With the conversion of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka to Buddhism the Buddhist faith receiving royal patronage emerged as a distinct religion with great potentialities for expansion. According to the Buddhist chronicle Mahāvaṃśa Aśoka convened the third Buddhist council and later deputed missionaries to different countries with the purpose of spreading the message of the Buddha. While Majjhāntika introduced the new faith in Kashmir and Gandhara, Mahārakṣita introduced it in the country of the Greeks in the west. The statement of the Mahāvaṃśa is also corroborated by the evidence of the Aśokan inscriptions. The rock edicts II and V refer to Aśoka's sending of missionaries for humanitarian work and for preaching the Dharma to such countries as Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epirus. It is not unlikely that these missionaries also extended their activities beyond the Hindukush to the Central Asian territories. This is indicated by the fact that the immediate successors of Aśoka in Khorasan and Bactria, viz., the Bactrian and the Indo-Greeks were favourably disposed towards Buddhism. Among the Bactrian and the Indo-Greek
kings who professed Buddhist faith, mention may be made of
Menander who of all the Greek kings has found the prominent
place in the Buddhist tradition as a scholar and a patron
of Buddhism.

Buddhism seems to have continued to flourish during the
great nomadic movements of the Scythians and the Yue-chis
that swept Central Asia during the early centuries precede-
ing the Christian era. It, however, entered into its most glorious
epoch during the regime of the Yue-chis the political
influence of whose chiefs extended to this region. The
most celebrated king of the Yue-chis was king Kaniska whose
empire included part of Central Asia. Kaniska after Asoka
was a great patron of Buddhism and his reign witnessed
remarkable progress and popularity of Buddhism. He patronised
the famous Gandhara school of art and the Mahayana sect of
Buddhism gained an unprecedented popularity under his benign
patronage. The name of Kaniska is closely associated with the
fourth Buddhist council which was, most probably held in
Kashmir under the chairmanship and the vice-chairmanship of
Parśva and Vasumitra. It was during the reign of Kaniska
that the Buddhist canonical texts appear to have been carried
to Central Asia by the Buddhist missionaries. Some important
Buddhist texts have been discovered in Central Asia, which
on linguistic, paleographic and other considerations can be
assigned to this period. Among these, specially noteworthy are
some Buddhist texts of Asvaghosa, (the spiritual advisor of Kaniska); the Prakrit Dhammapada and the Sanskrit Udānevarga.

The continued flourishing condition of Buddhism in Central Asia during the subsequent centuries is attested to by the discovery of images and the remains of Buddhist stūpas, shrines and vihāras built after Indian models and by a large number of Buddhist texts written in sanskrit and prakrit as well as in the local languages of Central Asia and in the Indian scripts of Kharoshthī and Brāhmī.

For the information of the state of Buddhism in Central Asia in the fourth and the subsequent centuries we are indebted to the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hien and Yuan-chuang. Fa-hien passed through Central Asia on way to India in 399/400 A.D. while Yuan-chuang crossed the region in 629/30 A.D. on his way back to China after his visit to India. The two pilgrim scholars describe in detail the condition of Buddhism in such famous Buddhist centres of Taklamakan region of Central Asia as Lau-lan, Karashahr, Khotan, Kuchi, Yarkand, Kashghar, Turfan, Niya, Endere etc. There were pretty large number of monasteries at these centres where thousands of monks resided. Both the sects of Buddhism the Hinayāna and Mahāyāna flourished and had a great following. These cities yielded a pretty large number of manuscripts of important Buddhist texts belonging to the Hinayāna, the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna sects of Buddhism.
Besides the places mentioned above, Buddhism was widely prevalent all over the hilly region between the Tarim-basin and the valley of the upper Sindh. Fa-hien has given a graphic description of the predominance of Buddhism all over the region. Yuan-chuang also saw abundant traces of Buddhism in this region. Balkh was a great centre of Buddhism and had one hundred monasteries containing three thousand monks. Other centres of Buddhism were Ghazni, Kunduz and various other places between Badakshan and Kashghar.

Buddhism was, however, on decline in the time of Yuan-chuang in the land between the Amu and Syr Darya. Yuan-chuang did not see any trace of Buddhism in this region. But the influence of Buddhism had not completely waned. The great Khan of western Turks who lived west of Issiq Kol held Buddhism in high reverence. Yuan-chuang received warm welcome at his hands. It seems that Buddhism had begun to exercise its influence over the western Turks who were the dominant power in this region. The great Khan learnt Buddhist faith from the Indian monk Prabhākaramitra of Nalanda.

With the ascendancy of Islam and the expansion of Islamic culture in Central Asia the decline of Buddhism fast set in. The centre of Buddhist activity now shifted to Tibet where Buddhism was first introduced in the seventh century in the reign of Sron-bSran-sGam-po
who under the influence of his two Buddhist queens adopted Buddhist religion and had temples and monasteries built and a number of Buddhist texts translated.

Among the Buddhist centres of learning of ancient India, Kashmir has a pride of place. As a result of Kaniska's council referred to above there burst forth considerable literary activity in the valley and soon a galaxy of distinguished teachers and philosophers was produced who by their erudition and scholarship made Kashmir a cradle of Buddhistic learning for several centuries. They attracted large number of adherents and scholars not only from different parts of the country but also from abroad. The Chinese pilgrims Yuan-chuang and Q'kong speak highly of these scholars. Admiring the contents of their works Yuan-chuang remarks, "there was evidence of great study and research. In them could be found an extraordinary insight into the Buddhist lore of various kinds and also into the Brahmanical learning."

The Buddhist scholars of Kashmir were so imbued with missionary zeal and enthusiasm that they did not remain content with confining their spheres of activity within the boundaries of the valley but felt keen urge to disseminate and preach the gospel of the Buddha.
across the Pamirs and the Karakoram. The contribution made by Kashmir in the spreading of Buddhism in Central Asia, China and Tibet is significant. Most of the Buddhist missionaries who preached the Buddhist faith in Central Asia, either hailed from Kashmir or were educated in Kashmir. Among the host of Kashmiri missionaries mention may be made of Vairocana, Śāṅghabhūṭi, Pūnyatrāta, Dharmayaśas, Buddhayaśas, Vimalakēa, etc. The most famous and celebrated Buddhist savant of Central Asia named Kumārajīva though born at Kuchi was educated in Kashmir. Many Tibetan scholars also received their initial education in Kashmir.

There are very few works dealing with the history of Buddhism in Central Asia. Kshanika Saha’s “Buddhism in Central Asia” is very brief and sketchy and the study is confined only to eastern Turkestan. The highly erudite paper of the Russian scholar Litvinsky entitled “Outline History of Buddhism in Central Asia” though very informative and scholarly is mainly based on the archaeological sources and here too the study has been confined only to a part of Central Asia viz. Western Turkestan. No significant attempt has been made till date to write a comprehensive and an authentic account of Buddhism in Central Asia based on
archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and literary sources. Again as said above numerous Kashmiri scholars elected to work outside India in various parts of Central Asia. Unfortunately, the ancient records of India including those of Kashmir are generally silent about the missionary activities of her scholars in propagating Buddhism in these far flung areas. Besides the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims a good amount of information of these celebrated sons of Kashmir is available in Central Asian, Chinese and Tibetan documents which needed to be tapped for an extensive analysis of the contribution of Kashmiri scholars in the development of Buddhist lore in Central Asia. The present thesis fills in this vital lacuna in the development of Buddhist lore. Besides, presenting an authentic and comprehensive account of Buddhism in Central Asia an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the contributions made by Kashmiri Buddhist scholars in popularising the Buddhist faith in Central Asia. To make the work original and authentic use has been made of the relevant literary, epigraphic and archaeological material available on the subject. The work has been divided into eight chapters.

Chapter I presents the geography and topography of
Central Asia. Also, various routes leading to Central Asia from India and Kashmir have been described in detail.

In Chapter II attempt has been made to trade the history of the introduction of Buddhism in various parts of Central Asia. The study is based on epigraphic, archaeological, traditional and literary sources.

Chapter III discusses the progress of Buddhism under the Indo-Greek rulers and among the nomadic tribes of Central Asia i.e. the śakas (scythians) and Kushānas (yue-chis) till the third century A.D. A brief description of the position of Buddhism in various parts of Central Asia, during the fourth and the seventh centuries is presented on the basis of the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hien and Yuan-chwang.

Chapter IV traces a brief history of Buddhism in Kashmir from its initial introduction in the third century B.C. to the thirteenth century A.D.

Chapter V discusses various aspects of the *sārśāstivāda* Buddhism -- an important school of Kashmir Buddhism. It has been shown that there did thrive side by side other schools of Buddhism also, in the valley.
Chapter VI presents the accounts of the life and the activities of Kashmiri Buddhist scholars in the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia, China, and Tibet. The chapter also presents an account of some Central Asian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars who received their initial education in Kashmir.

Contributions to Buddhist literature made by Kashmiri Buddhist scholars forms the theme of chapter VII. The gradual development of this literature from Hinayana through Mahayana till the introduction of various esoteric practices (Buddhist tantrism), has been given and it has shown how Kashmiri Buddhist scholars were active in writing treatises or translating various texts in all these branches of Buddhist learning. Since the Gilgit Buddhist manuscripts are an important source of information on the historical development of Buddhist learning and practices, separate treatment of the same forms a part of this chapter.

In chapter VIII effort has been made to trace Kashmir's contributions to Buddhist art and architecture in Central Asia and Tibet.
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