

Expressions of Cultural Confluence and Cultural Influence: A Study of Cultural Geography of Gandhara

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Abstract: *What is Gandhara? It is really difficult to define. Gandhara was a territory and Gandhara was a community. Gandhara was a mystery and Gandhara is a history. Gandhara was the name of a culture and Gandhara was a style of sculpture. Gandhara was the of land of confluence and Gandhara was the land influence. Gandhara was the land of quest and Gandhara was the land of conquest. Gandhara was an identity and Gandhara was a reality. Gandhara had it all. Thus, Gandhara was simply unique.*

The present paper aims to explore 'spatiality' of Gandhara as the land of confluence and the land influence. It gives a spatial explanation to the processes of cultural confluence and cultural influence. Therefore, it evaluates the expressions of 'space and place' and (re)evaluates the 'events or interactions' that is related to the identity of Gandhara.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Gandhara, cultural confluence, cultural influence, Diffusion of Buddhism*

I. INTRODUCTION

What is Gandhara? it is really difficult to define. Gandhara was a territory (Mahajanpada) and Gandhara was a community (Gandharva, as spoken in Samhitas). Gandhara was a mystery (narrative of Gandhara of Mahabharata) and Gandhara was a history (history of empires; from Ashoka to Kushanas). Gandhara was the name of a culture (a music tradition or raga) and Gandhara was a style of sculpture (art tradition). Gandhara was the land of influence (fragrance) and Gandhara was the land of confluence (confluence of civilisation). Gandhara was the land of quest (land of Mahayana philosophy) and Gandhara was the land of conquest. Gandhara was an identity and Gandhara was a reality. Gandhara has it all. Thus, Gandhara was simply unique.

Gandhara has different references in literary sources of ancient India (Bharatvarsha). Out of the many names of Lord Siva one name was 'Gandhara' (ref. Siva Sahastranamam Stotram; Mahabharata). The word (nomenclature) Gandhara is composed of two Sanskrit words, 'Gandh' which means fragrance and 'hara' which means land. Therefore, Gandhara denotes, 'the land of fragrance'. Gandhara is also related to the music tradition of India or raga (ref. Gandhara Swara).

It had a significant place in the cultural history of India since the Vedic period. The inhabitants of Gandhara were known as 'Gandharis' (clouded in mystery). This community has multiple references in both Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra 1923) Gandhara was frequently referred to as 'Uttara'. (Warraich, Tauqeer Ahmad, 2011) It was the region situated south of Kabul river (river Kabul or Kubha). The Gandhara also has references in the Chandogya Upanishad. From this time (times of Upanishads) 'Gandhara' emerged as a janpada of ancient India. In the ancient history it is documented as a territory of Bharatvarsha (Vayu Purana). Gandhara also has its reference in the epic of Ramayana and Mahabharata. It formed a part of Uttarapatha (ref. in Mahabharata). (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra 1923) The land (frontier province) had connections with Gandhari. As described in Mahabharata Gandhari was queen of Dhritrashtra, the king of Hastinapur. She was daughter (princess) of Gandhara Naresh. King of Gandhara took aside of Kauravas in the great war of Mahabharata. (Warraich, Tauqeer Ahmad, 2011, Rath, Saroj Kumar, 2013)

The early history of Gandhara is lost in the midst of antiquity. The Mahajanpada of Gandhara had been a significant region of ancient Hindustan (India). (since the partition of India, it is governed by Pakistan) From the Pauranic literature we learn that Gandhara consisted of two great cities; Takshasila and Pushkaravati. Takshashila was the capital of Gandhara. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra 1923 Romila Thapar, 2002, Rath, Saroj Kumar, 2013) The great Sanskrit scholar, Panini, himself was a native of Gandhara. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra 1923) Gandhara had references in early Buddhist literatures and also in many of the ancient inscriptions. According to Jataka (No. 406) the kingdom of Gandhara included Kashmir as well as the Takshashila region. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra 1923) The Chinese pilgrims referred Gandhara as kien-to-lo. (Warraich, Tauqeer Ahmad, 2011) It was the birthplace of Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. (Luca Maria Olivieri, 2016)

The Spatial Characteristics of Gandhara

The cultural history of Gandhara is spread over thousands of years. In these thousands of years, the spatial characteristics of Gandhara took many forms (included many spaces and places). At the time of Mahabharata, it formed a part of Uttarapatha. The Gandhara Mahajanpada included the north-western part of the Panjab and the adjoining portions of the North West Frontier Province (PWFP). (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra, 1923) According to Jataka the extent of this state was over one hundred yojanas. Its boundaries included parts of eastern Afghanistan, the whole of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Kashmir Valley.

The spatial characteristics of Gandhara was frequently described by the Chinese pilgrims. In the story of their journey they have recorded it as Kien-to-lo. It is identified with the Valley of Peshawar. (Tauqeer Ahmad Warraich, 2015) Xuan Zang has also described the boundaries of Gandhara. According to his information Gandhara was spread over an area of 1000 li (about 166 miles) from east to west and 800 li (about 133 miles) from north to south. Though his description may only be relevant to the time of his visit (middle of the seventh century AD) the area thus marked in the west probably had Lamghan and Jalalabad (in Afghanistan) and the Indus in the east, the hills of Swat and Buner in the North and the hills of Kalabagh (Murree Hills) in the south. (Tauqeer Ahmad Warraich, 2015)

The Historical and Political Geography of Gandhara

The political boundaries of Gandhara were never fixed. It wavered with the strength and weakness of its rulers. Sometimes Purus Pura or the Peshawar Valley and Takshashila (Taxila) were collectively referred to as Gandhara; sometimes the Swat Valley (Sanskrit: Suvastu) was also included in its boundary. (In ancient times the Swat valley was called Uddiyana or Udyana). However, the heart of Gandhara, was always the Peshawar Valley. In the historical past Gandhara contained two great cities, Takshashila and Pushkaravati. (Raychaudhuri, Hem Chandra, 1923) The Kingdom of Gandhara is considered to have lasted from the first century B.C., till the eleventh century A.D. It attained its height position under the Kushana kings in the first to the fifth century A.D. (Jens Braarvig and Fredrik Liland 2010) The kingdom was ruled from different capitals in different periods in the history. The ancient capital of Gandhara was at Taxila, Purus Pura (Peshawar), Pushkalavati (Charsadda), Kapisa (Bagram) and in its final days from Udabhandapura (Hund) on the River Indus.

The Historical and Spatial Characteristics of Gandhara

Vedic Period
The rich history of Gandhara dates back to over thousands of years. The ancient kingdom of the Gandhara was spread over Purus Pura or the Peshawar Valley and Takshashila (Taxila) were collectively referred to as Gandhara; sometimes the Swat Valley (Sanskrit: Suvastu) was also included in its boundary. (In ancient times the Swat valley was called Uddiyana or Udyana). It also included parts of Afghanistan. The primary cities of Gandhara were Purus Pura (Peshawar) and Pushkalavati (Charsadda).
Persian Empire
In 518 BC Gandhara was occupied by Persians and it became a territory (satrapies) of Persians (Achaemenian) Empire. (Harmatta J., 1994) It was spread over what is today Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It included larger part of land in upper Indus region. At that time Pushkalavati (Charsadda) became the capital of Gandhara. By 380 BC the Persian hold on the region had weakened and it disintegrated. Many small kingdoms sprang up (with different boundaries) in and around Gandhara.
Greek Empire
In 327 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Gandhara and in the following years the Greeks extended their territory over the Hindu Kush and up to the Indus. It included the area of north eastern Afghanistan, down to the Indus. (the areas around the Khyber Pass). The Greek presence in this area left far reaching effects on the history and cultural of Gandhara.
Mauryan Empire
After the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. Gandhara was annexed by the Mauryans. The territories between Hindu Kush mountains and the river (Sindhu) came under control of Chandragupta Maurya. The western limit of the Mauryan Empire was Gandhara (it included the cities of Takshashila (Taxila) and Pushkalavati Charsadda) Thus, Gandhara became part of Mauryan Empire. The great Mauryan king Ashoka introduced great change in the political and cultural morphology of Gandhara. He installed two rock edicts in the country of Gandhara. These rock edicts are situated at Mardan near Shabaz Garhi and at Mansehra (Abbotabad). Gandhara remained a part of Mauryan Empire till its disintegration. The greatest contribution of Ashoka in the cultural landscape of Gandhara was creation of Buddhist stupas in this territory.
After the death of Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire underwent a rapid decline and from about 184 B.C. Gandhara returned to Greeks. later on, Sakas and then Kushans occupied this territory. (Harmatta J., 1994)
Kushan Empire and after;
Kushans consolidated and enlarged their territory in all directions, thus, turning it into a great empire. (Harmatta J., 1994) Like Asoka, Kanishka too adopted Buddhist faith. He also established many Stupas and

monasteries in the territory. Thus, Gandhara again became the 'Land of Buddha'. During this period, Gandhara was approximately the region surrounding Peshawar and the Kabul River.

After Kanishka, Gandhara was annexed by Persian rulers and after that it was overrun by the Huns. But, even after successive political change, Buddhism continued to flourish and develop at greater or lesser pace till about 460 A.D. It even survived the destruction and devastation carried out by the Huns.

In the history of thousand years, Buddhism had developed such firm roots in Gandhara that in spite of a number of invasions and a succession of foreign rules, Gandhara remained Buddhist. (Iqtidar Karamat Cheema, 2007)

Spatial Relations and Connectivity

Ancient Gandhara was situated at the contact zone for movement into and out of South Asia. Geographically it was linked with the rest of India with the west. situation close to the Uttara Path and the silk route facilitated spatial relations and connectivity to the region. Culturally and Historically (and also commercially) it remains a transit point for goods and ideas between India and China.

Migrations of Greeks, Sakas, Kushanas and Huns enriched cultural history of this region. It has also been a crossroad of Cultural influences. Due to close cultural contacts and commercial relations with the Greek and Roman World the confluence of the Greek art the Buddhist Art of Gandhara was inevitable.

The localization of relics of buddha and narratives of bodhisattva contributed to a strong and enduring presence of Buddhism during the first millennium CE. During the period of Kanishka, pilgrimage of Buddhist monasteries of Gandharan started from travelling monks and Silk Route traders. it led to the spread of religion and diffusion of culture.

The geographical landscape of Gandhara created a meeting space. Geographically, historically and even culturally it was 'a frontier land' where all the neighbouring cultures with its regional and universal values and meanings found a meeting space or a melting pot. It offered a bridge to the regions 'elsewhere and anywhere' and finally, created a culture 'not strictly Indian but cosmopolitan'. (Michael Falser, 2015)

Change in the Cultural Landscape of Gandhara

Buddhism was introduced in to Gandhara at this time of Ashoka. (Andrew Glass, 2004) It is said that Ashoka established 84000 stupas to honour the Buddha. (Andrew Glass, 2004) One such stupa 'Dharmrajika' was located in the vicinity of Gandhara. However, the golden age of Buddhism in Gandhara began during the first century A.D. During that period, there was an increase in the number of Buddhist monasteries and stupas in the region. It has also witnessed the evolution of a distinctive school of art. (Andrew Glass, 2004) The patrons to Buddhism rose to its peak at the times of Kanishka and during that period, many monasteries started their functioning in and around Gandhara. (Kumar Abhijeet, 2015)

Rise of Mahayana and Anthropomorphism of Buddha

Kanishka gave patronage to Buddhism. In his patronage fourth Buddhist Council was convened at Kuvana near Jullundur (or at Kandalavana in Kashmir). (Harmatta J., 1994) As a result of this Buddhist Council a liberal tradition of Buddhism; Mahayana, flourished in Gandhara. (Harmatta J., 1994) The new tradition laid to the transformation of the Buddha into an eternal God. It also led emphasis on the deification of Buddha. Consequently, in the influence of Mahayana, for the first time, Buddha was permitted to be represented in human form. Thus, the first image of the Buddha was created in Gandhara. (Harmatta J., 1994) Anthropomorphic representation of Buddha (Etiennele Motte, 1988, Andrew Glass, 2004) is considered to be a revolutionary change in the history of Buddhism.

Gandhara Art: A Cultural Confluence

In the first century B.C. to the first century A.D. Gandhara witnessed the development of a new art form. It was result of cultural confluence. A constant exposure of the Gandhara to the art and culture of the western world led to the development of the new art form. It is known as Gandhara art. It was a cultural confluence of the indigenous Indian art and the other art form from the West. (Harmatta J., 1994) It was Greek and Roman cultural influence. Standing and seated statues of the Buddha and the Buddhist narratives (legend of the Jatakas) were the main theme of this art form. (Harmatta J., 1994)

The statue of seated Buddha and the figure of the seated or standing Bodhisattva has no classical or Indian precedent. It was a peculiar invention of Gandharan artists. The statue of seated Buddha from Sahr-i Bahlol stupa is a classic example of Gandhara art. (Harmatta J., 1994)

Stupas and Monasteries

Gandhara also contributed in the development of religious architecture. The Kushan contribution in its development is substantial. Buddhist stupa of Shaji-ki-Dheri was a monumental stupa established by Kanishka during the 2nd century AD. Xuan Zang has also made reference of the Great Stupa in his account. It is said to have been built as a thirteen-storey tower with a total height of 213 m. Nothing of this monument survives now. Stupas and monasteries were the principal buildings of this period. Almost all Kushan monuments in Gandhara are Buddhist shrines. Although the development of monasteries in Gandhara antedates the arrival of the Kushans, it was here that the pattern of monastic establishment was perfected and became popular. (Harmatta J.,

1994) Among the prominent monuments of that period, the remains at Takht-i Bahi, Jamal Garhi, Tharelli and the sites of Jaulian, Mohra-Muradu, Kalawan, Pipala, etc. are significant. (Harmatta J., 1994)
In the history of thousand years, it served as a centre of confluence and centre of influence for Buddhism across the Hindu Kush and Karakorum mountains, in Afghanistan, Central Asia and western China.

II. CONCLUSION

The influence of Gandhara Buddhism has been found in a much area wider than the Peshawar Valley. It may be called the Greater Gandhara. It played a prominent role in the propagation of Buddhism. It is from this region that Buddhism spread in to Central Asia and China. As a result, Gandhara enjoyed a very high status in the ancient Buddhist world.

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