

BUDDHISM IN GANDHARA

Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti¹ and Anwaar Mohyuddin¹

Abstract

The present study entitled “Buddhism in Gandhara” focuses on the religious faith of Gandharans during the Kushan Empire, especially during Kanishka Reign when Buddhism became popular. This research focuses on the religious art works flourished during the regime, including stone sculpture of Gandhara and Mathura reflect the Hellenistic style of Gandharan Buddhist art. It also deals with the artifacts, coins, inscriptions, narrative sculptures from Kushan to ascertain Gandharan Buddhist tradition as documented in art, archaeology, and epigraphy, which comes mainly from the region. The Study can be distinguished as a special case study of its own nature for being conducted in the geographical boundaries, where Kushan and Gandhara art was experimented and practiced which afterwards achieved a status of the full-scale culture of the area. The main aim of the research was to study the religious aspects of the inhabitants of the Kushan period, which was prominent in the living patterns of different social classes, structural design of the buildings, attires and cultural outfits of various segments of the society as well as personal features like ornaments, headdresses, and social rituals in shaping the cultural contours of Gandhara art. The study, based on empirical data collected from various museums and archaeological sites, particularly from excavated areas around Taxila valley, which reflect a special understanding of religious artwork during the regime of Kushans supporting a close link with the Kings and Princess during their control of South Asian region. This paper concludes that Buddhism was a thriving religion during the Greek regime and was supported by the state.

Keywords: Gandhara, Buddhism, stupas, Sarvastivada, Dharmaguptaka, Bodhisattvas, Hellenistic, Graeco-Roman

¹ Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad - Pakistan

Introduction

The Kushans swept away completely the remnants of the Indo-Greeks and Parthians in the first century CE and established a mighty empire extending into the three great river valleys of Asia—the Oxus in the northwest, the Indus and the Ganges in the northeast of their extents which included many states of Central Asia and countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Due to violent and disturbed situation on the borders of China, the tribes were fighting with each other for the grazing lands. Because of this situation the Yüeh-chi tribe came towards Pakistan, this branch of the tribes was called Kushans. The Kushan dynasty became the notable empire in this world regarding cultural, commercial, art and religious accomplishment.

The Kushans built a truly Central Asian Empire, with their capital at Peshawar and Kapisa. Kanishka, the supreme ruler of the Kushan dynasty converted into Buddhism and he was the one who gave the importance to the Buddhism religion and the art of Gandhara. The king Kanishka spread the Buddhism religion in whole Central Asia and China. Kanishka's period was most important and respectable in the history of Buddhist art and culture. The Kushans remained in the region of Gandhara more than three hundred years and introduce the excellent work of art both foreign influence and local traditions. Along with the existed socio-cultural system they patronized and flourished their own culture and traditions and hence developed new complex political and cultural environment. What we wear today in Pakistan as our national dress; Shalwar Kameez is given to us by the Kushans. Dr. Dani strongly argued that the dress of Pakistani society is borrowed from Kushans (Dni, 1983). Social divisions, family life, marriage, dress and ornaments, food and household effects, luxuries and social evil can be seen in the sculptures of the Kushans. The term Kushans is noticed in several forms in inscriptions—Brahmi and Kharoshthi, as on a dedicatory stone for a Buddhist stupa at Manikiala near Rawalpindi, and on the coins as a suffix to the individual king's name—for example, SHAO-NANOSHAO KANESHKI KOSHANO (King of Kings, Kanishka the Kushan) (Rosenfield, 1967).

The advent of Buddhism in Gandhara dates back to no further than the middle of the third century BCE. The Maurya emperor Asoka began sending his missionaries

to the Northwest frontier during this time. The efforts of the missionaries can be seen in the fourteen Edicts that are engraved on rocks in Shahbaz-Garhi, 12 km from Mardan. These commandments, outlined by Asoka, highlighted the basic teachings of Buddhism. Other than composing the code of conduct and ethics of this new-found faith, Asoka placed great importance to the worship of funeral mounds or stupas. To promulgate the Sakya faith, he gifted each primary city of his state with a Buddha relic. These relics had been obtained by unearthing seven of the eight stupas preserved in the region. Along with these gifts, the emperor also presented a stupa to each city. By so doing, Asoka provided the worshippers with tangible objects that would become the subject of their prayers and thoughts. This stupa culture is particularly important because it was due to this that the Buddhists began to esteem their sculpture and stupas, ornately adorning them.

METHODOLOGY

The narrative stone sculptures, decorative reliefs, or images of Gandhara are an important tool with the help of which an attempt has been made to understand the various aspects of the Kushan's multi-ethnic blend of many cultures, history, architecture, and religion. Gandharan studies in general and studies of Gandhara art in particular have traditionally been, and continue to be, dominated by archaeologists and art historians. In fact, until very recently materials falling within the purview of these fields - mainly artistic and archaeological remains, including stone sculpture, inscriptions and coins - were nearly all that we had at our disposal for the study of Gandhara art. Images carved in the sculpture workshops of this ancient realm are among the most expressive and influential in the history of Buddhist art of Gandhara. Scholars have often tried to force the evidence into orderly configurations that fit their own presumption.

❖ LOCALE

Taxila is located 30 Km north-west of Islamabad and its exact bearings are: longitude 72° 49' 51" E and latitude 33° 44' 47" N (Cunningham, 2002). It is situated in the open west-end of a valley which is some 20 km east-west and 8 km north-south. The valley itself occupies a picturesque position at the head of Sindh-Sagar Doab between Indus and Jhelum rivers. The average height of the valley is about

549 meters (1,800 ft.) above sea level. The whole area is well watered by the main River Haro as well as numerous small rivulets such as Tamra, Lundi etc., all fed by a number of permanent springs (Bhatta, Penzer, & Tawney, 1924). Here the rainfall is abundant and the climate pleasant and refreshing as was in ancient times (Beal, 1906). Inhabitants of the valley are of mixed races and speak a dialect of Punjabi language. Administratively, the valley, partly belongs to the Punjab and partly to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine how Buddhism spread among the second century BCE Greek princes of the Northwest is merely guesswork. This is because a large number of Buddhist antiquities and monuments that have survived till today hold no relation to the Greek rule in the second century BCE. Of all the existing information about the Greek period, the only positive story is that told in the Milindapanha about King Menander and his conversion to Buddhism by Nagasena. Although the Greeks were not flexible to matters of religion, they were fascinated by the teachings laid down by the Sakyamuni religion, despite the fact that they were relatively pessimistic and subdued than those of their own. From a political perspective, Menander must have associated himself with the Buddhist Church as he shared its struggle against the Sunga King Pushyamitra and the violent Brahmanical reaction which had led to the mass destruction of Buddhist monasteries in Eastern Punjab.

Although there is a lack of concrete evidence, it can be concluded with certainty that Buddhism was a thriving religion during the Greek regime and was supported by the state. This is further manifested in the fact that the ruling parties of Sakas, who always followed their Greek predecessors, converted to Buddhism. On the other hand, there are no grounds to deduce that the Greeks fully supported Buddhism just because they erected memorials of the Founder. The case may perhaps be that their bond with Buddhism was mainly due to the doctrines of the great Teacher rather than to the interest of stupa worship or the adoration of a lion-crowned pillar.

Surviving antiquities display that the Saka were not artistic. Most of the ornaments were mere replicas of the dying Greek art while a few displayed attractive Scythic and Smartian designs. When, for example, comparing two coins of two people or the ornamental features of a Saka building, it becomes very difficult to conclude that the Saka employed artificers other than the Greek. The artificers, Greek by origin, for generations, continued to preserve Greek traditions till the end of the Saka rule in the North-West. As time went on, the craftsmanship and traditions of the Greek deteriorated. This, naturally, was inevitable considering that the Parthian empire had disrupted interaction between the Saka and their Greek subjects and the Western world.

Soon after, when the Parthians became rulers of the North-West, Greek arts and crafts were revived. The Parthians, like the Sakas, were confirmed philhellenes, taking pride in their Hellenistic culture and with numerous Greek subjects, were in a position to maintain commercial relations with the Mediterranean coasts. Post conquest of Taxila by Gondophares, the Suren of eastern Parthia, the revival of Greek arts and crafts became very noticeable in this region. Evidence derived from sculptures go on to show that the local Gandhara artists were capable of creating pieces of Hellenistic art that formed the basis for Buddhist art of that region by the end of the last century before the Christian era. However, after the Parthian conquest of c. 25 CE, there was a revival of Hellenistic art followed by a positive transformation in Buddhist art. I shall discuss this further in an upcoming chapter. For now, let us focus our attention to artistic influences other than that of the Greeks, which contributed towards the making of Gandhara School. Such influences include that of the Early Buddhist School of Central India.

In the last century BCE and 1st century CE stupas were built at Taxila and in Swat (Allchin, 1960; Faccenna, 1980; Fussman, 1985) and much has been said of the patronage in the following period of the Kujula dynasty. For this, however, at any rate as regards Buddhist structures and sculptures in Gandhara, there is little independent evidence; the piety of Kaniska I, his summoning of a council and construction of a stupa and monastery at Peshawar are barely mentioned outside a very persistent Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless Buddhism, offering perhaps an easier form of cultural naturalisation to foreigners and frontier folk than Hinduism with its caste system and no strong proselytising character, evidently flourished so

much in the Kujula period that the North-west became another Buddhist holy land full of goals of pilgrimage and religious foundations (Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949; Mukherjee, 1988; Liu, 1988; Bivar, 1991).

Tradition also associates Vasumitra and other famous scholars with Kaniska as patron of the Buddhist Council usually placed in Kashmir, a land subsequently famous for Buddhist scholarship. The earlier importance of Gandhara for the Buddhism and Buddhist art transmitted into Central Asia and the Far East is, however, generally admitted, and scholars attribute texts and translators to Gandhara and the rise of Mahayana Buddhism to the North-west. In this connection, a manuscript discovered in Central Asia, but probably written in Gandhara in the Kharosthi script and on the birch-bark characteristic of the North-west, shows that the Middle Indo-Aryan Gandhari had been adapted to Buddhist literature and its canonical use has been proposed for the Sarvastivada and Dharmaguptaka sects (Beal, 1984).

❖ **Gandhara sculpture and Iconography**

In Gandhara, a progressive development began with anthropomorphic narratives focusing on the life of the Buddha, typically emphasizing his birth and his relics. Over time, these narrative reliefs took on more iconic characteristics. The religious and aesthetic aspects have been carefully brought within the extent of the sculptural art. The Gandhara sculptures serve as welcome corrective and an addition to the Buddhist canonical books, visualizing the form of Buddhism in Gandhara. The Gandhara artistic efforts are evidently Buddhist; the icons, legends and monuments together with their motifs are still Buddhist. The form is strongly Hellenistic, while the matter is yet Indian. Consequently, many of the old motifs of the early school have been retained, while some are modified and a few entirely transformed. Statues serving independent cult images, chiefly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, stood in niches and chapels, on benches and platforms and against the walls of sacred buildings.

The cult involved figures of princely aspect who are taken to be Bodhisattvas, that is, Buddha-to-be, among whom, however, the only one iconographically distinct to us is the commonly found Maitreya; other figures, who wear turbans, remain to be identified as one or several entities. Although he became prominent in the

Mahayana with other great Bodhisattvas, Maitreya can be connected with an older scheme of successive Buddha in which the latest is Sakyamuni, whose successor, Maitreya, in the interim reigns in the Tusita heaven, and his Messianic character has been seen as reinforced by Iranian influences to which Northwestern Buddhism may reasonably have been exposed. Aspects of light symbolism, the frequently represented fire-altar, the halo, the flames seen on a Buddha's shoulder and the nature of Amitabha or the transcendental Buddha of Limitless Light, have been connected with Iranian concepts, but interpretations of such features of Buddhism are readily available from Indian ideas and symbolism (Rowland, 1936; Foucher, 1942-7; Rosenfield, 1967; Basham, 1981).

The iconographies have been connected with the concepts and practice of yoga which Buddhism has, shared with other Indian paths to liberation. Two of the Buddha's special marks at the top of the body and between the eyes, the usnisa and urna respectively, may reflect the bodily centres (cakra) of progressively ascending spiritual liberation, both are sources of light and a hole sometimes seen in the usnisa has been interpreted in this sense (Huntington, 1984). This feature has been particularly noted on the fasting Bodhisattva, a striking Gandhara iconography, found in narrative scenes and perhaps as a cult image, which might have developed from the prescribed Buddhist contemplation of death and impurity (Soper, 1959).

The deities without specific Buddhist connection can be found in Gandhara in Buddhist contexts. Scenes of drinking, dancing, wine and music-making can occur together; they may exhibit degrees of abandon and have an erotic aspect, while others appear solemn and ritualistic and with a processional character. The formal Western appearance of such elements could have come from widespread Dionysian or related themes expressed in Hellenistic forms in the Near East where, as in Gandhara, they may also have been re-valued in terms of local religious concerns. In this connection the Gandhara has been linked with a pre-Buddhist cult of yaksas, which, on account of the presence of the vine in the North-west, had a character of ritual celebrations when it came into contact and coexistence with Buddhism. The vine-scrolls (Ingholt, 1957) who are elsewhere drinkers and dancers, riding dragons or lions (Ingholt, 1957) to which they also offer drink perhaps rather than food; (Ingholt, 1957) water spirits or nagas also appears in

drinking scenes and musical performances, (Ingholt, 1957) and tutelary deities carrying drinking cups or bowls may be influenced by the divine couple engaged in ritual celebrations. The abundance of images of Hariti and Pancika, perhaps, meant to satisfy the man's natural desire for offspring and riches. The presence of the numerous monuments and their wealth of sculptures furnish proof of the prosperity of the country and the richness of its inhabitants, who were not less mixed in race than sculptures themselves, in style.

❖ **Archaeological Remains of Gandhara**

The large number of existing sculpture and archaeological sites be a sign of religious enthusiasm in Gandhara. The Kushan Empire possessed the commercial significance and subsequent wealth for generous donations. Patronage was lavished on stupa complexes which might also be important goals of pilgrimage. The literary evidence for them, in Chinese pilgrim's accounts of their locations, legends and the worship they received, dates mostly from the 4th century onwards, but the information, like the foundations, must be older. Fa Hiyen in 400 CE tells of the four great stupas, each marking an act of self-sacrifice by the future Sakyamuni as a Bodhisattva, and other such traditions - with their commemorative shrines--are situated by Chinese pilgrims in or near Gandhara. Many relics are also reported: at Nagarahara and Hadda shrines contained the Buddha's skull-bone or usnisa, his teeth, eyeball, staff and robe, hair and nail-parings, and his bowl was enshrined at Purusapura (Peshawar). Although quite unhistorical, visits by the Buddha were also commemorated: at Nagarahara, where a cave preserved the Buddha's shadow, (Beal, 1884; Kuwayama, 1990) at Purusapura, (Beal, 1884) at the Hariti stupa north-west of Pushkalavati (Charsada) (Beal, 1884) and along the Swat river (Beal, 1884). Other records, in the form of prediction by the Buddha, admire the Buddhist glories of Gandhara. The Chinese pilgrim Hsüan Tsang, writing in the 7th century, constantly attributes stupas to the emperor Asoka (272-232 BCE), in the legendary author of their miraculous multiplication to house relics of the Buddha.

The characteristic religious foundation consisted of a main stupa and monastery, usually found together, (Foucher, 1905-51) but the merit gained by building stupas ensured that there were often many at one site. At large foundations the main

stupa was surrounded with lesser stupas, some of which might have been covered in carved stone reliefs, like the stucco figures and compositions, as at Jaulian, Taxila, while rows of chapels, niches and benches housing images of stone, stucco and clay formed enclosures (Foucher, 1905-51). Although the climb to one such monastery, at Takht-i-Bahi, (Errington, 1992) where some buildings appear almost complete, still makes a dramatic impact, in the almost total lack of sculpture in situ it is difficult, except at the Jaulian complex, (Errington, 1992) to imagine today the effect on the pilgrim and worshipper, enhanced as it must have been by colour on plastered surfaces and statuary, of complexes densely provided with sculpture, for a time at least, by sustained devotion and the religious duty of constant renewal (Marshall; 1951). At Takht-i-Bahi the combination of the monastic quadrangle lined with residential cells and of the quadrangle with principal stupa lined with image chapels forms a north-south alignment, with an enclosure in between lying on a lower level and given over to minor stupas and very high image chapels, the latter presumably for large clay and stucco figures (Spooner, 1911; Hargreaves, 1914b; Sehrai, 1982). Similar and compact alignments (Marshall, 1951; Kuwayama, 1990; Callieri, 1989a) are found at Jaulian and elsewhere in the neighbourhood of Taxila.

❖ **Gandhara Art**

The practice of consciously organizing elements in a way that appeals to the senses or emotions is termed as Art. It covers a various sequence of human being's activities, conception, and mode of expression. Art is an action of expressing our feelings, thoughts, and observations. Buddhist art reached its apex due to introducing Mahayana Buddhism by Kushan king, Kanishka, during the 1st Century BCE to 1st Century CE. During this period the anthropomorphic representation of the Lord Buddha or the figure art was introduced. In the 1st century to 2nd century of the Christian era, under the Kushan rulers a new school of art prospered in the region of Gandhara. Taxila and Peshawar, including its neighbouring districts, were the main centers where the specimen of this art can be seen. Due to ecological and geographical location of the region turned into a meeting place of several races and cultures. As a consequence of this, the assimilation of both foreign ideas and Indian cultural motifs can be observed in the art of Gandhara. This art is an amalgamation of various cultures, the Buddhist

in the theme it is Graeco-Roman in technique and style. It is evident from physiognomy and drapery of the images of Buddha and other personalities. The sculptors and artists of this region have shaped a huge quantity of Buddha and Bodhisattva images along with other Buddhist deities. The image of Buddha and Bodhisattva, in Central Asian archaeological sites, shows the resemblance with the Gandhara style. Taxila and Peshawar were the main centers of Gandhara art. Afghanistan was also the main center of Gandhara art as the archaeologists have excavated many archaeological sites and found excellent specimens of sculptures, stupas, and Buddhist monasteries.

The Art of Gandhara came into being in the last century before the Christian era, when the Sakas were ruling in the North-West and when the widespread Hellenistic art which they had inherited from their Greek predecessors had already reached a decadent state. The Gandhara sculptures were produced between outside limits of the 1st century BCE and the 6th century CE, the character of this art and the way in which it declined under the Sakas and was subsequently given a new lease of life after the Parthian conquest is clearly apparent, although on a small scale, in a series of ornamental toilet-trays of Gandharan workmanship which were unearthed in the Sirkap city of Taxila. Greek arts and crafts achieved incentive during the reign of the Parthians when Gondophares, the Suren of Eastern Parthia conquered Taxila. These specimens can be seen in artifacts exhibited in Taxila museum.

The art of Gandhara possesses both autonomy and originality; its unresolved relationship with Graeco-Roman art and the effect of this relationship on its uncertain chronology and development have always exerted a particularly strong interest. Foucher believed that the earliest Western source was Hellenistic (Foucher, 1942-7). The very strength of the art in the Peshawar valley, the broadest and most fertile expanse along the great trade route from the Oxus to Taxila, he believed that fresh settlers coming southwards when nomads took Bactria (c. 130 BCE) strengthened the hold of these elements between then and the political extinction of the Greeks in Gandhara (c. 75 CE), for without Greek rule on Buddhist soil there could have been no Graeco-Buddhist art, but once implanted the impulse maintained itself and revived with the recovery of Gandhara after the Saka and Parthian conquests (Foucher, 1942-7).

Foucher proposed instead an eastward cultural movement taking Hellenistic art across Iran in Graeco-Iranian form, so that Taxila and Puskalavati in a sense paralleled Palmyra and Dura-Europos in the west (Foucher, 1942-7). In 1889, Vincent Smith declared the 'art of Gandhara essentially Roman in style' (Smith, 1966), its models 'Graeco-Roman, and not pure Greek' (Smith, 1966), developed by artists of Peshawar (Smith, 1966) adopting the 'Roman system of design and decoration, (Smith, 1966) and probably belonging to a foreign colony resulting from trade connections (Smith, 1966). As evidence he cited the diffusion of the Roman form of Corinthian capital with its use of the human figure (Smith, 1966), resemblances with Christian work and sarcophagi (Smith, 1966), vine-scroll and garland motifs and Bacchic subjects (Smith, 1966).

According to Marshall, the style in the earlier 1st century CE to a revived Western taste favoured in the period of brief eastern Parthian rule in Gandhara (Marshall, 1960). But the term Parthian has also been comprehensively given to work produced at different centres both within and outside Parthian political control between the 3rd centuries BCE and 1st century CE in Iran proper, in Mesopotamia and the Syrian desert, varying greatly in scale and integration of Hellenistic and local traditions; the early Parthian capital of Nisa (an ancient city, located near modern-day Bagir village, 18 km southwest of Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) attracted or produced still strongly Hellenising works around the 2nd century BCE, (Schlumberger, 1978) but the most abundant art, for which the term Parthian is generally preferred, is found later, in western Parthia or outside, in caravan cities like Palmyra, where the commercial prosperity of the early centuries CE resulted in a rich Hellenised art and architecture with what might be termed an Iranian character particularly prominent in the painting and sculpture (Ingholt, 1957; Schlumberger, 1952; Ghirshman, 1961; Kawami, 1987). Since works from Shami, Hatra and most notably Palmyra show resemblances with Gandhara in respect of frontality, simplified volumes and drapery, dress and ornaments. Foucher used the term Graeco-Iranian, combined with Graeco-Syrian, to indicate the early eastward transformation of Hellenistic art and stressed that, besides Alexandria, the Syrian and Mesopotamian monuments offer the best agreements of detail with Gandhara (Foucher, 1905-51; Rowland, 1953). Schlumberger has expressed as Graeco-Iranian the hybrid productions at the courts of rulers between eastern Anatolia and Bactria

as forming a common source from which Buddhist Gandhara developed its art in the east and later Parthian art grew in the west (Schlumberger, 1952).

Ingholt in his work, referred the early influences on Gandhara to what he called the Graeco-Parthian civilization of Mesopotamia and, quoting parallels from Rome, Palestine, Palmyra, Hatra and Shami, dated the first period of the art with the accession of Kaniska to 144-240 CE (Ingholt, 1957). Pugachenkova in his summary conclude that Gandhara images and motifs were due to widespread Hellenistic culture which, in differing degrees and local conditions, also governed Roman and Parthian art. Passing into Gandhara chiefly through a Bactrian and eastern Iranian filter, Graeco-Roman motifs like the Corinthian capital, with its altered proportions and details, took a secondary and modified place in a sculpture with altogether different themes. Western elements were due perhaps partly to early Greek settlers, but also to the patronage, during the Graeco-Bactrian and Saka-Parthian periods, of Greek culture at royal courts, where Greek gods were worshipped and the Greek alphabet was used, and it may have been diffused by the large circulation of coins figuring Greek deities, by their worship in temples and perhaps at festivals with Dionysian or similar themes, even if their religious symbolism had been revalued in local terms. The prosperity of Kushan rule too must subsequently have encouraged the import of artefacts from Syria and Alexandria (Pugachenkova, 2000).

In the last century BCE and first century CE, Gandhara tradition took shape, when the Buddhists had been established in Gandhara, adopted for sculpture, besides the clay and stucco characteristic of Bactria, an abundant local stone, and combined Indian elements, supplied by geography and religious content, with traditions which must previously have served Hellenised courts and an urbanised, perhaps mercantile patronage in a region long exposed to Hellenism (Foucher, 1942-7; Nehru, 1989; Rosenfield, 1967). The craftsmen, whether indigenous, from Bactria or farther west, must also have been active in the Indo-Greek states and in their former territories after their fall. In the east Punjab the last Greeks ruled until the beginning of the Common Era and, whoever their builders may have been, the town-plan at Sirkap, the nearby Jandial temple and, west of the Indus, the urban layout at Shaikhan Dheri and a variety of indications in Swat suggest that a local Hellenism may have been sufficient to influence the Indian Buddhist sculpture

brought to Gandhara (Cribb, 1992; Rowland, 1935; Bernard, 1980; Faccenna, 1962; Callieri, 1992; Callieri et al., 1990; Pugachenkova et al., 1994).

The growth of Buddhist foundations may have reflected a new prosperity after a period of invasions and the attractions of an accessible religion with its altruistic concept of pious acts. Such Indian elements as the image of the Buddha, the concern with his life, aspects of dress and ornament and architectural forms (Foucher, 1905-51; Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949) must have undergone rapid standardisation in the service of the cult. It is hard to judge the part played here by the Kusana conquests; there is little evidence that the dynasty, as against individual Kusana donors, directly patronised Buddhism. The evidence at Taxila and particularly at Butkara-I points to earlier beginnings (Marshall, 1918 & 1960) and finds from Sirkap and Shaikhan Dheri indicate a contributory taste for imported Western forms and artefacts which local workshops, presumed to be familiar with a Hellenising tradition, might already have acknowledged as models before Kusana rule united Gandhara with Bactria and the Silk Road and promoted the economic conditions which appear so greatly to have favoured Buddhist patronage and its artistic direction (Nehru, 1989).

Alfred Foucher argued that in Gandhara art the scheme combined stylistic with iconographic criteria (Foucher, 1942-7); Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1949), who admitted only a brief initial influence of imitated or imported Hellenistic models on Indian composition and iconography, also gave some consideration to the development of the Gandhara school of art.; John Marshall (1951), using his recognition of early work at Taxila as a starting point, arranged by style a sequence of stone carving from beginnings under the Sakas and Parthians until what he considered the end of stone sculpture after the destructions by the Sasanians in the 3rd century. In respect of sculpture the most instructive excavations have been at Taxila, including the urban site of Sirkap, at Shaikhan Dheri and at Butkara I.

The earliest Gandhara production as described by Marshall (1960) during his Taxila excavations to distinguish work in stone, clay and stucco from Sirkap of the Saka-Parthian period and related work from the Dharmarajika site, and this material has been analysed by Nehru in conjunction with that from Butkara I to show how, during the 1st century AD, Indian, Parthian and Hellenistic elements

became amalgamated into the distinct style of the following early Kushana period. The usually distinctive material from Butkara I is a much larger quantity from the great yield of sculpture provided by the Italian excavations (Marshall, 1960). The excavator distinguishes three main groups by style and the earliest, work of this group has been recognised also in fragments of a large relief ascribed to Great Building at Butkara I and from the drum frieze, dated to the middle of the 1st century CE, on the Main Stupa at Saidu Sharif I and elsewhere (Faccenna, 1980, 1981, 1993b). There are many features which must represent developments in the mature period, but their distribution in time and space is hard to determine. The hands held before the breast in a characteristic Gandhara manner by seated preaching Buddhas form a mudra which is not recognized in early work and occurs very often with the robe draped to leave the right shoulder bare (Foucher, 1905-51; Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949). Other such features are the snail-shell curls and stylised bands from side to side forming the Buddha's hairstyles (Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1972), the paired grooves for drapery folds, found usually on reliefs (Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949: p. 130, and Ingholt, 1957) and various forms of lotus base (Dani, 1968-9b).

John Marshall recognised that the great variety of work in stucco might indicate diversity of dates, he settled for one in the late 4th-5th centuries, that of the semi-ashlar masonry-type at Taxila associated with comparable stucco sculpture still in position and, he judged the stucco at other sites in Gandhara and of Hadda to accord in style and date with his later Taxila material as a part of a distinct school separated by an interval from the stone sculpture (Marshall, 1951). At Taxila Marshall himself found archaeological grounds for recognizing work of different and earlier periods, starting with heads of the Saka-Parthian period from Sirkap; stucco figures are reported in the last phase of the house of Naradakna at Shaikhan Dheri ascribed to the time of Vasudeva I. A wider range of dates is thus appropriate for the stucco and clay production which was part of a continuous output but became preponderant at a later stage when it absorbed changes already mentioned in respect of stone (Faccenna, 1962; Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949; Wheeler, 1950; Rowland, 1953). In the mature work, besides close agreements between stone and stucco in general iconography and architectural motifs (Foucher, 1942), figural sculpture shares such characteristics as the sharp thin edges of brows and eyelids,

the lowered eyelids and effect of slits, hairstyles, and many forms of dress and personal ornament, besides differences which may seem matters of fashion or of medium.

Marshall believed on the Taxila evidence that what he called the second Gandharan or Indo-Afghan school had come to an end at the hands of the Hephthalites not later than the opening of the 6th century, for although the Dharmarajika site was in occupation later, no clearly associated Buddhist sculpture is reported. Destruction marks some Taxila monasteries, but the evidence elsewhere generally suggests abandonment. Where possible, traditional Buddhist piety would have prompted repairs and a continued production, however diminished, and surviving monuments could have remained influential (Marshall, 1951). Besides these larger sculptures a series of small or miniature stone pieces of uncertain source may owe their production to conditions of economic decline, reduced patronage and a need for easy circulation among a more scattered faithful. There are many examples of what have been called portable shrines, carved on both sides and formerly made up of connected panels with several framed narrative scenes, and of small plaques that may also have served for domestic or travelling shrines or as amulets. Many of these are Buddhist and, despite post-Gandhara details, such as the very dense treatment of drapery folds, mechanical hatching of the Buddha's hair and apparently always a different type of stone, still appear, with their frames sometimes of stylised brackets, close to the older narrative tradition in stone (Stein, 1905). In stucco and in clay, the medium which replaces stucco entirely in post-Gandhara work, the style develops, perhaps, as in stone, under influences from or shared with the Indian interior (Marshall, 1951).

CONCLUSION

The Study of art is considered as an essential part for better understanding the religious history of ruling dynasty of the historic period. Therefore, the history of ancient Gandhara is equally based on the study of rich material culture unearthed in the region of Gandhara. The Kushans established most fascinating political empire in the region of Gandhara and lasted more than three hundred years, starting from the first century before the Christian era with its submission to the Sassanian Empire in the third century of the Common Era. The Kushans reached at

its peak and included the large region from Central Asia down to Sub-continent. The religious art works flourished during the regime of Kushans, the most famous were stone sculpture of Gandhara and Mathura. The sculptures of various kings and princes of the Kushan dynasty were also unearthed from various religious establishments. It is obvious that the dynastic art was a part of religious art. A number of cults and gods were recorded on the various coins of the Kushans which were found from Taxila and other Gandharan archaeological sites in the region. When the Kushan took over the control of the South Asia region, they come across Buddhism and Brahmanism; the both religious cults emerged on the Kushan coins and sculptures. Hellenistic style of Gandharan Buddhist art was also seen in the sculptures. The Kushan rulers called themselves the 'Son of God' or the 'Son of the Heaven'.

The Inscriptions found from various archaeological sites experienced the donations and patronage of religious institutions, i.e. Buddhism and Jainism by the Kushan kings and aristocrats. The Kushan rulers promoted and flourished commerce, trades and urban life in the region where ever they went. The figures sculpted on Gandhara narrative reliefs and sculptures during the Kushan regime depicted the beginning of the sari and garment to cover the breasts. The mixer of local and foreign elements can be seen in the Gandhara sculptures. The aforesaid account of the wealthy material culture, marked out on the Gandhara reliefs, endeavours to present graphically, some aspects of the pattern of life lived by the Gandharanese during the 2nd Century BCE to 4th -5th Century CE. Religion, indigenous traits and a large measure of foreign elements have played a significant role in shaping the society and civilization that thrived during the period of the Kushan dynasty.

The most significant feature of the Kushan religion is the construction of royal temples. The various epigraphic references and different archaeological excavations attest that the Kushan kings, particularly the early Kings erected temple or sanctuary or shrine for the images of Kushan gods who granted them kingship and images of the Kushan kings. From different sources, it is known that various religious structures in different regions were built by the Kushan kings like the Mat (Mathura) Temple of Vima-I Takto, Oesho sanctuary of Vima Takto, Surkh Kotal temple of Kanishka-I and Kanishka-I sanctuary of Rabatak inscription.

The religious structures that get portraiture in the Gandhara reliefs include stupas with all their components, domed-shrines and Fire-temples. Thus, one notices the fusion of foreign and native traits obvious in the portraiture of architecture in the Gandhara Sculptures.

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