesta*. Mitra in this book is perceived as the protector of the heaven and earth from the evil. The latter is expressed in the figurative concept of 'LIE'. Mitra fights against lie. Ahura Mazda created him as one of the superior gods in the heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Rig Vedic sources suggest that the two of Aditi's 12 sons, that is, Mitra and Varuna were depicted in their magnificent and bright armours in the army of the warlike Indra. According to the legend, both of them were going to fight asuras. In contrast, we do not find any motives in *Avesta* where Mitra was appurtenant to other deities' army. Mitra was described as wearing strong armour and holding a cudgel on one arm and he fought alone. He protects wide pastures and cattle breeding there. Looking from the heaven, Mitra observes east, west, north and south, and the beautiful world full of people. He can look at the seven heavens simultaneously. He is the god of heaven. He presents triumph and victory to all the kings on earth. Fighting against evils, Mitra destroys all of them,

be at home, at tribe, in a country or wherever. He destroys the home, tribe and the land of evil with rage and ensures the victory of the right. In this regard, one can notice the deific status of Mitra. People are ordered to worship Mitra in *Avesta*. For instance, "we worship Mitra, he protects us from misfortune, from the lie and harms of the unfaithful". Such peculiarities are also specific to Ahura Mazda as well. However, the deific status of Mitra was marked in the second level of the theological system, to be precise, Mitra was regarded as *yazat*. He was among those whom people worshipped. This was specially done by Zaratushtra who wanted to preserve Ahura Mazda's single god status. Although the faith to Mitra is connected to the earliest religious views historically, it was initially rejected in *Avesta*. The reason for this was that his functions were similar to those of Ahura Mazda.

There are common features between *Rig Veda* and *Avesta*. For instance, a number of gods in *Avesta* have the same names as Veda. Indra's nickname in *Rig Veda* is Vrtrahan. This name was given to him after slaying the terrible demon. In *Avesta* this image belongs to god Varahran who has 10 manifestations. He protects the good world from the evil. He can be seen by people as a two-humped camel, sharp-toothed boar, a heavy storm, a white horse, a wild ram etc. This was the result of deification of animals and national phenomena in the primitive beliefs of the ancestors. Obviously, Avestan Varahran differs from the evil *daeva* Vritra killed by Indra. One can, therefore, say that Varahran's image preserved archaic Indo-Aryan representation.

While paying attention to ancient Indian mythology, we can observe that versatile stories describe the state of polytheistic system in the society. For instance, the concept of the creation of world is described as consisting of complicated step-by-step phenomenon. As an absolute god, Brahma created elements of the world from parts of his body. In particular, heaven and earth emerged from Brahma. The upper half of the egg turned into the heaven, the bottom part was the earth. Air was placed between the heaven and earth. The latter was located in the middle of water. Brahma was alone and because of this and afraid of loneliness he created the elements of the world as well as humans out of his body. The first of the greatest lords, Marichi emerged from Brahma's heart, the second lord - Atri arose from his eyes. Angiras came into being from his lips, Pulatya from the right ear, Pulaha from the left ear and Kratu from his nose. Dharma was born to the second son of Brahma Atri. Dharma was the lord of justice and law. The third son Angiras became the forefather of all the

wizards. In the same way, Daksha was born to the seventh son of Brahma. In a word, history of the creation of gods, wizards, heavenly spirits and finally humanity is described along with creation of the world.<sup>7</sup>

This scene is comparatively simpler in *Avesta*. For example, there are ties of relationship such as Ahura Mazda's son Atar and his daughter Asha. However, they are not at the level of complicated kinship relations like in *Rig Veda*. The gods of pantheon in *Avesta* were created in the heaven by Ahura Mazda of his own disposition. They were created by Ahura Mazda, but their functions were determined independently. All deities (Mitra, Ardi Sura, Ashi, Varahran and Tishtiya) must serve to protect the good world from its evil forces (Ahriman and many of his manifestations).

This kind of functional centralization is based on the concept of monotheism declaring Ahura Mazda as a single god. Brahma in *Rig Veda*, on the other hand, had not become such a central idea.<sup>8</sup> Brahma separates his essence into large, medium and small deities. Asuras initially were among them and were regarded as positive theological concepts. Later on, they came to be sermonized as evil forces. To illustrate, Indra fights with evil army of asuras, etc. As opposed to this, asuras became a quality of the absolute lord Ahura Mazda. The word Ahura Mazda rose to the level of the lord. This occurrence denotes the level of social-economic and economic division of Zoroastrian society.

*Avestan* and *Rig Veda's* periodic features depict tribal relations and class division periods in the development of society. Among numerous problems of Avestology, study of social orientation of *Avesta* as a whole, and its separate levels particularly attracts our attention most. In this regard, comparative sociological analysis of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* in the level of social relations of various chronological stages of Indo-Aryan Vedic community life and Zoroastrian community could be a great help.

Indologists and Iranologists have been analyzing the problems of comparison of various aspects of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* for more than 250 years. As L.A. Lelekov (1992) pointed out, several scientists such as R.Rott, M.Haug (1971), H.Oldenbergh (1917), K.Humbah, B.Sleratt, H.Baily, M.Mole (1963), G.Dumesil (1938) and others, apart from hundreds of works on linguistic, literary, methodological comparisons analyse the issue on the basis of the two sources.

There are two opposing groups of scientists making a comparative study of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta*. For instance, R.Rot, G. Darmestater, K. Heldner etc. paid much attention to the similarities between *Rig Veda* and

*Avesta*. They tried to prove the identity of their ideology, uniqueness of their origin from a common ethno-cultural source. Also, on the basis of the comparison of the lexis, grammar structure, mythology and some aspects of theology, they postulated commonness of their social institutions. As regards the commonness of political institutions, apparently these scientists defined the situation. As investigations show, there is not any strictly described political system of government in *Rig Veda*. As to the hierarchy of *Avesta*, governments of dmanu, vis, zantu, dahju are just traditional gradation system from a big patriarchal family to the territorial unity of defined little and big oases along the rivers of Central Asia. From the point of view of social relations, this system corresponds to a big family house, strain, tribe or union of tribes governed by the seniors' council consisting of the representatives of the elite, communities, military aristocracy, and priests of Zarathustra. Exactly the same governance structure of society is provided in the 21<sup>st</sup> paragraph, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> fragrad of *Videvdad*, which informs of Hanjaman-popular assembly among the best population. Additionally, it is a factor that points to the consultative government. L.A. Lelekov is right to compare this system with the House of Lords, not with Commons in England.<sup>9</sup>

What notion does *Rig Veda* have towards above the mentioned point? There is also mention of the topic of calling of a meeting with Yama (Yima in *Avesta*) a tribal connoisseur. However, this meeting in social plan is limited to commons level that has not reached the level of different order representatives. So, from the given fragment of two sources, it is impossible to draw a hasty conclusion about the historical equivalence of above mentioned meetings (sanjamana-hanjamana). Consequently, we find out higher level of social relations in *Avesta* than in *Rig Veda*.

Some mythological parallels of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* have been compared many times by the scientists of certain generations. As an example we can give myths about Trit in *Rig Veda* and Traetaon in *Avesta*. In parallel plot, it is said that a savage three headed Ajdakhak was defeated by the hero of mythology. L.A. Lelekov estimated the episode as "a symbol and prelude of a new Cosmo order".<sup>10</sup> Thereby, Trit's victory is perceived as overcoming the first space chaos. In *Avesta*, Traetaon's victory over Ajdakhak was not cosmogonical, but it was a step towards kindness in social life and realization of the idea of justice and order in the world. There is evidence to suggest that the idea became viable, changing into social utopia in folklore and in artwork.

Examined plot is considered different in its own way. Indeed, Greek

mythology Heracles defeats the three faced Gerion.<sup>11</sup> However, this plot is deprived of cosmogonical context, though it is semantically close to ancient Indian and Avestan one. In this case, closeness and similarity of myths, identity of names and actions of characters cannot lead to complete and confident reconstruction of initial phase in combining context. The fact of the matter is that *Rig Veda* means creative level of primitive communal relations, whereas *Avesta* proceeds from the conditions of social and property stratification of society.

In the tradition of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* there is the notion of *Arta* (truth) which is equally presented as the unity of physical and moral life. In *Avesta*, *Arta* is high norm and inexhaustible ideal, in triumph without doubts for the future. Honesty, with his kindness in his words and deed every pious must help in triumph of *Arta*. In *Rig Veda*, *Rita* (the parallel of *Arta* in *Avesta*) is reviewed as a remote echo of the past, sad recollections of image that lost good beginning. As *Rig Veda* (1.105, 4-6 lines)<sup>12</sup> says "Where are you Rita of past time?" It is essential to note that plurality of theological anthroponomy based on *Arta* in *Avesta* can hardly ever be found in *Rig-Veda*. This can be explained with that the concept of *Arta* in *Avesta* directly encompassed the whole virtue of Ahura Mazda, the initial virtue of all being.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Yasna (fifth song of Ahunavad Gatha) keeps old time consequences of pre - Zoroastrian imagination about reverence of daevas, which were rejected by Zaratushtra as an image of all evil beginning. So, the 32<sup>nd</sup> song says: "Yima son of Vivahvanta, for his enjoyment and as if for the sake of people abased his veritable lord. By doing this he also became a famous sinner". According to L.A. Lelekov these words belong to Deavas who tried to be involved into the member of Zoroastrian gods at least in the line of messengers of Mazda.<sup>13</sup> However, "Ahura Mazda, with Good mind and with his lordship and good friendship with ... beaming Verity said that he would choose the sacred good mind of the righteous. "Let it be ours!" he exclaims." In this context, Good mind, Ahura Mazda Lordship, beaming Verity, sacred good mind are the various functional characteristics of Ahura Mazda. *Rig Veda* does not contain such embodiment of the gods. As to the absence of Spenta Armaita of Ahura Mazda, which reflects one of its functions as a symbol of sacred piety, now it belongs to the Junior Avesta who makes the Earth sacred. Herein, the investigators see the ancient mythological universal of the union of Heaven and the Earth, but not in a new level compared to *Veda*. As an example, *Atharvaveda* (12.1) presents an earlier mythological scene than

*Avesta*. According to the motives of *Atharvaveda* Daevas defeated the so called asuras as their enemies and became the universal sway of the world apparently. Apparently, the Earth pleaded the reign of Indra, one of the Vedic theological authorities over itself. So, it is possible to conclude that the image of the connection between Heaven and the Earth in *Avesta*, as a factor of life on Earth, is more organized in terms of social relations, than the society in *Rig Veda*. It should be stated that the asuras as discussed in *Rig Veda*, minor gods in Zarathustra took another, absolutely positive explication in *Avesta*. Zarathustra considers asuras not as secondary goddesses, but as an epithet of the highest rank and honor of the One God, Ahura Mazda. In the traditions of comparative study of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta*, B. Branties paid much attention to the architecture. In this case, it is interesting to compare the "house" of Varuna in *Rig Veda* and military installations of Arda Sura Anaxita in *Aban Yasht*. In *Rig Veda* there are hundred gates in Varuna's house, however, in *Avesta* there are palaces consisting of thousands of columns with shining windows on the shores of many horns of great river Ardi. The description of the palaces of Arda in *Avesta* is more detailed. So, a window is equal to thousand, a thousand windows are equal to countless numbers of windows. In other words, thousand columns multiplied by thousand are million and endless numbers of houses and supports and so on. This detailed description of the architecture in *Avesta* must be considered either as additions in later written list of *Avesta*, or as a fantasy of hymn writers.

It is impossible to speak without detailed comparison of pantheons while discussing similarities and differences between *Vedas* and *Avesta*. Earlier gods of *Rig Veda* did not have a fixed hierarchy and clear distribution of function. Indra in *Rig Veda* announces its sovereignty arguing on this right with Varuna.<sup>14</sup> Each god reigned in chaos and ruled in some spheres until another god invaded this sphere. Members of the pantheon in *Rig Veda* just as the mortality of all living beings were mortal. But they reached immortality through other means, through deceit.<sup>15</sup> Life of the gods on heaven resembled the life on earth. Even such mighty ones as Indra and Brihaspati could not pretend the supremacy considering enough their functions. Gods and people were thought to be common and the heirs of the Mother Earth and did not have distinct borders. And it was characteristic of the whole Indo-European archaic proper. Under these conditions the most important point of *Rig Veda* lies in the signs of the ancestors' culture. Strophe of 9.83.9 of *Rig Veda* and the *Manu* ( III.203 ) tell us about this. As against this, the pantheons of *Avesta*, in which



there are some repeating elements between Yashts, one can see clear distinction and borders between their function. At first, Ahura Mazda, as Varuna in *Rig Veda*, is the only lord, who created a good world by himself. The highest ranks after Ahura Mazda belong to immortal spirituals, that is, his emanations. Then follows the culture of pantheon gods (*Yazats*), which was sung in Yashtas about their honor in hymns. The next rank belongs to the fravashi angels who patronise the spirits of all living and lifeless things.

As can be seen, Avestan pantheon has a higher level than *Rig Veda* pantheon. So, Zoroastrianism came close to the monotheism, to that of the reign of Ahura Mazda that was considered to have created other heavenly beings.

In contrary to the collective social mind in *Rig Veda*, *Avesta* proposes the ideas of a centralized country. In *Avestan* Turan such country is named Afrasiab (Avestan Frahasian) and in Iran the rulers of such state were Keanids with the title Kavi Usan (Keikavus) and others. Husrav, the son of Siavarshan (Siavush) and the grandson of Keikovus is stated to have built such an Empire. The word *Hshatra* denoted Husrav's title. Zarathustra in *Gathas* (sermonizing songs) used the word *Hshatra* to mean the undivided lordship of Ahura Mazda. As a part of realization of this function by Ahura Mazda, his emanation Hshatra Varya acts as the idea of fair state governance. Reality of the idea of statehood and its embodiment in *Avesta* was more complicated than tribal relations. The gods of Yashts, and Ahura Mazda more specifically, ruled the society, universe, whereas the Rig Vedic ones were far from such perfectness. If it was possible in *Rig Veda* for a human to interconnect with gods, this seemed too far beyond a person's ability in *Avesta*, and Ahura Mazda was the lord over people and the world. So, the comparative analysis of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* enables us to find answers to a number of questions not only on Indo-Iranology, but also on Avestology too.

The comparison of the level of mythology of *Rig Veda* and *Avesta* in accordance with social life of the epoch is of great interest to us. Moreover the mythology of these two sources contains a specific system that subordinates all means of expression of their main idea. These include different literary devices and language means, choice of which depends on aims and tasks and also character of different scenes. Both the sources contain huge amount of widely known facts of that time that is far beyond the mind of a modern person. For instance, on the basis of the mythological thinking of these two sources one can easily understand Avestan and Rig

Vedic models of the societies and their world outlook. The famous scientist G. Dumesil, whose creativity on historiography is highly appreciated, thought that the question is to be in three functions of the ancient layer of Rig Vedic pantheon. These triple functions were to be magic, physical and special according to G. Dumesil. The third of them, that is, special is interpreted as material prosperity of society, eternal well-being, healthy and long life, healthy generation and etc. This theory, proposed by G. Dumesil, could not embody the whole mythology of *Rig Veda* according to T.Y. Elisarenkova (1972) this theory does not include Agni, Soma and many other gods.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of the views expressed above it would be of great importance to analyze the functional status of the similar gods of Veda in *Avesta*. As is known, the Gatian period of Zoroastrianism proposed the ideas of absolute monotheism that excluded all Vedic gods. The Daives of *Rig Veda* were announced liars and the source of Evil in *Avesta*. However, there are a lot of gods under the name of Yazatin Yashts which are also known from *Veda*.<sup>17</sup>

However, the distribution of their functions varies greatly among them. For instance, there is no unity of Mitra-Varuna in *Avesta*. Mitra acts as a protector of all good creature of Ahura Mazda. If Asuras have a secondary function in *Rig Veda*, then Ahura with its real name of the highest god Mazda becomes an epithet of "Lord" in *Avesta*. Indra is considered as a symbol of military forces, whereas it completely disappears in *Avesta*. More exactly, he becomes a demon, so he is excluded from the list of gods. Consequently, the triple function of Mitra-Varuna, Indra and Nasatii were crystallized in *Avesta* like Ahura Mazda and Mitra (Dumesil J, 1986). In spite of huge number of coinciding parallels and differences, the image combining the spirituality and reality, *Avesta* differs greatly from the Vedic system. If Vedic gods were distributed as heavenly aerspatial and earthly ones, then almost all Avestan gods are connected with the life on earth, with nature and society. The gods of *Avesta* have more specific spheres of activity. This advance was not easily achieved in theory and practice of religion. One thing is certain: introducing the concept of the Single god that was contra positioned to the cosmic Lie, Zarathustra made a great spiritual deed in the history of mankind. It was he who put forward the idea of the important role of a righteous man as a protector of foundation of prosperous world, as an active fighter against the evil in any form.

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## ROERICH PACT



PAX CULTURA

PROTECTION OF ARTISTIC  
AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS  
AND HISTORIC MONUMENTS

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TREATY  
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AND THE OTHER AMERICAN REPUBLICS

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The High Contracting Parties, animated by the purpose of giving conventional form to the postulates of the Resolution approved on December 16, 1933, by all the States represented at the Seventh International Conference of American States, held at Montevideo, which recommended to “the Governments of America which have not yet done so that they sign the ‘Roerich Pact’, initiated by the Roerich Museum in the United States, and which has as its object, the universal adoption of a flag, already designed and generally known, in order thereby to preserve in any time of danger all nationally and privately owned immovable monuments which form the cultural treasure of peoples”, have resolved to conclude a treaty with that end in view, and to the effect that the treasures of culture be respected and protected in time of war and in peace, have agreed upon the following articles:

**ARTICLE I**

The historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions shall be considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by belligerents. The same respect and protection shall be due to the personnel of the institutions mentioned above. The same respect and protection shall be accorded to the historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions in time of peace as well as in war.

**ARTICLE II**

The neutrality of, and protection and respect due to, the monuments and institutions mentioned in the preceding article, shall be recognized in the entire expanse of territories subject to the sovereignty of each of the signatory and acceding States, without any discrimination as to the State allegiance of said monuments and institutions. The respective Governments agree to adopt the measures of internal legislation necessary to insure said protection and respect.

**ARTICLE III**

In order to identify the monuments and institutions mentioned in article I, use may be made of a distinctive flag (red circle with a triple red sphere in the circle on a white background) in accordance with the model attached to this treaty.

**ARTICLE IV**

The signatory Governments and those which accede to this treaty, shall send to the Pan American Union, at the time of signature or accession, or at any time thereafter, a list of the monuments and institutions for which they desire the protection agreed to in this treaty. The Pan American Union, when notifying the Governments of signatures or accessions, shall also send the list of monuments and institutions mentioned in this article, and shall inform the other Governments of any changes in said list.

**ARTICLE V**

The monuments and institutions mentioned in article I shall cease to enjoy the privileges recognized in the present treaty in case they are made use of for military purposes.

**ARTICLE VI**

The States which do not sign the present treaty on the date it is opened for signature, may sign or adhere to it at any time.

**ARTICLE VII**

The instruments of accession, as well as those of ratification and denunciation of the present treaty, shall be deposited with the Pan American Union, which shall communicate notice of the act of deposit to the other signatory or acceding States.

**ARTICLE VIII**

The present treaty may be denounced at any time by any of the signatory or acceding States, and the denunciation shall go into effect three months after notice of it has been given to the other signatory or acceding States.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Undersigned Plenipotentiaries, after having deposited their full powers found to be in due and proper form, sign this treaty on behalf of their respective governments, and affix thereto their seals, on the dates appearing opposite their signatures.

For the Argentine Republic: FELIPE A. ESPIL	April 15, 1935
For Bolivia: ENRIQUE FINOT	April 15, 1935
For Brazil: OSWALDO ARANHA	April 15, 1935
For Chile: M. TRUCCO	April 15, 1935
For Colombia: M. LOPEZ PUMAREJO	April 15, 1935
For Costa Rica: MAN. GONZALEZ	April 15, 1935
For Cuba: GUILLERMO PATTERSON	April 15, 1935
For the Dominican Republic: RAF. BRACHE	April 15, 1935

For Ecuador: C. E. ALFARO	April 15, 1935
For El Salvador: HECTOR DAVID CASTRO	April 15, 1935
For Guatemala: ADRIAN RECINOS	April 15, 1935
For Haiti: A. BLANCHET	April 15, 1935
For Honduras: M. PAZ BARAONA	April 15, 1935
For Mexico: F. CASTILLO NAJERA	April 15, 1935
For Nicaragua: HENRI DE BAYLE	April 15, 1935
For Panama: R. J. ALFARO	April 15, 1935
For Paraguay: ENRIQUE BORDENAVE	April 15, 1935
For Peru: M. DE FREYRE Y S.	April 15, 1935
For the United States of America: HENRY A. WALLACE	April 15, 1935
For Uruguay: J. RICHLING	April 15, 1935
For Venezuela: PEDRO M. ARCAYA	April 15, 1935

AND WHEREAS the said Treaty has been duly ratified by the United States of America, whose instrument of ratification was deposited with the Pan American Union on July 13, 1935;

AND WHEREAS the said Treaty has been duly ratified also by the Republic of Cuba, whose instrument of ratification was deposited with the Pan American Union on August 26, 1935;

NOW, THEREFORE be it known that I, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, have caused the said Treaty to

HRCF FILE

be made public to the end that the same and every article and clause thereof may be observed and fulfilled with good faith by the United States of America and the citizens thereof.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have caused the Seal of the United States of America to be hereunto affixed.

DONE at the city of Washington this twenty-fifth day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and sixtieth.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

By the President:  
CORDELL HULL  
*Secretary of State.*



## SEMINAR REPORT

Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation (HRCF) organized in association with RADDHO and Al-Hakim Foundation a Public Dialogue on the *Right to Cultural Heritage* at the Palais des Nations on 15 March 2013. Main speakers included Biro Diwara, Aldoulou Aboulahi of Mali, Prof. K. Warikoo, Dr. Abdul Amir Hashom of Iraq, Dr. Ibrahima Guisse of Geneva University and Sultan Shahin.

**Biro Diawara** of RADDHO, who moderated the meeting, referred to the terrorist attacks on world heritage sites, such as the destruction of Bamiyan by the Taliban. “Mali is also similarly targeted now. Each civilization has its own pyramid. It is our duty to preserve and protect our traditional heritage from the attacks of terrorists. On 12 June 2012, UNESCO organized a special meeting to safeguard the monuments of Timbuktu. There is need to restore and preserve this unique historical heritage, he added”

**Aldoulou Aboulahi** of Mali who is an advisor of UNESCO for the Timbuktu manuscripts projects and is President of the Malian Coalition, Rhone-Alpes, described the historical cultural heritage of Mali, and the fate of this heritage. “Mali was called French Sudan before independence. Then it became Mali. It is situated between two Arab speaking countries – Algeria and Mauritania. It is known for its Timbuktu mosques. The mosque of Djanna has not suffered. The Askia tomb was built in 1495. In 2004 it became the cultural heritage. Timbuktu is the crossroads situated at a geo-strategic point, trade centre. Scholars came to Timbuktu to learn. It became a sort of university. Teaching was in Arabic. In 1593, Morocco conquered Mali and Timbuktu. The condition of Quranic manuscripts is in a state of shock.

After March 1991, Mali was a democratic model, but it was a sham democracy and there was mismanagement by corrupt officials. Drug trafficking and jihadis became powerful. Crisis in Mali is a result of the Libyan crisis. Radical Islamists are against the local people. MNLA are

the minority and are demanding separate Islamic state. Pakistani, Algerian and other extremist groups are involved in the violence. Mausoleum of a Timbuktu saint was demolished. Famous Arabic manuscripts in the famous Ahmad Baba institute were destroyed. Some citizens managed to hide the manuscripts. But 10% (i.e. 2,500 MSS) of the MSS were destroyed in fire caused by the Islamists. Boxes of MSS were put on fire. UNESCO has made an effort. About 5 million dollars are required to rebuilt the institute. These MSS need to be digitized. One cannot protect intangible heritage, if one's life is threatened. The MSS belong to the whole of African continent – Mauritana, Algeria, Mali, even Indonesia. It is invaluable treasure.”

**Prof. K. Warikoo** made the following statement on the demolition of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban:

“Due to its geographical position straddling the trade routes between Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia and the Indian sub-continent, Afghanistan has throughout its history been a cultural, ethnic and linguistic crossroads. That not only the Afghan rulers but the Afghans themselves respected and protected their cultural heritage for the past 1500 years, speaks volumes about their love and pride of this composite cultural heritage. The destruction of 1800 years old Bamiyan Buddha statues and other historico-cultural relics by the Taliban in Afghanistan in February 2001 caused irreversible loss to the heritage of the Afghan people and also to world heritage. The Taliban went ahead with this sacrilege rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread condemnation, demonstrating the Taliban way of enforcing their extremism and also setting an agenda for extremist forces elsewhere. Even the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Nasr Farid Wasel failed to persuade the Taliban to halt the destruction

Bamiyan, situated about 250 kms. north-west of Kabul, is one of the most important historical sites in Afghanistan. Nestled between the mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush and Koh-i-baba, at an altitude of about 2,850 metres, the valley, with its lush green tableland, presents a quaint scenic contrast to the surrounding rugged scarps of mountains. The site offered an ideal camping place for the merchandise-laden caravans that travelled in ancient times along the ‘Silk Route’ that linked India with Central Asia and China. Later the valley developed into a major centre of Buddhism, with two gigantic statues and hundreds of shrines scooped out of rock, to which devotees flocked to meditate and worship.

Located at the entrance to a pass on the foot of the Hindu Kush linking Kabul with the Silk Route at Balkh, Bamiyan was the foremost

symbol of the civilisational link between India and Afghanistan. Buddhism was introduced to the region first by Ashoka and subsequently by the Kushans. In the 3rd century, the city of Bamiyan became an administrative centre, a caravan stop and the location of a great monastery. It became famous when the Buddhist monks settled into the rock caves built into the great cliff to the north. Other nearby valleys, like Kakrak (in the southeast) and Foladi (in the southwest) were also monastic centres. The world's largest Buddha statues, towering at the height of 175 feet and 120 feet, were carved out of the mountain cliffs perhaps during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The honey-comb of rock cut sanctuaries on the mountain cliffs and the colossal images of the Buddhas at Bamiyan were the glory of classical Afghanistan. They represented splendour, stability and prosperity of the region in harmony with neighbouring kingdoms. A Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hien who passed through Bamiyan in around 400 AD, spoke of over a thousand monks in attendance there, describing the assembly of monks held with great ceremony. Another Chinese traveller, Hsuan Tsang who visited Bamiyan in around 630 AD, found it a thriving Buddhist centre, with many hundreds of monks living in the caves dotted around the statues.

Before their destruction by the fanatic and obscurantist Taliban the two imposing Buddha colossi at Bamiyan withstood the vicissitudes of time and nature for more than a millennium and a half, as a testimony to the splendour of history and the devotion of pilgrims at their feet. In a land that was a veritable melting pot of various religions, and where the prevailing Buddhist art-forms were metamorphosed by influences as diverse as Achaemenian, Indian and Hellenistic, the tallest standing Buddha statues of the world endured like the grand apotheosis of timeless composite art. The site seems to have fallen into desuetude from the 9th century onwards. Earthquake shocks in the highly seismic zone of Afghanistan took its toll on the statues, dislodging portions of the shrine walls. The cold and arid conditions of the rock conglomerate in which the shrines were carved caused extensive weathering. Snow deposits in the crevices in winter turned to ice and widened the cracks; subsequent melting and water run-off in summer made deep scars, each reinforcing the other. The paintings on the walls suffered considerably from both physical and chemical weathering, the pigments coming off at places. The faces of the images were mutilated. The ceilings and the walls were blackened with smoke and soot, caused by burning of firewood inside the shrine. No preservation work had been done at the Bamiyan monuments till a team

of experts from the Archaeological Survey of India arrived in 1969 for a project that was to last for the next seven years. The remedial measures they adopted included, inter alia, a drainage system on the rock-roof of the niche to discharge snow-water, a buttress wall, trimmed and treated to match the profile of the rock surface, to reduce natural wear and tear, and the restoration of the stairs. As for the images, the emphasis was on preventing their further disintegration and not on reproducing the missing portions, although damaged legs were stabilized and broken edges filleted. The preservation of paintings necessitated elaborate physical and chemical cleaning, plastering and consolidation of the surface. At the end of the long restoration operation, Bamiyan retrieved much of its former glory.

Bamiyan was not the only major centre of Buddhism in Afghanistan. In Hadda, visited by both Fa-hien and Hsuan-Tsang, archeologists unearthed the ruins of more than five hundred stupas and many examples of sculpture in the Gandhara style. Digs in the Kushan summer capital of Bagram, Ali Khanum, Tillya Tepe etc. unearthed a wealth of artefacts and objects, which was housed in the Kabul Museum, the principal treasure house of Afghanistan's history and culture. A massive Kushan city at Delbarjin, north of Balkh and a number of gold ornaments near Sheberghan, west of Balkh were also excavated. Sculptures, artefacts and carvings of the Gandhara period had survived more than 1000 year Muslim rule in Afghanistan. The museums at Bamiyan, Kabul and Hadda near Jalalabad contained the largest collection of exquisite sculptures and carvings of the Gandhara school. Their systematic destruction started as the Taliban gained ascendancy in Afghanistan from 1996 onwards. The open air museum of Gandhara art forms at Hadda was destroyed by the Taliban gunfire. The Kabul Museum, has since been vandalised and destroyed, with its precious objects having been plundered and sold into markets in Pakistan. The rich testimony for the important role of Afghanistan whose unique cultural heritage was witness to the exceptional dialogue between civilisations, stands destroyed.

The Bamiyan demolition brought into focus the need for safeguarding world heritage and for promoting cultural pluralism, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to promote understanding and peaceful co-existence. The Bamiyan demolition which evoked universal condemnation, triggered general mobilisation for preserving, restoring and even recreating such cultural objects. It has highlighted the need to preserve and restore all kinds of traditional and popular knowledge, languages, oral traditions, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture

and monuments. It also underscored the need to develop appropriate legal standards to deal with such cultural crimes and to evolve mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring safety of world heritage sites. That heritage is the essential source of identity of peoples, the foundation and lifeblood of their communities and a source of development, is universally recognised. Time has come for the international community to restore the historico-cultural heritage of Afghanistan, so that the Afghans get back the cultural basis of their identity and self-understanding.

**Dr. Abdul Amir Hashom** of Ali Hakim Foundation stated that Mali has asked for a UN Fund to reconstruct the cultural objects destroyed recently. "Mali has sought cooperation of OIC. Problem of the destruction of historical monuments started during 2nd World War. Wahabi new interpretation of Islam does not allow building of new construction on tombs. Wahabis even wanted to destroy the tomb of Prophet. Iraq has various cultural traditions, it is a mosaic of different groups with different interpretations of Islam. In 2004, the Shiite holy mosque of Samara was destroyed. It led to the attacks on and killing of Sunni religious leaders."

**Dr. Ibrahima Guisse** of Geneva University stated that cultural identities are being destroyed. "In case of Mali, we have rich and diverse culture. Imagine the social impact of destruction of culture and identity on a young Mali child. There is need for inter-cultural and intra-religious dialogue to have better understanding. Otherwise, there is the risk of more destruction. It is in the name of religion, that destruction is occurring. People's basic beliefs and identities are being challenged by the Islamists. Mali is also a member of the OIC."

**Sultan Shahin** made the following statement:

"In modern world, human rights to preserving and maintaining cultural heritage is considered universal and inalienable. But there are some forces of darkness, unfortunately professing the faith that I myself do, Islam, that are enemies of cultural heritage. Schooled and trained in Saudi-Wahhabi-Salafi version of Islam, the Taliban in Afghan-Pakistan region and Boko Haram in Africa have devastated precious Islamic heritage in parts of Africa and Buddhist heritage in Afghanistan. Their inspiration comes from Saudi Arabia which is engaged right now in the destruction of oldest Muslim heritage buildings in Medina in the name of expansion of the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Masjid al-Nabawi) to facilitate the building of luxurious seven star hotels. The tomb of the Prophet is once again the prime target of the Saudi regime as it has been ever since the illiterate Najdi Bedouins captured Hejaz. Najdis started dismantling the sites in

1806 almost as soon as the Wahhabi army of the First Saudi State occupied Medina. Their first target was the Jannat al-Baqi Cemetery. This is the vast burial site adjacent to the Prophet's Mosque. It has the remains of many of the members of Prophet Muhammad's family and his companions who had played crucial roles in the survival of Islam through its most difficult initial phase. The Turkish Khilafat-e-Umania, had built beautiful mausoleums over these graves. Like the inhabitants of this area at this time, Turks too had a mystical bent of mind. This was anathema to Wahhabis, guided as they were by the extremely narrow-minded view of Ibn-e-Taimiya and Mohammad Ibn-Abdul Wahhab. Not only were the elaborate mausoleums at Jannat al-Baqi raised to the ground but even heritage mosques across the city were targeted. It was only when these Wahhabi hordes tried to tear down Prophet Muhammad's tomb that a great hue and cry was made by the world Muslim community and the attempt failed. The Turks fought and defeated Saudi Wahhabis in wars fought between 1811 and 1818, then rebuilt the mausoleums employing their finest craftsmen between 1848 and 1860. But after nearly half-a-century Najdi Wahhabis once again asserted control over the region and started their demolitions of all heritage sites associated with Islam. The mausoleums and domes at Al-Baqi' in Medina were demolished for the second time on 21 April 1925. Nearly 300 Islamic structures have been destroyed since then and turned into public toilets, roads and luxurious hotels.

As journalist Daniel Howden wrote in *The Independent* on 6 August 2005: "Historic Mecca, the cradle of Islam, is being buried in an unprecedented onslaught by religious zealots. Almost all the rich and multi-layered history of the holy city is gone. The Washington-based Gulf Institute estimates that 95 per cent of millennium-old buildings have been demolished in the past two decades. Now the actual birthplace of Prophet Mohammed is facing the bulldozers, with the connivance of Saudi religious authorities whose hard-line interpretation of Islam is compelling them to wipe out their own heritage. It is the same oil-rich orthodoxy that pumped money into the Taliban as they prepared to detonate the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2000. And the same doctrine – violently opposed to all forms of idolatry – that this week decreed that the Saudis' own king be buried in an unmarked desert grave."

A Saudi architect, Sami Angawi, who is an acknowledged specialist on the region's Islamic architecture, told *The Independent* that the final farewell to Mecca is imminent: "What we are witnessing are the last days of Mecca and Medina."

According to Dr. Angawi – who has dedicated his life to preserving Islam’s two holiest cities – as few as 20 structures are left that date back to the lifetime of the Prophet 1,400 years ago and those that remain could be bulldozed at any time. “This is the end of history of Mecca and Medina and the end of their future,” said Dr. Angawi. “At the root of the problem is Wahhabism,” says Dr. Angawi. “They have a big complex about idolatry and anything that relates to the Prophet.”

As before, the threat to Prophet Mohammad’s tomb has stirred some conscience among Muslims. The Sufi *Ulema* and *Mashaikh* of India have recently protested against destruction of sacred monuments of Islam in Saudi Arabia. They have written to Indian government as well as to the Saudi Ambassador in India and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) among others venting the angst of “thousands of Indian Muslims”.

Similar awakening can be seen in parts of Africa as well. The League of the *Sahel Ulema*, comprising Sheikhs from Algeria and other African countries, *Ulema* from the Ministry of Religious affairs in Mauritania and representatives of Sufi movements in Mali, has announced the launch of an initiative to counter the “extremism and exaggeration in religion” promoted by groups claiming to be carrying out so-called “jihad”.

The Tunisian government too has said recently that “protecting the shrines has become an urgent matter after we found out that there is a systematic plan by some religious extremist groups to completely destroy these historical symbols”.

Apparently a need is being felt by many Muslims to fight back and reclaim the spiritual values of Islam from the Islamo-fascists. But backed by the massive petrodollar funding, the fascist ideology has found so many backers around the world that common Muslims are finding it difficult to fight back. Barring a few stray voices, the silence over the destruction of precious Islamic heritage as much as terrorism in the name of Islam is overwhelming.

Imagine a mosque being leveled in Europe or North America. The war cry raised by us Muslims all over the world will be deafening. The same fascists who are bent on destroying Islam’s historicity will raise hell and undoubtedly violence will ensue in some parts of the world. Muslims are supposed to be very sensitive in matters of religion. But one wonders where this sensitivity goes when extremist Muslims destroy heritage Muslim structures, Sufi shrines and beautiful mausoleums and mosques. It’s time more Muslims searched their consciences and stood up for what they believe in. Islam will just have to be reclaimed from these dark forces

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threatening all that is good in Islam. It's also time the international community took effective measures to protect world's cultural heritage."

**Hidayat Bhutto** of World Sindhi Congress stated that extremists in Pakistan are destroying the historic shrines in Sindh and other areas.



From the left are Sultan Shahin, Aldoulou Aboulahi of Mali, Biro Diawara of RADDHO, Dr. Ibrahima Guisse of Geneva University, Prof. K. Warikoo and Dr. Abdul Amir Hashom of Ali Hakim Foundation.





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**Human Rights Council**

Thirty-third session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Written statement\* submitted by the Himalayan Research and  
Cultural Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special  
consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is  
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/  
31.

[22 August 2016]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting  
non-governmental organization(s).

## DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: THREAT TO PEACE

Culture and cultural heritage binds different peoples, communities, groups diluting the divisive factors based on religion, class, creed, language, region etc. Cultures and civilizations coexist in harmony and even complement each other, by building economic and cultural bridges. Recurring incidents of systematic attacks on indigenous cultural heritage in various parts of Asia and Africa pose grave threat to peace and security.

Over the past two decades, there have been organised attacks by the extremist militant groups like the Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban, Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Daesh and Islamic State to destroy indigenous and composite cultural heritage, value systems and ways of life, which were retained with remarkable continuity through long history of over 2,000 years. Taking the case of Jammu and Kashmir, it has witnessed the orgy of violence, brutal killings, extortions, kidnappings, rape of women, destruction of properties and holy shrines, both Hindu and Muslim, by Islamist terrorists and mercenaries. *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* directed their efforts to eliminate traditional social and religious practices prevalent among the Kashmiri Muslims, exhorting them to banish such un-Islamic practices as visiting ancient holy shrines of Sufis and Rishis. The militant groups tried to stop the celebration of annual *Urs* (festival) at Batmol Rishi. Then a part of Baba Rishi shrine near Tangmarg was burnt. In Aish Muqam, there was a bloody clash in which few people got killed, when militants tried to prevent the local villagers from celebrating the *Urs* of Baba Zainuddin Rishi. On May 11, 1995 the mercenaries from Afghanistan and Pakistan led by Mast Gul, destroyed the ancient holy shrine of Sheikh Nooruddin Rishi at Char-e-Sharif, 35 kms. from Srinagar. This shrine has been a centre of pilgrimage for millions of devotees both Hindus and Muslims, over the past 600 years. In early July 1998 the terrorists made an abortive attempt to blow up the nearly 700 years old shrine of Naqshband Sahib in Srinagar. In June 2012, over 200 years old khanqah of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani, popularly known as Dastgeer Saheb was gutted in mysterious circumstances. Soon after in October 2012, another Sufi shrine of Hazrat Baba Reshi in Dabrana village was set on fire. *Hizbul Mujahideen* and other militant groups in Kashmir have been holding out public threats against participation by Hindu pilgrims to the annual pilgrimage of the holy Amar Nath cave. They even resorted to mine blasts and firing upon the Hindu pilgrims on numerous occasions. Hindu temples have been routinely destroyed or

vandalized and their landed properties encroached upon. The Jammu and Kashmir government in its written reply to the State Assembly admitted in 2012 that “of the 438 temples in the Valley, 208 had been damaged. However, Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti disputed the government figures and stated that around 550 temples were damaged and 50,000 kanals of land encroached upon”. (Peerzada Ashiq, 208 temples damaged in Kashmir. Hindustan Times 4 October 2012). Raising the issue of demolition of temples in Kashmir in Indian parliament in December 2015, Bhartruhari Mahtab, Member of Parliament of Biju Janata Dal pointed out that at least 80 temples were missing now, as there were 436 temples in Kashmir before 1989. These holy shrines and Hindu places of worship in Kashmir have been targeted by the Islamist terrorists and mercenaries in order to obliterate the indigenous ethno-cultural and spiritual heritage of Kashmir and the traditional ethos of religious tolerance, harmony and peaceful co-existence, and to usher in the fundamentalist and radical Islamic practices. Even the Valley’s first all Muslim girls rock band was forced to stop performing, after a fatwa was issued against the three Kashmiri Muslim girls - Noma Nazir, Farah Deeba and Aneeka Khalid in early 2013, who went into hiding after receiving a threat of social boycott from the militant women’s outfit Dukhtaran-e-Millat.

Earlier in 2001, the Taliban rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread international condemnation, not only went ahead with the destruction of the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan, but even made a public demonstration of their savage acts. Inside Pakistan, the extremist militants bombed in early 2009, the famous shrine of 17th century Sufi Rehman Baba, the most widely read Pashto poet on both sides of the Durand Line. On 28 May 2010 two mosques belonging to the Ahmadi sect in Lahore were attacked killing 93 persons. At least 42 persons were killed and over 200 injured in blasts at the popular Data Darbar shrine in Lahore on 2 July 2010. On 7 October 2010, two suicide bombers struck at the sufi shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi - the patron saint of Karachi on Thursday, when it was packed with thousands of devotees, killing at least 16 persons and wounding over 60 others. On 25 October 2010 shrine of Baba Farid Shakar Ganj, a 12th century Sufi saint in Punjab was bombed, killing 6 persons and injuring scores of others. Two powerful blasts ripped through the shrine of 13th century Sufi saint Ahmed Sultan, popularly known as Sakhi Sarwar in Dera Ghazi Khan district of Punjab province killing 41 persons on 3 April 2011, when thousands of devotees were attending the celebrations to mark the saint’s anniversary. On 22 June

2016, Amjad Sabri well known Pakistani Sufi qawwal, best known for his renditions of mystic poetry, was shot dead by Taliban in Karachi.

Ever since the Islamic State took control of Mosul and adjoining areas, home to thousands of archeological sites, it indulged in organized destruction of the rich and historical cultural heritage. Hatra, 110 kms southeast of Mosul, founded in 300 BC, a Silk Route centre with Greek and Roman architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1985, was occupied by the IS in mid-2014. In February 2015, the IS blew up with explosives Mosul's nearly a century old Central Public Library, along with thousands of ancient manuscripts and books. In Mosul the IS vandalized the museum having 173 antiquities and also razed the tomb and mosque of Biblical prophet Jonah. In March 2015, IS bulldozed the ancient Assyrian city and its priceless artifacts in Nineveh province, 30 kms south of Mosul.

In August 2015, Islamic State blew up three ancient funeral towers including that of Elahbel, in the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria. The militants also beheaded Khaled-al-Assad, the 82 year old archeologist and guardian of Palmyra's ancient heritage. UNESCO condemned the Islamic State's action as war crime, wiping out evidence of Syria's diverse cultural history. A week later the IS destroyed about 2,000 years old temple of Baal and temple of Baalshamin, also in Palmyra, which were the source of pride for Syrians. In another instance, they attacked the 8th century BC citadel of Assyrian king Sargon II at Khorasabad, 10 miles north-west of Mosul in Iraq. The rich art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, a symbol of diversity of Syrian identity and history, has been destroyed in a determined bid to erase this great culture from our memory.

That heritage is the essential source of identity of peoples, the foundation and lifeblood of their communities and a source of development, is universally recognized. The legacy of shared values and cultural heritage provides a sound basis for sustaining harmonious relations among different countries. An awareness of a shared language, ethnicity, history, religion, and landscape represents the building blocks of culture which needs to be preserved and promoted to achieve enduring peace and harmony. The silent majority of traditional, moderate and liberal Muslims, who practice Islam in accordance with the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination, need to shun their silence and assert and organize themselves against the extremist Islamists. On their part, the governments and secular societies need to help in preserving, restoring and emphasizing

the indigenous, traditional and diverse Islamic practices and institutions, as have been prevalent in different parts of the world.

Time has come for the international community to pay attention to the problem of destruction of the historical-cultural heritage, which is being done deliberately to obliterate the indigenous heritage and cultural basis of the identity and self-understanding of various peoples. Some concrete steps at local, national regional and international levels need to be taken for this purpose. UNESCO should take the lead in this regard:

- 1) Safeguarding world heritage and promoting cultural pluralism, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to promote understanding and peaceful co-existence.
- 2) Preserving and restoring all kinds of traditional and popular knowledge, languages, oral traditions, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture and monuments.
- 3) Developing appropriate legal standards to deal with such cultural crimes and to evolve mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring safety of world heritage sites.
- 4) Preparing a register of tangible cultural property in the form of monuments of art, architecture, history, shrines and religious places, archeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, libraries, museums, objects or buildings of artistic, historical, architectural and cultural importance.

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers R.No. 67256/97

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*Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*

**Vol. 21, No. 1, January-March 2017**