

## BUDDHISM IN LADAKH AND THE ROLE OF THE KASHMIRI BUDDHIST MONKS FOR THE PROPAGATION OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL ASIA AND CHINA THROUGH LADAKH

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Buddhism, the most well-known spiritual development of Ladakh, was one of the greatest binding and unifying force which transcended the barriers of regional diversity. Ladakh is bounded by some important nations of Central Asia and China. Silk trade between China and India began on a huge scale within the early centuries of the Christian era. This trade developed with the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia and China. This paper highlights the important role played by the Kashmiri Buddhist monk in the translation of Sacred scriptures of Buddhism from Sanskrit into Chinese. Buddhist scripture translation is essential to the propagation of Buddhism.*

*In the eight Centuries, Kashmir was once an important Buddhist Centre and one of the primary channels via which Buddhism has been transplanted to Central Asia and China. For the principle line of Communication from India to China ran at that time via the Kashmir valley, Baltistan, Leh, Nubra (a northern district of Ladakh) and across the Karakoram and Suget passes into Turkistan and thence to China. Ladakh had enjoyed close relationships with Central Asia from the ancient period. It is said that Buddhism was first introduced into Ladakh from Kashmir during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. The Buddhist missionaries under Ashoka (273-232 B.C) from Kashmir passed through Ladakh on their way to Central Asia. These Buddhist missionaries played an important role in spreading of Mahayana Buddhism. The Central Asia trade route was about 400 miles. It was known in the 7th and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. It was this route which was used when the fourth Buddhist council was held in Kashmir in the time of Kaniska. Besides, engraving decisions on copper plates; this council gave to the world, a progressive type of Buddhism, called the Mahayana. With their base in Kashmir, the Kashmirian Buddhist scholars introduced new doctrines in Central Asia, China and Korea. A cultural movement in the form of Mahayana Buddhism traveled to Central Asia and had a tremendous influence on its art, writing, dress and crafts. During the reign of Kushana rulers, many Kashmiri monks went to China for the propagation of the Buddhism doctrines, Famous among the monks who propagated Buddhism in China during the fourth and fifth centuries are Sangabhutti, Kumarajiva, Buddhayasa, Guatam Sangadeva, Punyatrata, Vikmalaksha and Guna Varman. Vikmalaksha and Buddabhadra went to Nankin to China to work with Kumarajiva. The existence of Kushana interest in Ladakh is proved by the Indian Kharosti manuscript by A. H. Francke at Khalse*

**KEYWORDS:** *Buddhism, Monk, Mahayana, Sanskrit, Leh, Route, Trade, Manuscript, Kanishka*