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KHASHA BUDDHIST HERITAGE: SCOPE AND CHALLENGES

Khasha Kingdom was famous for ancient Buddhist history and architecture. King Nagaraja, who came from Khari Province, located in China at present, established the Khasha kingdom around the 12th century. Based on the historical and archeological records existing at the place, this country was renowned for Buddhism and Buddhist heritage; however, at present, there are just a few remaining Buddhist heritages that are in critical condition; Buddhism is almost collapsed from those places. Some of the remarkable and significant Buddhist heritage of that place is *Kānkre Bihar* (Buddhist Monastery). *Pātharnauli* (Stupa including images of five Buddhas), *Pādukāsthāna* (Foot print of Buddha), etc. This paper explores the historical significance of Buddhism and its heritage as Khasha Kingsom. It also highlights the present status of Buddhist heritage and its scope and challenges. Analytical and descriptive methods have been applied, and primary and secondary sources have been consulted to draft this paper.

Keywords: Khasha Buddhism, Tangible Heritage, Khasha Kingdom, Khasha, Khasha Kings.

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БУДДИЙСКОЕ НАСЛЕДИЕ ХАША: МАСШТАБ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ

Королевство Хаша славилось древней буддийской историей и архитектурой. Король Нагараджа, прибывший из провинции Кхари, в настоящее время расположенной в Китае, основал королевство Хаша в XII в. Согласно историческим и археологическим записям, существующим в этом месте, страна славилась буддизмом и буддийским наследием. Однако в настоящее время осталось всего несколько буддийских памятников, которые находятся в критическом состоянии; буддизм в этих местах почти исчез. Некоторые из замечательных и значительных буддийских наследий этого места – *Канкре Бихар* (буддийский монастырь), *Патхарнаули* (ступа, включающая изображения пяти Будд), *Падукаштана* (отпечаток стопы Будды) и т. д. В статье исследуется историческое значение буддизма и его наследия королевства Хаша. Подчеркивается нынешний статус буддийского наследия, его масштаб и проблемы. При написании данной статьи применялись аналитические и описательные методы, а также изучались первичные и вторичные источники.

Ключевые слова: Хаша-буддизм, материальное наследие, королевство Хаша, Хаша, короли Хаша.

Introduction

This paper discusses the Buddhist heritage and its present status. Khasha Kingdom was once very popular, and the area of the kingdom is very huge. The Khasha king, who came from Ngari prefecture, established his kingdom at Sinja Valley, which is located in Karnali Province at present. They ruled at Sinja valley from twelve century to end of four-

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teen century. Nagraja is the first king of the kingdom. The Khasha kings not only expanded the territory of the kingdom but also disseminated Buddhism and made Buddhist heritage, which is very artistic. This valuable Buddhist heritage is scattered in Surkhet and Dailekha districts. They are in critical condition. Historical and archeological heritage must be preserved. This paper highlights the significance of the heritage and its scope, as well as the challenges.

Surkhet and Dailekha districts

Surkhet and Dailekh District of present-day Nepal were parts of Khasha kingdom during the 12th to 14th centuries. Sinja Valley, located in Dailekha district, was the ancient capital city and powerful town of the Khasha Kingdom. Most of the Khasha Buddhist heritage is found there.

The present Surkhet seems to have existed as a trading route and an educational center during the Khasha Empire. Surkhet district, located in the west of present-day Nepal, is an administrative unit that is connected to Achham in the north and some parts of Dailekh. The district is also named after Surkhet Valley. The Mahayani Buddhist text named "Abhisamayalankar" preserved in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet was moved from Surkhet. In the colophon of the text, it is written that "This text was written in 1313 AD during the reign of King Ripu Malla at Surksetra". Based on the statement, it is understood that Surkhet is a corrupted name of Surakshetra.

The present Dailekha district is the winter capital of the Khasha kings. They come to Dulu from Sinja in the winter season because the temperature in Dailekha is a little bit hotter than in Sinja. Historical and significant monuments are found in Dailekha, which were constructed during the reign of Khasha kings.

Origin of Khasha

"Khasha" is also known as "Kash", and this word is believed to be related to the region called "Kakas" or "Caucasus". It is also a strategic area on the border of Europe and Asia, four thousand kilometers northwest of Nepal. Caucasus is also said to be the name of the place or region from the name of the "Kas". It is mentioned that the present Khasha tribe is related to the Caucasus.

Samsuluna (1749–12 BC), son of the Babylonian emperor Hammurabi (1795–50 BC) In 1726, it is mentioned that a security fort was built near the crossing of the Tigris River to protect it from the attacks of the Kash. It is mentioned that after 26 years, Khasha attacked Babylonia and established their kingdom. They ruled in Babylonia for five and a half hundred years.

It is mentioned that in 1155 BC, the Khasha kingdom of Babylon was destroyed by the Elam tribe, who had to push further east for their defense, similarly during the expansion campaign of the Iranian Empire. Khashas were defeated and migrated to the east. There is a place called Khashistan near the border of Iraq in western Iran where the Kasas lived for some time.

In Afghanistan, there are places similar to the name Khasha, such as the Khasha desert and the Khasha river in Afghanistan, which are close to Iran. This river flows into Lake Helmand. Badakhshan is located on the northern side of the Hindu Kush mountain range in Afghanistan. Based on the two mountains named Hindukush and Kashagar and the inhabitants of Khasha, Kashmir City is named.

Geographical Structure of the Khasha Kingdom

At present, Khasha kingdom covers only the area of Karnali province in Nepal. But, in ancient times, around the 13th century, the territory of the Khasha kingdom covered Kumaun and Gadhawala in the west, which places are situated in India at present; its area covered Gandaki province; therefore, the birth palace of Buddha, Lumbini, was also under the control of the Khasha kingdom.

It is clear that the territory of the Khasha empire was larger than the area of present-day Nepal, and its main capital was Sinja in Jumla district, and its winter capital was Dullu in Dailekh district. Although most of the territory of this empire did not fall within the borders of present-day Nepal, the main centers of governance, i.e., the two capitals, Sinja and Dullu, are located in present-day Nepal.

Kings of the Khasha Kingdom

The genealogy of the Khasha kingdom is mentioned in the inscription inscribed on Kirtikhamba installed by Prithvi Malla at Dullu. Similarly, this information can be found in the chronology of Shreepali. In addition, the mythological accounts of Tibbet are also one of the sources regarding the genealogy of Khasha kings. The Buddhist statues found in Kankrevihara are according to the Mahayani Buddhist concept. The Buddhism developed in the Khasha Empire is also Mahayana. The mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hua' recorded in records found in the Khasha Empire is related to Mahayana Buddhism. King Ashoka Challa clearly called himself “Mahayanika”, while he and other kings also called themselves “Bodhisattvavatara”. It means that they are strong followers of Buddhism.

Nagraja

According to the Kirtikhamba inscription, he is the first king to establish the Khasha kingdom in Sinja Valley. In the expansion of his kingdom from Khari Prefecture, he came to Jumla and concorded the Jumla by defecating King Jaweswr, who was king of Jumla. On the inscription, there is a statement like “Nagaraja established the management at Sinja City”, which means Nagaraja established the kingdom at Sinja Valley.

After passing away of Nagraja, King Chap, Chapilla, Krashi Challa, and Kradhi Challa ruled in Khasha kingdom accordingly. After that, King Krachalla ruled in Khasha kingdom, and he seems to have conducted remarkable activities during his reign. Based on the copper sheet found in the Baleswor temple of Kumau, it seems that he conquered the place where local kings were ruling.

After that, king Ashok Challa, Jitari Malla, Ripu Malla, Aksaya Malla, Aditya Malla, Punya Malla, Prithvi Malla, Surya Malla, and Abhaya Malla ruled in Khasha kingdom accordingly.Among them, one king named Aditya Malla became a monk for a few periods of time. Most of the inscriptions installed by the Khasha kings begin with a mantra such as OM MANI PADME HUM. This is the mantra of Avalokiteswor. Therefore, it is clear that Khasha kings were inspired by Buddhism.

Khasha Buddhist Heritage

Once, Khasha Buddhist heritage seemed very sophisticated, but due to different impacts, this heritage is almost lost. A few heritages are remaining, which are very important through historical, archeological, and artistic points of view, which are as follows:

a. Temple of Kanak Sundari

This temple belongs to Hindus at present; however, there is a stone at the entrance gate on which “OM MANI PADME HUM” is inscribed. According to the research report

published by the Department of Archeology, it was found that this temple was constructed at the place where the ancient royal palace was. It is also said that the temple might be built on the Buddhist monument.

b. Chaitya of Micha village

This village is located southwest of Khalanga Market, Jumla. There are 12 different chaitys made in the beginning of the 15th century. It proved the influence of Buddhism in the local society after collapsing the Khasha kingdom from there.

c. Kirtikhamba

The Kirtikhamba is the major source that describes the genealogy of the Khasha dynasty. Established by King Prithvi Malla in 1279 AD, this pillar is 2.78 meters high, 50 cm wide, and 8 cm thick. It was established on the palace premises, but at present no ruins of the palace can be seen there; instead, they are covered by private houses. Kirtikhamb is the main historical source that sheds light on the period of the Khasha Empire. Some genealogies related to this have also been found, but there is reliable Tibetan genealogy in them. The record engraved on the monument can also be called a genealogy.

On one side of the Kirtikhamb, the family tree of the Pala dynasty is given, while on the other side, the family tree of the successors of Nagaraja, the founder of the Khasha Empire, is presented. King Prithvi Malla has mixed blood from the Nagaraja and Pala dynasties, so it can be understood that the family tree of both of them is given here. This record indicates that the Palas also had dominion in this region before the establishment of a vast empire by Nagaraja, but after their defeat, they were given the status of feudal lords. In it, the name of Punya Malla is given from "Pal" to "Malla" according to the custom of giving the names of the Palas.

d. Three Buddha statues

These statues are found near the temple of Bhairab Sthan. Three Buddha Statues, which are 300 kilometers away from Dullukot. The statues are of Aksobhya Buddha. These statues are in critical condition. Scholars said that these statues were made during the reign of Khasha kings.

e. Images of Bodhisattva

The image of Bodhisattva is located at Dharmagadhi, which is 300 meters away from Dullukot. These are the excellent heritages of that place. These images were also constructed during the reign of Khasha kings.

f. Buddha Statue located at Dhuleswor

This Buddha statue is situated on Dhuleswor Hill, under a tree. It is difficult to identify the image because it is converted into a Hindu deity by people. However, the gesture of the statue proves that this is the image of the earth touching Buddha.

g. Three Important Inscriptions

These inscriptions are located at Dullu; now there are only the stone inscriptions; nothing is left. However, the inscription highlights the influence of Buddhism at that place. On the top of the stone inscription, there is the Buddhist mantra "OMMANI PADME HUM". Inscribing in the beginning shows that the local people were influenced by Mahayan Buddhism.

h. Kankrevihar

Kankrevihar (Kankre Monastery) is located on the south side of the Surkhet valley. It is constructed on a small hill extending from east to west. A few years ago, it was archaeo-

logical ruins. This place was identified in 1957 AD by Yogi Narharinath, who brought it to the public. This monastery was constructed by King Asok Challa, one of the renowned kings of the Khasha empire. Kankrevihar temple, which is about 15 minutes drive outside Surkhet on a wooded hill in the center of the valley.

Buddha and other related statues of Buddhism were found in abundance in Kankrevihar itself. The archaeological remains of the Khasha Empire period were found in the Surkhet valley. Kankrevihar became popular after King Birendra's visit to this region. Before that, this place was unknown to locals.

Kankrevihar is constructed in Urushikhar architecture. This type of architecture can be found in different parts of India. One of the famous Buddhist temples located in Buddhagaya is also constructed in this style. The artists might have copied that architecture while constructing Kankrevihar.

The monastery had either collapsed or been destroyed at some point in the past. Later, it was founded by a Nepali historian and archaeologist, Mr. Yogi Narihari Natha, in 1950, and was partially excavated in 2003 by the Department of Archeology of Nepal.

The decorative stonework and architectural style of the temple are certainly impressive. The base, foundation, and superstructure of the temple and its size and scale are very artistic and attractive.

Reconstructing remarks can be seen at present.

The main temple height is an average 12 meters, and it is built in the classical style of Shikhar-style temple architecture. It has main entrances from the south; however, there are gates from four directions. There are a series of niches containing images of the Buddha and other deities. Further above there are mouldings and chaitya niches, and then the curvilinear shikhara, or tower, of the temple is surmounted by amalaka and kalasha (architectural features in the tradition of Nepalese temples). At the four corners of the parapet of the temple are four statues of the Buddha in small shrine chambers. A small tower is built above each of these shrines. At present, in the sanctum, there is no deity; it might be stolen.

This temple was reconstructed by the government of Nepal by cataloging the stonework and documenting the amount of stone lying around the temple site. The artists have made the original design of the temple on paper, and the temple base, foundation, and lowest course of the superstructure of the temple have been physically reconstructed. As a part of the Surkhet Valley Project, the Cambridge Archeological Unit carried out a further survey of the temple in 2010.

i. Pathara Nauli

It is situated on the bank side of the road going from Dailekha to Dullu. The location of Pathar Nauli is 1 km away from Kirtikhamba. Once, it was a resource for water. Pathar means stone, and Nauli means water tank. Thus, it can be called a water tank made of stone. On the top of this tank, a huge stone stupa is located at present. However, on the basis of the inscription inscribed on the water tank, it seems that there were five stupas. On the entrance gate of the water tank, a mantra like Om Mani Padme Hum is inscribed. This tank seems to have been constructed by Dev Varma. He made this tank to serve water to the walkers. In addition, he made five stupas on the water tank. According to Mahayana Buddhism, the stupa contains five transcendental Buddhas: Vairocan, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi. This heritage reveals that the ministers of the Khasha kingdom were also followers of Buddhism.

j. Padukasthan

One of the significant Khasha Buddhist heritages is Padukasthan. It is located on the bank of the Paduka River, which is 6 kilometers northwest of Dullu. At this place, there were 108 images of gods and goddesses. There is a small Buddhist temple, which was constructed by Sauna Karki. It is part of the ancient heritage, and one of the stone pillars that is concerned with the temple is essential. On the pillar, there is an image of Aksobhya Buddha. On the inscription inscribed on the pillar, King Ashok Challa's name is mentioned. The image made on the pillar is very attractive and artistic. On this pillar is the statement "om namo Budhay", which is distinct from the other pillars. The donors of this heritage seem to be lay people; till now, there have been many Karki people in that area.

The numerous temples, pillar stones, Nauli (waterpoints or tanks), and other monuments scattered across West Nepal also proved that Khasha Buddhist heritage is very rich and remarkable.

Cause of decline of Buddhist heritage in Khasha kingdom

Buddhist heritages in Khasha kingdom are declining due to various reasons. This is a matter of research; however, in this paper, I have mentioned some causes based on my research. The cause behind the declination of Khasha Buddhist heritage can be drawn as follows:

a. Absence of powerful kings

The dynasty that continued unbroken from the founder, King Nagaraja of the Khasha Empire, passed to Aditya Malla's son-in-law, the daughter of the Pala dynasty. Punya Pal and his successor, Prithvi Malla, are found to have maintained the Khasha empire. During the reign of both of them, the Khash empire retained its character and took over the government.

Yasho Varma and others who became powerful at the time of Prithvi Malla became even more powerful at this time. Yasho Varma's son Malaya Varma also became powerful and weakened Abhay Malla, who was on the throne, and declared himself king. After this step of Malay Varma, two kings appear at the same time. Later, Khasha kings became unsuccessful.

b. Increasing influence of Hinduism

The Vedic Aryas also succeeded in becoming feudatories in various places. Later, when the Khasha Empire was dissolved, the feudatories that established an independent state were Vedic Aryas or Rajputs, so it seems that the work of uprooting the Khasha Empire from Bhikra had already started.

c. Disintegration of the Khasha Empire

It can be said that after the political change, Buddhism became stronger in this region. By the time of the disintegration of the Khasha Empire, religious and social life had started to change. It was at this time that the Khasha Empire disintegrated. Due to the lack of Buddhist rulers, Buddhism is also getting weaker.

d. Division of Kingdoms

At the end of the 14th century, King Malay Varma could not hold the rule in his own hands. He divided his kingdom among his daughters-in-law. Then the country was divided into many countries. Later, the kings of the small countries became different religions; most of them were Vedic followers from the southern region.

They had no interest in Buddhism, and due to the lack of royal patronage, Buddhism could not gain influence even among the common people.

Scope of Khasha Buddhist heritage

This year, I personally went there to document the Khasha heritage. I saw many opportunities for the heritage to be applied in different ways. The value of Khasha heritage is very essential. We cannot produce and generate those types of tangible heritage immediately. The ancient heritage has its own value. Most of the heritage is historically proven and archeologically established, such as Kankre Vihar, Patharnauli, Kirtikhmba, Padukasthan, etc. Those heritages can be a source of study and research for identifying the history, culture, lifestyle, habitation, and anthropology of Nepal. Besides, it can be a reference to find out the status of Buddhism and its rise and fall in Nepal. At present, that heritage can be used from a tourism perspective. It might be a source of income, and it can be a reference for studying Asian Buddhist history.

Challenges of Khasha Buddhist Heritage

In the 12th to 14th centuries, Khasha Buddhist heritage was renowned from a Buddhist artistic point of view. Khasha kings themselves protected the heritage. Therefore, we can imagine that Khasha Buddhism and its heritage were very famous in the 12th and 14th centuries. However, it is very sad to say that in Sinja Valley and Dullu, where Khasha kings made royal palaces, now nothing remains of the palace there. All the architecture is now on the ground. There are not any Buddhist monasteries. Only a few heritages are remaining, and they are scattered here and there; however, their values are very significant. Local government and central government could not give their attention to preserving the heritage. Even so, there is not a proper description of the heritage. People are unaware of the heritage. Most of the local people living around the heritage are from different religions; therefore, they do not have devotion to preserving the heritage. They are not playing a significant role in preserving the heritage.

Conclusion

As a Buddhist empire, there is ample historical and significant Buddhist heritage; the Khasha Empire played a role as a protector of Buddhism and Buddhist heritage. In this sense, The important issue is that Khasha kings themselves announce themselves as Buddhist empires.

Without even mentioning the word “Buddha” which can be clearly read in the records, only giving other words, “Om Mani Padme Hum” mantra, and the statue of Prithvi Mall in Dullu, which has the shape of Chaitya.

The remaining Buddhist heritage must be preserved. Those resources are allowed to remain in this state; it seems that in the next few years, it will be necessary to find them. Pathar Nauli itself seems to be neglected. It cannot be said that the records, monuments, and Kirtikhamba in the place are safe. The face of a Buddha statue in Dhuleshwar has been in a broken state for a long time, and now it has been cemented to make a different face. From these examples, there is a strong possibility that the present-day heritage will fall into critical.

The Khasha Buddhist heritage has numerous scopes. Those heritages can be applied in different ways. At present, those heritage sites can be tourist spots. People from different parts of the world may come to see the heritage if it can be propagated properly. Those

heritages can be a source of income. Besides, in order to explore the Buddhist history of Nepal, this heritage might be one of the great sources.

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