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RINCHEN ZANGPO: A GREAT BUDDHIST MISSIONARY

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In the religio-cultural history of Buddhist Tibet the name of Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055 C.E.) is remembered with great reverence and veneration. He was a great Buddhist scholar, unparalleled translator formidable traveler and founder of hundreds of Buddhist monasteries, shrines and stupas. This great apostle of Buddhism was born in Guge, which was a small province Western Tibet in the year 958 C.E. Lotsava Rinchen Zangpo was the key figure in the second movement of Buddhist in Tibet after its persecution by the apostled king Langdlarma (841-901 C.E.) and was the chief architect of Lamaist renaissance in Tibet. He was a champion of the period known as New Translation School in Tibetan history. The enlivening apostalate of Rinchen Zangpo kindled new enthusiasm among the Buddhist fraternity in Western Tibet. Due to him it first appeared in Naris (Western Tibet) and later on spread in Dhus (Central Tibet) and Tsang.

This great translator journey to Kashmir on three occasions and learnt all the branches of Buddhist knowledge at the feet of the Kashmiri Buddhist scholars and teachers. He invited many learned Pandits from Kashmir and properly established the custom of teaching yoga tantra, which was his special field of study in Kashmir. The credit of the revival of Buddhism in Tibet partially goes to those distinguished rulers of Western Tibet who kept the light of Buddhism burning vigorously in their regions by patronizing learned monks, sending Tibetan scholars and students to India specially to Kashmir to study the latest developments in Buddhist doctrine and furthering the translation of important Sanskrit Buddhist Texts into Tibetan. One of them most distinguished among them was Gyanaprabha (Lha-Lama-Yeshes Od), who sent twenty-one intelligent students including Rinchen Zangpo to Kashmir to study Sanskrit Buddhist Texts.
With Rinchen Zangpo a new movement started in the cultural history of Tibetan and Buddhist study. It was Rinchen Zangpo who gave a clear and more comprehensive vision of essence of Buddhism. The Tibetan historians are correct when they define the re-birth of Buddhism in the period of Rinchen Zangpo as a new penetration of Buddhism to distinguish it from the first one that began in the time of Srong-btsan-sgam-po (617-650 C.E.), the first historical ruler of Tibet in Lhasa. And that is generally known as the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet. Hence, the second spread of Buddhism started on a massive scale from Rinchen Zangpo’s time onwards in Tibet.

Rinchen Zangpo was a unique ‘Lotsava’ (translator). The term ‘Lotsava’ means ‘one with eyes’. In the past a scholar was therefore called as Lotsava, ‘a man with eyes’. Who could see through culture and civilization and he was one such Lotsava. Being a great Lotsava or a translator, his contribution in the field of culture and literature was immense. He translated and revised hundreds of Sanskrit Buddhist texts on various subjects like philosophy, logic, tantra, medicine, astrology and religion. Of course, he had collaborated with many Kashmiri and Indian master scholars in translating and revising many of the Buddhist Texts. He was not only concerned with the promotion, interpretation and propagation of the Buddhist doctrines but also in creation and institutionalization of a typical Buddhist art. He lived in a period of great importance for the formulation and development of Tibetan culture.

Rinchen Zangpo was a founder of hundreds of monasteries, shrines and stupas in western Tibet of Tholing and Guge, Indian Himalayas of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir and spiti in Lahoul district of Himachal Pradesh. On his last departure from Kashmir he brought a large number of Buddhist Texts as well as thirty two Kashmiri artists. He is believed to have dotted the Western part of the Himalayas with academic institutions and religious shrines that traditionally counted as 108. Particularly his contribution towards laying firm foundation for Buddhism in Ladakh is immense. Indeed, he may be called the true founder of Buddhism as well as the father of culture in Ladakh. He was also known for his profound knowledge in the field Yogatantra due to which he was called the Father of New Tantra.
He visited Kashmir thrice and during his three visits he stayed here for 17 years. He first visited Kashmir on the advice of the Dakini and later the king Yeshes Od requested to revisit Kashmir and sent fifteen young boys. During his three visits to India, he studied under 75 learned teachers, received number of initiation, mastered five branches of learning and translated many Sanskrit Buddhist Texts into Tibetan. His special field of study in Kashmir was Yogatantra which he studied under Pandit Shraddhakaravarman in particular. He is said to have set out to Kashmir in the pig year of Tibetan calendar which corresponds to 975 C.E. accompanied by an Upasaka named Tashis Tsemo and other young man of Mon from Kullu valley who was conversant with the geography of the area and knew the way to Kashmir. Within a period of a month and three days they reached a village called Karikia via Kullu, Kinaur, Lahaul along the Chandrabhaga valley into Padar and Kishtwar. Karikia is probably a village in the lower Chandrabhaga in the present-day Pangi area. When he reached Kashmir his first encounter was with a naked Yogi. Ratnasiddhi whose tantrik powers left him spellbound. Under Pandita Gunamitra he studied grammar and Buddhist logic. He undertook his monastic vows as fully ordained monk from another Kashmiri scholar Pandita Dharmashanti. Here he translated Vajradhatu liturgy together with mandala. In the town of Tamalasanti he met the great Pandita Shraddhakaravarman with whom he studied for about two years about various aspects of coercive rites both practically and theoretically. These include teachings related to Yogatantra. He also studied and translated many other Tantrik works and texts of the class of secret mantra as well as sadhna’s. From another scholar Buddhhasri he learnt the fulfillment of Yoga and many other doctrines. On the advice of his teacher Shraddhakaravarman, Rinchen Zangpo visited Naropa and under him he received instructions on Mahamudra. Under Kamala Gupta he learnt many teachings related to tantrik meditation.

In eastern India he studied various aspects of Buddhist studies under Jinamitra, Jnanasri and Silendrabodhi. He also translated various texts from Vinaya, Abhidharma and Pratimoksha besides treatise regarding Sutra and Tantra. In eastern India Rinchen Zangpo was better known as Ratnasena or Ratnabhadra. It is said that during his first stay in Kashmir for 13 years, he is believed to be equipped profound scholarship. He
came back with thousands of texts in their original forms and translated version. Due to him a vast body of scriptural knowledge was transferred from India to Guge in Tibet.

During his second visit to Kashmir, he returned with 32 Kashmiri artists. As for the royal gifts, the mighty one Lhadé (Lha-Ide) and the mighty Bodhisattva granted him twenty-one sites with a view to establishing temples and monasteries so that the study and translation were of the Buddhist scriptures and other subjects could be carried out in a systematic manner. Accordingly under the patronage of King Lhadé, Rinchen Zangpo embarked upon the task of founding 108 temples from Zher to Purang as far as Hobulanka (Chini in Kinaur). To identify at present the locations and names of these 108 temples is herculean task because they fall in different political boundaries and protected border areas like Ladakh, Zanskar, Lahaul, Spiti, Kinaur and Western Tibet. Secondly the most of the sites, where he founded temples and monasteries are not identifiable because many of them have now ruined and even vanished completely. In some cases, the old names of the sites have been changed and in some other, new structures have been raised on the old foundations, thus obliterating evidences of the old ones.

Rinchen Zangpo met Atisa in 1042 C.E. and this visit proved very significant for both of them. The temple where both these scholars interacted was Tholing. It was dedicated to different Tantric deities. The lower storey of it was dedicated to the divinities of Guhyasamaja circle, the middle to those of the Hevajra and the third or the top to those of the Cakrasamvara. On realizing the extent of his knowledge, Atisa said to Rinchen Zangpo: “With learned man like you in Tibet there was no need for me to come here”.

Rinchen Zangpo was not only an accomplished translator and a scholar, but also a great founder of Buddhist monasteries, Lhakhangs and Shigpas. Above all he was a great visionary who integrated scholarship and religion together in the monasteries and Choskhar Lhakhang. His figure cannot be disassociated from the building activity that took place in the 11th century in Western and Indian Tibet, which were perennial centers of Tibetan Buddhism and its culture. Rinchen Zangpo ushered in an era of monastic revivalism in Western Tibet. Some of the temples and Choskhors
founded by Rinchen Zangpo in Ladakh are as follows: Nyarma, which was the first monastery of Rinchen Zangpo in Ladakh.

Atchi, it is one of the living establishments of Rinchen Zangpo in Ladakh which have become world famous because of paintings that informs it to be carried out by the Kashmiri artists in 11th century C.E., Mangyu, Sumda-Chung, Sumda-Chenmo, Singe-Sgang of Lamayuru, Sganglas Chaskhor, Stok Choskhor, Wanla, Sabu Thar-rgyun-Iha-Khang, Leh Choskhor, White Temple of Hunder, Red Temple of Hunder, Dpal-dan-rtse, Atilse, Nar-Chun, Bkra-Shis-Sgan, d Ben-sa, Mgar-bo-gron, Kyi-li-bug, Lha-bran, Lha-khang-rste-Iha-khang.
परिप्रेक्ष्य

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THE BEGINNING OF BUDDHIST ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN KASHMIR–GANDHAR REGION

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After the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha his followers started Buddha worship. It was probably due the influence of the idolatry prevalent among the followers of Vedic religion. Since the Mahayana deified the Buddha and embraced the element of Bhakti, the situation demanded the creation of Buddha images and the chapels for installing such images. Every article that Buddha used and even his Sarira brought became an object of veneration for the Buddhists. As the Buddhist church grew, the Sresthis and royal votaries, foremost among whom was Emperor Asoka, endowed Buddhist Sangha and built caityas, stupas and viharas. With the corporate life came the monastery and into the monastery were introduced temples and chapels. Thus on pacifying and serene hills, where Buddhist monks and nuns gathered, came up marvelous cave temples as at Karle, Kanheri, Bhaja and Ajanta. Painting and sculpture which evoke the artists, admiration were enlisted to display the glory of the Buddha, and the life of the Master, his past births and other edifying legends became their subject matter. After the passing away of the Buddha his relics—Sarrika or corporeal relics, Uddesika or memorials and Paribhogika or ‘objects having been of use to the Buddha, sacred pots, holy trees and the like’—began to be venerated. For the first time eight stupas were erected on the corporeal relics of Buddha in Rajagaha, Vaisali, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Vethadipa, Pava and Kusinagara, besides those erected by Brahmana Drona and the Mauryas of Pippalivana.

The earliest surviving architectural relics is the Caitya of the Buddhist period, which is not specially Buddhistic but was adopted by the Buddhists from Vedic architectural models. Memorial mounds were erected over the relics of worthy people even in the pre-Buddhist age. The word Caitya is derived from the word Cita, or funeral pile. Generally speaking Caitya means a relic shrine or a temple or any place of worship, technically it means a mound. Caitya is a religious term, while stupa is an architectural term for a relic mound.

Asoka is said to have erected 84,000 stupas and several Viharas. Chinese pilgrims also testify that during their stay in India they saw stupas and Viharas at several places. They were told that they all were constructed during the reign of Asoka. In Rajatarangini Kalhana has
furnished us the details of the prominent viharas and monuments of Kasmira. All these viharas are now rubble and dust. Since the time of Asoka Gandhara–Kasmira was a great Buddhist centre. The predatory Huna incursions and the relentless vandalism of Mihirkula had reduced to ruins many great Viharas in Gandhara, Kasmira and Western Uttar Pradesh. The condition of Buddhism in Kasmira from the 7th century onwards is fairly recorded in travelogues of Yuan Chwang and Ou' Kong. Yuan Chwang who visited Kasmira in 631 A.D. reports that despite the persecution of Mihirkula a hundred monasteries were sheltering in whole of Kasmira about 5000 monks. Hoei-Li and Yent’song report that in the capital there were 100 convents and four stupas. The flourishing state of Buddhism in Kasmira during the period of Karkota rulers which extended over a span of 7th and 8th centuries A.D. is historically authenticated by the travel accounts of Ou-K’ong. He entered the valley from Gandhara in the year 759 A.D. by the same route through which Yuan Chwang came. While Yuan Chwang saw about one hundred viharas. Ou’ Kong noticed more than three hundred viharas in Kasmira and innumerable stupas and sacred images. Starting from Asoka the Great (274-232 B.C.) to the reign of Jayasimha who ascended the throne in 1128 A.D. in Kasmira the kings and queens of different dynasties build many viharas, erected innumerable stupas and caityas and installed colossal statues of Buddha. Ashoka, Jalauka, Kanisha, Meghavahana and his queens, Jayendra, Lalitaditya-Muktapida, Lalitaditya’s minister Cankuna, Jayaphida and the kings and queens of Utpala dynasties took a great interest in building viharas, erecting stupas and caityas and making Buddha’s images and statues.

Notwithstanding the long and prosperous career of the faith, Buddhist monuments are not many. Of the extant ones again, only the plinths and the lower portions of the superstructure have come down to us. Even these little vestiges, particularly the stupas with their terraced bases and ornamental drum surrounded by enclosures, exhibit a distinct resemblance to the Buddhist architecture as practiced in Gandhara. Indeed, the resemblance is so close that the art-critics are led to presume that the artists of Gandhara, after the close of their ateliers due to wanting of Buddhism in their country, resorted to the monasteries of Kasmira only to receive a ready welcome. There are certain sites of great importance which are directly connected with Buddhist Art and Architecture. These sites are scattered in Kasmira region. They are: (i) Pandrethan (ii) Harwan. (iii) Ushkura. (iv) Parasapora. (v) Malangapur. (vi) Gilgit (vii) Ambaran.

Besides these places of archaeological importance, there are many famous monasteries and monuments in Ladakh. There is both art and architecture in them. Form all these remains we can meticulously
reconstruct the history of the development of Buddhist art and architecture in Jammu and Kasmira through the ages. The task of reconstructing such a history is really very challenging particularly when our archaeologists have yet to discover many sites that are indicated in literary sources.

Hitherto no serious attempt has been made to write a succinct history of the origin and development of Buddhist Art and Architecture in Jammu and Kasmira. It is not the case that there is dearth of research material for such a study. In fact, whatever relevant research material is available is not only widely scattered but fragmentary too. For writing a constructive and well connected history of Buddhist religion in Kasmira region, it is imperative that the history of Buddhism preserved in lithic record, monastic establishments, reliquary memorial, objects of veneration, sculptures, icons, Buddha images and scroll and wall paintings be brought to light. An in-depth and thorough study of the development of the Buddhist Art and Architecture in Jammu and Kasmira may provide a clue for tracing many missing links of Buddhists history besides indicating and identifying the areas and sites of archaeological importance. Our knowledge about Buddhist monuments and monasteries of Kasmira region is so scant that it is confined only to literary sources and travelogues of Chinese pilgrims. It still needs to be corroborated by archaeological evidences. The discovery of unexplored sites, shrines and monuments indicated in literary sources may help even the archaeologists to trace the remains of glorious art and architecture of Buddhist Kasmira which is presently lying dormant under the earth’s crust. It is great irony that despite being a bastion of Buddhism for more than a millennium, Kasmira region at present has no trace of her glorious past. It, therefore, becomes necessary that the past and lost grandeur of Kasmira be traced in the Buddhist art and architecture of the hoary antiquity.

Because of its proximity to Gandhara and being the rendezvous of different cultures and civilizations, Kashmir became a stronghold of a number of glorious artistic traditions both indigenous and foreign. The intercourse of diverse cultures and thoughts brought into the world a new cult of devotion and idolatry with Buddhistic overtones and it paved way for a peculiar art and architecture which was spiritual in nature and divine in outlook. Thus came up the Stupas, Caityas, Buddha images, monasteries, Chapels. The awe-inspiring Jataka tales were exhibited in wall and scroll paintings. Buddha-bhakti, was the motivation and it necessitated the idols and chapels. The seeds of Buddhist art and architecture were deeply rooted in the divine status of Buddha. The Buddhist art and architecture that developed in Ladakh region bore the conspicuous marks of Lamaism of Tibet.
In Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and *Milindapanha*, a lot of historical information about the Buddhist monasteries and monuments is treasured. The information about the dialogue between Nagasena and Menander that took place around the beginning of the common era is also preserved in *Milindapanha*. This dialogue took place at Sogala Nagari which is yet to be identified. Many more interesting informations regarding Buddhist personages and places may help the archaeologists in locating these places. Besides these original sources the secondary sources which may be of immense help are: S. Schayer's *The Arts of Indian through the Ages*, London, 1955; A Foucher's *The Beginning of Buddhist Art*, London, 1918; A Grunwedel's *Buddhist Arts in India*, London, 1901; J.P. Vogel's *Buddhist Arts in India, Ceylon and Java*, Oxford, 1936; A.K. Coomaraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, London, 1927; A Foucher's *L'Art Greco-Buddhique du Gandhara*, Paris, 1918; B. Rowaland's *The Art and Architecture of India*, London, 1953; H. Zimmer's *The Art of Indian Asia*, USA, 1955; S.L. Shali’s *Kashmir : History and Archaeology through the Ages* and D.N. Dhar’s *Artisan of the Paradise; A Study of Art and Artisians of Kashmir from Ancient to Modern Times*, Delhi, 2000. S.P. Gupta’s *Roots of Indian Art* is also very useful for genealogical history of the Buddhist Art and Architecture against the background of Gandhara Art and on the wider canvas of the Hallenic Chal Roman Art.

The most reliable and easily accessible source of our information about the Buddhist Art and Architecture of Kasmira is Kalaha's *Rajatarangini* and the *Milindapanha*. Here we are introduced with all the important Buddhist viharas and monuments. Besides these sources, the travelogues of Chinese pilgrims also testify that there were several viharas and ancient monuments in Kasmira. It is a great irony that all these viharas and ancient Buddhist monuments of Kasmira-Gandhara are now rubble and dust. Under these circumstances we are left with no alternative but to rely mainly on the following sources: 1. Literary sources, 2. Historical sources, 3. Available archaeological evidence, 4. Epigraphic sources’ 5. Itineraries of the Chinese pilgrims, and 6. Extant Buddhist sites, monuments and monasteries.