

ETHNIC PROFILE OF GANDHĀRA

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The word Gandhāra (not Gandhārā, with a medial long ā at the end, as it is generally mispronounced at present) is often translated as ‘the Land of Fragrance’ – *gandha* being ‘fragrance’ and *hāra*, the land. It is interesting to note that in the fairly vast stretching from Jalālābad (in Afghanistan) to Khushāb in the Punjāb (Pakistan), the pattern of nomenclature to denote different lands is the same. Thus, the plateau like tract of land to the east of the Indus, particularly around Rāwalpindī, is, on the pattern of Gandhāra called Poṭhohāra. The *Poṭho* (Poṭhohāra) is derived from a well known Indo-European root which becomes *post* in English (as in post-modern) and *Pusht* in Persian, meaning back or behind. In India it takes the form Pīṭha. Thus, the word Poṭhohāra would mean ‘the land at the back’, i.e. back of the mountains, or, metaphorically, simply the ‘Highland’ which it certainly is. The regions Vanahāra, i.e. Woodland. Coming to the western side of Gandhāra we know that ancient name of the present Jalālābād (in Afghanistan) was Nagarahāra, often corrupted as Nangnehār. These names clearly show that they follow a consistent pattern and were given on account of the topographical features of the lands they cover. But, strangely, the meaning given to Gandhāra, i.e. ‘the land of fragrance’, is inconsistent with the general pattern of nomenclature, for, fragrance is an abstract quality, not topographical feature. This creates a sneaky suspicion regarding the accuracy of this meaning.

The word Gandhāra first occurs in the *Rigveda*¹ (Griffith 1968:652), the earliest Aryan literature compiled approximately between 1500 to 1200 BC and is then repeatedly mentioned in various contexts. Had the earliest use of this word been due to the Buddhist of this region who held Gandhāra as a sacred land, its alleged meaning would have made some sense. But the earliest use of this word occurs more than one thousand years before Majjhantika² first brought Buddhism to Gandhāra in the 3rd century BC.

Did then the Āryans of the *Rigveda* also look upon Gandhāra as a sacred land³, as the Buddhists of China, Korea etc. did in the centuries following the Christian era? The answer is in the negative. In the time of the *Rigveda* Āryan communities had scarcely advanced beyond the country of the river Sarasvati (in East Panjāb) which for ever afterwards was remembered with special veneration as Brahmāvarta, i.e. ‘The Holy Land’. In the period of the Brāhmaṇas, which follow the *Rigveda*, the centre of religious activity was transferred to the adjacent country on the south east, i.e. the upper portion of the Doāb between the Jumnā and the Ganges. This was Brahmarshideśa, i.e. ‘The Country of the Holy Sages’ (Rapson 1965: 40). Quite on the contrary, the Gandhāris mentioned in the *Atharvaveda* and also in the *Śrauta Sūtras* appear as a despised people to whom fever as an illness wished to be relegated. The Āryans of Vedic period therefore cannot be expected to have looked upon Gandhāra as venerated and holy land giving out a sweet spiritual smell (as it did in the case of Buddhists) to fill the hearts and imagination of Āryan poets.

The first part of the name, i.e. Qand (in Qand hār or Gandhāra) also occurs as a second part of the names of several Central Asian cities such as Yārqaṇd, Tāshqaṇd (Stone Village) and Samarqaṇd (Fat or Large Village). But this does not suit our purpose, for, judged on this pattern the word Qandahār (or Gandhāra) would mean ‘Land of the village’ which is nonsense when applied to a region. If however ‘Qand’ is taken to stand for a similar Persian word meaning sugar, or metaphorically Sugar-cane, it does make sense. Then the composite word Gandhāra on this account would mean ‘The Land of Sugarcane’. This it certainly is. The Peshawar valley still grows huge quantities of sugarcane. We do not know how old the Persian word ‘*Qand*’ is, but it does give a meaning to Gandhāra which fits into the general pattern of nomenclature indicated above. Even

Hsuan Tsang (Beal 1884:98) in the 7th century AD did not fail to mention this feature. Gandhāra, he says, 'is rich in cereals and produces a variety of flowers and fruits; it abounds also in sugarcane from the juice of which they prepare the 'solid sugar', i.e. Guṛ. The *Purāṇas* however give an altogether different season as to how and why his land came to be known as Gandhāra, as we shall see below.

The *Rigveda*, our earliest source, mentions several tribes but the particular places where they had settled are not specified. A generic name 'Udīchya' is used for the whole group of Northern tribes. This group included the Uttarakurus, the Uttaramadra, Majavants, Mahāvṛishas, Gandhāras, Bāhlikas, Keśins, Kekayas, and Kāmbojas. Of these tribes only the Gandhāris, Bāhlikas, Kekayas and Kāmbojas are relevant to us here.

Besides the *Rigveda*, the Gandhāris are mentioned in the *Atharvaveda* and also in the *Śrauta Sūtras*. In the former source a wish is expressed, as noted above, that fever may visit the Gandhāris (Majumdar 1951: 258). Whether the wish of the *Atharvaveda* was ever fulfilled, we do not know, but the fever malaria had been taking a heavy toll every year in Peshawar till recent times. During the British period, the soldiers stationed in Peshawar were duty-bound to put on their socks even at night and sleep inside mosquito nets. The *Aitreya Brāhmaṇa* (VII, 34) mentions Nagnajit, a King of Gandhāra, among Vedic teachers who propagated the Soma-Cult.

From various references in Indian literature, it appears that the boundaries of Gandhāra varied at different periods of its history. The Gandhāras are generally placed to the west of the Indus and south of the river Kabul. The Bāhlikas (literally meaning 'outsiders') may have lived somewhere on the fingers of Gandhāra as they are mentioned as a contiguous tribe. Some scholars are inclined to place this tribe in Iran. The Kekayas, probably descended from the Anus of the *Rigveda*, were southern neighbours of the Gandhāris. Their Araces may be seen in place-names such as Kakki near Bannu (Dani 1967: 58). Aśvapati, king of the Kekayas is mentioned as a man of learning in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (X, 6.1.2.) and the *Chhādogya Upanishad* (V.II,4). The Kāmbojas are mentioned in the *Vaṃśa Brāhmaṇa* of the *Sāmaveda*, though there is considerable difference of opinion regarding their precise location. They are nevertheless a northwestern tribe and are also subsequently mentioned, together with the Gandhāras, in Aśoka's Edicts. The *Vaṃśa Brāhmaṇa* refer to a Kāmboja teacher named Aupamanyava who was probably a son of the sage Upamanyu mentioned in the *Rigveda*. Aupamanyava is stated to be a pupil of Madragāra. This has led some people to assure that Kāmbojas and Madras were close neighbours and lived somewhere in the northwest. The mention of Madragāra as an ancient Vedic Teacher shows that the Madras were expert in Vedic learning. This fact is confirmed by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which records that the sages of northern India repaired to the Madra country to study the Vedas. The territory of the southern Madras roughly corresponds to the present Siālkot and its adjoining districts. In Buddhist times the Madras dwelt between the Chenāb and Ravi.

The tribes of the Northwest come out more prominently in the well known 'Battle of the Ten Kings' mentioned in the *Rigveda*. The battle was caused by the mutual jealousy of two priests (Griffith 1986: 159 note) and was fought on the bank of the river Ravi (ancient Parushnī), perhaps somewhere near the present Lahore. Among the frontier tribes who took active part in the battle were Alina, Paktha, Bhalanās, Śiva and Vishāṇi (Griffith 1986: 342). The Alinas were closely allied with the Pakthas and hailed, perhaps, from a region to the northwest of Gandhāra, though their precise location is a matter of considerable doubt. The Pakthas are sometimes identified with modern Pukhtuns, but without any solid ground (Bailey 1952). The word Pukhtūn is a later version of the original Pushtun – a generic name for the people who lived at the *pusht* or back of the Sufaid Koh (hence the word Pushtun) in the Sulaiman Range – their original home – although they have been expanding to the hill valleys in the north in the course of centuries. This is where they still

happen to be and never call themselves Pukhtuns. They are Pushtuns and speak Pushtu, not Pukhtu⁴. The Pakthas, therefore, whosoever they were, may be connected with Paktiya or Paktika, the names of provinces in the same neighbourhood in Afghanistan. They lived in the hills from which the river Kurrum originates. South of the pakthas lived the Bhalānases. The Vishāṇins, so-called probably because of their horn shaped helmets, lived further down between the Kurrum and Gomal. Although connected with Gandhāra on way or the other, non of these tribes seem to have ever actually lived in the Peshawar valley. The Śivas lived between the Indus and the Jhelum in the Vedic times.

In the past-Rigvedic period (i.e. after 1200 BC) we find new tribes coming into prominence. Many of the old ones disappear or get merged into each other under new names. The Druhyus who were once counted amongst the five principal tribes of the Panjāb were new driven out their habitat and pushed into the northwestern corner of the Panjāb (Majumdar 1951: 279), between Rāwalpindi and Attock. Their king named Aṅgāra was killed in the turmoil, he was succeeded by a person named Gāndhāra, after whose name the Druhyu settlements in the Panjab came to be known as such. This is how, as the traditional history (based on Purāṇas) says, the term Gāndhāra came into vogue as the name of a territory. After sometime the Druhyus crossed the borders of India (i.e. Indus) and founded many princelalities in the Mleccha territories in the north (i.e. Gandhāra) (Ibid).

Hereafter Gandhāras are frequently mentioned in Indian and foreign literatures but the information consist merely of isolated references. Thus, a certain King Śakuni of Gāndhāra, along with Kekaya and Kāmboja princes, is mentioned to have taken in the Bhārat⁵ war. The scene of the battle has not been mentioned in the Mahābhārata or the Purāṇic texts. If however it is the same location as mentioned in the Rigveda, i.e. the bank of the river Rāvi, then it is difficult to see how the Druhyus who occupied Gandhāra at that time could be interested in or affected by the conflicts of people far away from them. In another reference a certain King Dhṛitarāshṭra is said to have taken a Gāndhāra wife. In a yet another reference we are told that, after the Bhārata war, king Janamejaya whose kingdom corresponded to modern Thanesar, Delhi and Upper Doāb, routed the Nāga ruler of Taxila⁶ and also brought Gandhāra under his control (Ibid). The story of the *Mahābhārata* was recited to Janamejaya at Taxila by a sage known as Vaisam pāyana. Aśvapati Kekaya, whose territory lay to the east of Gandhāra also accepted Janamejaya's suzerainty. There is a reference to King Pukkusāti or Pushkarasārin⁷, the ruler of Gandhāra in the middle of the 6th century BC. He was a contemporary of king Bimbisāra of Magadha. He is said to have sent an embassy and a letter to his Magadhan contemporary and inflicted a crushing defeat on king Pradyota of Avanti (present Mālwā).

The Behistūn inscription of the Achaemenian emperor Darius (522-486 BC) mentions Gandhāra (written as Gahāra) as one of the provinces of his empire. The Susa Palace inscription of the same states that teak wood used in the construction of the palace was brought from Gadāra (Gandhāra). Another Iranian emperor, Xerxes (468-465 BC) is known to have recruited Gandhāran soldiers for his wars in Greece. Whether these Gandhārāns were descendants of the Druhyus or had a different source of origin is not known. Greek historians mention on Assakenian tribe (Majumdar 1960: 215) who occupied the present Bajaur and Dir regions and valiantly resisted Alexander's march through their territory⁸.

Alexander's campaign in the Frontier brought him to a strongly fortified place known as Oṛa to Greek historians. Sir Aurel Stein has identified this place with Oḍgrām (Stein 1975: 60) on the Mālākand – Mingora road near Saidu Sharif (in Swāt). Oḍigrām literally means 'Oḍi Town'. This is not the only one of its kind, for, we know of a number of other such 'towns' scattered in Bajaur, Dir and the Peshawar Valley. The pre-Muslim ruler of Gandhāra who suffered defeat at the hands of Maḥmūd of Ghazna (in AD 1001 near Peshawar) and the power of whose descendants were completely rooted out by the victor is known to local history⁹ as a Hoḍirājā (Abdur Rahman 2002: 37-42). The mountain range on the right bank of the Indus opposite Akbar's fort at Attock is still

known as Hoḍi Ghar (i.e. Mount Hoḍi) (Raverty 1976: 33). The Oḍis finally moved to Kashmīr. The Oḍi Valley of Kashmir is evidently known after them. In their modern accounts these Hoḍi (correctly Oḍi) kings are mentioned under the misnomer Hindu Śāhis (see Abdur Rahman 1979).

The Oḍi rājās are now abundantly known from Kharoshṭhi inscriptions found evidently in Gandhāra. One of these records (Bailey: 1980) found upon a gold tablet mentions the Oḍi king Senavarma who was a contemporary of the early Kushans¹⁰. There has been some confusion about the actual find spot of this tablet. Zaro dheri in Hazāra is often thought to be the real find spot. But now I have been able to find out for certain that the tablet was found in Mata Durush Khela (Upper Swat). Unfortunately the tablet is now lost, so for as my information goes.

Another group of Kharoshṭhi inscriptions found in Gandhāra (Soloman: 1984: 95) mentions several Apracha rājās¹¹. Whether these Apracha rulers represented a tribe or were merely professional soldiers who reached the highest political office of the country through their fighting propensities, is not known. Keeping the Oḍi example in view one may assume that they were a distinct ethnic group and wielded power in the early centuries before and after the Christian era in the hill states bordering Gandhāra¹². Indian literature mentions Apāchyas (Majumdar 1951: 257-58, 315) as a tribe of the extreme northwest. Whether the Aprachas of the Kharoshṭhi inscriptions are the same as Apāchyas is hard to say so long as we don't find a concrete evidence, though the close resemblance between these two names and the geographical position they held in the extreme northwest favours such an identification.

The demolition of the Hoḍi kingdom early in the 11th century opened the floodgates of Muslim invaders who, wave after wave, poured into the vast Indian plains, utterly disturbing the balance of power between the tribes, which had held in check the stronger among them from devouring the weaker. Sitting on the crest of these waves were Muslim Turks from Central Asia¹³. They first established themselves at Ghazna in Afghānistān and then started making inroads in every direction. Apparently the Afghāns who were still non-Muslim in the 11th century AD (Schau 1910-199) did not like the sudden rise of a Muslim state in their midst and continuously harassed the Muslim armies passing through their territory. But the Ghaznavid ruler Maḥmūd punished them severely (Nazim 1931: 76). After Jayapāl's defeat near Jalalabad the Khaljis became Muslims and joined the Ghaznavid armies. Economic benefits obliged the other Afghan tribes to follow suit. Gandhāra was now a small chip in the much larger scene of conflict emanating from Ghazna, Lahore and subsequently Delhi. In the melee that followed Gandhāra lost its importance, and also its name.

Having lost their political umbrella which the Oḍi rulers had provided them in the past, the ancient tribes of Gandhāra by themselves could not put up an effective barrier against the eastward thrust of the hill tribes who had been enviously looking at the fertile lands of the Peshawar valley. Then came Mongols of the family of Chingiz Khan who ravaged the country from Kabul to Lahore several times leaving nothing but desolation and lawlessness behind. The conditions were now ripe for mass movements. Another great cause of this eastward thrust was the advent of an Afghan sovereign over the Delhi kingdom and Afghan governors in its western provinces. By the middle of the 14th century the ancient tribes of Gandhāra had been dispossessed of their fertile lands, although pockets of Buddhism continued to exist for some more time in Swat, and were either exterminated or driven to the hill tops in Dir, Swat, Buner and Hazara. The Dihqān tribe of the Shalmānīs, who originally hailed from Shaluzān and Kaṛmān near the present Mīran Shāh, occupied Hashtnagar (Raverty 1878: 175-...). The Jahangirian Sultans of Swat carved out a fairly large kingdom, extending from Swat to Hashtnagar, while the rest of the Peshawar Valley was taken over by Dilazāk Afghans (Ibid: 388). Who entered the newly conquered territories shortly before the time of Timūr (1369-1405). They were the first Afghans to do so. Around 1480 when the great division of the Afghan people

called Khashi or Khakhi comprising Yusufzai, Mandans, Tarkalāni, and Gaggiani, along with their Muhammadzai and Jadun allies, were driven out of Kabul after a great massacre, they applied to the Dilazāks for quarter. Much to their delight, the Khakhis were assigned the Doāba area for their use. This area they still possess. But what happened afterwards is unbelievable. The Khakhis, as their number increased, picked up a quarrel with their benefactors and after a series of skirmishes inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Dilazāks near Katlang and forced them out of Peshawar valley.¹⁴

Notes

- ¹ Stanza 7 of Hymn 126 in which the name Gandhāra occurs, together with stanza 6, is in a different metre from the rest of the hymn and has no apparent connection with what precedes. It alludes to Gandhāra ewe or wool. It may be a later addition.
- ² According to the *Mahāvamsa* the third Buddhist Council, held in Pāṭaliputra during the time of Aśoka, decided to send missionaries to various regions for the propagation of Buddhism. Majjhantika was assigned Kashmir and Gandhāra.
- ³ Gandhāra being the source from which Buddhism spread to Afghanistan, Central Asia, China and Korea, it was looked upon as a holy land by the Buddhist communities of these countries.
- ⁴ H.W. Bailey in an article entitled 'Kuṣhanika' (*Journal of the British School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1952) considers the 'hard' pronunciation *Pakhtun* as comparatively new and dialectical
- ⁵ The later Vedic literature does not know of any Mahābhārata war. It is a mythical war which does not seem to have taken place and may, at the best be a revised version of the 'Battle of the Ten King' mentioned in the *Rigveda*.
- ⁶ There is a curious story about Janamejaya's father Parīkshit. One day, as the story goes, Parīkshit went to a forest for hunting but lost his way back home. There he met a sage who was observing a vow of silence. Parīkshit asked about the way but the sage did not answer. Being angry Parīkshit put a dead snake round the sage's neck and went away. When the son of the sage saw Parīkshit's mischief he cursed him and predicted that he would be bitten to death by Takshak, king of the snakes. Scholars read a genuine historical fact in this mythical story. Takshak was the king of Taxila, it is remarked, who found an opportunity to invade Parīkshit's capital Hastinapur. The latter died in the defence of his territories. It was to avenge his father's death that Janamejaya conquered Taxila and slaughtered the Nāga rulers.
- ⁷ Evidently King of Pushkalavati (present Charsadda). It is very strange that the king of Charsadda passing through the territory of several independent tribes in the Panjāb went all the way to central India to pick up a quarrel.
- ⁸ Alexander succeeded in taking control of Massaga (perhaps Ziārat in the Tālāsh valley in Dīr district) after a great struggle.
- ⁹ While mentioning the arrival of Shah Ima'il in Lahore, the author says that the kings of that place were Hodi and Sarwan. See Muhammad Latif Malik, *Auliya-e Lahore*, Sange Meel Publications, Lahore, n.d., p.25.
- ¹⁰ It mentions Kuyula Kataphsa's son Sadaṣkaṇo
- ¹¹ The most frequently mentioned ruler in these inscriptions is Vijaymitra (Harry Falk 1988:85)
- ¹² The earliest example coming from Shinkot (in Bajaur) refers to Indo-Greek ruler Menander
- ¹³ Alaptigīn a disgruntled Turkish general of the Sāmānid Amīrs of Bokhara was the first to do so. In April 962 he won a brilliant victory against the superior army of Manṣūr and shortly afterward established himself at Ghazni
- ¹⁴ With reference to people living in the hilly regions bordering India on the northwest Albīrūnī remarks that they do not let the weaker (armies) pass through their territory a stronger force can manage and that they are non-Muslims. See his *Fī Taḥqīq Mā li'l-Hind*, Hyderabad edn. 1958, p.158.

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