

Cultural Links Between India, Central Asia and Arab

Dr. Rita H. Parekh

Dept. of Sanskrit

Shri & Smt. P. K. Kotawala Arts College, Patan

❖ **INTRODUCTION:**

From prehistoric days, India had trade and cultural relations with West Asia, Rome, China and Southeast Asia. India sent its traders and missionaries to these regions and in some places these persons also settled. During the reign of Darius the Great of Persia, Greece and India had their earliest contact in about 510 BCE. After the discovery of the monsoon by Hippalus in first century CE, Roman vessels played directly across the Indian Ocean. The port of Palura on the eastern coast of India had an important role. The ships came here from Arikamedu, crossed the Bay of Bengal and went to the delta of the Irrawaddy, whence they proceeded to the Malay Peninsula. Demand for Eastern goods had the effect of stimulating Indian trading along the Malay Peninsula. It is not surprising that Roman coins, pottery, amphora and other trade goods have been found in the Malay Peninsula originating from coastal regions of eastern India. Indo-Roman contact declined during the third and fourth centuries CE, but India's relationship with Southeast Asia continued. In the spread of Indian culture, the sea played an important role. There was intensification of sea-borne commerce in the early centuries of Common Era. In the following few paragraphs we will examine the significance of interrelationship between the world with India in ancient days.

❖ **IMPACT OF INDIA ON LIFE AND CULTURE OF CENTRAL ASIA:**

Indian religion, social and cultural life and art had profoundly affected the life and culture of people of Central Asia.

A) Religion:

In the sphere of religion, Buddhism was very popular. Buddhism probably had taken its root in central Asia earlier than the period of the Kushana. Because of the famous Buddhist theologian Ghosaka, born in Tukharstan, attended the Buddhist council at Purusapura, convened by Kanishka. He was one of the distinguished Buddhist personalities there. During

the reign of Kaniska, the Sarvastivada sect of Buddhism was gaining ground in western Turkistan but in the other place Mahayana sect was popular. Numerous Buddhist stupas, shrines and monasteries were constructed and many images of Buddha and Bodhisattava were executed, after their Indian models. Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan and Kuchi were significant centre of Buddhism. The ruler of Kuchi and other countries in the central Asia were devout followed of Buddhism and they had adopted Indian names such as Haripuspa, Suvarnapusa etc. The country was dotted with Buddhist monasteries where in thousand of monks lived. The monks were known as Sramana or Thera Vikshyu, there Buddhist organization were called Bikshyu Sangha. On the southern route to China, from west to east, Sarikote had ten monasteries with five hundred monks, Wusha had ten monasteries with hundred monks, Kashgar had many hundred monasteries and ten thousand monks and Khotan and over hundred monasteries with five thousand monks. The famous establishment of the Gomati Vihara was at Khotan. On the northern route to China from west to east, Aqsu had about ten monasteries with nearly thousand monks. Kucha was almost entirely a Buddhist city, it had royal palace looking like a monastery full of image of Buddha. Buddhism was flourished in the northern Chinese Turkistan, till about the eighteenth century.

Beside the Buddhism, Brahminism was also followed by the people of Central Asia. Images of Siva Shakti, Ganesha, Kubera and Naryana have been found there. God Shiva is depicted there having four hands, three faces, seating cross legged and clothed in tight fitting vest and a tiger skin around the middle. Other Brahminical divinities that were revered and worship there were Brahma, Narayana, Indra, Ganesa, Kartikeya etc.

B) Language and Literature:

In addition to the local dialects, people in central Asia were acquainted with Sanskrit and Prakrit languages. A large number of Buddhist texts, written in Sanskrit and Prakrit, as well as in local languages of central Asia, in Brahmi and Kharosthi script of Indian have been discovered there. Some of the phrases used in the prayers and worshipped by the people were almost identical with those found in Indian inscription of Kushana age. Numerous sacred texts of Buddhism were discovered in Khotan, Kucha, Gilgit and other places. A text of the Dhammapada in Pali language, another text of Udanavarga and the palm leaf manuscript from Turfan containing some portion of the drama of Sariputtaparakarana and other two drama of Asvaghosa have been discovered.

C) Government:

According to ancient Khotanese tradition an Indian royal dynasties rule Khotan for fifty Six generation. Important states of Central Asia like Khotan, Baruka, Kusha, Agni Desa and

Kao-Chang adopted many features of Indian monarchical government. The king adopted Indian royal title such as Maharayasa, Rayatirayasa, Mahanuaya, Sachadhamastidasa etc. The Khotanese King used Deva with his name such as Maharaja Rajatiraja Deva Vijhita Singha. The divine element in royalty was in conception of royalty. The Ruler of Kushu and other states adopted Indian names like Vijita Simha, Haripusha, Suvarnapuisha etc. Many other people used such names like Bhima, Bangusena, Nadasena etc. The king adopted official designation such as Chara(spy), Dutyua or Dutta etc. About forty coins have been found in Khotan which bear Indian legend in Kharoshti script. This indicates the language and the script used in administration were Indian.

D) Social-Economic Life:

The patriarchal family system of India was followed there. The male head of the family commanded great reverence and exercise authority over the other members of the family. He led a pious and noble life. Slavery was common practice. The dresses of the people were influenced by Indian costumes. They used words for clothes, such as woolen, hem, silk, leather etc. They adopted Indian names for profession such as silpigyan(Sculptor), suranakara(gold smith) etc. The central Asian also adopted Indian system of coinage.

E) Art:

Indian architecture, sculpture and painting spread all over the region of central Asia in the early century of Christian Era. The seals with the effigies of Kuvera and Trimukha found at Niya and the painted Ganesha discovered at Endere. The close architectural resemblance between the Turkistan stupa and the corresponding stupa extant in Kabul valley and the north-west frontier region of Pakistan and the wall painting of Indian Buddhist monk in yellow robes with names written in Brahmi, discovered in the Buddhist temples at Bazaklik in the northern part of Central Asia, bear testimony to the profound influence of Indian art on the art of Central Asia. The GrecoBuddhist art of Gandhara flourishing in the north-western frontier of India, contributed most to shape the Buddhist art of Central Asia. On the southern slope of Tien-Shan mountains, caves of thousand Buddhas were excavated and decorated with mural paintings. These were executed in the period from the seventh to tenth A.D. Some of the states in Central Asia were flourishing Indian colonies.

❖ **INDIA AND ARABIA**

New Islamic political power rose in prominence in Arabia in 8th Century. Bagdad in Arabia was at this time the centre of Muslim world. Indian culture reached Arabia directly as well as through Persia. In the beginning, Indian literature was at first translated into Persian and later on translated from Persian to Arabic. A good example of this fables known as Kalila-

wa-dimna, based on Indian works the Panchatantra. Similarly, the Charaka samhita, a treatise on Indian medical science, came to be known to the Arab world through Persian court. Arab interest in Indian literature and culture was aroused directly after the Arab conquest of Sind in the beginning of 8th Century A.D. This interest and intercourse between India and Arabia became more prominent during the reign of Al-Mansur (754-775 A.D.) and Harul-ul-Rashid (786-809 A.D), the Khlaifa of Muslim world with Baghdad as their capital. Indian embassies were sent to this Khalifa. They were accompanied by Indian scholar. The Arabs learnt Indian literature and science including Mathematics and Astronomy, from these Hindu scholar. The scholar who accompanied the embassies carried with them to Arabia, many works on Astronomy and Mathematics including the Brahmasphutasiddhanta and the Khanadakhadyaka of Brahmagupta. Before the translations of Ptolemy's Almagest, three Indian works on astronomy were translated with the help of these Indian scholars into Arabic, the most famous of them being Barhmagupta Siddhanat, given in Arabic convenient name Sindhind, translated by Al-Fazari and Yaqub-Ibn-Tariq. Other two work from Hindu astronomy, translated into Arabic were Brahmagupta's Khanadakhadyaka and work of Aryabhatta. Digest and commentaries of the Siddhanta continued to be written until the 11th century in the Arab world.

Hindu Mathematics left a far more lasting impression on the Arab science. The Indian scholar in Baghdad introduced in Arab the Hindu numerals, particularly the system of decimalnotation, based on the place value of the first nine numbers and use of zero. In the reign of AlMamun (813-870) the Arab mathematician Al-Khwarizm adopted Sanskrit numerals to Arabic orthography. An assessment on the Hindu influence on the mathematics can be made from the work of Al-Naswi(980-1040) on Indian arithmetic. Some mathematical and astronomical terms were borrowed into Arabic from Sanskrit.

During the period of early Khalifas, contact with India was promoted and the Arab interest in Hindu sciences was aroused chiefly by the efforts of Barmak family, which provided ministers to the Abbasid Khalifa. The founder of the family was a Buddhist high priest of the monastery in Balkh. Though he was converted to Islam from Buddhism, he had great learning towards Indian culture. These Barmakid ministers invited Indian scholar to come Baghdad. They were employed to translate into Arabic Sanskrit works on Mathematics, Algebra, Astronomy, Medicine, Pharmacology, Toxicology and other literature.

Many standard Hindu treaties on medicine, material medica and therapeutics were translated into Arabic by order of Khalifa Har-Ulul-Rashid. Such famous work such as Charaka samhita, the susruta, the nidana and the ashtanga of Banabhatta were translated in Arabic.

When Indian physician name Mankh cured Har-Ulul-Rashid of chronic deases he was exceedingly delighted and appointed Mankh as the head of royal Hospital. Among the other Sanskrit work, translated into Arabic, were the ethical writings of Chanakya and the Hitopodesa, and works ranging logic to magic, catalogue by Iba-Nadim. Panchtantra was translated into Sassanid, old Persian and then from Persian version to Arabic by Ibn-UL-Muquaffa and named Kalila-wa-dimna. The fascinating and interesting story of Sindbad, the sailor which was later on incorporated into the Arabians night was partly of Indian origin. Part on the Indian Epic Mahabharata was translated into Arabic by AbuSalih-Ibn, Shuayb and later by Abul-Hasan-Ali-Jabali. Works dealing with the life and teachings of Buddha were translated from Pavelevi into Arabic and named as Kitab-ul-Budd, Kitab-Balawhar wa Budhasaga and Kitab-Budhasab Mufrad.

Many Arabian scholars, Traveler and merchants had given an account of Indian of their period. Sulaiman, the merchant who visited India, wrote of Hindu customs like trial by Ordeal, the cremation of dead and during alive of widow. He praised Hindu proficiency in medicine, astronomy and philosophy. Abu-yed Husan-ul Sayrafi who visited India in 916 A.D showed interest in Hindu ascetics in his accounts. AL-Masud who also visited India in the 10th Century A.D given us a good account on the religious beliefs and practices of India. Hindu religious ideas influenced Islam and it led to the growth and development of Islamic mysticism or Sufism. Titus has observed that India has contributed in thought, religios imageries of expression and pious practices of Sufism. In fine art such as music , art and architecture Indian influenced the Islami world in many aspects.

❖ **SUMMARY:**

- 1) From prehistoric days, India had trade and cultural relations with West Asia, Rome, China and Southeast Asia. India sent its traders and missionaries to these regions and in some places these persons also settled.
- 2) For several millennia India has interacted with the Central Asian region; Afghanistan, Central Asia and Xinjiang. Trade was the motivating factor throughout history and with trade cum cultural interaction.
- 3) It was not a mechanical transmission of cultural values from one people to another, it was a creative process in which cultural achievements were further refined before they were passed on.
- 4) Indian religion, social and cultural life and art had profoundly affected the life and culture of people of Central Asia in the sphere of Art, Culture and Religion.

- 5) The art and culture of the various countries got itself reflected over the Indian culture as well as get reflected in the other countries also.
- 6) India's links with West Asia, by land as well as sea routes, goes back to very ancient times. These ties between the two culture zones (the idea of nations had not yet developed) became particularly close with the rise and spread of Islamic civilization in West Asia.
- 7) About the economic aspects of this relationship, we have from about mid-ninth century AD a number of accounts by Arab and other travellers, such as Sulaiman, the Merchant, AlMasudi, Ibn Hauqal, Al Idrisi, etc, which attest to a flourishing commercial exchange between these areas. Evidence for a very active interaction in the cultural sphere, however, goes back to the eighth century and earlier.

❖ **REFERENCES:**

- 1) Chakravarti, Ranabir: Merchants, Merchandise & Merchantmen, in: Prakash, Om (ed.): The Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800 (History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, ed. by D.P. Chattopadhyaya, vol. III, 7), Pearson, Delhi, 2012, pp. 53- 116.
- 2) Chaudhuri, Kirti N.: Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean, CUP, Cambridge, 1985.
- 3) Malekandathil, Pius: Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean, Primus Books, Delhi, 2010.
- 4) McPherson, Kenneth: The early Maritime Trade of the Indian Ocean, in: ib.: The Indian Ocean: A History of People and The Sea, OUP, 1993, pp. 16-75.
Christie, J.W., 1999, The Banigrama in the Indian Ocean and the Java sea during the early Asian trade boom, Communarute's maritimes del'ocean indien, Brepols