

International Seminar
Trans-Himalayan Buddhism– Exploring the Cultural Space

Organised by

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS)

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The majestic Himalayas have been considered sacred by the human imagination since time immemorial. Throughout the ages, these pristine mountains have been a refuge for silent contemplation, sacred solitude and spiritual rejuvenation to many sages and seers who have offered us their enormous wisdom, contributing to the growth of the Indian civilisation. Probably, the name most prominent among such enlightened souls, who hail from the Himalayas, is that of Sakyamuni Gautam Buddha.

The Buddha was born in Lumbini, an ancient region in the southern part of the present day Nepal, and grew up in Kapilavastu, nestled in a quiet green valley, from where the majestic peak of Dhaulagiri is visible. Such pristine environments of the Himalayas is a place perfect for meditative introspection, and taking refuge there for spiritual reawakening was a common practice that pre-existed the Buddha's time, as is clear from such references in the narratives of the Jataka stories, where we find the Buddha asking his disciple monks - "Do you wish to go wandering in the Himalayas"? (*Gacchissatha pana Himavanta cārikam*, Jataka V, 415). From the very same perspective, Buddhism in the present time too, with its widely varied forms and manifestations, is in one way or another linked to the Himalayas.

In the subsequent periods after the Buddha, his followers developed many sublime thoughts and beliefs, which have kept on circulating in Tibetan traditions, that many earthly paradises are hidden in the Himalayas and many of them are believed to be consecrated by Guru Padmasambhava. Thus, the Himalayas occupy a special position in the later phase of development of the Mahayana traditions. These Mahayana traditions or Himalayan Buddhism had spread even to the Mongol regions from its earliest days. It is a well-documented fact that Emperor Kublai Khan declared Himalayan Buddhism as state religion across his vast empire in the thirteenth century.

Over the centuries Buddhism evolved manifold, as it spread from its place of origin - the Indian subcontinent, specifically the majestic Himalayas. Being a liberal religion, wherever the teaching of the Buddha reached, it got a new manifestation by the way of articulation of the local myths, symbols and contexts. Thus, the concept of 'Naga' in its original form, as depicted in the Indian subcontinent, changed into a Dragon in the Chinese form of Buddhism while articulating its specific metaphorical expression and the context.

Over a vast period of human civilisation, in various waves, Buddhism spread beyond the Himalayan mountains to Central, East and Southeast Asia and at one time or another it influenced most of the Asian continent. No wonder, we find numerous forms, movements and manifestation of Buddhism under the broader schools of thoughts such as Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Yet, in all its forms and manifestations, the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, the doctrine of the four noble truths, the noble eightfold path and the theory of dependent

origination remain intact. In fact, in all these traditions, the training of mindfulness and achieving psychic power to free oneself from sufferings remain objectively the same in all its forms and manifestations, although the techniques might be different.

For various reasons, from the last century onwards, Buddhism began to spread to the Western hemisphere as well, and by now has attracted many. Aside from here in the East, many Western scholars too are now dedicating their time and scholarly endeavors to exploring, understanding and practicing the wider dimensions of Buddhism and seeking its applicability in resolving the complex social problems of modern times. From these perspectives, the members of the Western Buddhist Order are also adding new temperaments in reinterpretation of Buddhism with modern scientific tools and techniques.

Within such a framework, the objective endeavors of this Seminar on *Trans-Himalayan Buddhism –Exploring the Cultural Space* would be to look into the vast constituent elements of Himalayan Buddhism and their manifestations in forms of art and architecture. As these treasures of human experience cannot be appreciated fully without linking it with passing time and evolutionary patterns, efforts would be made by the participant scholars to trace out such patterns with explanatory causal variables of the time. Cultural variations in the form of trans-localisation of culture are a part of any human intuitive endeavor. Thus, the diverse aspect of manifestation of Trans-Himalayan Buddhism will be taken care of in the form of case studies by the expert participants in this Seminar. Efforts will be made to address the points of interpretative Buddhism in the modern age of scientific outlook and linking the same with different manifestations of Buddhism and western thoughts and philosophies. Therefore, the Seminar will be divided broadly into four sessions as given hereunder.

Tentative Sessions:

Session-1

Exploring the Constituent Elements – Cultures, Traits, Beliefs, Practices and Myths Associated with Trans-Himalayan Buddhism.

Session-2

Trans-localisation of Buddhist Culture and Specific Manifestations in the Localised Context.

Session- 3

Buddhism and Modern Western Thoughts – Interpretative and Explanatory Approaches to Buddhism and Its Applications.

Abstract with Title is to be send by 12.02.2016. Besides, an Edited Volume would be published by MAKAIAS, with the papers presented at the Seminar. For this purpose, a **paper (approximately 3000-4000 words) with references is to be submitted to MAKAIAS by 04.03. 2016.**