

# Analytical Study of Sculptures of Ladakh with preliminary Account on Kashmir Sculptures

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## Abstract

*Sculptures are representational divinity in India whose origin and end is expressed through the religion and the spiritual beliefs. It is tough to state that when and where the first Buddha images appeared in the sculptural form and scholars have different opinion on this. It has been argued that the Buddha image is of Greek origin and first came into being at Gandhāra or in India proper, Buddha image known to be earlier than the first century A.D. It is admitted that Buddhist figures in Gandhāra are adaptations of western types.*

*With these leading facts established, the narrative of the School's development automatically resolved itself into three topics: its infancy under the Sakas; its childhood and early adolescence under the Parthians; and its later adolescence and maturity under the Kushans. The most prolific and best known period in the history for producing sculpture is Kushana period. During this period; Gandhāra art was introduced which is basic art of later School of Arts. The first production of Buddha image could be associated with the time of Kushana's period especially with Kanishka.*

*The purpose of sculptures was to glorify the Buddha. In the Early Indian School there is no clue of the Buddha ever having been so portrayed because of the fact that as per Buddhist tradition, the making of image was prohibited and Buddha himself discouraged the idea of making his image. Lastly to be believed that under the patronage of Kanishka, religious revolution was possible in the form of Buddhist Council. The outcome of the Fourth Buddhist Council was the creation of Buddha images was common under the start of new tradition of Mahayana and this Council sanctioned the worship of the Buddha through his iconic forms. Regarding the origin of Buddha images there are two schools of thought; Produce in Gandhāra area could be associated with the foreign influence of*

*Gandhāra art and the one produce in Mathura area associated with the result of indigenous atmosphere.*

*Even in Kashmiri art style sculpture, the roots lay in the Gandhāra sculptural tradition. It had been a great centre of art and culture during ancient and medieval period. It received the same amount of recognition in the medieval time as a centre of academic activities as Nalanda enjoyed in the east. Kashmir produced a number of Buddhist images in the medieval period. The Kashmiri style was very assorted and attracted many different influences during its development which reflected to a large scale, the political conditions of the time and the relative position of Kashmir. Since Kashmir was once an integral part of the vast Kushana Empire, it is not surprising that the Gandhāra tradition to a great extent formed the roots of the Kashmiri Art style.*

*Ladakh apart from monasteries and picturesque beauty also famous for colossal images located at important ancient routes. The colossal images originated in Ladakh region especially Kargil District are considered to be the second largest sculptures in world after Bamiyan and witnessed the influences of Gandhāra art. The sculptures have been found across the northern region of India from Kashmir Valley to Kargil of Ladakh. The stray Sculptures of Kashmir region and colossal images of Kargil regions are the affluent of Gandhāra which are subsequently influenced to Gupta and Tibetan art. The Mulbek, Apathy and Kartse Maitreya of Kargil District proclaim from their magnificent appearance that it was one of the major trade route from Gandhāra region because reflecting the same art in those sculptures and also signifies that Buddhism was its zenith during Kushana period.*

**Keywords:** *Buddha, Gandhāra, Ladakh, Kargil, Maitreya, Greek, Kushana, Sculpture, Art, colossal image, Kanishka, Kushanas.*

### **General Introduction**

In India sculptures are symbolic representation of divinity whose origin and end is expressed through the religion and the spiritual beliefs. The

construction of the divine images and their subsequent meditation and adoration brought pureness in thinking and mental peace to the human being. Nothing could be said with assurance

that when and where the 1<sup>st</sup> Buddha appeared in the sculptural form and also scholars have different esteem opinion on this. According to Sir John Marshall the earliest examples of Buddhist sculpture in stone dated from the reign of the Mauryan emperor Asoka, and they were the handiwork of Greek or Perso-Greek wood sculptors supported by local craftsmen. However, a century later, stone came to be employed on a large scale in place of wood by the Buddhist sculptors of Central India and the Jumna valley; and it are logical, therefore, to suppose that the idea of using the less perishable material was borrowed from the Bactrian Greeks who were then established in the neighboring kingdom of the Eastern Punjab (Marshall 1980; 7).<sup>1</sup>

It has been argued among scholars that the Buddha image is of Greek origin and first came into being at Gandhara or in Indian origin (Coomaraswamy 1966; 36-37).<sup>2</sup> It is believe that in both the areas appeared simultaneously Hellenistic types at Gandhara, and in the tradition of ancient Indian art at Mathura. It is

admitted that Buddhist figures in Gandhara are adaptations of western types and the earliest Gandhara figures must have been made as early as the first century A.D. A certain amount of originality is proved by the occurrence of such types as those of the realistic emaciated Buddhas, which have no part even in later Indian Buddhist art. Early Indian religious art, on the other hand, makes use of primal symbols without anthropomorphic icons.

According to Marshall during late Sakas period, to which the oldest examples of Buddhist carvings are concerned, the old Hellenistic art in Gandhara had turned to low level, however better work appears to have been done by sculptors of the early Indian School. The evidence from Taxila proves that a strong revival of Hellenistic art took place under the Parthians, who succeeded the Sakas in the north-west in the first century A.D., and that this Partho-Hellenistic art played an important part in the later evolution of the Gandhara School. According to Alfred Foucher, with these leading facts established, the story of the Gandhara School's development automatically resolved by distributing it in three categories: it is now abundantly

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<sup>1</sup> Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist art of Gandhara*, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1980, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Introduction of Indian Art*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1966, pp. 36-37

clear that the it passed through its adolescence or infancy under the Sakas; its childhood and early adolescence under the Parthians; and its later adolescence and maturity under the Kushans, who overthrew the Parthians in circa A.D. 64, and that it came to an abrupt end in the reign of Vasudeva I; when the Buddhist monasteries throughout the north-west overrun and destructed. It is confirmed that different varieties of stone were in use at different periods in the history of School of Art, and that the nature of their stones can help materially in determining the age of the sculptures.

Marshall said the most fertile and best known period in the history for producing sculpture is Kushana period and during this period; Gandhāra art was introduced which is basic art of later School of arts. It was the period when produced the bulk of the sculptures usually found in public and private collections. But, according to some of the well-known scholars, under the circumstances and on the basis of evidence, the first production of Buddha image could be associated with the time of Kushana's period especially with Kanishka. Maximum number of

Buddhist sculpture A.D. 50 and 300 associated with the monuments and monasteries of Taxila, and of the Gandhara provinces of the North-West Frontier (Coomaraswamy 1966; 36).<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of sculptures was to glorify the Buddha. In the Early Indian School there is no trace of the Buddha ever having been so portrayed because of the fact that as per Buddhist tradition, the making of image was prohibited and Buddha himself discouraged the idea of making his image. In that school it was an inflexible rule that his presence should be indicated by means only of a symbol, for example; by his foot prints or his throne, or the promenade (*cankrama*) on which he want to take his daily exercise, or by his special Bodhi tree or his funeral mound (stupa). This rule, which extended also to the previous life of a Buddha's was religiously observed until the last days of the Early Indian School and was one of the chief characteristics that distinguished it from the School of Gandhāra (Marshall 1980; 85).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Introduction of Indian Art*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1966, p. 36

<sup>4</sup> Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist art of Gandhara*, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1980, p. 85

Lastly to be believed that under the patronage of Kanishka, religious revolution was possible in the form of Buddhist Council. The outcome of the Fourth Buddhist Council was the creation of Buddha images was common under the start of new tradition of Mahayana and this council sanctioned the worship of the Buddha through his iconic forms (Watters 1904-05; 270-71).<sup>5</sup> Regarding the origin of Buddha images there are two schools of thought; Produce in Gandhāra area could be associated with the foreign influence of Gandhāra art and the one produce in Mathura area associated with the result of indigenous atmosphere. Scholars like Cunningham, Smitha, Blakh, etc. the first Buddhist image was produced in Gandhāra area with foreign influence on it but a follower of this hypothesis considering it to be controversial. According to Marshall, Gandhāra sculpture was introduced later in many parts of India and sculptures belong to this period “Gandhāra Art” named as scattered all over the world; displayed in world renowned Museums.

If one is not familiar with the word ‘Gandhāra it was the ancient name of the

tract of country on the west bank of the Indus River which comprises the Peshawar valley and the modern Swat, Buner and Bajaur. It was the country with rich, well-watered valleys, clear-cut hills and a pleasant climate; a country where a Greeks might well dream of being back in his homeland situated on the borderland between Indus and Western Asia, Gandhāra belonged as much and as little to the one as to the other. In the sixth and fifth century B.C. it formed part of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. In the fourth it was occupied for a brief period by the armies of Alexander the great. Thereafter it was conquered by Chandragupta Maurya, but after a century of Indian rule the west again asserted itself, and for another century (roughly the second century B.C.) Greeks dynasty took the place of Indian then came, early in the first century B.C., the victorious Sakas or Scythians, to be followed, after yet another century, by the Parthians and Kushans and even then the tale of foreign conquest was not ended. For in the third century of our era Gandhara again reverted to Persia, now under Sasanid sovereigns, and was again re conquered by the Kidara Kushans in the fourth. Finally, the dealt below to its

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Watters, *Yuan Chwang*, Vol. I, London, 1904-05, pp. 270-271

prosperity was given by the Ephthalites or white Huns, who swept over the country about A.D. 465, carrying fire and sword wherever they went and destroying the Buddhist monasteries (Marshall 1980; 1).<sup>6</sup>

### **The Setting**

Ladakh apart from monasteries and scenic beauty also famous for colossal images (sculptures) located at important ancient routes. The colossal images originated in Ladakh region especially Kargil District are considered to be the second largest in world after Bamiyan and witnessed the influences of Gandhāra art. The colossal images have been found across the northern region of India from Kashmir Valley to Kargil district of Ladakh. As with other regions of the subcontinent, Gandhāra Art (2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. to 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D.) provides the evidence for the presence of Buddhism in Northern most part of India. The stray Sculptures of Kashmir region and colossal images of Kargil regions are the affluent of Gandhāra which are subsequently influenced to Gupta and Tibetan art. The Tibetan sculptures are the last to be promulgated,

example of these has so far been found in monasteries of Ladakh and Tibet. These Buddhist sculptures express remorse and grandeur of the Buddhism of that period. The Mulbek, Apathy and Kartse Maitreya of Kargil District proclaim from their magnificent appearance that it was one of the major trade route from Gandhāra region because reflecting the same art in those sculptures and also signifies that Buddhism was its zenith during Kushana period.

### **Gandhāra Art influences in Kashmir and Ladakh Sculptures**

Gandhāra was an ancient kingdom in the Swat valley, Potohar Plateau and Peshawar regions, in modern-day states of northern Pakistan and north eastern Afghanistan. Its main cities were *Purushapura* (modern Peshawar), literally meaning "city of men", and *Takshashila* (modern Taxila). The Kingdom of Gandhāra lasted from the Vedic period (C. 1500-500 BC). As a center of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Greco-Buddhism, Gandhara attained its height from the 1st century to the 5th century A.D. under the Kushana Kings and its art propagated during this period.

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<sup>6</sup> Sir John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, Oriental Books Reprint Co., New Delhi, 1980, p. 1

Even in Kashmiri art style sculpture, the roots lay in the Gandhāra sculptural tradition. It had been a great centre of art and culture during ancient and medieval period. But Kashmir yielded a number of Buddhist images in the medieval period. It received the same amount of recognition in the medieval time as a centre of academic activities as Nalanda enjoyed in the east (Malla 1990; 1).<sup>7</sup>

The influence of Gandhara in Kashmir sculpture is prominently perceptible in pre-Karkota, but by the 7<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri artists seem to have become more aware of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Gupta style of the Gangetic plains. Because of their strong reliance on the earlier Gandhara style, Kashmiri sculptors continued to model their figures in a more naturalistic style. The two articles by John Siudmak and Fisher on “*The Stone Sculptures of Kashmir*” cover six centuries of Kashmir history from C. A.D. 600 to 1200. This is when Kashmiri sculptors were at their busiest and most creative. Yet to date no attempts have been made by scholars to provide a substantial overview of the history of Kashmiri sculpture during this period. This article not only fills an

important gap in our knowledge of the history and development of Kashmiri sculpture but also the origin of the sculptures in the region.

The Kashmiri style was very eclectic and attracted many during its development which reflected, to a large degree, the political conditions of the time and the relative position of Kashmir (Siudmak 1989; 41).<sup>8</sup> Since Kashmir was once an integral part of the vast Kushana Empire, it is not surprising that the Gandhāra tradition to a great extent formed the roots of the Kashmiri Art style. Although this is undoubtedly the case, the Kashmiri School absorbed all those influences and transformed them into an idiom that is uniquely Gandhāra affinity is the most. Gandhārais however, but one factor contributing to this complex style, which is equally strongly influenced by the plasticity and spirituality of Gupta arts. The style thus created is characterized by great elegance and sophistication with slightly elongated figures that exhibit the naturalistic modeling of Gandhāra and the sensuality of Gupta Art (Czuma

<sup>7</sup>Bansilal Malla, *Sculptures of Kashmir*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi-52, 1990; p. 1

<sup>8</sup>John Siudmak, *Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Early Stone and Terracotta Sculpture*, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, p.41

1989; 62).<sup>9</sup> However, although there is some evidence of direct Gupta influence, the predominant influence was from the north-west, either from Gandhāra or from the post Gandhāra tradition which survived in the region. This was natural given the geographical proximity of Gandhāra to Kashmir and was generally the case historically with the exception of the Mauryan period when the local art must have followed the Mauryan conventions. Hermann Goetz in his extensive work on Kashmir justified this assorted character of style by the presence of artists of various foreign backgrounds who found refuge in Kashmir and played an active role in the formulation of this unusual style.

The migration of Kashmiri sculptures beyond the territories of Kashmir was to a certain extent possible also by conquests made by the powerful Kashmiri kings. When these powerful kings extended their empire, they not only intended to subdue the conquered people politically but also tried to influence them culturally as well. One of the notable Kashmiri kings was Duralabhavardhana (625-661 A.D.) who

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<sup>9</sup> Stanislaw Czuma, *Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Ivory Sculpture*, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, p.62

was the founder of Karkota dynasty and who extended his empire to Taxila, Ursar, Hazara, Simhapur or the salt range and also his conquests included Rajapuri (Rajouri) and Parnotsa (Poonch)<sup>10</sup>. The next ruler was Lalitaditya (724-761 A.D.), who was the greatest king of Karkota dynasty and lifted his country to the pinnacle of fame and desire for world conquest (Bamzai 1962; 111).<sup>11</sup> According to Kalhana, he made wide conquests and extended his territory (Kapur 1983; 20).<sup>12</sup> It was during 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. that Lalitaditya expanded his empire towards eastern India and his contacts with this region led to the introduction to Vajrayana gods and goddesses in Kashmir (Singh 1968; 62).<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, Kashmir supplied skilled craftsmen, exported its craft and dispatched illustrated and un-illustrated manuscripts along with distinguished religious teachers to different places. The results of this cultural fusion are, therefore, found in some of the artifacts of other places. One of the nearer places that experienced the strong impact of

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, New Delhi, 1884, p.68

<sup>11</sup> P. N. K. Bamzai, *A History of Kashmir*, Delhi 1962, p.111

<sup>12</sup> M. L. Kapur, *Kingdom of Kashmir*, Kashmir History Publications, Jammu, 1983, p.20

<sup>13</sup> M. Singh, *Himalayan Art*, Melbourne, 1968, p.62

Kashmir between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. was Ladakh (Malla 1990; 96-97).<sup>14</sup>

Ladakh is one of the important centers of Buddhism. Colossal images, stray sculptures, rock engraving of Buddhist divinities are found in abundant almost from every parts of Ladakh (Francke 1907; 80).<sup>15</sup> However, there is no doubt, that many of the impressive huge rock-cut figures (colossal images) such as the famous *Maitreya* at Mulbek, Tumail, Kartse is fashioned out of cliff showing clear affinity in style and execution to Kashmiri art prototypes which is influenced from Gandhara art, and the impressive wood sculpture also representing *Maitreya*, are the result of local talent which are also broadly reflect strong influences of the Kashmiri sculptural traditional too. It is important to note that the aesthetic traditions of Kashmiri art in Ladakh which is rooted from Gandhāra should come as no surprise as geographically it is contiguous to Kashmir. We do get ample of evidences that in the “Second Phase of Buddhism” sculptures and colossal images are introduced in Ladakh region at larger extent during 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>14</sup>Bansilal Malla, *Sculptures of Kashmir*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1990, pp. 96-97

<sup>15</sup>A. H. Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, p.80

and the evidences reveals that sculptural art is link to Gandhāra (Spalzin 2015; 69).<sup>16</sup>

These sculptures are usually found on the ancient routes passing through Ladakh carved mostly by missionaries on their way from mainland India and Gandhāra region to Tibet and other Central Asian countries. It is considered that India in general and Kashmir in particular were connected with southern silk route: two of them passed through Gilgit and Yassin valley up to Tashkurgan and joined the Kashgar route and the third one reached Khotan through Ladakh and from there it proceeded to Yarkand route.

The custom of carving colossal images from live rock in Ladakh may well have been inspired by rock-carved reliefs in the Swat Valley and Afghanistan (Fisher 1989; 122).<sup>17</sup> Kargil witnessed the giant and finest example of rock cut sculptures in India. In general we get evidences that dissemination of Buddhism is from Kashmir region but the custom of engraving giant colossal images is not available in Kashmir but traced from

<sup>16</sup>Sonam Spalzin, *gSter-rNying-Archaeological Remains of Ladakh*, Bangkokok Publishers, 2015, p.69

<sup>17</sup>Robert E. Fisher, *Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Later Stone Sculpture*, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, p.122

many regions of Pakistan. After doing research on this subject and area for years I came to the conclusion that it may be the reason that mountain and hillock landscape in Ladakh and Pakistan are almost same which is differing in Kashmir where moisture and vegetation on hillocks are not favorable for huge colossal images to engrave. Whatever the reason but Kashmir is richest region in containing stray sculptures and sculptures which is now housed in Museums in many parts of India and outside India.

The colossal images in Ladakh region is generally found in a close proximity to a settlement by a river, a stream or natural springs and probably these would be the halted places of traders, itinerants, travelers and monks travelling from Kashmir and probably directly from Gandhara region and other places. All these were erected in or near the political centre of smaller chiefdoms. According to the historians, these Buddhist rock sculptures bear witness to early introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist art in Ladakh from Kashmir and others much before the Tibetan influence on Buddhism began in the region. Kargil falls on a route from

Kashmir and Gandhara while travelling towards Leh was followed by the traders and Buddhist missionaries alike, the first evidence to support this inference can be seen in Drass valley after crossing Zojila pass on a way side of Srinagar-Leh National Highway. Some 65 km from Drass entering into the densely populated Shia town of Kargil gives you the least idea that its outskirts are repositories of perhaps some of the world's most remarkable and biggest Buddhist colossal images of 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. are found on the major trade routes. From about the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the grand route between Lhasa and Kashmir was frequented by travelers. This paved the way for the models of Kashmiri art to travel to Western Tibet (Malla 1990; 97).<sup>18</sup> The impact of Kashmiri on the Tibetan art of this period was conspicuous by its presence. The impact of Kashmiri is visible on the technique of bronze casting of Tibet (Schroeder 1981; 158).<sup>19</sup> Mulbek *Maitreya* is also constructed on major trade route and this might be partially true for Kartse too. However there is no major trade route from

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<sup>18</sup>Bansilal Malla, *Sculptures of Kashmir*, Agam Kala Prakashan, 1990, p. 97

<sup>19</sup>U. V. Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, Hongkong, 1981, p.158

Tumail (Apathi) to the north or east, it is presumed that this sub-route was followed by traders and Buddhist missionaries alike. In Ladakh region maximum of the images are found of *Maitreya*, Main attribute of *Maitreya* is stupa on his crown, holding *Nagakesvara* flower, standing or half seated posture, adorned by rich ornaments, holding vase in right hand.

Although the rock sculptures and rock-reliefs of Kargil District belong to more or less geographical coherent area, they were constructed on the base of totally different concept. Federic Drew in his book "*Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*" mentioned Kartse Chamba near Sankoo which he compared with Kargah (Naupur) in Gilgit which is now a day well known (Drew 1875; 257).<sup>20</sup> Petech Lucarno in his book the '*Kingdom of Ladakh*' has attributed Buddhist rock-reliefs in Ladakh to the 8<sup>th</sup> and subsequent centuries, representing direct influence of rock relief from India (Petech 1977: 15).<sup>21</sup> Similarly Dr. B.R.Mani of Archaeological Survey of India says; prior to the first Tibetan invasion in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and for

several centuries afterwards the cultural inspiration came almost entirely from the west, namely Kashmir (IAR 1988-89; 28).<sup>22</sup> There are sculptures or rock reliefs are scattered in almost every parts of Ladakh region Central Leh, Kargil and Nubra. It is tough to approach as there is a narrow passage leading to the site.

### The Sites

The important and unique sculptures or rock reliefs of Ladakh are mentioned below:

**Drass (34°25'N 75°46'E)** is a hamlet sited at a distance of 60 km from Kargil and is second coldest region in the world. After crossing Zojila pass Maitin is the first village of Ladakh and Drass is the second village falling on a trade route of Srinagar-Leh. It is presumed that this route was followed by traders, itinerants and Buddhist missionaries alike in the past. At Skitbu village of Drass, on the road side some of the stray rock sculptures are installed under a shelter (Moorcraft 1841; 41).<sup>23</sup> This stray sculptures placed on a low level

<sup>20</sup>Federic Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*, Jammu, 1875, p. 257

<sup>21</sup> Luciano Petech, *Kingdom of Ladakh*, University of Michigan, 1977, p. 15

<sup>22</sup>*Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1988-89, p. 28

<sup>23</sup> William Moorcraft, *Travels in Himalayan provinces of Hindustan, Punjab, Ladakh, and Kashmir*, Low Prices Publications, 1841, p. 41

plinth in one single row comes under Archaeological Survey of India (Pl. 1). The stray stone sculptures represents are Avalokitesvara (Snellgrove 1979; 9)<sup>24</sup>, six feet height standing Maitreya where three devotees are depicted on the same reach up to the knees and the left side of the head of a *Maitreya* is carved with very small human figure and to the right *sarada* inscription is inscribed, man riding horse holding sword in left hand bridle wielding pose, depiction of human figurine and a lotus flower are placed in a row next to the old road which assignable to circa 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Francke 2008; 52).<sup>25</sup>

There are some more detached sculptures are installed these are a wheel engraved on a boulder, detached *chatravali* and a probably lower portion seated posture Buddha etc. Probably these stray sculptures were detached from a monastery close to the Drass river introduction of Buddhist art from Kashmir. These sculptures placed on a platform by the side in a row where it is close to the Drass River.

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<sup>24</sup>D. L. Snellgrove, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p. 9

<sup>25</sup>A. H. Francke, *A History of Western Tibet*, Gulshan Publishers, Kashmir, 2008, p. 52

**Kartse (N34°16'; E76°0')** is some 65 km from Drass and 40 km from Kargil town. It is an extensive valley with lots of greenery towards south of Kargil town. Kartse-Suru valley is known all over for its magnificent colossal image of *Maitreya* belongs to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which is 40 feet high (Snellgrove 1979; 9).<sup>26</sup> This colossal image which is perfect example of rock relief engraved on a huge boulder attached with a hillock overlooks a cluster of mud houses and a mosque at the foot of a picturesque and glaciated mountain, in between flows a fully blown stream with sparkling waves and its sound (Pl. 2). The sculpture of the Kartse is badly weathered and quality seems inferior comparatively to the *Maitreyas* available at other places of Kargil. To approach this site a link road is connected via bridge across Suru River and from the last stoppage of village there is a narrow path along water channel approaching to the site. Before the narrow passage starts a beautiful *maqbara* of queen embellished with green marble located in the centre of a garden.

This *Maitreya* is fully ornamented and embellished with crown and flanked by

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<sup>26</sup>D. L. Snellgrove, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p. 9

two flying goddesses (*apsaras*) on both side of the head. The inscription of later period is inscribed on the both sides of the *Maitreya* is later addition. Federic Drew in his book “*Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*” mentioned Kartse Chamba near Sankoo is almost similar to Kargah (Naupur) in Gilgit (Drew 1875; 257).<sup>27</sup> Technique for engraving of Tumail and Kartse *Maitreya* is almost similar.

There is a ruin of Kartse fortresses straight across the Kartse River flowing through Kartse village which is popularly known as Kartse Khar summer residence of the local king Tri Sultans. Tri Sultans remained in the hands of the Dogras for long, and they further improved their hold on the country by building a fort at Suru, and taking the neighboring unoccupied fort of Shagkar (Francke 2008; 140).<sup>28</sup>

**Tumail (34°33'N 76°12'E)** is situated at a distance of 20 km from Kargil main city. It is located in a rugged terrain between the war zone of Battalik and Pashkyum valley. It comes in the area of Soth adjoining Kargil town towards north. The village is covered with poplar trees

and a stream is following deep downhill from the village. The sculpture is located across the other side of the stream, the poplar grove of Tumail hamlet hides strikingly imposing *Maitreya* image deeply carved on rock surface of a mountain. This is semi rock shelter kind of relief and the quality of the rock is inferior because of weathered it is much effected. The *Maitreya* is embellished with crown and fully ornamented and on the right side of the *Maitreya*, a small sized attendant deity shown in seated posture is depicted (Pl. 3). The engraving technique and style of Kartse and Tumail is almost similar except the crown and facial expression and feature. It is depends on the place to place so there is difference in texture and surface material of boulder. This colossal image is 21 feet height and comparative to Kartse and Mulbek, this is smaller in height. The colossal images are generally found on major trade route but there is no major trade route from Tumail (Apathi) to the north or east. Probably this sub-route was followed by traders and Buddhist missionaries alike.

**Mulbek (34°23'N 76°25'E)** is sited at a distance of 40 km from Kargil situated on the right bank of the Paskhyum River

<sup>27</sup>Federic Drew, *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*, 1875, Jammu, p. 257

<sup>28</sup>A. H. Francke, *A History of Ladakh*, ed. Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, 2008, p.140

(Wakha Chu) on Srinagar-Leh National Highway (Francke 1994; 102).<sup>29</sup> It is a largest rock relief sculpture of Buddha *Maitreya* (*Byams-pa*) on the road-side assignable stylistically to circa 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Koul 1977; 21).<sup>30</sup> This colossal image of Mulbek is the finest and the largest figure of northern region bears affluent of Kashmiri stylistic (Singh 1968; 59).<sup>31</sup> It was noticed by Moorcroft in 1820, also mentioned that *Maitreya* sculpture of Mulbek is shown with Brahminical cord (Francke 1994; 101).<sup>32</sup> Moreover outer appearance is totally different from those of the *Maitreya* of Kartse and Tumail (Apathi). It is interesting to note that there is only one huge boulder in the middle of the village where the craftsman chooses this to engrave deep relief beautiful figure of *Maitreya*. This hand poses of *Maitreya* Mulbek are *Varada mudra* and *Kamandalu*. Details of associated divinities are depicted on the corner of the boulder in which one of the depictions is shown like dress of

Kushana (Moorcroft 1841; 17).<sup>33</sup> Mulbek *Maitreya* is in controversy whether the figure is of *Maitreya* or something else. According to me this is the *Maitreya* Buddha as it is embellished with rich ornaments and holding in his right hand the stalk of lotus (*Nagakesra* flower) and a small stupa adorning his crown (Pl. 4).

A monastery is perched on a cliff about 200 feet high situated on the right bank of the Paskhyum river (or Wakha-chu), and passed between Shergol and Kharbu on the route from Srinagar to Leh. The monastery and the rock relief of *Maitreya* are 4 miles from Shergol. The village of Mulbek contains hundreds of houses (Gazetteer 1974; 610).<sup>34</sup> It is easy to understand that in the early times this site of the monastery might also have served as a guard post for the caravan route. On a rock at Mulbek is carved a wedding congratulation to king Jamyang and his new Queen. Soon after the wedding Ali Mir had a remarkable dream which proved to be of the greatest

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<sup>29</sup> A. H. Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Archaeological Survey of India Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 102

<sup>30</sup> Samsar Chand Koul, *Ladakh*, Utpal Publications, Srinagar, 1977, p. 21

<sup>31</sup> M. Singh, *Himalayan Art*, Melbourne, 1968, p. 59

<sup>32</sup> A. H. Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Archaeological Survey of India Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 101

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<sup>33</sup> William Moorcroft, *Travels in Himalayan provinces of Hindustan, Punjab, Ladakh, and Kashmir*, Low Prices Publications, 1841, p. 17

<sup>34</sup> *Gazetteer Jammu & Kashmir*, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p. 610

importance to his son-in-law (Francke 1979; 93).<sup>35</sup>

**Hunder Nallah (N34°35'04"; E77°27'31"):** This site is located at a distance of 10 km from Disket, capital of Nubra region. There is a major route from Phyang to Nubra via Hunder Dok. Phyang-Nubra pass is one of the important passages of Ladakh to Khotan, connecting the historical silk route. On Hunder - Phyang pass before approach Hunder village there is a *Maitreya* rock relief near river resource which witnessed the introduction of Buddhism in Nubra valley (IAR 1992-93; 112).<sup>36</sup> This route was frequently used by nomads and Buddhist monks who follow each other in Central Asia. This image of *Maitreya* is carved in deep relief situated in the main stream near the bridge (Pl. 5). It is badly weathered as its features are washed out to make any identification. The time period of Hunder *Maitreya* is 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Almost same type of sculpture of *Maitreya* also found from Panamik and Tirith dated 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (IAR 1992-93; 36-37).<sup>37</sup> Rock cut sculpture of

*Yensa Maitreya* datable to 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Igoo (N33°53'; E77°46'):** There are countless sculptures in Leh region but the sculpture found from Igoo is one of the unique and significant important findings of rock relief of five Dhyani Buddha depicted on a pillar facing four cardinal directions (Pl. 6). The site is located at a distance of approx. 45 km from Leh city connecting a link road from Himachal-Leh National Highway and off to the river Indus. This sculpture is credit with the name of master piece and unique because this kind of sculpture is not found anywhere in Ladakh as well as outside. It is fixed on a socket which is lotus petal pedestrian and is installed in the centre of a chapel. Probably in the ancient time it was three tier small chapels, but now it is in ruin and pathetic condition, only the last tier is left. But the sculpture is in very good condition and probably time period goes to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This seems to be influenced from Kashmir (Spalzin 2014; 2).<sup>38</sup> It is sculpture of *Gyalwa Rig-nya* (five dhyani Buddha) depicted on a pillar facing four cardinal directions. AkshyaBhya is facing towards the east

<sup>35</sup>A. H. Francke, *History Folklore & Culture of Tibet*, Ess Publications, Ansari Road, New Delhi, 1979, p. 93

<sup>36</sup>*Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1992-93, p. 112

<sup>37</sup>*Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1992-93, pp. 36-37

<sup>38</sup>Sonam Spalzin, *Journey from Prehistoric to Historical Period-Ladakh*, *Greater Jammu*, 2014, p. 2

in Bhumi Spatsh Mudra, Amitabh Bhya is facing towards west in Dhyani Mudra, Ratnasambhava facing towards the south with Varada Mudra, Amoghasiddhi facing towards the north with AbhyaMudha and Vairochana on the top or in the centre. To cover the fifth depiction, fourth and fifth Buddha in a seated posture one above the other on fourth pillar.

**Padum (33o28'N 76o54'E)** was the capital since from ancient kingdom of Zanskar and at present day it is administrative centre and sub-division of Kargil District. In Zanskar, during my exploration found sculptures and early stupa depiction on rock boulders and on rock pillar in different places like Sani, Rantaksha, Zangla, Muni (Snellgrove 1977; 26)<sup>39</sup>, Tongde, Karsha, Lungnak (Phugtal bridge) indicate the existence of Buddhism in the land at a very early time. These explorations led to the discovery of petroglyphs along with rock-cut sculptures of Buddhist divinities particularly at Phe and Tonde. Rock relief of Gyalwa Rig-nya (Five Dhyani Buddhas) of 7th century A.D. in one row (Pl. 7) are found from Piyu, Padum. At a few distances away from

this site one more Dhyani Buddha are found engraved on a smooth rock boulder surface. So, Zanskar Padum is having countless archaeological sites. Among all most fascinating remains is numerous small early stupa (*mchod-rten*) in an inch sizes engravings on rock relief technique on huge boulder at Piyu Padum (Indian Archaeology 1988-89; 28).<sup>40</sup> Padum Monastery is situated on a pyramidal hillock in the middle of the village which lies on the left side of the Zanskar River.

## Conclusion

Above study presents that colossal images in Ladakh region are directly or indirectly enter from Gandhāra region. The fact established with the help of literary and archaeological evidences reveals that Gandhāra Art entered to the valley of Kashmir and from Kashmir it reached to Ladakh region and also directly from the ancient trade route of Pakistan to Kargil valley. The colossal images originated in Ladakh region especially Kargil District are considered to be the second largest in world after Bamiyan and witnessed the influences of Gandhāra Art.

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<sup>39</sup>D. L. Snellgrove, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979; p. 26

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<sup>40</sup>*Indian Archaeology-A Review*; 1988-89; p. 28

It is to be believed that under the patronage of Kanishka, religious revolution was possible in the form of Buddhist Council was the creation of Buddha images was common under the start of new tradition of Mahayana and this council sanctioned the worship of the Buddha through his iconic forms.

Kashmir yielded a number of Buddhist images in the medieval period. The influence of Gandhara in Kashmir sculpture is prominently perceptible in pre-Karkota, but by the 7th century Kashmiri artists seem to have become more aware of the 5th century Gupta style of the Gangetic plains. Because of their strong reliance on the earlier Gandhara style, Kashmiri sculptors continued to model their figures in a more naturalistic style.

Ladakh is also one of the important centers of Buddhism. Colossal images,

stray sculptures, rock engraving of Buddhist divinities found in abundant almost from every parts of Ladakh. However, there is no doubt, that many of the impressive huge rock-cut figures such as the famous Maitreya at Mulbek, Tumail, Kartse is fashioned out of cliff showing clear affinity in style and execution to Kashmiri art prototypes which is influenced from Gandhara art, and the impressive wood sculpture also representing Maitreya, are the result of local talent which are also broadly reflect strong influences of the Kashmiri sculptural traditional too. The aesthetic traditions of Kashmiri art in Ladakh which is rooted from Gandhāra should come as no surprise as geographically it is contiguous to Kashmir.

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## Figures

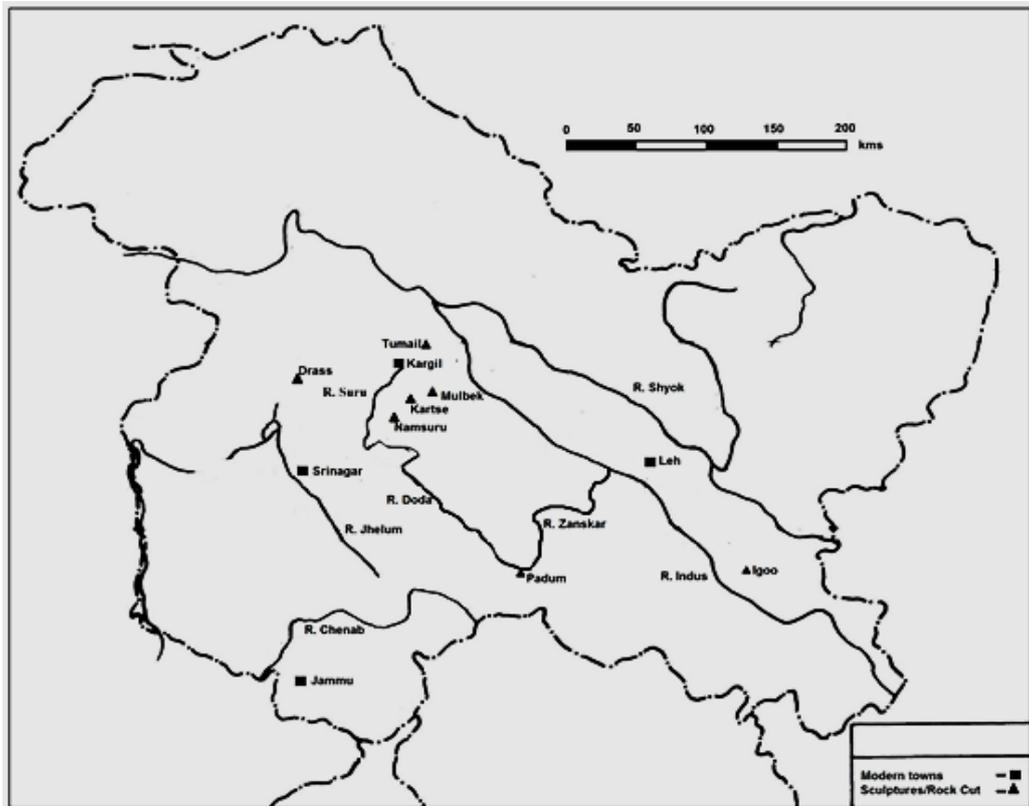
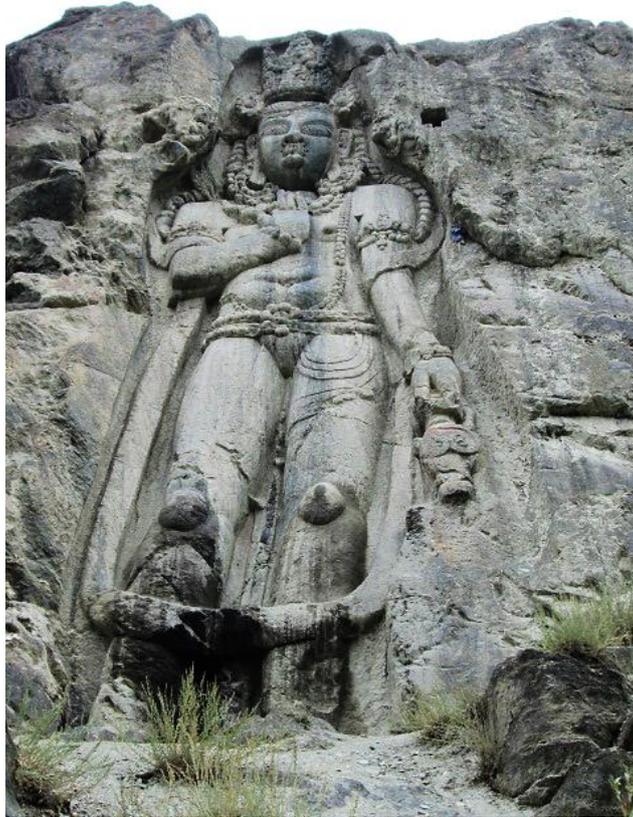


Figure 1. Map showing sites of the sculptures of Ladakh



Figure 2. Drass Maitreya, Kargil; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)



**Figure 3.**Kartse Maitreya, Kargil; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)



**Figure 4.**Tumail Maitreya, Kargil; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)



**Figure 5.**Mulbek Maitreya, Kargil; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)



**Figure 6.**Hunder Maitreya, Nubra; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)



**Figure 7. Gyalwa rig-nya (Five Dhyani Buddha) Rock relief Igoo, Leh (Jammu & Kashmir)**



**Figure 8. Gyalwa rig-nya (five dhyani buddha rock relief), Zanskar, Kargil; Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir)**