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Chronicles of Gandh ra and Its Cultural Physiography

Introduction

The term "Gandh ra" was first time found in *Rigveda* from Vedic literature of second millennium B.C. *Rigveda* is a collection of all Indian hymns. Gandh ra was a region on India's northern frontier, according to writings from the Achaemenian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods. The reports of the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang, who visited the Buddhist places of India in the early 7th century CE, contain the first specific information about the occupation of Gandh ra. He said that Gandh ra had taken over the Pesh war valley, which included the steep settlements of Sw t and Buner to the north, Taxila to the south-east, and the Indus River on the eastern side. Taxila was dependent on Kashmir during the time of Xuan Zang's visit, but in earlier periods it had also shared in the political and cultural fate of Gandh ra. Beal's translation of Xuan Zang states that the kingdom of Gandh ra was roughly 800 li from north to south and 1000 li from east to west. In the east, it shared a border with the Sin River (Sindh, another name for the Indus River). The nation produced a broad variety of flowers and fruits, had an abundance of cereals, and had enough sugarcane to make solid sugar. The capital of the Gandh ra was *Purushapura*, also known as Pesh war in ancient times, and it measured 40 li in circumference " (Beal: 2003: 150). It is crucial to understand the geographical and historical context of the area in order to comprehend the evolution of Gandh ra art.

Geography of Gandh ra

As Gandh ra is surrounded from northern, eastern and the western sides with mountains, But on the southern side Indus valley is located. So it had close ties with the south. Similarly to the north east Khayber pass connects Gandh ra with Afgh nist n, Similarly with China and the west. Gandh ra was a hilly region located below the meeting point of Hind Kush and Himalayan mountain ranges (Zwalf: 1996: 14). The Gandh ran area had plenty of water and lush forests in its several valleys. Gandh ra's geographical location, situated between India, Central Asia, and Western Asia, was ideal for the establishment and encouragement of cultural exchanges between these Old World regions. The vast geographical mass that lies between the Indus and the Oxus rivers is denoted as the Indus-Oxus

region, according to Farooq Swati. With the exception of brief periods of imperial dominance by the Mauryans and the Kushans, the entire region was divided into a number of small kingdoms, including Udy na, Gandh ra, Kapi a, Bactria, and others (Swati: 1997: 3). It is significant to remember that the artistic traditions of these various kingdoms persisted. As opposed to that, across the period covered by the Indus-Oxus school of Buddhist art, each region maintained its unique identity, at least in terms of finer details. Peshawar and Mardan divisions in the Peshawar valley have been divided into districts, and Swat has been made a district of the Malakand division, which also oversees the M I kand and Bajaur Agencies. Some sites are located east of the Indus in the NWFP districts of Taxila (Rawalpindi District) and Haripur, Abbottabad, Mansehra, and Batagram.

Historical background of Gandh ra:

The Middle Palaeolithic artefacts were found in the lowest levels of Sangho cave (Mard n) during excavations carried out in 1962–1963, under the direction of Prof. A.H. Dani, then chairman of the University of Peshawar's Department of Archaeology. Despite the Rigveda mentions Gandh ra. Sanghao Cave's first phase is dated to 35,000 B.P. Period II, which corresponds to the Upper Palaeolithic, follows (30,000 B.P. to 10,000 B.P.). The third period is defined as Mesolithic (10,000 B.P.). Other Mesolithic sites in the Gandh ra region include Kh npur Cave (Haripur) and Jamal Garhi Rock Shelter (Mard n). Another cave residence was recently uncovered in Bajaur close to Tangu Nau by an archaeological team from the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of KPK. Members of the team gathered Middle Palaeolithic-era stone tools outside the cave (Ali: 2004: 207).

The New Stone Age, also known as the Neolithic, followed the Mesolithic period. Sarai Khola, located south of Taxila and excavated by M.A. Halim in 1969-70, is a well-known Neolithic site in or around Gandh ra (Halim: 1972: 1-112; Mughal: 1972: 126). Halim found indications of agricultural activity as well as permanent habitations for the site's residents. This site's polished celts and burnished ceramics have been dated to between 3,260 and 3000 B.C.

The second level of Sarai Khola, which lasted from 3,000 to 2,600 B.C., is a prime example of the Kot Dijian culture, whereas the third level, which lasted from 2,600 to 1,700 B.C., is unquestionably Harappan. The Harappan culture in Gandh ra was replaced by the Gandh ra Grave Complex, which existed between 1,700 and 600 B.C. The main sites in Gandh ra that provide evidence of the Gandh ra Burial Complex are Period IV at Sarai Khola and Hathial at Taxila, Zarif Kor na near Pesh war (Mughal: 1972: 125–6; Khan: 1973: 3-94), and Timargarha, Balambat, Th na, Aligr ma, Loebanr, and Butkara-II in Sw t Valley. Only a few dwelling sites associated with the Gandh ra Grave Complex have been

uncovered, aside from cemeteries and the grave items they contain. The top instances found so far are Aligra (Swat), Balambat (Dir), and Hathial (Taxila). It is widely accepted that speakers of Indo-European are connected to the Gandhara Grave Culture. It is believed that these people brought varied artifact styles to Gandhara in some fashion towards the end of the second millennium B.C. through several immigration routes from northwest passes.

Gandhara was the part of Achaemenian Empire in the time of Cyrus the Great (558-28 B.C.) was first time mentioned in the Behistun inscriptions of King Darius. In this historical literature the people of Gandhara are mentioned as the subject nation, and they also participated as the soldiers of the great king Xerxes I against the Greek in 480 and 479 B.C. (Ingolt 1957:14)

The Persians continued to rule over Gandhara until Alexander the Great took control of it in 327–26 B.C. But barely twenty years were spent under Greek authority. Eventually, in the year 305 B.C., Seleucus, Alexander's successor, gave it to the Indian monarch Chandra Gupta Maurya (Marshall: 1923-24: 68). The Mauryan dynasty was founded by Chandra Gupta. Asoka, Chandra Gupta Maurya's grandson, who lived from 272 to 37 B.C., is the most significant individual. He adopted Buddhism as his new faith. And when he was in power, the citizens of Gandhara became Buddhists. After Asoka's death, the Mauryan Empire fell apart, and from 190 B.C. onward, Gandhara was once again ruled by foreigners. (Burgess: 1897: 77; Murthy: 1977: 2). First of all Bactrian Greeks remained in Gandhara until they were removed or pushed by the nomadic tribes, the Sakas and then Parthia. Their prominent rulers were Maues and his son Azes. The Sakas and the Parthians ruled Gandhara for about one and a half century. But they were ousted by another similar group, the Kushans, who belonged to the Kansu province in northwest China, known in Chinese history as the Yueh-chi. Haraeus and Kajula Kadphises, the first two kings of the Kushan dynasty, expanded the realm. In 99 AD, Kajula Kadphises' grandson Vima Kadphises overcame Taxila. Kanishka, a descendant of Vima Kadphises, is the most well-known ruler of the Kushan dynasty. His extensive dominion included Choresmia and Sogdia and extended from Marga in the west to Khotan in the east as well as northward to the southern Aral Sea coast. It was only present-day Afghanistan and the Indus Valley to the south. Kanishka also became a convert to Buddhism like Asoka. He constructed many monasteries, stupas containing relics of Buddha and Buddhist's saints. The exact date of accession of Kanishka is not yet confirmed. There are many opinions of the expert scholars regarding this such as 78, 128, 144 A.D. Almost Kanishka ruled Kushan empire for twenty one years. He was succeeded by two more kings from his dynasty named Huvishka and Vasudeva. His last ruler Vasudeva had to cope with the Sasanians, the new overlords of Persian Empire. (Ingolt 1957:16) As a result, under Ardashir's leadership, they had

conquered the Parthians in 226 AD, and Shahpur I, Ardashir's son and successor, was able to take Gandhara in 241 AD. However, they did not directly administer this province of Gandhara; instead, a few years later, they gave this region to a new dynasty connected to the Kanishka or Kushans. These new Kushans ruled this land for about a century they had the kings varying the names of preceding dynasty such as Vasudeva II, Kanishka II, Vasudeva III. They had alliance with Roman and Persian empires and could never gain their previous power which their predecessors had. In 340 A.D. Shahpur II defeated the last king of the dynasty, Vasudeva III. This time also Sassanians were reluctant to rule Gandhara directly. So they recognize a new dynasty in 358 A.D., which was a new Kushan group led by, Kidara, as the rulers of the region. They are also known as the Kidara Kushans or little Kushans. But these Kidara Kushans were brave and fearless like their predecessors of post-Kanishka period. They rose not only against Sassanians but also against their southern neighbours Guptas (Sims-Williams & Cribb: 1996: 75-96). Their success and rule was very short term and ended in 460 A.D. by Yetha or White Huns or Hephthalites. They brought great destruction with them and tried to ruin the Gandhara. The Chinese traveller Fa-Hsien, who visited Gandhara during 400 A.D. described Gandhara as flourishing state. But the picture has changed completely in the accounts of later pilgrims. The Chinese ambassador Sung-yung passed through the region in 520 A.D. and he also mentioned the destruction of Gandhara by Yetha (Hephthalites) (Khan: 1998: 57). Moreover Xuan Zang in the early seventh century confirmed the characterization described by Sung-yung, who also found this region in a ruinous condition. Thus during the one thousand years starting from Achaemenians till White Huns Gandhara remained under the succession of foreign invaders except only over a hundred year when this region was occupied by native rulers of Maurian dynasty. So, Achaemenians, Greek, Bactrian, Scythians, Parthians and Kushans had ruled this region. But the Sassanians were not directly ruling this region. They had partial control during the post Kanishka dynasties of Kushans (240-460 A.D.) (Ingolt 1957:17). Although this region had been under the succession of invaders even then the people of this land remained Indian, loyal to culture, language of their ancestors. If it is said that the greatest unifying power was the Buddhist faith so it would be correct, which Gandharans had adopted during the reign of Asoka. This religion not only formed a strong bond among the Gandharans themselves but also with rest of India as well as the religious art of Gandhara also influenced the central Asia, China, Japan, Indo-china, Indonesia. The majority of Gandhara artwork is religious in nature and supports the Buddhism faith. (1950 Deydier:19) The sculptures and paintings were stored for the worshippers on stupas and in monasteries. Indeed, pictorial depiction is the foundation of Gandhara art. Clay slate or schist, a form of soft bluish stone, was the substance employed for the sculpture. It was transported there from Peshawar's northern slopes of Swat and Buner. The earlier Buddha incarnations, the circumstances leading up to his birth,

and finally his miraculous birth are the subjects of Gandhara art. He was born close to Kapilvastu, the little kingdom's capital located close to Nepal's southern border. His father was king Suddhodana and his mother was a queen Maya. His parents gave him the name, Siddhartha. (Sehrai 1978:24) Buddha was distinguishable from an ordinary man by having the thirty-two attributes of superhuman perfection, according to legend. The protuberance or ushnisha on top of his head and the urna in the middle of his forehead were the two that stood out the most (Ingolt 1957:18). Many moments from his early years as Prince Sidharata, including his boyhood, adolescence, and marriage, are shown in the reliefs. The reliefs that show his first meditation also show the earliest indication of his intense interest in issues related to life and death. (Burgess 1985:29)

He was living a comfortable life in his palace, but these unsolved questions kept following him. Eventually, he made the decision to leave his wife and son behind in order to search for the answers to the riddle of living alone or in solitude. The Renunciation and the Great Departure took place on this particular night. After six years of renunciation, he ultimately experienced the Bodhi, or Enlightenment, as a result of his continued travelling and focused meditation. So it was the stage when he was a *Buddhisattva*, one who is on the path to get enlightenment and to be Buddha. And now he had evolved into the Buddha, the enlightened one. (Marshall 1960:43) achieving *nirvana*, a state of passionlessness where a person is free from all wants from the outside world. He preached his inaugural sermon in Sarnath's Deer Park. Afterwards, up to his death at the age of 80, he travelled the provinces of Magadha and Kosala while preaching. There are numerous sculptures that depict the noteworthy incidents of his wanderings as well as numerous scenes that demonstrate the Buddha's various births. He passed away at a community close to the hamlet of Kushinagara. The death of Buddha is *parinirvana*, end of the life means no return, no rebirth (Ingolt 1957:19).

Conclusion:

Due to its unusual geographic location, Gandhara had been interestingly contributing to the advancement of South Asian culture and civilisation. Throughout its history, it has taken in cultural currents from Iran and Central Asia, moulding them in its own crucible before transmitting them to the Indian plains, or the other way around. The Achaemenians from Iran, the Greeks from Bactria, the Kushans from Central Asia, and the Mauryans from Pataliputra all left their indelible impressions on its soil, proving that it was in fact the meeting site of multiple divergent cultures. It's interesting to note that no foreign culture has ever been able to entirely supplant Gandhara's native cultural pattern. This was largely because of the robustness and vitality of the cultural forces that the newly introduced religion of the Buddha unleashed, which not only withstood the pressure of constant foreign invasions but also allowed alien components to get

fully assimilated into the mainstream. Even Buddhism underwent a new phase of development when it reached Gandh ra. It eventually became a major world religion. This was commonly referred to as the *Mah yana* (the Great Vehicle). The most visible manifestation of the Gandh ra culture, the Gandh ra art, was born from *Mah y nism*. (Zwalf 1996:54)

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