CHAPTER IV

Brief History of Buddhism in Kashmir
The origin of Buddhism in Kashmir is shrouded in obscurity. Buddhist sources, however, are unanimous in attributing the introduction of Buddhism in Kashmir to Majjhāntika, a monk of Varanasi and a disciple of Ānanda. According to the Ceylonese Chronicle — the Mahāvaśa.* Moggliputta Tissa, the spiritual guide of king Ásoka after the conclusion of the third Buddhist Council, sent missionaries to different countries to propagate Buddhism. A Buddhist savant Majjhāntika was deputed to Kashmir and Gandhara. The story of the introduction of Buddhism in Kashmir by Majjhāntika is also told in several other Buddhist texts like the Māsokāvadāna², the Aavadānakalpadā, the Tibetan Dul-va⁴ (vineya) and the travel account left by YuanChwang⁵. It is infested with legendary colouring and relates how Majjhāntika received hostile treatment at the hands of the local Nāga people and their chief and how he was finally able to win over to Buddhist faith the entire Nāga population along with the king through his supernatural power.

According to the Buddhist text the Divyāvadāna⁶,
however, several monks from Tamasavana in Kashmir were invited by Asoka to attend the third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra. Again, Kalhana describes the establishment of several vihāras in Kashmir during the reign of king Surendra, the predecessor of Asoka. It leads to presume that the Buddhist faith had already been introduced in Kashmir before the time of Majjhāntika and Asoka. However, it seems that Buddhism, though introduced earlier, gained a firm footing in Kashmir only under the spiritual leadership of Majjhāntika during the third century B.C.

Asoka (circa. 273-236 B.C.), whose sway extended to Kashmir as well, is described by Kalhana as a king of Kashmir and the follower of Jina i.e. Buddha and is credited by him with the establishment of several stūpas and vihāras in the valley. Thus he is credited with the building of a caitya of amazing height in the town of Vitastātra. Yuan-chwang also noticed four stūpas in the valley containing a portion of the relics of the Buddha which, according to him were set up by Asoka. The well known Tibetan historian Tārānātha speaks of king Asoka as having bestowed lavish gifts on the several Buddhist sāṃghas of Kashmir.
The history of Budhism in Kashmir after Asoka is somewhat obscure. Buddhism seems to have fallen on evil days during the reign of Jaluka the son of Asoka. Jaluka was a supporter of the indigenous Nāga and Śaiva cults and not well disposed towards the Buddhist faith. A change in his attitude towards the Buddhist faith is, however, said to have been effected in him later by the intercession of the divine sorceress named Kṛtya at whose request he built a vihāra called Kṛtyāśrama. This vihāra has been identified as 'Ki-teche' visited by O'kong during the eighth century A.D.

The next landmark in the history of Buddhism in Kashmir is formed by the famous Buddhist treatise Millindapāṇha which records the discussion on important Buddhist topics between the Indo-Greek king Menander or Milinda and the arhat Nāgasena. The scene of the discussion is said to have been a spot only twelve yojanas from Kashmir. The author of this famous treatise refers to his intimate knowledge with Kashmir and surrounding regions and appears to be fairly familiar with the people of this region. King Milinda, according to this work, first became a lay devotee, then built the Milindavihāra and after some time handed over the reins of his government to his son to join the Buddhist samgha. The epigraphic
and numismatic evidence attest to the professing of Buddhist faith by the Indo-Greek rulers, who, after the fall of Mauryan empire, established their sway over whole of the north-western India. It is not unlikely that Kashmir also came under the influence of Indo-Greek rulers and Buddhism flourished in the valley under their benign patronage. A coin of Menander has been found in Kashmir which is now in the SPS Museum in Srinagar.

Buddhism received a great phillip during the rule of the Kushāṇa rulers. Kanishka's reign (circa. 78 A.D.) is full of glory in the history of Buddhism. He recovered the lost glory of the religion and fulfilled the work of king Asoka viz. sending of distinguished scholars abroad to propagate the religion. Kashmir and Gandhara particularly enjoyed the prosperity in the history of Buddhism during Kanishka's reign. The session of the fourth Buddhist Council, the creation of the famous commentaries called vibhaṣā śāstras and the appearance of distinguished scholars are some of the important factors for which Kashmir stood prominent during his reign.

According to Kalhaṇa Huṣka, Juṣka and Kanishka were the pious Turuṣka rulers who built Huṣkapura (Uskur), Juṣkapura (Zukur) and Kanishkapura (Kanespur) respectively and erected caityas and mathas at
According to Tārānātha, Kanisṭha became a devout Buddhist and listened to the discourses delivered to him by Simha—a ruler of Kashmir, who, after ordination was called Sudarśana.

Subsequently, Kashmir became an important centre of Abhidharma studies i.e. the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma. It produced a large number of distinguished scholars who specialised in Abhidharma studies and wrote commentaries on the same. Many scholars went outside India to propagate the faith. Some, who went to other countries like Central Asia, China, Tibet; translated Sanskrit texts into the languages of those regions. Again, after becoming an important centre of Abhidharma studies, distinguished scholars of other countries were attracted to Kashmir to gain knowledge.

After Kanisṭha, another king who is known to have extended patronage to Buddhism in Kashmir was Meghavahana (circa. 6th century A.D.). Meghavahana originally hailed from Gandhara—a predominantly Buddhist country. He prohibited the slaughter of living beings in his country. His queen Amṛtātaprabha of Prāgjyotisha built, for the use of foreign monks, a lofty vihāra called Amṛtābhavana to which reference has been made by the Chinese traveller O’Kong and
which is represented by the extent ruins at Vounta Bhavana (ancient Amrītabhavana) a suburb of Srinagar. His other queens are also referred to have built many viharas²⁵.

Kalhana further refers to some evidences which prove the establishment of Buddhism during the sixth and the seventh centuries A.D. Jayendra the maternal uncle of king Pravarasena II patronised Buddhism and built Jayendra vihāra and erected a statue of Buddha in it²⁶. This vihāra was subsequently destroyed by king Kṣemagupta²⁷ (950-958 A.D.). The ministers of Yudhisthira II also patronised the faith and constructed viharas, caityas and completed other pious works²⁸.

Arar taprabha, wife of king Ranaditya installed the statue of Buddha in a vihāra built by Meghavāhana's wife Bhinna²⁹. Galuna the minister of king Vikramāditya built one vihāra in the name of his queen Ratnāvali³⁰. The queen of king Durlabhavardhana (600-636 A.D.) set up Anāṅgabhavana vihāra³¹ and Prakāśā Devi, wife of king Candrapīda (686-695 A.D.) founded Prakāśa vihāra³².

A fairly trustworthy account of the condition of Buddhism in Kashmir from the 7th century onwards is furnished by some literary documents, the travel accounts of the Chinese travellers Yuan-chwang and
O'Kong, the Rājataraṅginī, some archaeological discoveries and epigraphic records.

Nīlmata Purāṇa of the 6th - 7th century A.D. is a Sanskrit text dealing with the sacred places, rituals and ceremonials of Kashmir. The Buddha is made an incarnation of Viṣṇu in this work. It prescribes the celebration of Buddha's birthday as follows: "In the bright fortnight the image of the Buddha should be bathed in water rendered holy with all herbs, jewels and scents, in accordance with the instructions of the Sākyas i.e., Buddhists. The dwelling places of the Sākyas should be white washed and the walls of the Caityas - the abodes of the God - should be decorated with paintings. Gifts of clothes, food and books should be made to the Buddhists and a festival swarming with dancers and actors should be celebrated. Worship of Buddha with eatable offerings, flowers, clothes, etc., and the charities to the poor should continue for three days."

The discovery of Buddhist manuscripts from a stūpa at Gilgit is an important landmark in the history of Buddhism in Kashmir. On the basis of paleography these manuscripts which are written in the so-called post Gupta alphabets may be assigned to the 7th century A.D. "Gilgit at that time was ruled by the
Sahi princes as is indicated by some epigraphic records\textsuperscript{35} and the manuscripts themselves which contain a mention of some Sahi rulers\textsuperscript{36}. These Sahi rulers owed allegiance to the rulers of Kashmir.

It appears that the flourishing state of Buddhism in the 7th century was not confined to the valley alone but the predominance of Buddhism could also be noticed in the distant north of Kashmir.

Yuan-chwang visited Kashmir in 631 A.D. He saw about a hundred sanghārāmas and five thousand Buddhist priests in the valley\textsuperscript{37}. He also saw four stūpas built by Asoka each of which contained relics of the Buddha\textsuperscript{38}. Among the Buddhist vihāras visited by him he specially mentions the Juska vihāra\textsuperscript{39} where he stayed for the night after his first entry into the valley at Baramulla and the Jayendravihāra\textsuperscript{40} founded by the maternal uncle of Pravarasena II. Here, he stayed for a couple of years and received instructions in various śāstras. Yuan-chwang was warmly received by the king and was invited to his palace where he provided all facilities including assistance for copying important Buddhist texts. Yuan-chwang's account proves beyond doubt that Kashmir at the time of his visit was a centre of Buddhist learning and there were several distinguished Buddhist scholars.
in the valley who not only commanded mastery over the vibhāṣā and the upadeśa śāstras but also continued composing Buddhist texts on valuable subjects with un-abated and un-flagged zeal and enthusiasm. Admiring the contents of these literary texts, Yuan-chwang remarks that in these 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 Brāhmaṇical learning, Indian alphabets and Vedas and their aṅgas.

O’Kong also known as Dharmadhatu, reached Kashmir via Kabul and Kandhar in 759 A.D. He stayed in Kashmir for four years and studied Sanskrit and vinaya texts from the celebrated Buddhist teachers. In Muñḍīvihāra, he studied the vinaya texts of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. He noticed more than three hundred vihāras in the valley and a large number of stūpas and images. Besides, the Muṅg-ti vihāra, O’Kong mentions the following Buddhist monasteries in the valley:

1) Ngo-mi-to-P’s-wan (Amitabhanava),
2) Ngo-Namli (Anāṅga or Ānandabhavana),
3) Ki-teche (Krtyāsramavihāra),
4) Nao-ye-le,
5) Je-jo,
The rulers of the Kārkota dynasty of Kashmir, who ruled during the 8th century A.D., though staunch followers of Śaiva and Vaisnava faiths were also favourably disposed towards the Buddhist religion. They founded Buddhist institutions and endowed them with lavish gifts. The celebrated Kārkota ruler, Lalitāditya Muktapida (699-736 A.D.) founded one Rājavihāra with a large quadrangle and a large caitya at Parihaspura (the modern Paraspur). He also built another vihāra with a stūpa at Huskāpur near Baramulla. A huge copper image of Buddha built by him is said to have been as high as almost touching the sky. His minister Kayya built Kayyavihāra where lived the bhikṣu Sarvajñāmitra who had attained the purity of Buddha. Another minister of Lalitāditya named Cankuna, a Tokharian, built two vihāras one of which had a golden image of Buddha. Cankuna's son-in-law also built a vihāra. Next celebrated ruler of the Kārkota dynasty, Jayāpīda Vinayāditya (751-782 A.D.) embellished his newly founded town Jayapura with three images of Buddha and a large vihāra. The flourishing condition of Buddhism during the period of Kārkotas is also evidenced by archaeological excava-
tions carried on at Parihaspura and other places which have brought to light several stūpas, vihāras, caityas and Buddhist images. Mention may be made of the excavated site at Parihaspura founded by Lalitāditya which has revealed the existence of a stūpa, a monastery and a caitya and brought to surface two images of Bodhisattva and one of Buddha.

In the following centuries Buddhism in Kashmir was over-shadowed by the wide upsurge of the vaishnava and śaiva faiths. However, inspite of the overwhelming predominance of Brāhmaṇic faith and the loss of the royal patronage, Buddhism continued to flourish even as late as the 13th century A.D. This is supported by the Rajatarangini and the epigraphic evidence.

King Avantivarman (855/6-833 A.D.) had respect for Viṣṇu, Śiva and also Buddha. He prohibited the killing of living beings. During his time the great scholars like Śivasvāmin, poet Ānandavardhana, Muktakāṇa and Ratnakara lived. Although a Śaiva by faith, Śivasvāmin composed a work with Buddhist theme entitled Kapphinābhyudaya. The poet Ānandavardana is also reported to have written a sub-commentary (vivṛtti) on the Pramāṇa-viniscaya-tīka of Dharmottara, a text belonging to Buddhist logic.

That Buddhism was still popular in the valley,
and had some following in the tenth century is indi-
cated by the inscription of the reign of Queen Diddhā
preserved in the SPS Museum, Srinagar. The inscrip-
tion is incised on three sides of a pedestal of
bronze statuette of the Bodhisattva Padmapani. The
epigraph records consecration of a religious gift
(dāyā-dharma) consisting of the statuette itself by
Rājānaka Bimaṭa, a Buddhist devotee. Another inscrip-
tion of probably the same or somewhat later period
and incised on the back of a Buddhist image, contains
the famous Buddhist creed Ye Dharmā, etc. Another
inscription, discovered from Ārigom and belonging to
1197 A.D., records the construction of a brick shrine
by certain Rajadeva for installing an image of the
Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Similarly in the reign
of Rajadeva (1213-1235 A.D) a particular cult object,
called Mandalaka, was consecrated by the Buddhist
teacher Kamalaśrī in honour of Bodhisattva
Lokeśvarā (Avalokiteśvara). To the same or the
somewhat earlier period probably belong the two
inscriptions discovered by Cunningham at Drass in
Ladakh which contain mention of the Bodhisattva
Maitreya and Lokeśvara.

According to Rājatarāṅgini, Buddhism received
patronage under the II Lahora dynasty (1101-1339 A.D.)
as well. King Uccala's queen Jayamati built two vihāras and the king himself laid the foundation of a vihāra in honour of his sister Sullā. Jayasimha was another king of this dynasty, whose rule commenced in 1128 A.D. His favourable attitude towards Buddhism led to the construction of new vihāras and renovation of the old ones. The Sul vihāra, construction of which was started by Jayasimha's uncle Uccala, was completed by him. The relatives and officers of Jayasimha also gave expression to their Buddhist leanings and founded a number of Buddhist Institutions to which large endowments were granted by Jayasimha. His queen Ratnadevi's vihāras attained importance among the religious monuments. Rilhana, his minister, a pious man built a vihāra at BhaleraMaprapā in honour of his deceased wife Sussalā. Jayasimha adorned Bhutapura with vihāras and mathas and completed Bijja vihāra. His commander-in-chief's wife Cinta built a vihāra on the bank of the river Vitastā with five other buildings.

Thus on the basis of archaeological, epigraphical and literary evidences adduced to above, Buddhism continued to enjoy popularity in the valley even as late as the 13th century A.D.

In the history of Buddhism, Kashmir has a pride
of place. Even since its introduction, Buddhism continued to flourish and enjoy popularity in the valley. The benign patronage of the pious rulers with Buddhist leanings gave it a phillip and a large number of monasteries with rich endowments were constructed throughout. These vihāras, in course of time, became great centres of Buddhist study and research and a large number of authentic Buddhist texts and expository commentaries were composed by the distinguished Buddhist scholars. These flourishing centres of Buddhism not only attracted the attention of Buddhist scholars in the country but several Buddhist celebrities of other countries also flocked to the valley to gain first hand knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures. It was the Buddhist scholars of Kashmir who studied and taught not only in the valley but also disseminated and expounded the Buddhist faith and Buddhist teachings in neighbouring countries of Central Asia, China and Tibet. The discussion on the contributions made by Kashmir towards the dissemination of Buddhist culture in these countries we reserve for the chapters to follow.

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1. Mahāvamśa, Ch. 12, vv. 834-836.


8. ibid., v. 102.

9. ibid., v. 103.


20. Tārānātha, op.cit., p.91.


22. ibid., vv. 5,6.
23. ibid., vv 9.
26. ibid., v. 355.
27. ibid., Book VI, vv. 171-173.
28. ibid., Book III, vv. 379-381.
29. ibid., v. 464.
30. ibid., v. 476.
31. ibid., Book IV, v. 3.
32. ibid., v. 79.
34. Nīlamata Purāṇa, vv. 684-690.
36. Dutt, N., op.cit., p. 34.
41. Watters, op.cit., pp. 277 ff.
43. Kalhana, op.cit., Book IV, vv 200, 204.
44. ibid., v. 188.
45. ibid., v. 203.
47. ibid., vv. 211, 215.
48. ibid., v. 216.
49. ibid., v. 507.
52. ibid., v. 34.
56. ibid., p.139.
57. ibid., pp. 107 ff.
58. ibid., pp. 110 ff.
59. cf. ibid., p.153.
61. ibid., v.3318.
62. ibid., vv. 2401-2402, 2433.
63. ibid., vv. 2410-2411.
64. ibid., v. 2431.
65. ibid., vv. 3343-3344.
66. ibid., vv. 3352-3353.