

Kushana's Era, The Rise of Gandhara: The Ancient Regional Political History

Nadim Ahmed ^a Sulaman Khan ^b

Abstract: This paper aims at to investigate Kushana's era: the Rise of Gandhara civilization, the ancient regional political history which deems the Zenith of Gandhara civilization that met its climax in the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent. Gandhara as Greek had rich political history and tremendous contributions on the part of regional politico-historical discourse. In this paper it would be endeavored to address the Rise of Gandhara civilization by focusing on Kushana's era. The employed design to address the question is historical and qualitative both in the term of collecting and analysis of the data. The consulted sources are archival documents, books, encyclopedias, reputed journals and historical literature associated to the present study. The Kushana's era is the golden period of Gandhara civilization. Kanishka contributed enormously to the politico-historical development in the region. The role of religion in politics and shaping the international relation is the significant contributions in this context. Rise of Gandhara civilization reflect the splendid past being a great period of the region.

Keywords: Gandhara, Rise, Politics, Kanishka, Golden Era, Religion

Introduction

The story of civilization is not the lore of past but also seems the enormous contribution on the part of political history. Ancient civilizations contributed vividly to human history as ancient Greece is considered the birthplace and cradle of democracy. Similarly, Gandhara had the magnificent contribution associated to the field of political science and history. Political development is the ever result of continues flow of history. The golden era of Gandhara reflects the political blossom of the region during Kushana that paved the way for the Rise of a great civilization.

The Rise of Gandhara during the Kushana's era and political development in the region seems the tremendous development on the part of ancient regional political history that is overlooked earlier being endeavored to investigate in the underlying study. How Gandhara met its climax on the part of the Rise as politico-historical development in the region? The employed design is historical and qualitative for figuring out the very question. The Rise of Gandhara was the glorious period of ancient regional political history. The Kushana era reflects the golden period of the region. Gandhara as Greek had rich political history while the present study is the enormous contribution that could enlarge the canvass of political history including the discipline of political science and history on the part of civilization.

Gandhara civilization is subjected to the long history of ups and downs that dates back to the Vedic period. Gandhara emerged by 6th BCE however the Rise of Gandhara civilization started from the Maurayan rule (305–185 BCE) in the region. Samad (2010) views 4th BCE to 4th CE, the age of great reproduction, because in this period different culture intermixed in the term of Hellenistic, central Asian, Iranian and Indian origin. Kuwayama (2002) finds its period of climax 4th and 5th century though, every period had its own contribution and significance. During Kushana's period from 1st CE to 5th CE Gandhara met its peak that could be declared the Rise of Gandhara civilization. Kanishka titled Ashoka II for the best administration and rule.

^a PhD Political Science, Department of Political Science & IR, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

^b PhD Political Science Department of Political Science & IR Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

The paper is divided into five parts: The first section included the review of literature. Section two describes the applied method and theory. Section three discusses the Rise of Gandhara civilization that consists of the Kushana era by encompassing its political history and contributions. The last part elaborates the role of religion in politics followed by conclusion.

Review of Literature

Gandhara and regional history have been investigated and researched in different connotations and context. Khan (2014) focuses on the cultural hermitage of Gandhara while Quraeishi (1974) considers it the legacy of Indus civilization. Dani (2007) having archaeological understanding of the region while Chiragh (2001) compiles the regional history from the Stone Age by approaching the recent past. Herodotus (2005) provides a general insight into the ancient past of the region by recording the Greeks' struggle and freedom against the Persian hegemony. Amjad (1999), Avari (2007), Harman (2002), Mahajan (2016), Robb (2002) and Nehru (2004) encompass the ancient history of the region (Indian subcontinent). Though civilization has different elements and several aspect having a multidimensional nature however the political understanding, political development, political history is overlooked and understated in the earlier studies. The present work covers the Rise of Gandhara: the political history, political development of Gandhara civilization during Kushana era that is called the golden era of the region.

Methodology

The Underlying study is qualitative having historical nature of research while the material and sources are secondary. The events, political development and historical facts of the past have been interpreted and explained that associated to the Rise of Gandhara. Being historical research, the qualitative technique both for collecting and the analysis of data is applied. The archival documents, books, journal articles and encyclopedia articles are the sources being consulted that produced in the field of history, archaeology, culture and religious study of the region.

The origin of state embedded in the political thoughts and philosophy that developed in ancient times refers to the affinity of political development and evolution. It shows that neither the political development is static, nor the political evolution is over. Because the political evolution involves the invention, elaboration and diffusion of novel political forms of all types and only some may be more effective, or inclusive, or democratic (coming, et al, 1988). The political development is situation specific but the political evolution having historical nature consists of gradual transformation. The political development during Kushana's reflects the Rise of Gandhara region and its dynamic nature during that era refers to the political evolution. Thus, the theory of political development and political evolution suited for the better understanding of the Rise of Gandhara civilization an ancient regional politico-historical development in the region.

Kushana's Gandhara: The Rise of Gandhara

Gandhara Civilization had a magnificent and glorious political history, religious backdrop, distinguished secular world view, political system, Persian bureaucratic approach, Greek democratic fragrance, diversified cultural identity and hybridization, the story of struggle and survival, arrived at to its zenith (Ahmad, 2021). Gandhara Civilization had a multidimensional nature, but the underlying study encompasses, Rise of the political history of Kushana's as a civilization. Though Gandhara civilization is subjected to a long history of ups and downs that dates back to the Vedic period. However, 6th century BCE is the agreed period while blossom of Gandhara reflects the political development of the region. Samad (2010) views it from 4th BCE to 4th CE, of 700 years that could be declared the age of great reproduction. In this period different culture intermixed which confirmed as Hellenistic, central Asian, Iranian and Indian aftermath the Alexander commence to Gandhara region. Besides that, in Chinese sources as Kuwayama (2002) finds that its period of climax was 4th and 5th century CE. It has been enumerated the blooming of the Gandhara region. During, the bloom and apex of the Gandhara civilization can be observed a full-fledged civilization where all the elements reached its crowning.

Gandhara witnessed different rulers, dynasties while frequent change remained a permanent feature of the political history of Gandhara civilization. Kushana's era could be declared the golden era of the region and Kanishka is called Ashoka II in this context.

The Indo-Greek arrived the region by 190 BCE, while their rule lasted for a century replaced by Scythian or Sakas of central Asian origin (Naveed, 2015). Aftermath Scythian, according to him Parthian arrived in the mid of 1st Century BCE. Kushans came in 50 CE were Chinese (Yue-Chi tribe) who subdued Gandhara including Kabul valley.

The origin of Kushana's seems contentious and believed to be migrated tribe from Central Asia and Afghanistan around the first century to the 3rd Century BCE who controlled Gandhara in 80 CE (Naveed, 2015). Khan, S (2004) conceives them (Kushans) too of Chinese origin came from the Northwest of China by 145 BCE to Bactria Afghanistan. Jawad (2012) views that Kushans are the Yue Chi tribe belonged to central Asia, whose history is derived and investigated from the chronicle produced in China. Furthermore, Chang Khan visited Yue Chi by 125 BCE, Seu-mu-Chieu (father of Chinese history) by 145 BCE and claims that Yue-Chi abode in China by 165 BCE. Yue Chi invaded Bactria by making Heliocles depleted from thrown in 130 BCE.

Higham (2003) argues that Kushans (Kushana or Kusana) caused a major influence in the region which is also considered a nomadic group from China settled in the Aral Sea at the end of 2nd Century BCE. Sehrai, (1979) views that the Kushana dynasty was also a foreigner one who made amalgam with the Hindus by adopting their deities and names.

According to Khan, S, (2004) Kushana arrived in the region by making the Peshawar its capital by pushing back the Parthian and replacing them in the region. Kujula was the founder of the Kushana's Empire while Kujula after coming into power the Yuezli transformed to the Kushana (as cited in Khan, S). During that time the entire region was prosperous in the term of economic development as well in the term of political stability.

Gandhara due to its Geo-strategic, cultural and religious importance attracted the great powers and civilization of the world. Parthians during first Century CE subdued Gandhara and Punjab, whose king Gondophares who lived in the cosmopolitan city of Taxila (Naveed, 2015). Jawad (2012) claims that Scythian rule seized by Parthian king Gondophares in 65 CE and merged Gandhara and adjacent areas in his Empire. Besides that, Kujula-Kadphise or Wima-Kidphises ruled Gandhara and the mentioned territories.

Though the political division varied from time to time, during the Christian era two empires existed which were *Kushanshahar* and *Eranshahar* during the Sassanian dynasty (Dani and Litvinski, 1996). The *Kushanshahar* (named after the great emperor of Kushan) comprised of the *Amu Darya*, Indus to the Ganges while *Eranshahr* expanded toward east and west respectively.

Kushana's Empire (*Kushanshahar*) which came into existence after the great Kushan who boosted political, religious and socioeconomic development in the realm (Dani and Litvinski, 1996). It is also noted that prior to the establishment of a great empire, Kujula Kadphises (Kushan) of Yue Chi section (Horde) controlled and made the authority over five principalities (Jawad, 2012). Kanishka (Kushana) in the first Century CE established his empire stretched from Gandhara to Banaras including Sochi (Robb, 2002). Their period of glory and heyday was started from the Kanishka time. The new world Encyclopedia (n.d) declares the rise of Gandhara with, Kushan with the decline of Parthian in 75 CE when Kujula got the realm of Gandhara.

Kushana extended his rule to Kandahar and Kabul (Chiragh, 2001). Nehru (2004) considers Taxila the Headquarter of Northwest Province and Kanishka realm included Bengal to central Asia. According to Chiragh (2001) Kanishka's government consisted of Southern India Gandhara valley, Kashmir as well on Bannu. Kanishka included Bunir and Swat in his kingdom (Khan, A 2004). While after Kanishka the Swat Udyana remained in his rule, Buddha rulers Ram Raja whose regional capital was Khadokhel. After Ram Raja the Swat region was ruled by Virat and Biti of Buddhist stock whose capital was Takht-e-Bhai. Khan

provides that Raja Beti was followed by Raja Hodi who remained in power in the town which is now Hologram.

Kushana lineage of the dynasty was of six or seven kings as the Mughal, Rajput (2018) claims that Kanishka was the third ruler of the mentioned series and as his predecessor Ashoka,

The Kushana (Kusana) period could be declared the golden period of Gandhara during Kanishka (128–151 CE). Aftermath the first generation of victory the Kushana Empire was comprised of the region from Oxus to the Ganges and from Pamir to the edges of Indus (Khan, S, 2004). During this period due to the regional set up of government its civilization progressed and expanded outside from its earlier frontiers. Prior to the establishment of the great empire, Kujula Kadphises under Kushan, Yue-Chi section (Horde) controlled and made his authority over five principalities (Jawad, 2012). It is not known, either Kujula-Kadphises or Wima-Kidphises controlled Gandhara including the entire empire.

During the period of its peak some city-states came under the jurisdiction of a foreigner by 224–40 BCE. King Ardashir (Sassanian) the son of Shahpur I annexed Peshawar in his realm. Nevertheless their (Sassanians) policy was friendly rather than of hostility by persisting and adopting the kings' title of Kushan (Khan, S, 2004). Apart from Gandhara they ruled on Kabul and Bactria. Sassanian followed by Hun (Kidarites or little Kushans), the first Hun group by 370 CE as well a second group during this period of Hun (Chionities or Hapthalites) arrived at Bactria as well as to Peshawar also (Khan, S, 2004).

Kushan established a great empire in the region. It was consisted of Oxus (Central Asia) to Ganges (India) and from the Caspian Sea to the Arabian sea by 200 CE, the greatest empire in the region (Khan, S, 2004). Ashoka controlled his empire from Patliputhra while Kanishka from Peshawar. Khan views, the Kushan empire during Kanishka had the multidimensional structure of development occurred in the region while Buddhism exported beyond the earlier frontiers of his empire to China.

Gandhara had different political system that evolved and developed with the passage of time. Gandhara and Indus civilization featured as empire or kingdom comprised of units and had independent and interdependent regions including the city states (as cited in McIntosh, 2008). Peshawar and Taxila (Gandhara) had been remained urban centers, city-states, regional kingdom and remained the capitals also but the region most often investigated in historical, cultural and in archaeological context (Khan, S. 2004).

Kushans in the political system and government followed the philosophy of Indo-Greek including the writing system of Greek because they did not possess their own system of writing (Samad, 2010) while the legitimacy of Kanishka the Kushan king derived from the divine support.

Great Kushan empire of Vasudeva I existed on the eastern part of Gangetic valley which came to its end by the subjugation of Sassanian rulers Ardashir I as well as of Shahpur I (Dani, Litvinski, and Safi, 1996). They kept the hold of Gandhara region as well as the control of the areas in Punjab. Kushan ruled from Bactria to Punjab while the coins found from Punjab, Sistan, and Afghanistan endorsed it. Different dynasties ruled the region hence the exact period of their rule having debatable nature particularly regarding the Kushan era and Kideraties. Dani et al (1996) argue that Kushan is mutually attached to the Kideraties coins, which shows that some regions of the Kushana Empire can be declared as “Kidara Kushan Shahi”. Kidaras established themselves for a short period around the late 4th century.

Historically, the north (Gandhara) used to produce rulers, warrior, and victors, while south contributions were the artists and saints (Durant, 2000). Durant further includes that, Gandhara Civilization remained the center of exchange for the inhabitants as well for the foreigners, as the Chinese visitors in 399 CE visited Gandhara region i-e Swat, Taxila, region of Kashmir as well Shahbaz Garhi.

Kanishka ruled the region for 45 years followed by Vasishka, Huvishka, and Vasudeva respectively (Rajput, 2018). Kanishka belonged to Kushans who according to Rajput were the ablest and noblest rulers of Gandhara. The regional political conditions frequently changed throughout its history as Levinsky, Guang-da, and Samghabadi (1996) admit that around early 4th century Persia came under the Secleucide and afterward by Parthians as well mostly ruled by local rulers.

The capital of Gandhara is one of the most debatable subjects, Rajput (2018) provides that from the 6 BCE to 2nd century CE Pushkalavati (Charsadda) persisted the capital of Gandhara. Besides its capital Its political landscape had a strategic location, a meeting pot between central Asia, the Middle East and India. Its magnitude is worth noting as the region had inter-regional economical and culture homogeneous features (Khaw, 2016). Due to the fertile nature of the region, it had a considerable number of the population. Gandhara *Mahanjanapada* means the great sovereign nations (Empire) of clan and city-states. O' Neal (2008) argues that India did not remain a single kingdom but a collection of 16 kingdoms or kinglets by 500 BCE called the *Mhajanapadas* (empire). The region featured as regional kingdasm, city states and clan states during the historical development.

In the political arena, Taxila persisted the focal point. It remained the ancient metropolis city, the capital of Gandhara and the center of Buddhist learning (Naveed, 2015). The magnitude of Taxila is prominent being the central cities of the Gandhara Empire. Although the historical links of the city date back to the ancient times of Indus valley civilization. Naveed finds the human existence back in 3500 BCE, from three important caves found in 1964 by Eldon Johnson: from the Khanpure, Mohra Moradu and at Bhamala. The bronze age began in 2700 to 2100 BCE without any break between Neolithic and bronze age in the region.

Although the world Gandhara Civilization had a long period before its rise having a period of clashes and survival by approaching the political culmination. Gandhara due to its importance bridged the different civilizations, as it boosted the ingenuous civilization by interacting, intermingling, of art and culture as a global village (Saleem, 2013). Richard Soloman suggests the term Greater Gandhara for the description of a widespread culture of the region (as cited in Brancaccio & Behrendt, 2006).

Gandhara art is pertinent to understand in this context is the precision of date regarding its origin and the sociopolitical forces who contributed to it (Saleem, 2013). Hence it cannot be limited to its geographical locus. Rajput (2018) views the contribution of civilization as the Greek pottery, the art of Egypt and the Gandhara art will surprise the world in a very amazing way. Understanding of Gandhara civilization is one of the rich fields having multifarious aspects while by proper investigation seems a paradigm shift for the region and its people, and the prevailing of Gandhara Art also depicts and confirms it. The widespread Gandhara school of art in Kabul valley, Mathura and upper Indus Peshawar mostly and vividly flourished during the Kushan's period, (Sanujit, 2011).

The diversity of Gandhara is worth noting as Greek influence in the region could be observed. Alexander's invasion changed the paradigm of thinking; as well his successor prolonged his policy of colonization and set up 250 colonies on the part of Hedonistic civilization aftermath his death in seventy-five years (Sanujit, 2011). Saleem (2003) admits that Gandhara civilization (art and style context) influenced the other culture and civilization, as the similarities in the art context with Europe. He provides, the influence of great implication, to make it interesting, fascinating and intermingling of styles, etc. Brancaccio & Behrendt (2006) views that multifaceted nature of the Gandhara Buddhism features being overlooked by researchers, furthermore the ask for multidisciplinary feature for a productive dialogue to begin. In Greater Gandhara, during the Buddhist art sculpture, stucco, etc found in Take-i-Bhai region in Mardan (Saleem, 2013, p.33).

New world Encyclopedia declares the rise of Gandhara with, Kushan's aftermath the disappearance of Parthian in 75 CE when Kujola got the realm of Gandhara. During Kushana's era, ruins, Stupas, monasteries, Indian sculpture, Gandharan art produced and flourished in the region. Kanishka (121-151 CE) period is considered the golden age of Gandhara. O'Neal provides that he made the Sirsukh city at Taxila, shifted the capital to Peshawar as well propagated Buddhism inside the Gandhara and beyond its frontiers.

The rise of civilization is the contentious topics by investigating the past. Different civilizations around the world developed by kings and their dynasties (Bogocki, 2008). Notwithstanding so many others emerged in large populations as Mesopotamia and Egyptian while Americans rulers preferred to live with their protectors.

During the time of its Rise, the international relations were not beyond the ambit of Gandhara. China and Gandhara engaged in the context of civilization. Buddhism got the royal patronage and flourished to China including other countries. Sen (2003) argues that the scripts of Buddhism translated by monks in China which paved the way for the intermingling, influencing and bridging both civilizations. Gandhara (India) was influenced in the term of clothing and eating.

From the very ancient time till present the relation with China is of immense importance. Sen (2003) believes that the initial endeavors failed but the aftermath of the decline of the Xianzanu empire around 55 BCE and then the establishment of the Han realm in the region in Pamir the relation between Gandhara and Han developed rapidly. As Sen considers that, the Jiban kingdom around Gandhara during Azes I and II was a permanent barrier to pervert the Sino-India (Gandhara) relation.

Role of Religion

Religion played a pivotal role in Gandhara. Interacting, producing of western art and ideological concepts portrays the monument of Buddhist communities comprised of religious statues and monasteries (Samad, 2010). Kushana's period is of immense importance as Kanishka also convened the Buddhist council (Rajput, 2018). The glorious period of the empire of King Kanishka being a Zoroastrian, started Hindu traditions as well as Buddhism (Hayat, 2017). The religious freedom was much applauded by King Kanishka (121-151 CE), who believed in multiple philosophies in the term belief.

Buddhism arrived and then spread from Gandhara. It spread in China in 50 CE while in the following century the translation of text occurred (Harvey, 2003). Buddhism then emerged as the dominant religion of China by outranking Daoism. The Golden period according to Sen (2003) can be declared the Tang period where the exchange of sacred (religious) and secular (trade) the political ups and downs, intellectuals exchange contributed to boosting the mutual ties of Gandhara and China. Earlier the route passed through the north of Gandhara region through the mountain ranges ahead to Wakhan, China, Central Asia by east while by the west to Takharistan via Badakhshan (Kuwayama, 2002). The present China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the repercussions that seems the revitalization of the Gandhara China historical linkages.

Harvey (2003) views that the colonization of Gandhara played a crucial role in the promotion of Buddhism outside the geographical frontiers being the dominant factor and religion of its civilization. For communication between Gandhara and China, the 'Jiban' route was used till 7th century CE (Jawad, 2012). Chinese pilgrims used the mentioned route to reach the region. The Gandhara China relation in the Buddhist context provided for a multifaceted structure particularly in communication. The Chinese tradition as Jawad conceives, was made from the Prakrit of Gandhara during the emergence of Gandhara. It includes China's thirst for learning Buddhism during Emperor Han by (57-75 CE) by sending Chi Yin, to central Asia.

The Chinese pilgrims used to visit Taxila, Uddiyana, Peshawar, and Kashmir along the lower region of Indus valley, Sindh and Makran (as cited in Jawad, 2012). The mutual ties and cooperation further resulted in the political organization (Jetmar, 2008). Durant (2008) further includes that, Gandhara Civilization remained the center of exchange for the inhabitants as well as for the international visitors: the Chinese visitors in 399 CE visited Gandhara region i.e. Swat, Taxila, the region of Kashmir as well as Shahbaz Garhi.

Litvinsky, Guang-da, and Samghabadi (1996) admit the intermingling of Asian civilization is of paramount importance in this context. During the rise of Gandhara civilization, the silk route had contacted central Asia, India, and Iran while around 5th Century the southern route (silk route) connected the Lap Nor, Wakhan, Bamyan, and Gandhara.

During Kanishka the Karakoram played an essential role to channelize China and Gandhara relations (Jetmar, 2008). The Buddhist preachers and pilgrims used the same route by approaching the region. Kuwayama (2002) talks about the spread of Buddhism in Gandhara with other reasons for secularism, political and economic outlook of life.

Gandhara and China's bilateral relations of peace and war both contributed and influenced each other. In the religious context both countries influenced each other and surrounding areas too (Sen, 2003). The

religious teaching and belief of Gandhara of Buddhism spread to neighboring countries, to Central Asian states, Japan, Korea as well to the east Asia with the mutual collaboration of Chinese and Gandhara civilization. The religious ties then converted into secular relations of trade that provided by the strong role of Buddhism.

Buddhism prevailed and exported from Gandhara to the adjacent countries as well to the remote countries crossing the natural barriers. The regional connectivity is the great legacy of the region. The foreign secretary of Pakistan Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry endorsed the influence of ancient Pakistan that transcended geographical boundaries to the south, central and East Asia (MFA, 2016).

Buddhism can be traced in Chinese belief from the excavation in Sichuan, Gansu provinces, the southern region of Yangtze Rivers: particularly from the graves and tomb of the Han period by archaeological endeavors (Sen, 2003). Buddhism introduced its ideas in the native tradition of China that had various types, by capturing the multifarious types of imagination in there.

The great period of Kushan came to an end replaced by Sassanid in 241-350 CE, and the Sassanid's Gandhara remained the adjacent state of the Persian Empire (Hayat, 2017). According to Naveed (2015) Sassanian under the king ShahPur, I (Persian) merged Gandhara kingdom into Persian Empire on the defeat of Kushan. However, the region did not rule directly during that period. Power politics remained a constant feature of Gandhara political landscape, Naveed claims that Kidarites or Kidar Kushan (little Kushan) then regained Gandhara who continued up to the middle of 5th century CE.

Conclusion

The Kushana's Gandhara reflects the Rise of Gandhara civilization both in the term of political history and role of religion in the politics that comprises on the period 75 CE to 240 excluding a short break of Sassanids by approaching to 550 CE. Kanishka vividly contributed to regional political history. It was the golden period featured by Political development, the establishment of regional empire, role of religion in politics, religious harmony and secular attitude of the realm. Besides that, religion played vital role in the formation of foreign relation. During Kushana period Gandhara reached its zenith that could be termed the Rise of Gandhara civilization.

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