

Buddhism in the Western Himalayan Region as Revealed from the Literary & Archaeological Sources

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Abstract

The very thought of the Buddhist western Himalayas makes one's imagination flash back to the nascent days of Indian history when Buddhism had become a religion of the masses in north India. The circumstantial evidence suggests that the message of the Buddha echoed in the western Himalayan region on both sides of the Great Divide within a few decades after the Great Decease (544 BCE) through the missionary activities of the Sthavirs, but in the absence of evidence, nothing is known about that. However, the recent archaeological evidences affirm the pre-Ashokan existence of institutionalised Buddhism in Kashmir. The discovery of the Buddhist vihar at Soura, which King Surendra built and the Buddhist devices on the ancient coins of ancient janpads and oligarchies of this region are some of such pieces of evidence. Under Emperor Ashoka, the regional Buddhist Magadha Sangh emerged as a pan-Indian religion, and Buddhism established its institutional infrastructure in the entire western Himalayan region. Because of the Sarvastivadi philosophical ideology of the Kashmiri Buddhists, several Buddhist monks from Kashmir were invited by the emperor to participate in the Third Great Council convened at Pataliputra. In that Council, the decision was taken to send missions to different geographical regions. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang has spoken at length about the Buddhist missionary and institutional activities of the Emperor Ashoka in Kashmir and its tributaries, and the Kullu kingdom (K'iu-lu-to) in the inner Beas Valley of this region. King Menander, a contemporary of Pushyamitra Shunga (c. BCE 187-151), remained always

conscious of the anti-Buddhist views of the Shunga king, and he effectively buttressed the anti-Buddhist influences entering his territory. The Greek potentate extended whole-hearted patronage to Buddhism in his empire. The coins issued by King Menander aptly bore a Buddhist device, the dharmachakra and a legend, Basileus Soteris Menandros. It was because of his patronage of Buddhism that many viharas came up in the upper Kangra region. After the Indo-Greek King Menander, the next important kings responsible for the propagation of Buddhism in the western Himalayan region and beyond its frontiers were again the aliens – the Indo-Scythians, Kushans. The Buddhism that the Kushan emperor Kanishka propagated was a popular version of the cloistered philosophical concept. That popular version was developed on the pan-Asian scale as Mahayan Buddhism under his patronage. Thus, in the western Himalayan region, Buddhism was cast into a popular mould for the first time. It was from Magadha in the central Gangetic basin that the Buddhist doctrine proliferated under Emperor Ashoka, but it was from Gandhar that the Buddhist philosophical doctrine of the BCE era emerged in flesh and blood, duly clad in the loose toga-like robe.

Keywords: Great Divide, Great Decease, Buddhism, Satluj, Kashmir, Afghanistan, *Sharda Mandal*, Taxila, *Sthavir* Angira, Kailash, Manasarovar Lake

The very thought of the Buddhist Western Himalayas makes one's imagination flash back to the nascent days of Indian history when Buddhism had become a religion of the masses in north India. People in the interiors of the Western Himalayan wilderness, where the traditional *janapads* had been flourishing completely oblivious of the world outside, had found in the *Dhamma* of Buddha a hope of socio-religious resurgence. Numerous legends and traditions related to the visit of Buddha to this region

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to preach the *dhamma* revive the nostalgic refrain of those hoary days (Bapat, 1971).

As the tradition has it, the serpent-worshippers, defined as Nags, inhabited the upper Beas Valley and further in the northwest interiors in the remote past. The Buddha found them unfit for being inducted into the *bikkhu-sangh*, because of their licentious and sacrificial customs. He prevailed upon them to amend their unworthy habits. Thereupon, they were inducted into the *dhamma*, and they became they were made the custodians of Doctrine, which they later handed over to Nagarjun. Therefore, it is with good reason that the Nags figure so vividly in the Buddhist pantheistic system and lore (Handa, 2004). One of such popular lore inspired Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, to say in his *Si-yu Ki* that the *K'iu-lo-to* region, modern Kullu, was sanctified by the visit of Master (Beal, 1984 reprint). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Buddha ever visited the Western Himalayan region. During the early days, the *sangh* activities remained confined only to the ancient kingdom of Magadh – the ancient *Puratthima* -- as a regional faith. For that reason, some scholars even defined the early Buddhist Sangh as the *Magadh Sangh*.

Nevertheless, from the classical Pali literature (*Majjhim Nikay*, II, 4.8), we learn about the Vahita country that had a reputation for manufacturing woollen *chaddars*, known as the *vahitika* (Birdwood, 1880). The Magadhan king Ajatashatru is known to have presented one of such *chaddars* to the king Prasenjeet of Koshal, who in turn presented that souvenir to Anand, one of the principal disciples of the Buddha (Handa, 1998) That reference is important to suggest that the Vahita country was not only within the peripheral influence of the Magadhan Empire, but the woollen fabrics of that region were also highly valued. That Vahita country has been located between the Indus and the Satluj, which may geographically correspond to the area comprising western Himachal Pradesh and the entire Kashmir territory. The *Jatak* traditions reveal that Gandhar (now in Afghanistan) formed one of the sixteen *maha-janapads* – the great republics, which roughly covered the entire modern Kashmir (ancient *Sharda Mandal*) and Taxila (ancient *Takshasheela*). It is also known from the *Jatakas* that the trading caravans used to travel from the eastern Indian cities to the Western Himalayan trading centres in the ancient *janapads* as far as Gandhar (Handa, 1994). The Buddha had ample knowledge of this region, and he had proclaimed Kashmir as the most propitious place for spiritual pursuits. Hiuen-Tsang records that when the Lord Buddha was returning to the Middle Kingdom (Magadh) after having humbled a wicked spirit in Udyan (*U-chang-na*), he addressed Anand thus: “After my *Nirvana*, the *Arhat Madhyantika* will found a kingdom in this

land, civilise (pacify) the people, and by his effort spread abroad the Law of Buddha” (Beal, 1984, Pandit, 1990).

The circumstantial evidences suggest that the message of Buddha echoed in the Western Himalayan region on both sides of the Great Divide within a few decades after the Great Decease (544 BCE). The Buddhist literary traditions – the Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan – all talk about the original sixteen *Sthavirs* or the Chief Apostles, who were assigned different countries and regions to propagate the *Dharma*. Several of them outlived the Buddha. Of them, *Sthavir* Angira is known to have gone to the *Te-Se* Mountain, i.e., the Kailash region, around the Manasarovar Lake. *Sthavir* Kanakavats went to the Saffron Peak, which obviously may be Kashmir (Handa 1994). The Gilgit MSS records that the Nags were the first to embrace Buddhism in the Saffron Peak. Therefore, reasonably, we come across innumerable folk traditions about the spread of Buddhism by those *Sthavirs* in the Western Himalayan regions as far as the Yamuna basin. *Sthavir* Bhadra was deputed to Yamunadveep. The exact location of that country is not identifiable, but it may be located somewhere in the interiors of the Yamuna basin (Handa, 1994). The legendary association of Mahasu Devata with the Buddhist traditions popular in that part may be one of the significant examples in that regard (Handa, 2004). Another *Sthavir*, named *Mi-p'yed* in Bhoti, is known to have gone to the Himalaya, probably the central Himalayan region. How far those *Sthavirs* fared in their mission is anybody's guess. In the absence of material evidence of early Buddhism in the Western Himalayan region, the fate of those pioneer *Sthavirs'* missions is also unknown.

From the Buddhist literary sources and other related historical evidence, it is evident that the communities, that inhabited the entire *tarai* belt of the Himalaya, were considered outcastes under the Brahminical socio-religious system of the mainland. All those communities came under the Buddhist influence directly or indirectly through the missionary activities of the *bikkhus*. Thus, the Buddha emerged as the saviour of the downtrodden and the champion of resurgent hope for them. The beckoning message of the Buddha was not only a welcome augury for the non-Brahminical multitude – the outcastes and the native people – who had been labouring hard under the thraldom of Brahminical tyranny. Thus, Buddhism attracted a popular following largely from the substratum of the society. Therefore, the ancient traditional oligarchies and republics of the Western Himalayan region flocked *en masse* to embrace Buddhism (Handa, 2001).

Archaeological evidence has lately come forth to suggest the pre-Ashokan existence of institutionalised Buddhism in Kashmir, which lends credence to what Kalhan records in his *Rajatarangini* about King Surendra,

who built many Buddhist *viharas* at Soura near Srinagar. If the sculptural relics found at Soura are considered as credible evidence, it may be reasonable to assume that the Buddhist *vihar* at Soura remained functional for many centuries and it outlived even the Kushan Age. The Buddhist devices have commonly been found on the coins of several ancient *janapads* and oligarchies of this region from the 3rd-2nd century BCE downward. The *hammiya*-type of monastic edifice on the Audumbra coins and the Buddhist devices on the Kuloot coins eloquently indicate that Buddhism had a firm hold among the people of this region even before that period (Handa, 1984).

Under Emperor Ashoka (c.268-232 BCE), the regional Buddhist *Magadha Sangh* emerged as a pan-Indian religion, and Buddhism established its institutional infrastructure vigorously in the entire Western Himalayan region. The emperor was possibly aware of the strategic importance of the north-western part of his realm as the meeting ground of three great civilisations – the Indian, the Chinese, and the Western. Therefore, of the nine missions that he constituted to propagate the *Dhamma*, four were dispatched to the countries in the northwest of his empire in the Western Himalayan region and beyond. By that strategic planning, he could secure a firm hold for Buddhism in that region, which paved the way for its further advancement to the western and Central Asian countries in the following centuries (Kak, 1971).

It is revealed from the Buddhist literary traditions and inscriptional sources that most of the missionaries sent by the Emperor to the western countries belonged to the Western Himalayan region, especially from Kashmir, where Kharoshthi was the common script. The same script was adopted for the Edicts at Mansehra near Abbotabad and Shahbazgarhi near Peshawar. In 1958, the Italian Archaeological team also discovered a bilingual Greek-Aramaic edict of the Emperor Ashoka at Gandhar, which was reported in the *East and West* from March to June 1958.

Under Emperor Ashoka, Buddhism was a well-established and integrated religion in Kashmir, and it had emerged as a stronghold of the *Sarvastivad* School. Because of the *Sarvastivadi* philosophical ideology of the Kashmiri Buddhists, several Buddhist monks from Kashmir were invited by the emperor to participate in the Third Great Council convened at Pataliputra under his mentor Moggaliputta Tissa. In that Council, a decision was taken to send missions to different geographical regions. The Kashmiri scholar Majjhantika was selected to lead the most important mission to Kashmir and Gandhar, which eventually opened the gateways for Buddhism to spread to other countries (Dutt, 1962). The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang (in India between CE 629-645) has spoken at length about the Buddhist missionary and institutional

activities of the Emperor Ashoka in Kashmir kingdom (*Kia-shi-mi-lo*) and its tributaries and Kullu kingdom (*K'iu-lu-to*) in the inner Beas Valley of this region (Beal, 1984; Pandit, 1990). The ground prepared for the establishment of Buddhism by the missionary efforts of Ashoka in the Western Himalayan region was largely responsible for its further extension, proliferation and efflorescence in Central Asia, China and Japan in the following centuries.

A Karkot king, Durlabh Vardhan (CE 600-636), ruled Kashmir in the days of Hiuen-Tsang. According to him, Emperor Ashoka had built 500 *sangharams* in Kashmir for the *arhats*, but Hiuen-Tsang found only 100 of those *sangharams* and four ancient *stupas* during his visit to Kashmir. As he recorded, each of those contained “a pint measure of the relics of the *Tathagat*”. No trace of those monuments now remains. Nevertheless, evidence of the existence of *vihars* and *stupas* built by Emperor Ashoka has been found at Suskaletra and Vitastatra. The *Milindapanha* also records the existence of a *vihar*, named Ashokaram, built by the emperor. Nagasen, the preceptor of King Menander, is also known to have acquired the doctrinal knowledge of Buddhism from Yon Dhammarakkhita during his stay in that *vihar* (Kak, 1971).

In the Buddhist kingdom of Punch, the Chinese pilgrim found five deserted *sangharamas*, one of which those towards the north of the town with a few priests living there. A *stupa* that stood there was held in high esteem for its miraculous qualities. In Rajauri, he found ten *sangharamas*, but a very small number of resident Buddhists in those. He makes no mention of the builder of those monuments.

Hiuen-Tsang proceeded to Kullu (*K'iu-lu-to*) -- the ancient Kuloot kingdom -- from Jalandhar kingdom during the rainy season of CE 634. His mention of the Jalandhar (*Chen-lan-to-lo*) kingdom may not be relevant in the Western Himalayan context. Possibly, that reference pertains to the Jalandhar territory in the *Doab* area of Punjab. Skirting the upper Kangra territory, after going “along some high mountain passes and traversing some deep valleys, following a dangerous road, and crossing many ravines,” he reached the Kuloot kingdom, where he noted “about twenty *sangharams*, and 1000 priests or so” in the Kuloot territory. “Those mostly study the Great Vehicle; a few practise (the rule of) other schools (*nikayas*). There are fifteen *Dev temples*: different schools occupy them without distinction,” he records.

He further tells, “Along the precipitous sides of the mountains and hollowed into the rocks are stone chambers which face one another. Here the *Arhats* dwell, or the *Rishis* stop.”

“In the middle of the country is a *stupa* built by Ashoka-rajah. Of old, the *Tathagat* came to this country with his followers to

preach the law and to save men. This stoop is a memorial to the traces of his presence.” (Beal, 1984)

None of those establishments and monuments has now remained in Kullu Valley. However, it may be conjectured that there should have been a Buddhist establishment – a *sangharam* and a *stupa* – somewhere around the village of Kalath. An ancient stone image of Avalokiteshvara is still worshipped in that village as Kapil Muni. (Handa, 2015)

Hiuen-Tsang’s reference about a *stoop* in Kullu Valley and a cursory mention of Lahul and Ladakh would suggest that a trunk route ran through this valley from the mainland to the interiors of the Himalay and beyond. Ashoka’s rock inscription at Kalsi on the confluence of the Yamuna and Tons rivers upstream of Paonta also lends credence to that hypothesis. The Ashokan rock edicts, pillars and *stupas* not only outlined his realm but also defined the major trade routes leading to other countries. Notwithstanding the missionary activities of Emperor Ashoka, it is unlikely that the Western Himalayan region could register a significant impact of Buddhism during his time (Fig.1-Fig.3). Nevertheless, he prepared a favourable atmosphere for the establishment of Buddhism as a religious culture under the Kushans. (Handa, 1994)

The Shungas arose after the fall of the Mauryas. They belonged to the Brahmin Bhardwaj *gotra*. Buddhism generally suffered under them in the mainland, but in the places far drawn from the imperial centre, Buddhism continued to prosper on the patronage of local chiefs, *shresthis*, *dhaniks* and the popular munificence. The Bharhut *Stupa*, the Sanchi *Stupa* and the Karle Caves are some of the important Buddhist monuments of that transitional phase. The anti-Buddhist attitude of the Shungas did not have any impact on the popularity of Buddhism in the Western Himalayan region. Because, at that age, it formed a part of the vast empire comprising what now forms Afghanistan, Pakistan and a large part of northern India west of the Ganges under the *Yavan* (Greek) King Menander. King Menander ruled over that empire from his capital at Shakala, the present-day Sialkot. King Menander, a contemporary of Pushyamitra Shunga (c. 187-151 BCE), remained always conscious of the anti-Buddhist views of the Shunga king. Therefore, he effectively buttressed the anti-Buddhist influences entering his territory.

The Greek potentate extended whole-hearted patronage to Buddhism in his empire. It is said that the King was desirous of knowing the true nature of Buddhism. For that, he engaged Mahather Nagasen. The subtle questions of the King received a profound solution from the monk-scholar. Those question-answer discourses are well recorded in the *Milindapanh*. That work is considered the most important non-canonical treatise of early



Fig. 1: A wood-carved image of Buddha

Buddhism in the Pali script. Buddhaghosh (c. CE 400) has extensively quoted that treatise as an authority. It is said that Nagasen had acquired the phenomenal knowledge of Buddhism from Yona Dhammarakkhit during his stay at a *vihar* built by Ashoka in that region. That *vihar* (so far unidentified) was known as the Ashokaram. King Menander liberally donated to the *Bhikkhu sangh*. He built a monastery, named the Milind Vihar, and handed over that *vihar* to his preceptor, Mahather Nagasen. According to the *Milindapanha*, the King renounced his throne in favour of his son during his ending days. He became a Buddhist monk and attained sainthood. He died a monk (Rowland, 1961, Handa, Vol. I. 2008).

The coins issued by King Menander aptly bore a Buddhist device, the *dharmachakra* and a legend, *Basileus Soteris Menandros*. Interestingly, a similar device is found on the Kuloot coins of the Veeryash and Vrishni types of the 1st century BCE. Therefore, it may be reasonably assumed that the Western Himalayan region formed a part of his dominion. It was because of his patronage of



Fig. 2: Tabo Ambulatory Suragama



Fig. 3: Tabo Serkhang Vairochana

Buddhism that many *vihars* came up in the upper Kangra region. Some of the archaeological sites in the upper Kangra region may belong to that period, for example, the damaged Buddhist *stoop* at Chetru on way to Dharmsala. Nearby that *stoop*, there also exists a large freestanding stone image of Avalokiteshvar in the Draupadi-ka-bag. (Handa. 1984)

The Indo-Greeks in India not only strove to popularise Buddhism in their realm, but they also introduced formal Hellenistic idioms in the traditional Indian art, which was based on the abstract symbolism. That interfusion had a profound and multifarious impact on the religiocultural and artistic ferment in the entire Asian world. That hybrid religio-artistic legacy proliferated in Central Asia and China with local variations. It was mainly due to the mercantile enterprise of the powerful Indo-Greek rulers that the religio-cultural and commercial frontiers of this region were opened to the outside world, and the Central Asian people became aware of the Buddhist India and its mercantile potentialities. Thus, the initiative for the transcontinental expansion of the religious and

commercial activities had already been taken up under the Indo-Greek kings. What was left for the Kushans was to expand and establish those activities further.

In the Indian context, the techno-artistic interfusion of the two cultures culminated in the Indo-Greek mannerism in the Buddhist art and architecture. It was that style, which flourished in northwestern India in the following centuries as the Gandhar art, which further proliferated in the north Indian plains up to Mathura. It also paved the way for the popularisation of Buddhism as a religion of faith as against the spiritual and philosophical concept of yore. That popular Mahayanist version of classical Buddhism came to be known as Mahayan Buddhism under Kanishka.

After the Indo-Greek King Menander, the next important kings responsible for the propagation of Buddhism in the western Himalayan region and beyond its frontiers were again the aliens – the Indo-Scythians. The first of those, Kujul-kass (Kadphises I), was Buddhist by faith, but his successor Kadphises II was a devout Shaiv. Although his successor, Kanishka (CE 78-101), was again

a staunch and indefatigable propagator of Buddhism, he extended patronage to the other religions as well, as may be noted from his coins. Those carry images of Oesho (Shiv), the Persian Fire God Athsho, the Greek Sun God Helios, besides the Shakya Bodo (Shakyamuni Buddha). However, his successor, Vasishka, was a Bhagavat by faith. He assumed the title of *Devputra*, i.e., the Son of God. The last Kushan king, Vasudev, was again a Shaiv. He issued coins bearing an image of Shiv. That tendency of changing faith from one to another by the Kushan kings would unmistakably betray the typical naive character of inconsistency in them. Each of them fancifully chose his religion by convenience rather than by conviction.

Nevertheless, the contribution made to the popularisation of Buddhism by Kanishka can certainly be regarded as stupendous by any consideration. It was for the first and the last time in Indian history that an image of a Buddhist monarch seems to emerge in his personality. He was neither an intellectual nor a spiritualist, but a practical man of down-to-earth common sense. The Buddhism that he liked and propagated was a popular version of the cloistered philosophical concept. That popular version developed on the pan-Asian scale into the Mahayana Buddhism under his patronage.

It is said that Kanishka, like Chanda Ashoka, was a tyrant ruler who was drawn towards Buddhism after his conquests of Kashmir, Yarkand and Khotan. Those campaigns enlarged his empire to incorporate not only the regions of northwestern Himalay and the northern Indian plains up to the bank of Yamuna in the east, but it also extended to Central Asia and to the geographical tract, which now forms Pakistan and Afghanistan. He exercised his control over that vast empire from his capital at Purushapur (Peshawar).

Zealous patronage of Buddhism by the Emperor Kanishka marked a decisive turning point in its perception and practice. The Third Great Council of Pataliputra under Emperor Ashoka aimed at purifying the *dhamm* by curbing dissenting tendencies. Nevertheless, after that Council, eighteen different factions had sprung up in Buddhism. Kanishka recognised them all as the repositories of the genuine doctrine. All of those were represented in the Fourth Great Council convoked by him at Kundalavan *Vihar* in Kashmir. Hiuen-Tsang has furnished a detailed account of that Council. He says that the emperor donated the kingdom of Kashmir to the Buddhist *sangh* on the conclusion of that Council (Sali, 1993).

The Theravadi (i.e., *Sthirvad*) camp (which predominated in the Third Council that the Emperor Ashoka had convened at Pataliputra) condemned that Council as the assemblage of heretical sects and abstained from it. Even today, that Council is not recognised by

the Southern Buddhists (Hinayanists), and does not find mention in the Ceylonese chronicles. There had been conceptual disagreement between the Third and Fourth Councils. The Theravadi monk-scholars of the Third Council emphasised analysis (*Vibhajjvad*) to establish the true faith. Against that, deliberations of the Fourth Council were aimed at the synthesis and assimilation of the divergent sectarian ideas and commentaries (*Sarvastivad*). The Council compiled those ideas and commentaries into the *Pitiks*. Those ideas and commentaries reflected the unanimous and collective opinion of the Assembly. Thus, a *Sarvastivadi* version of the Buddhist scriptures was brought out in different commentaries. The *Vinayavibhash* – a commentary on the *Vinay-pitik* contained 1,00,000 *shlokas* (couplets), The *Abhidharmavibhash* – a commentary on *Abhidhamm* had 1,00,000 *shlokas* and a commentary on the *Sutt-pitik* consisted of 1,00,000 *shlokas*. It was for the first time that Sanskrit substituted Pali in the Buddhist literature. Hiuen-Tsang has furnished a vivid description of that Council in his *Si-yu Ki*. He recalls, “*Kanishka-raj*a forthwith ordered these discourses to be engraved on sheets of red copper. He enclosed them in a stone receptacle, and having sealed this, he raised over it a stoop with the Scriptures in the middle.” With those *Vibhashas*, the Buddhist creed was all set to redefine itself as a popular religion sustained by faith and devotional fervour in the Mahayanic version. Parshava, Ashvaghosha, Vasumitra, Vasubandhu, Dharmatrata, Sanghabhadra and many other Buddhist scholars emerged as the pioneers of that popular resurgence in that Council.

Thus, in the western Himalayan region, Buddhism was cast into a popular mould for the first time. Not only was this mountainous region galvanised into the Buddhist creed, but the missionary activities of the Buddhist monks from this region also became vigorous within the Kushan Empire and beyond under the imperial decree. Hiuen-Tsang found that Buddhist tradition relating to Kanishka was fully alive during his sojourn of two years from May of CE 631 to April of CE 633 in Kashmir.

Before the Kushans, the Buddha was represented symbolically in the abstract devices, like a footprint, a wheel, a foliated tree, a *stoop*, a rider-less caparisoned horse with an umbrella over it, etc. It was during the Kushans, particularly under King Kanishka, that a new experiment in the religious art was initiated. That brought Gandhar into sharp focus as the second Buddhist holy land, rivalling the ancient Magadh in the east. The new art style integrated the abstraction of classical and austere Buddhist spiritualism (which the Kashmir-Gandhar region had been receiving since the days of Moggaliputt Tiss in 3rd century BCE from the East) with the western Hellenistic diction, which emphasised upon the formal treatment of figures – their anatomy, physical

beauty, drapery, etc. Thus, for the first time in history, the Buddha, the Boddhisattvas and a host of other divinities are seen anthropomorphised in the plastic form. Under the Hellenistic influence, the Buddha came to be depicted with a straight, sharply chiselled nose, well-trimmed arched eyebrows, shapely classical lips and wavy hair. The classical Indian iconographical elements could be found in the protruding heavy-lidded eyes, elongated ear lobes (because of the ear-ornaments he wore as a prince that symbolised carnal lust, which he renounced) and the oval modelling of the face. (Rowland, 1961)

It was from Magadh in the central Gangetic basin that the Buddhist doctrine proliferated under Emperor Ashoka. Now it was from Gandhar that the Buddhist art and architecture was transported to our times as an austere and stark philosophical doctrine of the BCE era, but in flesh and blood, duly clad in the loose Mediterranean diaphanous toga-like robes.

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