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The Historical Influence of Buddhism on the Muslims of Hazara, KP

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ABSTRACT

The Hazara is a division among the most important regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan. In essence, the historical remains found in Hazara are predominantly of Gandharan origin showing Buddhist culture and trading significance in its time due to its geographical position as the gateway to Central Asian territories that connect through the Silk Route (presently being vitalized as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) having historical significance due to its connection with Uttaranatha. The doorway of Hazara connected China, Korea, and Tibet along with many designated link-routes, having the major role as the hub of trade and religious Buddhist meetings. The influence of Greek, Roman, Persian, and indigenes is quite evidently visible on the historical remains found in Hazara. These cultural features can also be seen in the Muslim architecture that borrowed their style in Mosques which transformed from the Buddhist Stupa. Moreover, there are other cultural and artistic behaviors that can be noticed on the costumes and decorative scenes of Buddhist resemblance that are still liked throughout the globe. Even Myths are still used from their religious part like the black cat, crow, dream, horn to the top of the house, etc. Folk and traditional games of Buddhist era like Archery (Mukha), Wrestling (Kuhsti), and Horse riding are still observed in some areas. Relevantly, the historical significance of Hazara can be judged through the Buddhist remains and rock inscriptions in Mansehra and Oghi. These inscriptions of Asoka are called the Law of Piety. Hazara is the hub of Buddhist Civilization whose impacts are still noticeable on Muslim community in various shapes that require scholarly research. In a nutshell, this research intends to expose the subtle remnants of Buddhist culture that has now adapted into the current Hazara culture.

Introduction:

The historical name of Hazara in Maha Bharita (Old Indian History 1301 BC) is mentioned as Urasha. Alexander invaded this area and handed it over to Raja of Poonch named Abhisara in 326 BC who named the previously called Urasha as Abhisar. This area in 319 BC, was ruled by the Maurya Family. And the reign of Asoka existed from 234 BC to 272 BC. Then in 135 BC the Seythians attacks subdued Taxila and was ruled by them up till 250 BC before being overthrown by the Sakas¹. After the war of Kalinga, Asoka accepted Buddhism and sent missions to propagate this religion all over the land¹⁸. The mission of Mahantika was sent to Salatoa (Swabi, Chota Lahore) and then the same mission was sent to Hazara on about 261 BC. This area was ideal for the propagation of Buddhism for this mission because of its link to many areas through the Silk Road leading to China, Korea, Tibet, etc. A few selected places of Buddhist rock inscriptions that can be seen in Mansehra, Oghi, and Shatial because these were the busiest route of any time especially from trade point of view. Gandhara art has the influence of different civilizations and culture i.e. Greco, Roman, and indigenes.² Because so many cultures existed from different lands, and all of which left a footprint, Hazara became rich in multiple aspects including: culturally, traditionally, customs/norms, religiously, and linguistically³. Hazara, and specifically the area of Mansehra can be identified as the hub of international influence from past eras like Greek, Persian, Sasanian, Aryan, etc¹⁷. Hazara, which is a complexity and an amalgamation of historically operated living standards and creed, holds different concepts and presumptions that overlap in every phase of everyday lives^{19,50}. The occupants of the area still bear the influence of its past invaders, and a look at the religious and cultural norms of the past dynasties, a turbid resemblance can be seen today with the culture today^{54,55}. At the time when Buddhism became popular and Hinduism decayed, Islam found space in that area and was accepted by people of different beliefs^{23,49}. People who converted to Islam from other religions brought with them their culture, myths, and other aspects of their past life before reversion which didn't stand out because people who practiced those norms (non-Muslims) existed in the same community with no obligation to change^{20,48,53}. Most of the cultural entries into Islam were still operational before Islam (i.e. Black cat crossing path), however it has nothing to do with Islam. And this very turbid ideology persisted throughout generations and exists today²¹. The area actually provided social gatherings because of its status as a trading hub where people of many ethnicities came together and discussed their culture, their tread, and their religion^{24,47}.

Methodology:

This research was accomplished via a multidisciplinary approach that combined historical analysis, archaeological evidence, and comparative religious studies to understand the influence of Buddhism on Hazara.

The data was collected in three ways:

Historical & Textual Analysis:

Primary Sources: Ancient inscriptions like the Mansehra Rock Edicts of Asoka, Travelogues like Xuanzang's accounts, and other Buddhist texts were examined to allow an understanding of Buddhism.

Secondary Sources: Modern works from scholars like A.H. Dani, John Marshall, and Kurt Behrendt were critically reviewed.

Archaeological & Field Research:

Site Surveys: Buddhist stupas, monasteries, and sculptures were examined in sites like Zar Dheri, and Bhamala of Hazara region.

Ethnographic & Oral Histories:

Interviews & Folklore: Local traditions in Hazara that were inquired from people to point of the Buddhist retaining culture, e.g. Mountain veneration, burial customs, etc.

A total of **300 locals**, **15 elders**, and **5 religious leaders** of Hazara were interviewed in person to inquire about their cultural activities from daily to occasional festivals and events connected all the dots to a meaningful output of the surviving culture of Buddhists in Hazara.

Literature Review

Hazara has a rich and complex history shaped by the religions and their cultural influence throughout history, including Buddhism^{45,46}. Scholarly works in this realm explore the Buddhist influence, its downfall, and also its remaining traces of cultural practices in Hazara throughout pedigree.

Buddhism in Ancient Hazara:

Hazara was actually part of the greater Gandhara civilization which was a major center of Buddhist learning as well as their art. Numerous scholars like John Marshall (1951) in Taxila highlighted the spread of Buddhism into Hazara through trade routes and missionary activities, rooting to the reign of Asoka^{22,44}. The presence of Buddhist art in Hazara including; Stupas, monasteries, sculptures, and other relics indicated that Hazara was actually a significant part of Gandharan Buddhism.^{4,43}

Ahmad Hasan Dani (1969), writes in "The Historic City of Taxila", Buddhist missionaries came from Taxila and Swat to propagate Buddhism in Hazara, and they left behind rock edicts like the Mansehra Rock Edicts of Asoka in 3rd Century BCE^{26,42}. These were inscriptions on big rocks in Kharosthi script that confirms Mauryan influence in early Buddhist presence in Hazara.

Archaeological & Architectural Evidence:

The Department of Archaeology & Museums in Pakistan conducted studies that uncovered numerous Buddhist sites in Hazara that included many stupas and monasteries^{27,41}. As Federico De Romanis discussed in his work about Hazara's strategic location along the Silk Road which gave it a major perk as the location that facilitated the exchange of Buddhist ideas and art styles with other nations, and so happened otherwise as well and many Greco-Buddhist sculptures were found in this nation because of that.^{5,40} Moreover, the architecture of Buddhist sites in Hazara are quite similar to those found in Taxila and Swat, implying that they had a shared architectural tradition²⁸. The Buddhist caves of Baltoro and other monastic complexes clearly show that

Hazara was not a mere periphery but instead, it was an active participant in Gandharan Buddhist culture.⁵

Decline of Buddhism:

The Hunnic Invasions in the 5th century are considered as the cause of Buddhist decline in Hazara where Hinduism overcame Buddhism which was later on followed by Islam^{29,39}. However, while Buddhism faded from that region, it left a footprint in the local folklore, art, and even some Sufi traditions of Hazara.^{6,38}

More studies show that some pre-Islamic customs in Hazara might be of Buddhist origin, such as the burial practices and reverence for sacred mountains that show a possible syncretism between indigenous beliefs and Buddhist traditions.⁷

Contemporary Perspectives:

Recent scholars like Llewelyn Morgan explored how the modern identity politics in Pakistan have shaped the memory of Hazara's Buddhist past³¹. However, there is still need for further archaeological exploration and interdisciplinary studies to completely understand Buddhism's socio-religious impact on Hazara.⁸

Collected Data:

All the collected data collected through keen observation and in-depth interviews from the indigenes of Hazara can be divided into the following two headings:

Present Hazara Culture Confirmed to be of Buddhist Origin:

This division encircles the Hazara culture that is confirmed to be of Buddhist origin through evidence found in their left behind remnants such as text and architecture³². Such elements of passed on Buddhist culture include:

Praying Beads:

A string of beads holding a religious element that can be seen in Sculptures are still used among Muslims in Hazara and other areas, as it has integrated itself into Islam³⁴.



(9)

Turban:

The Bodhisattva, a person who achieves Nirvana but delays doing so due to his compassion for other beings³³. A turban was a symbol of the Bodhisattva and can be seen them wearing it in Buddhist sculptures. It is still common today.



(10)

Construction:

The dome of the mosque is picked from Buddhist architecture.



(11)



(12)

Clothing:

Majority of the people in Hazara community have similar clothing fashion, particularly relating to the Shawls in males and certain jewelry in females that can prominently be seen in Buddhist sculptures.



(13)



(14)

Lotus Flower:

The Lotus flower had a religious aspect in Gandhara and its design can be seen in the turbans of Buddisattva and jewelry on sculptures³⁶. These designs are still quite common.^{15,51}

Games & Competition:

Many games of Buddhist origin such as; Parzawal (Wrestling), Mukha (A sort of archery), Sin Bakri (a type of board game), Pat Patorhay (Hide & Seek), are still found in Hazara.¹⁶

Present Hazara Culture Likely to be of Buddhist Origin:

Other cultures also exist in Hazara region that are not quite backed with evidence as above, however, because there was a majority of Buddhists living in Hazara, it is likely that the fragments of their culture were passed on undocumented^{37,52}. These cultures include a wide range of elements that include:

Myths:

Some pre-Islamic myths have already existed in Hazara for centuries that could likely be of Buddhist origin³⁸. Some of these myths were collected from the locals and are listed as follows:

- The hollering of a particular animal brings death.
- Owl is considered to bring bad luck, if it comes to a house, the house is soon to fall in ruin.
- The blinking of a female's right eye and a male's left eye brings sadness, but if they blink otherwise, it will bring happiness.
- An itchy palm brings wealth.
- An itchy foot sole and a flipped shoe means that the person will be travelling.
- Cleaning the house at evening was thought to be cleaning out blessings with the trash.
- A crying dog is considered to bring illness.
- The shout of a peacock indicates rainfall.
- It was not considered well to have the saddle on a horse when riding it to bring a doctor for the sick person.

- If someone had the intention to make fight between particular family members, they would place a porcupine quill in that house.
- A sparrow sandbathing indicates rainfall.
- A shooting star brings disturbance and disharmony in the country.
- Hiccups indicate the call from the person's grave that they will die soon.
- If someone destroys a hornet nest, a pimple will grow on their eye.
- A lightning strike on a house would kill the eldest child, boy or girl.
- If a father knits his cot at night, he will become the father of seven daughters.
- A wood cutter will not have children.
- If a one man is talking about another and that person arrives at that time, he will have a long life.

Days:

- Some people believe that Wednesday is considered an awful day.
- Most people consider Tuesday to be a bad day.
- Students begin their educational book on Wednesday with a belief that it will bring them success.

Eating Limitations:

- If someone invites you for a meal, do not excuse yourself until you are fed properly.
- Do not eat or drink at the time of eclipse (solar or lunar).
- Some women do not eat before men, considering it unpleasant.

Common Facts:

- If a woman becomes a widow, she cannot marry again, and another wedding is considered awkward.
- Upon the husband's death, women would break their bangles.
- In regular traditional practice, women do not get their dowry, not from parents or husband.
- A popular belief in Mansehra is that if a pregnant woman dies, she must wear steel chains, otherwise she would become a witch.
- A woman should deliver her first child at her parents' house, this practice is carried from the Buddhist time, however, there is no verification for it being Buddhist culture.

Guests:

- A crow in the house indicates the soon arrival of guests.
- While mixing the flour, if flour slips out, the guests are to be expected.
- While making bread (roti), if it breaks in hand, the guests will come.

Conclusion:

Since Buddhist culture holds great significance in the history of Hazara, the remnants of this religion survived as the people changed their religion but failed to overcome their past beliefs. We observe that surviving culture in many places and significantly in Hazara where it lives on in the shape of adapted faith, belief, myths, games, superstitions, architecture, and many more types of culture.

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