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Unveiling The Mystical Origins

In The Search Of Buddhist Monk Nagasen's Sacred Birthplace

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Abstract

Nagasena was a renowned Buddhist sage and monk whose birthplace is a subject of scholarly debate. According to traditional Pali Buddhist accounts, he was born into a Brahmin family in the Himalayan region, with some Kishtwar-area historical texts and local traditions claiming his birth village as Kunja near Galigad in Kishtwar district. His father, Sonuttara Brahmin, is sometimes described as the king of a small principality around Kajangal, identified with present-day Kunja or Galigad, though there is controversy over whether he was a king or just an ordinary Brahmin farmer. Contrastively, many scholars argue that the actual historical and geographic Kajangala, often mentioned in Buddhist texts including the Milind Panha, is an ancient territory located near Rajmahal in eastern India (in present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal), far from Kishtwar. This Kajangala is identified in classical literature and archaeological findings as a significant Buddhist area, fitting details in the Milind Panha that describe Nagasena's birthplace and educational journey better than the mountainous Kishtwar region, which is less suitable for certain events like massive caravan travels described in the texts. The Milind Panha itself mentions Nagasena's father Sonuttara as a Brahmin in a village called Kajangal, and portrays a life consistent with the plains and eastern geography rather than mountainous Himalayan terrain. Historical critiques highlight incongruities in claims assigning the Nagasena birthplace to Kishtwar, such as the improbability of growing crops or moving large wagons in that rugged terrain. The identification of the name "Nagseni" with Nagasena is more likely a local tradition reflecting later cultural reverence rather than a direct historical fact. Therefore, the controversy remains unresolved, but the stronger historical and textual evidence supports Kajangala near Rajmahal in eastern India as Nagasena's probable birthplace, while the Kishtwar claim is more a regional tradition tied to cultural pride and local reverence.

Keywords: Nagasena, Milinda, Milind Panha, Ghumai Nag, Sagala, cross-cultural philosophy, Buddhist literature, Kishtwar, Nagas, Kajangal, Dimzi, Nagseni, Kishtwar, Raja Nagpal, Buddhism, Sonuttara, Patliputra, Yugandhara, Bimal Nag, Buddhists cosmology.

Introduction

The Milind Panha is a revered Buddhist scripture presenting a captivating conversation between King Menander (Milinda), a distinguished Indo-Greek ruler, and venerable Nagasena, a sagacious Buddhist Monk, stands as a monumental work in the realm of Buddhist literature and cross-cultural philosophical discourse. This ancient text is part of Pali canon, is celebrated for its penetrating examination of Buddhists

doctrines and principles, and unfurls a tapestry of profound inquiries and enlightening responses that traverse the core tenets of Buddhism, touching upon the nature of existence, the self, karma, rebirth, and the path to liberation.

King Menander(Milinda), ruling over the Indo-Greek Kingdom in the 2nd century BCE, was a sovereign marked by his military prowess and notable interactions with Buddhist communities. His reign encapsulates a period of significant cultural syncretism, where Hellenistic and Indian traditions interwove, fostering an environment ripe for intellectual and spiritual exchanges. Nagasena, the sage monk, emerges as a luminary figure endowed with deep wisdom and eloquence, adept at unraveling the intricacies of Buddhist philosophy in response to the probing questions of King Milinda. The Milind Panha is architecturally crafted as a series of dialogues – a format that lends itself to the exploration of complex ideas through engaging conversation. King Milinda's inquiries often stem from a blend of curiosity and skepticism, prompting Nagasena to elucidate Buddhist concepts with remarkable clarity and depth. This method not only facilitates an accessible entry into Buddhist thought but also mirrors the dynamism of intellectual pursuit characteristic of ancient scholarly traditions. Central to the Milind Panha are discussions that probe fundamental aspects of Buddhist doctrine. The nature of the self finds eloquent exposition as Nagasena employs striking analogies, such as the chariot simile, to explicate the composite and transient nature of phenomena. Concepts like karma and rebirth are scrutinized, revealing the intricate workings of moral causation within the Buddhist cosmological vista. Moreover, the text navigates the interplay between wisdom and ethical conduct, illuminating the integrated path toward enlightenment. A striking facet of the Milind Panha is its embodiment of cultural and intellectual confluence between the Greek and Buddhist worlds. King Milinda's Greek heritage juxtaposed with the Indian Buddhist milieu of Nagasena underscores a remarkable instance of inter-civilizational dialogue in antiquity. This encounter not only highlights the universal appeal of Buddhist teachings but also reflects the porous boundaries of ancient thought traditions, where ideas flowed and mingled across cultural frontiers. As a pivotal text in the Pali Buddhist canon, the Milind Panha holds substantial import for understanding Theravada Buddhist philosophy. Its dialogical approach renders abstruse concepts more approachable, contributing to its enduring relevance in Buddhist studies. Scholars and practitioners alike have drawn upon its insights for elucidating the Buddha's teachings, attesting to its lasting influence. The Milind Panha has witnessed translations into multiple languages, broadening its accessibility across global readerships. Academic inquiry into this text spans historical, philosophical, and cultural dimensions, with scholars examining its implications for understanding ancient Indo-Greek relations, Buddhist doctrinal developments, and comparative philosophical studies. Beyond its historical context, the Milind Panha resonates with contemporary seekers exploring spiritual and philosophical questions. The exchanges between King Milinda and Nagasena transcend temporal bounds, inviting readers into a reflective space where perennial inquiries into existence, identity, and the human condition are pondered with profundity and nuance.

1. Controversy over the Birth Place of Nagasena

The birthplace of Nagasena, the revered Buddhist monk and scholar, has been a topic of debate among scholars and historians. While some accounts suggest that Nagasena was born in the Kunja village Galigad of Kishtwar, others propose different locations. This controversy highlights the complexities of historical record-keeping and the challenges of verifying information about ancient figures. However, not all scholars agree on Kunja village Galigad of Kishtwar as Nagasena's birthplace. Some researchers suggest that Nagasena might have been born in other regions, such as Kashmir or even further north in the ancient region of Gandhara. These claims are based on interpretations of ancient texts and archaeological findings. There are many challenges in Verifying Nagasena's Birthplace due to several factors like limited historical records, ancient records of Nagasena's life are scarce, and many texts have been lost or destroyed over time. Different interpretations of ancient texts can lead to conflicting claims about Nagasena's birthplace and there is limited archaeological evidence to support specific claims about Nagasena's birthplace. The controversy surrounding Nagasena's birthplace highlights the complexities of historical inquiry and the challenges of reconstructing

the past. While the exact birth place of Nagasena may remain uncertain, the debate itself underscores the significance of Nagasena's teachings and legacy in Buddhist tradition. The debate over Nagasena's birthplace serves as a reminder of the complexities and nuances of historical research. Despite the uncertainty surrounding his birthplace, Nagasena's teachings and legacy continue to inspire and guide Buddhist practitioners and scholars alike. Further research and inquiry may shed more light on this topic, but the significance of Nagasena's contributions to Buddhist thought and culture remains undeniable. This discussion on the controversy surrounding Nagasena's birthplace highlights the ongoing efforts to understand and interpret historical information. The debate itself is a testament to the enduring impact of Nagasena's teachings and the importance of continued scholarly inquiry.

Kishtwar history books written by various authors, the Nagasena was born in a Brahmin family in village Kunja near Galigad. His father Sonuttara Brahmin was a King of the middle Himalayan belt. Following his early education at home, Nagasena continued his studies at Nagseni Pargana and subsequently travelled Patliputra Patna, Bihar to pursue higher education, further broadening his knowledge and spiritual pursuits. Upon completing his advance studies in Patliputra Patna, Nagasena returned to Nagseni and subsequently journeyed to Sagala, (now Sialkot in Pakistan) to engage in a profound philosophical discussion with Greek King Milinda (King Menander). The King Menander (Milinda) is one of Alexander's Indo-Greek successors who ruled the Bactrian kingdom in Northwestern India around 150 B.C. King Milinda was harassing the Buddhist order by skillfully disputing points of doctrine the defeating Buddhists representatives in debate. Emerging triumphant in the debate, Nagasena convincingly converted King Milinda to the Buddhist faith, leaving an enduring legacy.

1.1. D.C. Sharma, in his History and Culture of Kishtwar, on page No. 30-33, writes that Nagasena was born in a Brahmin family of Kajangal village which has been identified as the present Kunja village of Galigad in Trigam pargana. He designates his father Sonuttara Brahman as the king of the middle Himalayan belt. D.C. Sharma again in his book 'Glimpses of Kishtwar History', on page no. 40, writes that Nagseni was also a small principality ruled by Sonuttara Brahman with Kajangal as its capital. In one book he writes that Sonuttara brahmin was a king of middle Himalayan belt, then in second book he writes that a small principality ruled by Sonuttara brahman with Kajangal as its capital? Ashish Chouhan in an article titled as 'Of Monk Nagsen and Nagseni' published in News paper Daily Excelsior, January 29, 2023, writes that Nagsen born in a brahmin family in the then Kajangal village of modern Galigad area of Kishtwar district.

1.2. Janki Nath Ganhar writes, "What a striking resemblance that a name bear to Nagseni area of Paddar (Kishtwar) which still has some Buddhists living in it. One is tempted to think that Nagseni is derived from his name (Nagasena)." But, if we observe, that the Nagseni area is much closer to Kishtwar in distance, religion, culture, tradition and in language than the Paddar. In district Kishtwar, Buddhists community can be found in far flung areas of Paddar mainly on the top of the barren mountains.

1.3. Jyoteshwar Pathik says, 'Raja Nagasena of Kishtwar, Raja Nagpal of Bhaderwah and many other rulers have in recent seem to come in the analogy'. According to the book "History of the Punjab Hill States" written by J. Hutchison and Vogel, Raja Nagpal ruled Bhaderwah during the period of Akbar and died in 1620 A.D. Nagasena was born in 150 B.C. Jyoteshwar Pathik might only tried to cross match their names not time period. He also eclipses famous identity of being a Buddhist monk, scholar, and preacher by designating Nagasena as king of the Kishtwar.

2. Documents the Supports the Name of Kajangala: The Original Birth Place of Nagasena

Historians and writers write that the name of Nagseni is after the name of the Great Monk and Buddhists preacher Nagasena. But there is a doubt about the name Nagseni. In Rajtarangani, Kalhana doesn't took any pain even to write a single sentence about the Nagasena, Demzi – Bhattan, Sagala (Sialkot), debate between

Nagsena and King Milinda etc. Nor the village Kunja is Kajangal and neither the Sonuttara Brahman was a king. There are many written evidences supporting the name Kajangal and its actual geographical location, which is in Rajmahal, Jharkhand.

2.1. In Milindapanha and Nagasenabhikshusutra, by Bhikku Thich Minh Chau of Vietnam, on page no. 29 writes that moreover P (Milindapanha) mentions many names of places which were located in the East such as Kajangala where Nagasena was supposed to be born, Pataliputta and Ashokarama where Nagasena went to study the Suttanta under Ven. Dhammarakkhita.

2.2. In Early Monastic Buddhism, Volume-I, by Nalinaksha Dutt, Calcutta-1941 AD, writes that Kajangala, the easternmost limit of the Buddhist Majjhima, was visited by Buddha on one or two occasions. The conversions of Uttara manava described above took place here. In Indriyabhavana Sutta, reads that, thus have I heard, on one occasion the Blessed One was living at Kajangal in a grove of mukhelu trees. Then the Brahmin student Uttara, a pupil of the Brahmin Parasariya, went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. In Sumangala Vilasani Budhaghosa commentary on the Digha Nikaya clearly mentions that Kajangala is in the east side, beyond that is Mahasala and then other Janapadas.

2.3. A book 'Systems of Rural Settlements in Developing countries' written by R.B. Mandal reads that, 'its mention is in ancient literature occurs in the Puranas which speak of the Manu's family. It consisted of eight small republics namely Bharg, Anga, Angutarai, Kajangal, south-west of Suhya, western part of Pundra, Alkap, and Pipli Kanan, in north and south Bihar plains.

2.4. "The Scared Books of The East" translation of Milind Panha translated by various oriental scholars reads that 'There is a Brahman village, venerable Rohana, called Kajangal, at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains, and there dwells a Brahman called Sonuttara. He will have a son called Nagsena. Further it reads that Kajangal is a famous place in Buddhist story. It is at the extreme limit, to the East, of the Buddhist Holy Land, the 'Middle Country'.

2.5. A book Bangalir Itihas Adi Prabha by Nihar Ranjan Ray in page No. 100 writes that "I have tried to show elsewhere that in Bhavishya Purana and Bhavadevabhata, a part of this country is called Kajangal as mentioned in the Ghuwan Choang -Ramacharita-Buddhist scriptures etc. Yuan-Chuang went to Kajangal from Champa. He has some statements about the geography and climate of this country. He says (seventh century), that the northern boundary of this place is not very far from the Ganges, wild elephants are abundant in the forest region of the south of it.

2.6. In Census 1961 West Bengal, District Census Handbook, Murshidabad, by B. Ray, of the west Bengal Civil Services, Deputy Superintendent of Census Operations, West Bengal, reads on page number 148, that in the vicinity of kagram a number of terracotta works, potteries and inscriptions were found. It was a capital of Kajangal or Kankagram Bhukti. Huen Tsang witnessed here a number of buildings, Mandirs and Viharas.

2.7. Col. Ved Prakash in his Encyclopedia of North – East India (volume – I), writes that Harsha returned to Kajangala from his Orissa campaigns and invited Bhaskara and Hiuen Tsang who was in Kamarupa to a Great Religious Assembly at Kanauj. They reached Kajangala with an army of 20,000 elephants and 30,000 ships, down the Brahmaputra and up to Ganges. This view find some support in a statement of Hiuen Tsang referring to Kajangala near Rajmahal he says that it is ceased to be an independent state centuries ago and its capital was deserted.

2.8. In the 'The Indian Review' volume 39, written by G.A. Natesan has written that, 'In Kanjangan (modern Rajmahal) there were six or seven monasteries and above three hundred Brethren'. Further in the same paragraph it is written that 'In the Raktavati University of Karnasuvarna congregated the most distinguished, learned and celebrated men of Kingdom'. From the statements provided shows that the Kajangan (present day Rajmahal) was in the Bihar and now in Jharkhand.

2.9. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, former Vice President of India, in his book 'The Cultural Heritage of India', on page no. 46 writes that according to the Buddhist Vinaya (third century B.C.) Madhyadesa extended from Kurushetra in the west to the town of Kajangan (Kankjol in Santhal Pargana) and the river Salilavati (the Salai of Chota Nagpur) in the east, and from the Himalayas to the river Narmada.

2.10. There are many books/articles that mention the name of Kajangan and provide the detailed information about the Kajangan, its history, geography and political conditions. An article of Yogendra P. Roy (Jharkhand), in his article Kajangala: A Capital town in Seventh century Jharkhand gave a detail account of the Kajangan and provides its evidences gleaned from the archaeological sources, Buddhist and Sanskrit texts; some of them unpublished that shed light on the history of Kajangala.

Kajangala is identified as one of the five kingdoms of Bengal and an ancient capital town in eastern India. Cunningham associates it with an old name of Rajmahal. According to Hiuen Tsang, Kajangala spans approximately 2000 li, or 333 miles, in circuit. Megasthenes notes its extensive population. Ptolemy indicates it did not encompass western Bengal but reached up to the Padam River. The Ramacaritam of Sandhyakaranandin confirms Kajangala was a Mandal near Rajmahal, governed by Arjuna Narasingharjuna, a vassal of Ramapala of the Pala dynasty. During lakshmana Sena's rule, it was part of northern Radha. In Ain-i- Akbari by Abul Fazal, Kajangala is listed as a pargana, yielding, 1,589,332 dams during Akbar's era. John Beames notes that in Jaffar Khan's settlement (1727), Kajangala was one of Bengal's largest estates. In Francis Buchanan's survey of Bhagalpur (1810-1811), Kajangala was a Tappa. Captain Sherwill's survey (1850) refers to it as a pargana (Kunjeeala) in Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Presently, the site of Kajangala's capital is on a protruding point of the old high bank of the Ganga River, along a historic high road connecting Jharkhand to Bengal. It lies on the northeast banks of the Gumani River. The area is bounded by Farakka and Malda West Bengal to the east Rajmahal hills to the south, the Ganga River and Rajmahal town to the north, and Sahibganj city to the west. Due to diverse races, Kajangala is now a polyglot region inhabited by Hindus, tribals, and Muslims primarily engaged in agriculture and arts. Despite changes the old name Kajangala persists as Kankjol/Kakjol, a large village on the northeast bank of the Gumani River.

2.11. In the book 'The Questions of King Milinda' by T.W. Rhys Davids, translated from Pali, in page no. 14-15 writes that, now the Mahasena the God passed away from the world of Gods, and was reborn in the womb of the wife of brahman Sonuttara. And at the moment of his conception three strange, wonderful things took place: arms and weapons became all ablaze, the tender grain became ripe in a moment, and there was a great rain (in the time of draught). The village Kunja near Galigad, Kishtwar is situated on the rocky place, it is not possible to grow grains here.

2.12. Professor P.K. Koul in his Raja Minanader ke Preshan (Questions of King Minander), by giving the examples of the Chinese translated book of Milind Panho and paradigm of the book Milind Preshan (Questions of Milind) by Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, writes that when Nagsena was born, his skin color was totally white and an elephant procreate a baby elephant at the same time or day. He also writes that the name of elephant is Nag, so with this coincidence the child was named after the name of elephant Nagsen. Further he writes that it all happens in the area near Kandani, Kajangan and Ajal. He combines all these names and creates a name 'Kajangan'. But Professor P.K. Koul forgot that being a hilly region, the possibility of elephants surviving here is zero percent. He further writes that there is a place between Kandani and Kishtwar called Hasti and the Sanskrit name of elephant is Hasti. He correlates all these

possibilities and tried to prove that Nagsena was born in Kajangal (Kandani, Kajangal and Ajal), in Kishtwar.

3. Other Events in Milind Panha

Another event from the book Milind Panho is that, at the behest of his teacher, Assugutta, Nagsena set out for Patliputra to pursue his further Buddhist studies, he met a merchant who was returning to Patliputra with a caravan of five hundred wagons. It is not possible for any roadster or cabby to drive a wagon in hilly area. Wagons needs plane areas to move, so, five hundred wagons moving in this mountainous area is not believable. Further it reads that “and on that day the Brahman (Sonuttara), on his way back from his work in the fields saw the Elder (Rohana). This proves that Sonuttara Brahman was an ordinary farmer and not a King. Then Sonuttara Brahman gave to a Brahman teacher a thousand pieces as his teaching fee, and had a divan spread for him aside in an inner chamber, and said to him: ‘Do thou, Brahman, teach this boy the scared hymns by heart’. Further it reads that Arhat Rohana used to visit the house of Sonuttara Brahmin for seven years for alms but returned empty handed. It’s astonishing to note that if Brahmin Sonuttara was a king, how could he let Rohana leave empty handed from his doorstep every day for seven long years? Reason is that the Sonuttara Brahman was an ordinary Brahman and after great hardships he earns bread for his family because Kajangala is in Bihar and from ancient times it frequently observes draughts and floods. One point, which is very important to bring in lime light, is that why writers of Kishtwar history had ignored Nagsena’s father Sonuttara Brahman whom they have declared as a King of Kishtwar in 2nd B.C. to 1st B.C. Nothing had been written by any historian or writer about King Sonuttara Brahmin except declaring him as king of middle Himalayas. The event of elephant birth which is related to the birth of Nagsena written in the book of Chinese translation of Milind Panho and book written by P.K. Koul and by Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap is also possible in Bihar. The event of the merchant that met with Nagsena who was on his way to Patliputra with his five hundred wagons is also possible in Bihar. Bihar is a plane area and is ideal for the moving the bullock carts and wagons.

4. Original Yugandhara Mountain

4.1. An event is in the Milindapanha that the Venerable Assagutta, by means of his divine power of hearing, heard the grumbling words of King Milinda. He therefore convened a meeting of bhikkhu on the summit of Yugandhara and enquired of the bhikkhu. Some historians claim that the Yugandhara is the mountain Jogindhar near Nagseni. But in Buddhists cosmology, the seven golden mountain ranges surround the central Mount Meru, forming the concentric circles. These mountain rings are interspersed with seas and exhibit a gradual decrease in height as the distance from the central mountain increases. Listed from innermost to outermost these ranges are: (1) Yugandhara: Bearing the name “Yoke”, (2) Isadhara: known as “Plough”, (3) Khadiraka: translating to “Acacia Forest”, (4) Sudarsana: Meaning “Beautiful to behold”, (5) Asvakarna: Referred to as “Horse’s ear”, (6) Vinataka: described as “Bowed or Bent”, and (7) Nimindhara: Interpreted as “Holding the Rim”. Yugandhara is a mountain among the seven mythological golden mountains in Buddhism where Assagutta convened a meeting of bhikkhus not the Jogindhar of Nagseni.

4.2. According to the Theravada tradition the Buddha dwelt in the celestial domain of the thirty three divine beings to teach the doctrine of Abhidhamma to his mother for three months. This describes the Buddha’s majestic Journey to Tavatimsa. The Buddha traversed the enormous distance to Tavatimsa heaven in three grand strides, showcasing his extraordinary abilities. In the first stride he (Lord Buddha) steeped from the earth’s surface to the summit of Yugandhara, the initial mountain range encircling Mount Sineru (Mount Meru). In the second stride he propelled to the peak of Mount Sineru, a central cosmic mountain in Buddhist cosmology. In the third stride with his final step, he arrived in the Tavatimsa heaven, a celestial realm in Buddhist tradition.

5. Sculptured Stone: A Window To Past

There is a statue in Dimzi, Nagseni that has drawn the attention of historians and writers, with several historians and writers penning their thoughts and observations about it and shedding light on its significance and mystique. The visual evidence suggests that the image depicts a stone carving, likely a deity or figure that is part of a temple structure. The carving's style is reminiscent of ancient Indian temple art, which often features gods, goddesses, and mythological scenes. The carving appears to be weathered and damaged, indicating that it may be from a ruined or ancient temple. Kishtwar's stone carving tradition is extensive and dates back thousands of years, with these carvings playing a significant role in preserving cultural, historical, and religious narratives. The durability of stone has allowed these narratives to endure through time, acting as a tangible link to past civilizations. Sculptured stone represents a palpable connection to Kishtwar's rich history, narrating tales of beauty, hardship, and resilience that mirror the lives of people today. As one navigates through these ancient stones, a journey through time unfolds, revealing a profound link to a bygone era. These stones serve as a historical record, preserving the experiences, traditions, and realities of those who came before, offering a unique glimpse into the Kishtwar's cultural heritage. Stone wall carvings are crafted with intention, where every curve, symbol, and texture is born from a tradition that values art not only for its aesthetic appeal but also for its deeper meaning. Across cultures, stone carving has played a pivotal role in shaping the way people express faith, power, mythology, daily life, and nature. In historical architecture, carvings often served as visual narratives, especially in eras where written language was not widespread. Whether it's the life stories of deities etched in temple walls or the emblems of royalty carved into palace corridors, these artworks have helped communities pass down traditions through generations. Today, many architects and homeowners still opt for stone carving for wall installations as a way to anchor their spaces in something lasting, grounded, and meaningful. Cultural identity is often expressed through symbols, and stone has been a medium through which these symbols are preserved for centuries. In different parts of the world, you'll find unique themes and motifs, depending on the local culture, region, and history. These patterns are often carved into temple walls, courtyards, and entrances, serving as a testament to the Kishtwar's rich cultural heritage. Stone wall carvings often feature captivating narratives of local legends, cultural icons, and symbolic scenes that resonate with the space's purpose. Imagine a serene mural of a deity showering blessings at the entrance of a home, or a dynamic scene of warriors in a commercial lobby, evoking strength, courage, and pride. These carvings not only add aesthetic value but also infuse the space with meaning, creating a lasting impression on all who enter. By incorporating these stories, stone carvings become an integral part of the space, reflecting the values, traditions, and aspirations of the community.

6. Speculations About The Statue Of Dimzi, Nagseni

Some historians and writers believed that there is a statue in Dimzi-Bhattan village of Nagseni that belongs to Lord Buddha and they associate it with Nagsena. However, after a thorough examination of the statue, it is revealed that it is not a statue of Lord Buddha, but rather a statue of Lord Vishnu, (Fig. 1.1.) and (Fig. 1.2.) as it is identical to the statue of Bimal Nag Mandir, Pular Mandir and can be found in many other Mandirs and Baolies. This idol is not exceptionally good in terms of craftsmanship however, we can see similar statue in Mandir of Bimal Nag Saroor, Mandir of village Polar of Nagseni, carved on the walls of Baolies of villages Pandail and Leondi of Paddar and other parts of Jammu and Kashmir and Bharatvarsha. The length of the Statue is two feet four and half inches, breadth is one foot and three inches and the thickness is of four inches. With this statue there is also a small statue behind this statue and the length of that statue is eleven inches, width is ten inches and thickness is of three inches.

A thorough examination of this statue can reveal a wealth of new information. This statue is chaturbuj (meaning it has four arms), a distinctive feature of Lord Vishnu. The presence of Naga on the either side of the statue's head, one on the right and one on the left, symbolizes Lord Vishnu's association with Sheshnaga, the serpent on which he reclines. In Shaktism, Nagas are often linked with Lord Vishnu, representing his power and protection. The statue's two hands are placed on the heads of two Ganas or

Devi's. At the base of this statue, Lord Vishnu's vehicle, Garuda, is depicted. Garuda's facial features are intricately carved, with a beak like nose and a distinctive mouth. His wings are elegantly rendered, showcasing exceptional craftsmanship. The statue also highlights Garuda's talons, which is meticulously detailed. These elements collectively confirm that this is indeed a statue of Lord Vishnu, as Garuda is an iconic symbol associated with him. The depiction of Garuda reinforces Lord Vishnu's divine status and underscores the significance of this statue in Hindu iconography. Adjacent to the Lord Vishnu statue, another stone statue is present, depicting a figure with hands clasped together in a prayer like pose and eyes closed. The statue wears a small headgear on its head, earrings in its ears, and a veil on its head. Based on these attributes, it is plausible that this statue represents a female deity. The dimension of this statue is: length is of eleven inches, width is ten inches and the thickness is of three inches. Beneath the Lord Vishnu statue lies a stone disc, of two feet and eight inches in diameter. The stone disc has nineteen spokes and on the rear side of the stone disc is broken. At first glance, it appears that they have been intentionally broken or damaged. Although a closer examination suggests it may have had around twenty six to twenty seven spokes. Historian identified this stone disc as Ashoka's Dharm Chakra. However a more thorough assessment indicates that it is either a stone from a Baolie roof or less likely a stone from a water flour mill. Around this statue, several large stones are placed, which appear to be remnants of a Mandir or broken fragments of a Baolie. These stones seem to be narrating an old tale, but alas, there seems to be no one around to listen to their story, leaving their history and significance unheard and lost in time. The idols installed in the Mandirs of Bimal Nag Saroor and in Mandir Polar village are carved in black stone and are fine pieces of art. The idols installed in Mandirs of Bimal Nag and in Mandir of village Polar are carved in black stone and are fine pieces of art. They are so captivating that they mesmerize anyone who sees them. Perhaps, similar attempts were made to create such idols at many places, but they couldn't replicate them exactly.

7. The Name Nagseni

In Sanatan (Hindu) tradition, the Nagas embody a dual nature both fearsome and wise, symbolizing the one who shares knowledge. It makes the ultimate sacrifice, allowing the hero claim life giving water, strength enhancing water, healing herbs, or hidden treasures. The Nagas don't just spare the destined hero but actually aids them. While it may bring harm to individuals, it ensures the survival of species. Though it can poison plants and induce deep slumber in humans, in its mystical realm, it channels new vitality to the sun, breathing life into the world with each dawn and every spring. This duality explains why Nagas are revered as symbols of learning across various disciplines.

Kishtwar, where a profound tradition has been woven into the fabric of local culture for centuries, the reverence for the Nagas. These serpent deities, believed to embody divine powers, have been worshipped and venerated in the villages of Kishtwar with deep-rooted devotion. The Nagas, symbolic of fertility, protection, and renewal, hold a special place in the hearts of the people, reflecting a spiritual connection that transcends generations. Naga worship in Kishtwar is not merely a religious practice but a way of life. The Nagas are considered guardians of nature, water sources, and the agricultural fields that sustain the local communities. Villagers believe that the Nagas have the power to bestow fertility on the land, ensure adequate rainfall, and protect crops from harm. This reverence for nature and its elements underscores the deep ecological consciousness embedded in the cultural practices of the region. The Nagas are often depicted as powerful serpents or anthropomorphic figures with serpent-like attributes, symbolizing their dual nature as both benevolent protectors and fearsome guardians. The tradition of Naga worship in Kishtwar dates back to ancient times, with its origins intertwined with Hinduism and local animistic beliefs. Temples and shrines dedicated to Naga deities can be found throughout the region, serving as focal points for communal worship and rituals. These sacred sites are often located in natural settings, such as near springs, forests, or mountain peaks, further emphasizing the connection between the Nagas and the natural world. The architecture of these temples and shrines reflects a blend of local craftsmanship and religious symbolism, attracting devotees and tourists alike.

7.1. Kishtwar is home to numerous Naga shrines and temples, each with its unique history and significance. These sacred sites are not only places of worship but also serve as community centers where people gather to celebrate festivals and participate in cultural events. The shrines are often adorned with intricate carvings and sculptures depicting the Nagas and other mythological figures, reflecting the rich artistic heritage of the region. Nagas feature prominently in the local legends and mythology of Kishtwar. Stories of their benevolence, power, and wisdom are passed down through generations, reinforcing their revered status. These tales often highlight the Nagas' role as protectors of the land and its people, as well as their association with water and fertility. The mythology surrounding the Nagas is rich and diverse, encompassing a wide range of stories and interpretations. The worship of Nagas in Kishtwar has significant cultural and environmental implications. It reflects a deep respect for nature and recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings. This tradition encourages sustainable practices and the preservation of natural habitats, promoting a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. The reverence for Nagas also underscores the importance of conservation and the need to protect the natural world for future generations. Moreover, the Naga tradition serves as a unifying force in the community, fostering social cohesion and cultural continuity. It is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Kishtwar and its ability to preserve ancient traditions in the face of modernization. The tradition has also inspired various forms of art and literature, contributing to the cultural richness of the region. The reverence for Nagas in the villages of Kishtwar is a vibrant and enduring tradition that encapsulates the spiritual and cultural essence of the region. As guardians of nature and symbols of fertility and protection, the Nagas continue to play a vital role in the lives of the people. This ancient practice not only enriches the cultural landscape of Kishtwar but also offers valuable insights into the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. As we move forward, it is essential to preserve and honor these traditions, recognizing their significance in promoting ecological consciousness and cultural diversity. The legacy of Naga worship in Kishtwar is a reminder of the region's rich cultural heritage and its ability to adapt and evolve while preserving its unique traditions. As the world continues to change, the tradition of Naga worship remains a testament to the enduring power of faith and the importance of preserving our cultural and natural heritage. By embracing and celebrating our traditions, we can ensure their continued relevance and significance in the modern world.

7.2. From ancient times, inhabitants of Nagseni area worship Nagas as their Kuldevta, Gramdevta and even Demigod which is still in practice. On every occasion, firstly they used to worship Nags and then gear up their work. From birth to death, people have some associations with these Nagas, even after the death relatives of the deceased perform the last rituals around these Nags (Bavalis). From ancient times people living there worship the serpents (Nags) along with the Vedic Gods and Goddesses. Ghumai Nag Devta, Rattan Nag Devta, Densher Nag Devta, Mehar Nag Devta, Sheshnag Devta (Tatapani Paddar), Damer Nag Devta, Mool Nag, Kanser Nag Devta, Chano Nag Devta, Devta, Kaninag Devta, Mayo Nag Devta, Bhairav Nag Devta, Bimal Nag Devta, Asar Nag Devta, Aapat Nag Devta etc. There are many places that have Nag as prefix or suffix in their names, like Naginsheru, Nagal, Nagin, Pootnagin, Godrashnag, Bimar Nag, Nagini (Keshwan) Nagbhatana (Kuntwara) etc.

7.3. Ghumai Nag in Bhattan village (Fig. 3.1.) of Nagseni is one of the most sacred Nag Devta and is worshiped by the Sanatan community with great reverence. The Ghumai Nag devta has had a profound influence on the Sanatani people residing not only in Nagseni but in Kishtwar, Paddar, Sarthal and other areas since ancient times. To fulfill their desires, people used to sacrifice sheep and goats at this place, a practice that continues to some extent even today, reflecting the enduring reverence for the Ghumai Nag devta and showcasing the lasting cultural and religious importance of the Ghumai Nag devta. According to the Pandit Shivji Dhar, who authored the first history of Kishtwar in Persian, there exists a stone featuring a hole on one of its side. Every Hindu family in the region would make an annual offering of a goat in sacrifice at this stone's altar. Despite the blood of approximately a hundred animals flowing into the hole, it

never became filed. In the past, local people would bring their women to bathe in the stone's waters during child birth, a practice believed to grant the mother and child protection against diseases and malevolent spirits.

7.4. The real name of Bhattan was Pattane means Pandit's. This would be the old abode of Brahmans and in Kishtwari language Brahmans were called as 'Patta'. In course of time, it gradually changed from pattane to Bhattane to Bhattan. Some historians correlate the name Vagamgad with the name Vagamvatthu, a place mentioned in Milind Panha. In Kishtwari language the word Vagam means the ingle of the household hearth and gad means a stream. It is a vertical stream and we can easily understand the meaning of the Vagamgad by understanding the meaning of the word. Vagamgad is a stream in Nagseni Pargana and Vagamvatthu is the name of a place in Milind Panha.

7.5. The word Nagseni is a polluted form of the word Nagsene. Nagsene in Kishtwari language is composed of two words, Nag and Sene. Nag means Snake and Sene means their home. Collectively means, "The adobe of Nags". There are many places in Kishtwar which have suffix as 'ne' in their name like Nagsene. Suffix 'NE' is used in Kishtwari language for 'THEIR'. In Kishtwar, villages like Begnene (Begana), Trekasene (Trekesena), Zelene (Zellena), Semnene (Semina), Badarane (Bandarana), and Nimberne (original name Memberne, means the home or house of member) etc. used suffix as 'NE'. Actually, if we keenly examine the name of these villages and places we find that Begana (Begnene) village might got its name after a man namely Bhag. Peoples used to say that we are going to Bhagne, which with the passage of time changes into Begnene and then Begana. Trekasene (Trekesena) was named after the man Tek chand, which is used as we are going to Teksene, which got polluted from Teksene to Trekasene and then Trekesena. Same story are with the names of the other places which are named after some peoples. There are many other examples of the names of places or villages which used suffix as 'NE' outside the Kishtwar town. Names like Shanene (Shanana, village of Thakarie), Kandane (Kandani), Rakane (Rakana), Suzene (Suzana), Odhene (Horana), Attene (Hatana), Razane (Razana), Nagpatane (Nagbhatana), Chagnane (Chingnana, the basic name of which was Chandane), Pydharane (Pydharana), Bhatane (which was originally named as Patane. And now it is known as Bhattan. Apart from this there are some other examples like Nayne (maternal home, Nani ke), Bujine (home of father's sister means Bua ke), Dazine (home of grandmother), Kudine (home of daughter), Mamne (home of mother's brother) etc. there are many other examples in this manner.

8. Architecture Of Ancient Mandirs

In Saidraman (Fig. 4.1) and in Cherji (Fig. 4.2), both villages of Nagseni, we found remnants of very ancient Mandirs. Both Mandirs have similar architecture and design, resembling the one found in Bimal Nag Saroor. Additionally, in Kashmir, there are some places like Pandrethan, Payer (Payech), where can still see the Mandirs similar in architecture to the Mandirs of Nagseni and Saroor. Furthermore, the language, food habits, culture, customs, rites and rituals, of the people residing in Nagseni area are more aligned with Santana Dharma (Hinduism) rather than the customs and traditions of Buddhism.

9. Conclusion

There is possibility that Mahatma Nagsen have visited Kishtwar, where Buddhism once flourished. Following his visit, Buddhism likely gained even more prominence and Nagsena may have established his monasteries and Ashrams somewhere in this region. However, due to lack of archaeological surveys and substantial written evidence apart from the book Milind Panho and the limited information provided by the modern historians, we lack concrete evidence to support this claim. Further research is essential to gain deeper understanding of our history. Presently, the Buddhist population in Kishtwar primarily resides in certain villages of the Paddar tehsil, located in the district's higher altitudes. These villages border Ladakh and tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh and include Hango, Haloti, Machail, Lusseni, and Dangail in the Machail Valley, as well as Kabban, Tun, and Charkhoni near Himachal Pradesh. These Buddhist villages

preserve distinct customs, traditions, and ways of life reflective of Tibetan Buddhist influence, which adds cultural value and potential for tourism in the region. Kishtwar's Buddhist population today is around 7,000, and the religious and cultural importance of Buddhism here was emphasized when the Dalai Lama inaugurated a Buddhist Center at Gulabgarh in 2010. This event attracted thousands of Buddhists from Kishtwar and neighboring regions like Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh who follow Tibetan Buddhism. The key historical sites of Buddhism in Kishtwar are mainly located in the Buddhist villages of the Paddar tehsil and surrounding areas, where Tibetan Buddhist culture has historically flourished and continues today. One of the most significant Buddhist sites is the collection of Gumpas, which are places of worship and residence for Buddhist monks known as Lamas. Prominent Gumpas in Kishtwar are found in Gulabgarh, Haloti, Kabban, and Tun villages. These Gumpas are typically built on hillocks or other prominent locations, visible from afar. Architecturally, they follow Ladakhi and Tibetan styles, and often appear like small fortresses. They feature intricate stonemasonry, wooden carvings, and brightly colored paintings of Lord Buddha, important Buddhist teachers, saints, and goddesses such as Tara and Saraswati. Inside, large copper idols and oil-colored wall paintings provide spiritual and artistic ambience. These Gumpas remain central to the religious and cultural life of the local Buddhist communities.

10. Figures related to the Paper.



Fig. 1.1. Statue of Lord Vishnu at Dimzi.



Fig. 1.2. Author with the Statue of Lord Vishnu at Dimzi



Fig. 2.1. Statue placed with the Statue of Lord Vishnu at Dimzi.



Fig. 3.1. Temple of Ghumai Nag Devta at Bhattan



Fig. 4.1. Author at the Ruins of the Temples at Sai Draman



Fig. 4.2. Ruins of the temples at Cherji

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