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BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF ANCIENT SWAT VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

Swat is a beautiful valley of the present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan border. Presently Pashto is the language of this region. This valley is the home of natural beauty. This valley is a witness to different rulers. Archaeological excavations reveal pre-historic Buddhist caves, monasteries, and Aryan Graveyards. Many monuments were ruined after the Taliban's attack. This is the time to preserve the remaining one. This paper highlights the Buddhist heritage of Swat valley. The beautiful valley with rich heritage and traces of destruction. It's the time to protect, preserve and reveal them.

INTRODUCTION

Swat valley a governmental province in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, located near Pakistan-Afghanistan border. It is the higher valley of the Swat which increases in the Hindu-kush Mountain. Swat district capital is Saidu Sharif and the main township of Swat valley is Minqora. It was a princely state till it was ruined in 1969. Currently the whole valley is occupied by traditional Pashtuns. Language vocalized in the basin is Pashto with high peaks, green fields, and pure waters; it is a home of excessive natural beauty and is common with travelers as the Switzerland of the area.

Swat valley has glorious past that period back over 2000 years. Swat valley named Udyana in earliest periods when it came under Achaemenid impact, earlier previous autonomous ruler's regained central over it. City Barikot and Udegram, named Bazira and Ora in Greeks version, at the time of Alexander in 327 BCE. The area became a portion of the Mauryan Empire by 305 BCE. Lastly when the Gandhara civilization was at its peak the Kushan Empire absorbed Swat. Kushanas were completed thrown by Huns someplace nearby the Fifth century CE. After the Eight Century CE ahead, Arabs tried to utilize load from the west in the Afghan-Persian region where the Hindu Dynasty was in the power. Archaeological excavated location in Swat reveals pre-historic caves to Buddhist monasteries and Aryan Graveyards. But the innumerable earliest relics of stupas, forts, rock inscriptions, rock paintings, seal, viharas and monasteries are spread in the plains and strained along the mountainous hills totally completed the Swat valley.

Chronological Account of Swat Valley

• Advent of Aryans

Alien migrants from central Asia, who established the base of the current ethnic crowd and faiths of the south Asian sub-continent, call Aryans established in swat 1700 BCE. They are also the writers of the Rig-Veda, in which we can trace the earliest versions of the north-western part of Indo-Pakistan. The Rig-Veda references than Suvastu or the current time Swat River flows into the Kubha, the current river Kabul.

• Greek Invasion

A New era of Hellenism started 327 BCE, when Alexander of Macedonia occupied Swat on his way from Afghanistan to India. He crossed the river of Kunar and Panjkora and lastly reached to the Swat valley, occupied the town of Udigrama (Ancient era) and Barikot (Ancient Bazira). The effect of Greek influence presented new cultural and ethnic origins in the area during this age.

• Mauryan Empire

When Greek attack within a few centuries, Chandragupta Maurya (first ruler of the Mauryan kingdom, famous to traditional historian in the west as Sandrocottus, Chandragupta occupied and governed much of the northern India from about 324 to 300 BCE) annexed the Peshawar and Swat valley.

Asoka the third ruler of the Maurya Empire, the grandson of Chandragupta, supported Buddhism and it's religious. Gandhara and Uddiyana were adapted to Buddhism under his support. From the second century BCE to ninth century CE Buddhism succeeded in the Swat valley, leaving behind a legacy of attractive sculpture and more than 500 monasteries. After the disintegration of the Mauryan Kingdom this area once again came under the Bactrian Greeks. They administrated this area from 256 to 50 BCE and governed here for almost 200 years than Saka and Parthian governed between 19 and 49 BCE. The Sakas administrated this area for around one and half eras.

• Kusanas

The Kusanas Empire ruled this land in the middle of the second century BCE. The supreme well-known ruler of this empire was Kaniska (128-15 CE). In this age Swat became an import center of Buddhism. In first century CE, Gandhara became the second divine land of Buddhism and experienced an exclusive financial and traditional flowering, trade with China and Rome. This brought a variation of impact to build what is now known as Gandhara arts. This is evident from various ruins, rock engravings, rock paintings and other archaeological discovers as well as from travelogue of Tibetan and Chinese Pilgrims. Its significance as a Buddhist Centre is attested by the information that it was considered as the birth-place of the second Buddha, the Padmasambhava and too it was here that ruler Indra Bhuti wrote his Tantric explanations, the Uddiyana Pita.

• Faxian

Faxian (399-414 CE) arrived in Swat valley in 403 CE, has described 500 monasteries with monks being the scholars of the Hinayana.

• Song Yun

Song Yun (518 CE) visited the Swat valley in 518 CE. He described 6000 gold images in a single monastery of Talo. The excavations at Talo, appear his accounts by the finding of various images with gold wash.

• Xuan-Xang

Xuan-Xang (629 CE) arrived in Swat valley around 630 CE. He stated Swat with Udyana and stated 1400 Buddhist monasteries generally empty. He saying the main Buddhist monastery called Ming Chili. He also spoke about the footprints of Buddha at Teerat where he saying the foot prints of Buddha (today in Swat Museum).

Important Buddhist Heritages

Gumbatuna Stupa

This stupa is Buddhist formation sited on the right bank of the swat river, 6 kilometer west of village Barikot.

Colossal Statue of Buddha

This sculpture is carved on the live rock of the hillside in the Swat valley. It is one of the hundreds of colossal rock statue Buddha displays the

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outstanding ancient societies of Swat (earliest Udyana). This sculpture sustained some harms affected by the unaware human hands in the procedure of touching and scraping which also coupled partially with the weathering effect.

The beautiful sculpture is Oym in height and looks to be enlarged dimension of a typical Gandhara style. It links to the late stages of Gandhara Sculptures (Seventh- Eight Century CE). A noble amount of good sculptures and an inspiring stupa compound was uncovered. These sculptures contain Buddha, Bodhisattvas, architectural features in stone and stucco. The area has yielded no coins which could have helped in providing due to complete dating. So, it appears probable that the Gumbatuna place succeeded during the second century CE and lasted till the seventh-eight century CE.

Amlukadara Stupa

Amlukadara stupa is located around two km of village Nawagai in the attractive basin of Amlukdara, on the main road to Buner. The place was examined by Berger in 1938 CE. Berger recovered Gandhara statues but did not examine advance to establish the scrupulous dated of the place.

Amlukdara stupa is attacked by treasure hunters and seriously broken. The anxiety branch must notification it, if they carelessness harms the stupa has established so far, future generation will not enjoy this glorious memorial of excellent historical monument.

Tokar Dara Stupa and Monastery

Tokar-Dara is a Buddhist place located around five km on the South of Barikot via Karakar pass and lies around one km from Najigram at the mouth of small basin.

Janabad seated Buddha

The seated image of Buddha carved on rock of red color. Which is situated on hillside of village Janabad. This great heritage can also be noticeable from the right side of the road, on the way to Malamjaba. The tallness of figure is about seven meters and is surely the best inspiring portion of sculpture to be seen in Gandhara area.

Nemogram Stupa and Monastery

This place was spotted in 1966 and excavated in 1967-68. Few coins of Kushana age excavated here are today in Swat museum.

Some Rock Carvings

Rock carvings established a main part of the Buddhist art in Swat. Jambil, sub valley is located to the east Mingora. Mingora is main trading Centre for the last two thousand centuries. Mingora Bazar is well-known for semi-

precious stones, hand-woven and embroidered cloths, shawls, bed sheets, wood work and tribal jewelry.

But Karavillage, new name of that place is Gul-kada is located in the entrance of the Jambil sub valley and south east of Mingora town. This region is called after a famous Buddhist formation of stupa and monastery of Butkara-I, Excavated by Italian Archaeological mission in 1956-62. This rock reviles a single figure of Bodhisattva Padmapani in Lalitasana. (Lalit means easy and asana means sitting)

Kalako-Dheray

Located at the back of the Kakarai town and about eight km of Mingora. Site excavated by ISMEO (Italian Mission) rock revelries and seated Bodhisattva in Lalitasana. The throne of the Bodhisattva small symbol of Dhyani-Buddha reveals.

Conclusion

The valley of Swat is possibly assumed as the birth place of Vajrayana Buddhism. Various archaeological places, sculptures, artifacts and Buddhist relics has been found here. The remains show that Swat was the place of Buddhist devotion in earlier period. Around 400 Buddhist places has been traced in Swat valley before the Taliban's rise to rule, however these ancient heritages are being methodically targeted by the Taliban and it is feared that their intolerance will not allow for the existence of some trace of Buddhism in Swat. It is fear that the future generation will not understand this glorious memorial of magnificent earlier. The time is to protect and preserve such attractive Buddhist as well as traditional culture of Swat.

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