This research-work presents a complete description of origin and development of Sarvastivada School of Buddhism in Kashmir-Gandhara Regions. In the historical development of Buddhism, a number of sects have been originated from it, such as the Theravāda, Mahāsāṅghika, Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika, Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, and so on. The multiplicity of sects of Buddhism was almost akin to that of Hinduism.

It is to be mentioned that the sectarian approach was too much prevalent in Hinduism. Sir Henry Maine in his discourse on Hinduism has said: “Hinduism is a vast repertoire of beliefs and practices from which different sects have drawn different positions at different times.”

The same may be concluded about Buddhism from which Sarvastivada School of Buddhism drew its position in the third century before the Christ. With regard to the origin of Sarvastivada School of Buddhism in India, there are a couple of Schools of Thought. According to the First School of Thought, the Sarvastivada School of Buddhism was sprung into existence in the Madhyadesh around Kaushambi regions. As per the Second School of Thought, the Sarvastivada School of Buddhism came into being in the northern regions of undivided India. The present work accords more emphasis on the Second School of Thought as compared to the First School of Thought. The Sarvastivada school of Buddhism was originating in Northern India especially Gandhara regions and Mathura. The Kashmir-Gandhara regions provided a congenial environment for the origin and development of the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism. The Sarvastivada was an important school of Hinayana
Buddhism. The Sarvāstivāda sect branched off from the Theravada, which was the most orthodox school of Buddhism.

The Dipavamsa records that the Sarvastivada came off from the Mahisasaka, a branch of orthodox group called the Theravada. it was also known as the Vaisbhāsika on account of its relying on the Vibhasha, the fundamental works of the Sarvastivada school and especially the Mahāvibhāsha Shastras, an encyclopaedia of the Sarvastivada School of Buddhism. In the later times, the so called Vaibhāsika came to be identified with the Sarvastivada and the two mutually interchangeable.

According to Sanskrit sources, the great Mauryan king Ashoka supported the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism. Emperor Ashoka convened the third Buddhist council at Asokarama Vihara in Pataliputra in about 249 BCE. In this council, the monk who subscribed to the view of the Theravāda was recognised as orthodox and the rest as unorthodox. The unorthodox monks left Magadh and went to Kashmir-Gandhāra regions. They occupied a conspicuous position in the Kashmir-Gandhāra regions and subsequently came to be known as the Sarvāstivādins. The Abhidharma Mahāvibhāsha Shastra and Yuan Chwang’s Si- Yu- Ki state that the monks migrated from Magadh to Kashmir were none other than Sarvāstivāda.

Thus, Kashmir became a great centre of Buddhist philosophical studies in northern India.

King Kaniska was a great patron of the Sarvāstivāda Buddhism. He was ruling over the Kashmir-Gandhāra regions in the first century CE. He convened a Buddhist Council at Kundalavana Vihāra in Kashmir. In this council, the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism was
more organised and systematized than before.

In this period, Kashmir had become the centre of Buddhist learning at that time. Kashmir was a part of Kanishka Empire. To spread the glory of Buddhist principles, he arranged at Kashmir a Buddhist Council, which was attended by various national and international scholars. The new Buddhist philosophy ‘Sarvāstivāda’ originated in Kashmir. This was explicated by various great scholars like Nagarjuna, Ashvagosha, Vasumitra, Sugatamitra, and so on.

Furthermore, all the prominent Acharyas of Sarvastivada School of Buddhism have been contributing for the development of the Sarvastivada School of Buddhism in form or the other. Mention may be made of Katyayaniputra, Vasubandhu, Jnanatrata, Parshva, Paramaratha, Upagupta, and so on. There is also the mention of other great teachers known as Acharya Buddhadeva, Bala, Buddhhamitra, and so and so forth.

In regard to the spread of the Sarvastivada School of Buddhism, the work enumerates the historical places where the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism has been in vogue. During the period of Asoka the Sarvastivada did not find a congenial home at Pataliputra, i.e. Magadha and migrated to the north. They found two centers, one in Kashmir and the other at Mathura under the leadership of Venerable Upagupta.

There are a few inscriptions dating from the 2nd to the 4th century CE, attesting to the presence of the Sarvastivadins in Mathura, Peshawar, Kashmir and Baluchistan. There were a few Sarvastivadins at Shravasti and Sarnath.
Finally, it may be concluded that the Kashmir-Gandhara regions were the hub of the origin of the Sarvastvada School of Buddhism to a great extent and the development of the Sarvastvada School of Buddhism to the maximum extent.

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