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BAMIYAN SPECIAL

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Lokesh Chandra

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WHEN THE NICHEs TREMBLED IN BAMIYAN

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THE CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN AND HUMAN SECURITY

Seminar Report

REMEMBERING THE BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

Seminar Report

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Editor : K. WARIKOO

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Editor's Page

Due to its geographical position straddling the trade routes between Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia and the Indian sub-continent, Afghanistan has throughout its history been a cultural, ethnic and linguistic crossroads. That not only the Afghan rulers but the Afghans themselves respected and protected their cultural heritage for the past 1500 years, speaks volumes about their love and pride of this composite cultural heritage. The destruction of 1800 years old Bamiyan Buddha statues and other historico-cultural relics by the Taliban in Afghanistan in February 2001 caused irreversible loss to the heritage of the Afghan people and also to world heritage. The Taliban went ahead with this sacrilege rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread condemnation, demonstrating the Taliban way of enforcing their extremism and also setting an agenda for extremist forces elsewhere. Even the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Nasr Farid Wasel failed to persuade the Taliban to halt the destruction

Bamiyan, situated about 250 kms. north-west of Kabul, is one of the most important historical sites in Afghanistan. Nestled between the mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush and Koh-i-baba, at an altitude of about 2,850 metres, the valley, with its lush green tableland, presents a quaint scenic contrast to the surrounding rugged scarps of mountains. The site offered an ideal camping place for the merchandise-laden caravans that travelled in ancient times along the 'Silk Route' that linked India with Central Asia and China. Later the valley developed into a major centre of Buddhism, with two gigantic statues and hundreds of shrines scooped out of rock, to which devotees flocked to meditate and worship.

Located at the entrance to a pass on the foot of the Hindu Kush linking Kabul with the Silk Route at Balkh, Bamiyan was the foremost symbol of the civilisational link between India and Afghanistan. Buddhism was introduced to the region first by Ashoka and subsequently by the Kushans. In the 3rd century, the city of Bamiyan became an administrative centre, a caravan stop and the location of a great monastery. It became famous when the Buddhist monks settled into the rock caves built into the great cliff to the north. Other nearby valleys,

like Kakrak (in the southeast) and Foladi (in the southwest) were also monastic centres. The world's largest Buddha statues, towering at the height of 175 feet and 120 feet, were carved out of the mountain cliffs perhaps during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The honey-comb of rock cut sanctuaries on the mountain cliffs and the colossal images of the Buddhas at Bamiyan were the glory of classical Afghanistan. They represented splendour, stability and prosperity of the region in harmony with neighbouring kingdoms. A Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hien who passed through Bamiyan in around 400 AD, spoke of over a thousand monks in attendance there, describing the assembly of monks held with great ceremony. Another Chinese traveller, Hsuan Tsang who visited Bamiyan in around 630 AD, found it a thriving Buddhist centre, with many hundreds of monks living in the caves dotted around the statues.

Before their destruction by the fanatic and obscurantist Taliban the two imposing Buddha colossi at Bamiyan withstood the vicissitudes of time and nature for more than a millennium and a half, as a testimony to the splendour of history and the devotion of pilgrims at their feet. In a land that was a veritable melting pot of various religions, and where the prevailing Buddhist art-forms were metamorphosed by influences as diverse as Achaemenian, Indian and Hellenistic, the tallest standing Buddha statues of the world endured like the grand apotheosis of timeless composite art.

The Kushan Empire of the early Christian era saw the emergence of the Gandhara School whose stamp on the Bamiyan landscape was unmistakable. It was ideologically affiliated to the Sarvastivadins and the Mahasanghikas – sects which defied the Lord through images. The two images were regarded as supernatural, an effect reinforced by the depiction of the Sun-god, the Lord's heavenly prototype, prominently above the head of the Small Buddha on the ceiling of its vaulted niche. The statue of the Small Buddha was carved out of the rock on three sides in the manner of alto-relievo, the wavy folds on the garment reproduced in mud-plaster and painted in bronze. The heavy proportions of the body, the schematic drapery and the posture of standing with the right hand in *abhayamudra* (protection) recalled Gandhara style, while the Sun-god iconography revealed Hellenistic and Sassanian influence. The ceiling paintings and the architecture of the shrines were also phenomenally rich. The worshipping families with offerings flanking the Buddha images in the ceiling, some of them inspired by the cave paintings of the Bodhisattvas in Ajanta, followed the Gupta idiom. The Lord, depicted

against a circular blue background simulating the cosmos, and surrounded by eight smaller figures of Buddha, presented a marked resemblance to the early Vedic conception of eight Adityas forming the universe. Similarly, in the stucco decorations on the ceiling of some shrines, figures of beheaded Cyclops donning the typical workman's cap and Mithra with Phrygian headgear mingled with Buddha, blending the distant with the indigenous in a delightful display of assimilation. As for architecture, the circular shrines in outline imitated the Stupas of Western India, with niches in the wall for images, as shown on the outer face of the drum of the Stupa. Those squarish in plan were provided with squinches at the corners, a base on which to raise the dome. There were also octagonal shrines, especially those adjoining the Big Buddha shrine, on seven sides of which were niches to hold images, the eighth being used as entrance. The semi-circular ceiling of a shrine to the east of the Big Buddha shrine was covered with a network of polygonal and trapezoidal compartments with the Buddha and Mithra conveying the sense of resplendent bodies in a star-spangled sky.

The site seems to have fallen into desuetude from the 9th century onwards. Earthquake shocks in the highly seismic zone of Afghanistan took its toll on the statues, dislodging portions of the shrine walls. The cold and arid conditions of the rock conglomerate in which the shrines were carved caused extensive weathering. Snow deposits in the crevices in winter turned to ice and widened the cracks; subsequent melting and water run-off in summer made deep scars, each reinforcing the other. The paintings on the walls suffered considerably from both physical and chemical weathering, the pigments coming off at places. The faces of the images were mutilated. The ceilings and the walls were blackened with smoke and soot, caused by burning of firewood inside the shrine. No preservation work had been done at the Bamiyan monuments till a team of experts from the Archaeological Survey of India arrived in 1969 for a project that was to last for the next seven years. The remedial measures they adopted included, *inter alia*, a drainage system on the rock-roof of the niche to discharge snow-water, a buttress wall, trimmed and treated to match the profile of the rock surface, to reduce natural wear and tear, and the restoration of the stairs. As for the images, the emphasis was on preventing their further disintegration and not on reproducing the missing portions, although damaged legs were stabilized and broken edges filleted. The preservation of paintings necessitated elaborate physical and chemical cleaning, plastering and consolidation of the

surface. At the end of the long restoration operation, Bamiyan retrieved much of its former glory.

Bamiyan was not the only major centre of Buddhism in Afghanistan. In Hadda, visited by both Fa-hien and Hsuan-Tsang, archeologists unearthed the ruins of more than five hundred stupas and many examples of sculpture in the Gandhara style. Digs in the Kushan summer capital of Bagram, Ali Khanum, Tillya Tepe etc. unearthed a wealth of artefacts and objects, which was housed in the Kabul Museum, the principal treasure house of Afghanistan's history and culture. A massive Kushan city at Delbarjin, north of Balkh and a number of gold ornaments near Sheberghan, west of Balkh were also excavated.

Sculptures, artefacts and carvings of the Gandhara period had survived more than 1000 year Muslim rule in Afghanistan. The museums at Bamiyan, Kabul and Hadda near Jalalabad contained the largest collection of exquisite sculptures and carvings of the Gandhara school. Their systematic destruction started as the Taliban gained ascendancy in Afghanistan from 1996 onwards. The open air museum of Gandhara art forms at Hadda was destroyed by the Taliban gunfire. The Kabul Museum, has since been vandalised and destroyed, with its precious objects having been plundered and sold into markets in Pakistan. The rich testimony for the important role of Afghanistan whose unique cultural heritage was witness to the exceptional dialogue between civilisations, stands destroyed.

The Bamiyan demolition brought into focus the need for safeguarding world heritage and for promoting cultural pluralism, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to promote understanding and peaceful co-existence. The Bamiyan demolition which evoked universal condemnation, triggered general mobilisation for preserving, restoring and even recreating such cultural objects. It has highlighted the need to preserve and restore all kinds of traditional and popular knowledge, languages, oral traditions, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture and monuments. It also underscored the need to develop appropriate legal standards to deal with such cultural crimes and to evolve mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring safety of world heritage sites. That heritage is the essential source of identity of peoples, the foundation and lifeblood of their communities and a source of development, is universally recognised. Time has come for the international community to restore the historico-cultural heritage of Afghanistan, so that the Afghans get back the cultural basis of their

identity and self-understanding.

It is in this perspective that the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation had organised an International Seminar on the theme *Bamiyan: Challenge to World Heritage* at India International Centre, New Delhi on 17-18 September 2001, in which eminent art historians, academics, artists, area specialists from India, Canada, France, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, U.K. etc. and representatives of UNESCO, Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, Archeological Survey of India and other bodies engaged in the promotion and preservation of world heritage had participated. Later a book titled *Bamiyan: Challenge to World Heritage* was published by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation in the year 2002.

This issue of *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* is a follow-up to this endeavour, seeking to remember the Bamiyan Buddhas and present a local Afghan perspective/ reactions to their demolition by the Taliban in early 2001. It includes the proceedings of the seminar *Remembering the Bamiyan Buddhas* organised by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation in collaboration with India International Centre at New Delhi on 7 May 2012.

K. Warikoo

BAMIYAN: THE JEWEL OF AFGHANISTAN'S GLORY

LOKESH CHANDRA

Bamiyan has been the millenia of the illumined mind (*bhāma*) of Afghanistan, the gorgeous picturesqueness of her nature and the magnificent grandeur of her colossi. The colossi of Bamiyan have inhabited deeper zones of immense stretches of Asia, endowed as they were with divine power. They have been the integrity of East Asian polities, a chronology of a new integrative mindscape, and a deepening reality of the spiritual. As the golden expression of the Avatamsaka system, Bamiyan became the cornerstone of the thought of East Asia. It was the Net of Indra or *Indrajāla* each jewel of which reflects all other jewels, and the reflection of all the jewels of the mind encompassed the infinity of the infinites.

The word Bamiyan goes back to the Rigvedic *bhāma* which means 'brightness, splendour' of the mind. It occurs four times in the Rigveda 3.26.6, 5.2.10, 6.6.3, 10.3.4. It is the way to *Brahmaloka* in the *Chāndogya-upanisad* 4.15.4:¹ "He is also *bhāmanī* for he shines in all worlds. He who knows this shines in all worlds" (*bhāma* 'shine' + *nī* 'leads to'). The Brahman is shining (4.5.3), luminous (4.7.4). One who meditates on Brahman as Luminous wins luminous worlds. This world of visualisation can be seen in Yasna 57.31 of the Avesta: *bāmya* 'bright, sublime' from *bāma*.² The Buddhist text *Mahāvastu*,³ names Seven Historical Buddhas: Vipasyin, Visvabh, Krakucchanda, *Bhāma*-Kanakamuni, Kāsyapa and Sākyamuni the historic Buddha. *Bhāma*-Kanakamuni means Kanakamuni of Bamiyan. There are several variants of this name, as both its elements were not understood. The Asokan form is *Konākamana*,⁴ and it may be the Tocharian word *kom-ñkāt* 'Sun-God'. As a predecessor in the transmission lineage (*guru-paramparā*) of Lord

Buddha, he leads us to the fact that the traditions of Bamiyan lay at the very roots of Buddhism.

The word has lived on in Balkh which was known as *Balkh-i-bāmi* 'Resplendent Balkh' or the Bactra of brilliant visualisations. Pahlavi *bām* 'brilliance, glory, splendour', *bāmik* 'brilliant, glorious', New Persian *bāmi*. *Bāmikān* was the older Middle Iranian form of the name: *bāmik* and the toponymic suffix *-an*. The modern name is with the glide *y*: Bami-y-an. The Chinese transcriptions⁵ indicate the name Bamiyan (without the glide *i*).

Fan-yen ()

Fan-yang in the Annals of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-556) in the 5th century AD

Wang (i.e. *Bang*)-*yen* ()

Hsüan-tsang who was in Bamiyan in 632, presents an entirely different transcription:

Fan-yen-na () It is a transliteration of a folk etymology that is reminiscent of the *Chāndogya-upanisad*: *Fan* is the Chinese for Brahma, *yen-na* is *yāna*, and the whole compound is Brahma-yāna, i.e., the place of meditation in the Brahmayāna system. Brahmayāna occurs in the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* along with Devayāna. Hsüan-tsang added *na* to emphasise that the final component is *yāna*, as well as he transliterated the first component clearly as Brahma in contradistinction to the earlier Chinese transcriptions. Thomas Watters¹ remarks that the King of Bamiyan "was probably regarded by Yuan-chuang as a descendant of the Sākya exile from Kapilavastu who went to Bamiyan and became its king". The ruling dynasty of Bamiyan was Buddhist till 724 AD. It was converted to Islam at the time of the Abbasids. The new capital of Baghdad was completed by 766 AD. The King of Bamiyan was appointed governor of Yaman in 844 AD. Bamiyan was destroyed by the Saffarid Yakub and portable images were carried to Baghdad in 871 AD.

The colossi continued to be worshipped and decorated. Hsüan-tsang saw them glittering with gold and other precious ornaments. Iranians looked at them with wonderment till the 11th century. The 10th century poet Ibn an Nadīm writes:

yekī khāna dīd az khoshī chōn bahār

(He saw a temple so fine that it was like the spring)

In the early 11th century AD, Lāme'i Gorganī sings of the evocative power of the adorned Buddhas, dazzling in their pure beauty. These details of ornamentation are confirmed by fresco paintings of East Iranian Buddhist

lands: dark blue veil over the red drapery of the robe, the circular golden earring with pearl pendants, the crowned heads, and the silken robes. The panegyric of Gorganī runs:

The rose-bushes are like the adorned Buddhas of the vihāra
With blue upper breasts and red veils
A hundred golden earrings in the ears of each one
Having scattered gems over these earrings:
Buddhas wrapped in silks and robes they are
All these sweet basils and fruit-bearing trees.
Having laid their crowns on their heads and taken their cups
And filled their arms with agates and emeralds.

The Telephone Directory of Delhi has 47 *Bamis* or families whose forefathers migrated from Bami-yan to India a thousand years ago.

The Muslim author of the Persian dictionary *Farhang-e Rashidi* written in India as late as the 17th century speaks of *Kheng But* 'Moon-white Buddha' as "one of the wonders of our time". In the 11th century, Sam'ani from Merv (now in southern Turkmenistan) noted that there is nothing like the *Surkh But* 'Red Buddha' and *Kheng But* 'Moon-white Buddha' anywhere in the world. They are the two colossi of Bamiyan.

On 1 March 2001 the Taliban blasted their patrimony that had been their glory across the whole of Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Today, the grandeur of Bamiyan lingers in memory, the desolation of their icons is still alive in unforgettable astonishment, as the profound moments of reverence are lost in the corridors of time. The solemnity of sagely silence haunts their *sūyatā* (*mauna*, 'silence' in Sanskrit from *muni* 'sage').

Bamiyan, Tokharians and colossi. Hsüan-tsang writes about Bamiyan: "their written language, their popular institutions, and their currency were like those of Tokhara, and they resembled the people of that country in appearance" (Watters 1904: 1.115). As late as the 12th century Bamiyan was the capital of Tukharistan (EIs. 1.1010). The Tokharians were spread over a vast area though the word Tukharistan connotes primarily the region along the southern banks of the middle and upper Oxus river. Hsüan-tsang mentions lands of Tukhara in both the desert area of Khotan and on the Oxus. Tokharian is an Italo-Celtic language found in documents from Central Asia. A Tokharian mummy from Loulan has been dated to 2000 BC. The Tokharians played a major role in the translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese, for instance, Kumārajīva created a new style of Chinese Buddhist diction.

His Chinese translations are superb for their Chinese literary style. A 3rd century mural depicting two episodes from the *Visvantara-jātaka* from Miran has a Kharosthi inscription that it is the work of *Tita* (Lat. Titus). Miran was under the rule of Tokharians who were ethnically of European stock, had connections with Greco-Roman lands of Asia Minor. Classical designs in Shrine M.V at Miran show winged angels, large open eyes, and classical designs like those on the painted panels of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

The Tocharian language and people were connected with western perceptions. Their images of royal power were inspired by the Classical models of Hellenism. Cults were part of the web of politics. The imperial image as a colossus was the personification of power, which kept the ruler ever present in the eyes of his people, in an integration of charisma and religious reverence. Classical Greek influences, gave rise to the concept and representation of Buddha as Cosmocrator, the Rocana of the Avatamsaka sutras. Monumental Apollo of Delos in the seventh century BC and frequent references to *kolossoi* by Herodotus in the fifth century BC, and other statues made colossus a living tradition. The most famous colossus was the bronze statue of the Sun-God Helios, 105 feet high, made from melted down weapons of a defeated enemy. It stood astride the entrance to the harbour of Rhodes. It was broken up by the Arabs during the raid of Rhodes in 653 AD, and the broken up metal totalled 900 camel loads. The Greater Colossus of Bamiyan surpassed them all by being thirty times life-size (5.83X30 = 175 feet).

The concept of colossus gave rise to the *Avatamsaka sūtra Gandavyūha*. The word *Avatamsaka* is from the root *tams* with the prefix *ava-* and the agentive suffix *ka*: *ava-tams-a-ka*. The root *tams* means 'to decorate' in Dhātupāṭha 17.31, in its ātmanepada form *avatamsate* 'to decorate one's self,' causative *avatamsayati* 'to decorate'. The words Bami-y-an and Balkh-i-bāmī 'resplendent Balkh' derive from Avesta *vīspū.bāma* (*visva-bhāma*) 'all-illuminated', Pahlavi *bāmūk*, Sanskrit *bhāma* 'light'. According to Geldner, Avesta *bāmya* means 'sublime'.

The *Avatamsaka sutras* represent *ojas* or *augustus* 'divine favour', awe-inspiring majesty of the dharmadhātu, impressive magnificence, imposing sublimity, stately solemnity, and awesome grandeur. The word *avatamsaka* signifies immense, gigantic, stupendous dimensions of conception, visualisation, as well as form. Both august vision and grandeur of size are inherent in its externalisation in form. The climax of the *Avatamsaka sutras* is the Gandavyūha 'The Excellent Array' or 'the

Outstanding Cosmos'. *Ganda* at the beginning of a compound means 'best, excellent' and *vyūha* ends titles like Sukhāvati-vyūha, Aksobhya-vyūha. Vyūha signifies 'cosmos' in the early sutras. The earliest Chinese translation of an *Avatamsaka* text is by Laugāksin in 167-185 AD. Its original Sanskrit text may be dated to the beginning of the Christian era. The evolution of the *Avatamsaka* should go back to the period of Vyūha texts from the first century BC to the first century AD.

The long list of future Tathāgatas in the Gandavyūha begins with Maitreya and ends with Rocana or Abhyucca-deva. Abhyucca-deva is the highest divine being. Abhi- is parallel to meta- in meta-physical. It denotes transcendence and colossal size. The distinct identity of Avatamsaka iconography is characterised by its Supreme Buddha Rocana as Abhyucca-deva or Colossus.

TWO FUTURE BUDDHAS

In the Gandavyūha, Maitreya and Rocana constitute the initial and final coordinates of the continuity of the future of Buddhist epiphanies. Māyā Mother of the historic Buddha Sākyamuni says that "Just as I was the mother of this Buddha in this world in all his manifestations of miracles of birth as an enlightening being, so was I the mother of the Buddhas Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kāsyapa; and so will I be the mother of all the Buddhas of this aeon.

"When the time comes for the enlightening being Maitreya,... I will be the mother of the enlightening being.

"And just as I will be the mother of Maitreya, so will I be the mother of all Buddhas in this eon in this universe, and in all universes of the ten directions, penetrating endless universes". In the Sanskrit text she says that she will be the mother of Maitreya and names over two hundred of the other Thousand Buddhas culminating in Abhyucca-deva who in another passage is named Rocana.

THE SMALLER EASTERN COLOSSUS: MAITREYA

This colossus was 127 feet (38 meters) high. As the size of the statue alone indicates, he is no longer Sākyamuni but a superhuman being. Continuing the tradition of Darel, kings of Bamiyan must have created a still more impressive image of Maitreya at Bamiyan. The gigantic painting of the Sun-god in his chariot, directly over the head of the colossus, is a

reference to the solar aspect of Maitreya, a patronymic from Mitra. The Sun-god in the guise of a 'Tokharian-Hephthalite Mihira-Sūrya' is an indication of a royal solar cult. Mithraic royal cults were wide-spread in the area. The background of the central panel is sky-blue and is ringed with fiery clouds (ibid.155). It again points to the solar Maitreya. The location of the colossus at the centre of the façade is significant. It was meant to be the centre-point of the entire complex for homage being paid by kings, as they did to the Darel image.

- (i) Four early sutras of Maitreya in Chinese dilate on the plenty and beauty of the age into which he will incarnate. His will be the Golden Age. The world will be ruled without the need of force by a *cakravartin*. His capital will be splendid. The deposits of treasures will be distributed as alms.
- (ii) His crown is decorated with millions of jewels: a symbol of royal splendour.
- (iii) Stupa in his crown denotes "a knot or tuft of hair, the upper part of the head, crest, top, summit (cf. Gk. *stūpos*) RV, TS, PañcavBr" (MW). It signifies the crown in the figurative meaning of "king or queen, regal power, supreme governing power in a monarchy". The stupa of Maitreya signifies the State, like the wheel/cakra of a *cakravartin*.
- (iv) Maitreya has an immense body in the Buddhist sutras (T 14.419c-420a). In the age of Maitreya men will be taller than they are now. This concept of Maitreya was conducive to his iconography as a colossus.
- (v) Maitraka is a variant of Maitreya. He is depicted seated in *padmāsana*, and his name is inscribed in Roman letters as *Metrago Boudo* or *Metrea Boudo* on about half a dozen coins of king Kaniska. The Chinese transliteration of Maitreya, and Japanese. Miroku, go back to Maitraka, from Mitra. The presence of Maitraka on the coins of Kaniska points to his relation to royalty. The use of Roman letters bespeaks of a nexus with the imperial cults of Roman Mithraism. Mithra was the special patron of the Achaemenid kings. In the Avestan hymn Yasht 10 he is the god of battles. Mithraism spread from Anatolia to the West, by the first century AD it took firm root, and Rome became a great centre of the cult. The conception of the Asian king was transferred to the Roman emperor. When Nero crowned the Persian prince Tiridates as king of Armenia (in Rome in 66 AD), Tiridates did obeisance to

Nero, and greeted him as Mithra, the god of royalty. From the cult of Maitreya among the Kushans to the smaller Bamiyan colossus was but natural. It represented the aspiration of a powerful king of Bamiyan for blessings from his dedication to the practice of Dharma, and for the stabilisation of his mundane authority. It was a macroscale manifestation of piety and power, the perpetuation of dominion in the perennality of devotion. The vast resources required for the two colossi could come only from the determination of a State to meet challenges. The colossus, showering blessings, was a saviour against all attacks, and the power of overcoming enemies. It was to sustain and perpetuate the state in divine symbolism, to objectify and institutionalise authority. It was a shared cultural vocabulary that gave Bamiyan pre-eminence and prosperity, security and sanctity among its neighbours who came as pilgrims in wonder and awe of the divine *numen* immanent in the colossi.

The fragments of frescoes on the lower sides of the niche indicate that once the entire alcove was decorated with rows of Buddhas, representing the Thousand Buddhas. Maitreya is surrounded by Thousand Buddhas in the Yun-kang caves, on a Japanese wood-print and in Tibetan thankas. Māyā points out in the *Gandavyūha* (441-443) that she will be the mother of Maitreya and other Thousand Buddhas.

Persian and Arabic sources call this colossus *Kheng But* meaning "The Moon-white Buddha". Yellow is the distinctive colour of Maitreya. Persian sources record the grand ceremonies of the two colossi when they were living statues, when the stone structures were sanctified by plastering, gilding, draping and adornments. They got their distinguishing colours when plastered, and other characteristics when the arms carried the appropriate attributes and the crown a stupa or the like.

In 776 AD monk Yulsa erected a 40 feet gilt bronze Maitreya for national prosperity and unity of the people of Korea at the Popchusa monastery. At the same monastery, Korea dedicated the world's largest bronze image of Maitreya in 1991. During the Eye-Opening Ceremony in April 1991, three rainbows appeared in the clear sky: "Isn't this a sign that we can even move heaven when we are truly devoted? When we build an image of Maitreya in our hearts too, all lives on earth will turn into lotus flowers, and the very world around us will become a pond of joy". (Chief Abbot Yu).

THE LARGEST WESTERN COLOSSUS: ROCANA

The smaller colossus of Maitreya of Bamiyan evolves into the larger colossus of Rocana, though the two are at a distance of more than half a mile. Rocana is also called Abhyucca-deva in Gandavyūha 443.9. Abhyucca-deva means a colossal image.

The Larger Western Colossus at Bamiyan is known as *Surkh But* 'The Red Buddha' in Iranian literature. He wore a red drapery and Hackin recovered fragments of red-painted stucco at His feet. There are countless allusions to the *but-e-ārāste* 'adorned Buddha' by early Persian poets. They also detail the ceremonies of presentation of gold-threaded draperies, bejewelling and crowning of the colossus. Situated in a region dominated by Iranian light cults, the colossus was the Supreme Light-God who endowed the king with his spirit. Hsüan-tsang refers to the Great Colossus: "Its golden hues sparkle on every side, and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness." He was Rocana, from the root *ruc* 'to shine'.

Bamiyan was the glory of classical Afghanistan, sanctified impirium, splendour shared by her ruler and her people, stabilisation and prosperity of the state in a common cultural syndrome with neighbouring kingdoms, in the majesty of the colossi.

CHRONOLOGICAL FOOTHOLDS

1. Rigveda: *bhāma*
2. Chāndogya upanisad: *Bhāmanī*
3. Avesta: *bāma*, *bāmya*
4. Buddhist texts: Bhāma-Kanakamuni in Pali texts, Mahāvastu, Lalitavistara.
5. 386-556 AD: Northern Wei Annals (697.10r) speak of Bamiyan
6. 487 AD: Gigantic Maitreya (16.25 metres) in Yün-kang Cave 17.
7. 632 AD: Hsüan-tsang
8. Till 725 AD ruled by a Buddhist dynasty
9. Islamised during the Abbasids
10. 844 AD: King of Bamiyan made governor of Yaman
11. 871 AD: Bamiyan destroyed by Yakub and the portable images were carried to Baghdad.
12. 10th century: Ibn an Nadīm: colossi wearing gold brocades
13. 17th century: Lāme'i Gorgānī

14. 47 Bami's in the Telephone Directory of Delhi
15. 1 March 2001: Taliban blasted the two colossi
16. 16 March 2001: Taliban slaughter 100 cows to atone for the delay to destroy the towering images.

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2. Paul Horn, *Grundriss der Neupersischen Etymologie*.
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 - Kanaka in the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra*
 - Kanakāhvaya in the *Lalitavistara*
 - Kabakagrani in *Mañjusrī-mūla-kalpa*
 - Konāgamuni in *Karmavācanā*
 - Konāgamana in *Therīgāthā*
 - Konāgamana (v.l. Konā°) in Pali texts
 - Konākamana in Asokan inscriptions (Hülszsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*. p.165)
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DESTRUCTION OF BAMMIYAN BUDDHAS

TALIBAN ICONOCLASM AND HAZARA RESPONSE

SAID REZA 'HUSSEINI'*

The destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban regime in March 2001 not only challenged the world heritage¹ and undermined the international law, it brought home the rising threat of religious extremist groups whose target this time was cultural heritage. Annihilation of these cultural icons and treasures of mankind will remain as an Islamic iconoclastic action in the public imagination². However, the systematic destruction of Buddhas being a modern phenomenon under the garb of an archaic iconoclasm can not be simply described as Islamic iconoclasm.

Being situated between South, West and Central Asian trade routes, Bamiyan valley is marked by remarkably true trans-culturalism and the statues, stupas, viharas, shrines and monastic murals are visual portraits which narrate the cultural creolization and religious syncretism³. Not only trade and commodities but ideas were also transmitted and converged here and that made Bamiyan a hub on the map of Asia⁴. Originating in the post-Gupta period, gigantism in Mahayana Buddhist art found its way to Bamiyan around 5th century AD. and remained

* Having seen the Bamiyan Buddhas earlier and again visiting it in 2004 and this time seeing the empty niches of Buddha, I wished to share the local stories of Hazaras of Bamiyan regarding the Buddha statues. I am thankful to Professor Dario Gamboni of JNU and to Dr. Kavita Singh for their lectures and advice. I also remain indebted to all those Afghans who have contributed to the repertoire of Hazara folklore. Special thanks to Dr. Najaf Haidar for his comments and helping with Mughal sources. I thank Prof. K. Warikoo for organizing the second seminar on Bamiyan Buddhas and for his valuable comments. I am very thankful to Haji Fahimi, ex-Deputy Governor of Bamiyan for his kind attention and valuable information particularly on the situation of Bamiyan in 2001. I am thankful to Tahir Shah who facilitated my trip to Bamiyan. I am also thankful to Shweta Shetty for her valuable comments and to all those Afghan students and residents of Bamiyan who provided me with myths of *Salsal* and *Shahmama*.

remarkably connected to rituals in time and content⁵. Their identification and chronology has been a continuous debate among the art historians and it is thought that the idea of all gigantic Buddhist statues of Central Asia and China originated from the Bamiyan Valley.⁶ To understand the Taliban iconoclasm, a comprehensive review of Islamic iconoclasm and its comparison with the Taliban action is essential. This paper argues the possible motivations behind this vandalism. Being home to Hazara⁷ ethnic community in origin who speak Hazaragi dialect of Persian and follow Shia school of Islam, the Buddhas of Bamiyan found their eternity in popular culture, a transmutation from cult to culture which has preserved them for centuries. So, the last section focuses on the Buddha's position in Hazara popular culture, the response of the Hazara community to this destruction and the plan of reconstruction.

The implacable shift from protection⁸ to annihilation⁹ of Buddhas by the Taliban regime and its damage to the world cultural heritage has already been studied from the art history and international law perspectives. Among them B. Flood (2002) explained the nature of Islamic iconoclasm and the distinction between cult and culture, W. Muzhda (2004) and J. Elias (2007) tried to show the impact of Al-Qaeda and connection of this act with Islamic calendar. D. Gamboni (2002) tried to show how the monumental art works could become target instead of protection, V.S Mani (2002) and F. Francioni (2003) discussed it from the aspect of international law and the latter called it as a "*criminal juris gentium*". Essentially, the nature of their work did not allow them to see the Buddhas from the lens of inhabitants of Bamiyan. N. Dupree (1977) and P. Levi (1972) tried to see Hazara myths related to Valley of Dragon (*Darayi Azhdar*) but could not find its relation to Bamiyan statutes though the local people were aware of it. There is a major flaw in these arguments as subjective position of Buddhas in popular culture is missing. This paper seeks to bring forth this aspect of the issue.

DESTRUCTION OF BAMİYAN BUDDHAS: A SHIFT FROM TOLERANCE TO HOSTILITY

The first possible question about the Taliban iconoclastic¹⁰ action of March 2001 in Bamiyan could be why Islam has objected to the representational art? The answer is more or less laid in the corpus of Islamic tradition and *Hadith* (Prophet's speech) as Quran is silent in this regard. Based on their oral sources, Ibn Hisham in the book of Idols (9th

century AD) and Abdul Malik in the biography of Prophet Muhammad (9th century AD) have explained early Muslim treatment towards icons¹¹. Removal of idols of Ka'ba was indeed rhetorical triumph of monotheism over polytheism¹². Apparently, the idols, seen as false gods, had usurped the position of true God, therefore they had to be removed¹³. The authenticity of *Hadith* itself is disputed as the earliest written *Hadith* is not earlier than 9th century AD. So, the idea of early Muslims about figural images remains obscure¹⁴. Based on it, Flood mentioned two reasons: firstly the anthropomorphic images are "usurping divine creating power" which is specific to God (Allah) and secondly it could give room to return of Shirk¹⁵. In addition, Flood called it a "kind of pathology known as Islamic iconoclasm", but remembering the geographic provenance of Islam and its vast adaptation from Judaism he agreed that its root lies in the "inherent temperamental dislike of Semitic races for representational art"¹⁶. Basically, Islamic iconoclasm is a result of specific theological attitude which is related to the understanding of this religion. According to Quran there are no gods but God¹⁷ and the accepted and perfect faith to Him is Islam¹⁸. This is a message to the Muslims and does not include the followers of other faiths. Moreover, Quran says that both Muslims and non-Muslims can live with respect and preserving their religions without repudiation of each other's faith¹⁹. But misinterpretation of above-mentioned has created conceit superiority and legitimized accusing and targeting other religious symbols (non-Muslims in general). Moreover, the political aspects reinforced theological impulse in many cases²⁰. However, there were economic motivations behind iconoclasm with the aim of avoiding the expenses of building a new place for the Muslim conquerors, besides imposing the superiority of the new faith as well²¹. In terms of relevance, what was the medieval Muslim strategy to approach the images? According to Flood, "the medieval attitude to figuration varied from individual to individual and changed over time or with advent of new political regime with different cultural values"²². But generally it could be seen in two main ways; by re-contextualization of the image to ensure that it won't be venerated anymore and decapitation of statues and rubbing the face or drawing line crossing the throat of painted figures. Each action is deeply linked with certain time and social understanding of body. The erasure of face and decapitation was a universal phenomenon seen in Egyptian and Christian world. This could be an act of dishonouring, elimination of identity and punishment²³ of images which could also be seen in Islamic iconoclasm. The mutilation

of head and hands were thought to be effective treatment as effective parts of body were targeted²⁴. Generally, the headless images are interpreted as dead images. Then the inanimate images would leave to be warning for the visitors (*Ibrat lil Nazirin*) to demonstrate their impotence and emptiness²⁵.

While, comparing the survived evidences from medieval Muslim iconoclastic acts one can draw two categories which Flood has classified as: instrumental and expressive iconoclasm²⁶. In the first category the action is to achieve a greater aim and it included decapitation, mutilation and defacement to render the images inanimate by depriving them of their effective parts. The expressive iconoclasm is achieved to express one's belief and is aimed to impose superiority of one on others. There are abundant instances for the earlier paradigm but it is rare to see the latter category. The medieval Muslim would not probably think about complete obliteration of representational art or religious site. In contrast to profanation and imposed iconoclasm upon others, the evidences show opulent decorated staffs with anthropomorphic images²⁷ mixed with vegetal design and calligraphy produced for the Muslim rulers over time²⁸. In fact, the palaces were exhibitions for secular art and the mosques were places for the religious art, an internal iconolatry in contrast to external praxis. However, producing secular or religious art were tools of communicating. Arraying the mosques with particular Quranic verses, names and epithets of God would be to remind the prayers of the promised world (*Akhirat*) beyond this materialistic world. On the other hand, destroying them was also a message. Both Flood and Gamboni mentioned that the destruction or displaying the icons itself is a "powerful political message even if formed within the context of conformity"²⁹. Dispatching the icons from Bamiyan to Baghdad by Yaqub in 9th century AD³⁰ and by Mahmud from Somanatha³¹ to Baghdad and Mecca could be seen as deliberate political strategy to propagate his fidelity to Islam to receive religious legitimacy on the one hand and to cast his political power to the Caliph on the other. After all, the theological impulse pushed by political-economic motivation and use of rhetorical superiority based on later interpretation of Islam changed the notion of treatment of Muslims towards the figurations from tolerance to hostility.

**BAMIIYAN BUDDHAS: FROM ARCHAIC ICONOCLASM TO
MODERN POLITICAL DESTRUCTION**

While studying the old images of Buddhas one can see that the nature of disfigured faces and mutilated hands are quiet comparable to medieval Muslim iconoclastic acts. The Perso-Arabic chronicles are supporting this fact as Yaqubi, Gardizi (10th century AD) explains about Yaqub ibn Layth expedition to Bamiyan in 870 AD and destruction of Buddhist monuments of the Valley. Based on a comparative study B. Flood argues that the faces were certainly removed in medieval era³² and he rejects the dispute of metallic masks. Moreover, incorporation of stucco statue with metallic mask is unknown to Gandharan Art. This indicates that these Buddhas were exposed to medieval Muslim iconoclasm and their religious significance came to an end. However, to the Muslim residents of Khorasan, neither Buddhas were religious icons nor Bamiyan was a Buddhist centre anymore but they were cultural icons. It is worth mentioning that no medieval Islamic text has objected to the existence of these statues. Indeed their gigantism created myths about them and made them as wonders of the world for the geographers and the lovers and heroes in Persian literature³³. If from the textual sources one can draw a conclusion that Islam did not object to the Buddhas of Bamiyan then how does one explain the Taliban's destruction of these in the name of Islam? The complete obliteration of Bamiyan Buddhas as it happened is unknown to medieval Muslim iconoclasm. Cleverly, it was performed "under the cover of an archaic justification"³⁴. The motivation behind this act has been discussed by various commentators. Reasons such as UN sanctions imposed on the regime in 2000, frustration over the failure to gain the UN recognition and a sheer and typical iconoclastic action are suggested³⁵. Gamboni (2001)³⁶ has argued that it was used as cover to traffic the pre-Islamic artefacts to Pakistani market³⁷ and suggested internal Afghan politics related to international relationships. Similarly, Pirre (2008) argued that the ransom offered by the West to purchase the statues while Afghan people were dying out of hunger in an extreme human crisis was resented by the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda members among Taliban who disliked Taliban's diplomatic relations with the West and manipulated the destruction of Buddhas³⁸. Indeed, all these reasons motivated Taliban as their strategy seemed very precise for such vandalism but where did this idea of obliteration of Buddhas and pre-Islamic arts of Afghanistan originate?

Psychologically, misunderstanding Islam under the influence of Wahabbism intermingled with Pashtun tribal lifestyle created megalomania and deceitful superiority among the Taliban. Consequently, they speculated themselves as true savers (*Munji*) of Islam and revivalists (*Muhyee*) of Abrahamic traditions³⁹. This ideology legitimized profanation, vengeance and eradication of not only others but even the cultural values by imposing their ideology on others⁴⁰. Undoubtedly, the systematic destruction of the cultural heritage which included the pre-Islamic representational art under the name of Islamic purification⁴¹ was a strategy to erase the ancient history of the country⁴² for constructing an Islamic Emirate modelled on Saudi Arabia with Wahabbi faith and Pashtun identity. Certainly, encountering western materialism⁴³ and their veneration of cultural heritage made the Buddhas the target.

Flood argues that we may never know what changed Taliban's decision from protection to destruction of Buddhas but he saw it as a political phenomenon rather than theological achievement⁴⁴. An answer could be the political constraints and UN sanctions, ideology and influence of Al-Qaeda on Taliban and Pakistani⁴⁵ fundamentalist groups which influenced Taliban's policy as they constantly received financial and manpower support from Pakistan⁴⁶. To justify their vandalism and show that they are successors of historical idol breakers, they used the historical dialogues of the famous idol-breaker Mahmud of Ghazna⁴⁷. They published calendar titled *But Shikan* with images of blasts in Urdu language which was for the audiences within Pakistan⁴⁸. The statements of Hazara eyewitnesses regarding cooperation of Urdu speaking engineers and observation of Arab speaking men⁴⁹ confirm the presence of Pakistani agents and Al-Qaeda and their involvement in the destruction of Buddhas⁵⁰. Bamiyan was home to Shia Hazara minority which has opposed the Taliban not only militarily but also criticized the Wahabbi ideology. This opposition had to be countered not only physically but also psychologically⁵¹.

Being a remarkable symbol of historical pluralism and a great paradigm of syncretization of various schools of art, the colossal Buddhas were the most visible monumental element which had survived from pre-Islamic Afghanistan. Secondly, it was reminiscent of an icon-centric religion which was known to the medieval Muslims as *But-parasti* (idol-worshipping). Their apparent glory which was a remarkable human artwork and their centric position in the Buddhist monastic complex of

Bamiyan evoked essential attention and necessity of preservation and study. In contrast, their Buddhist essence became a fact which would make them target of the Islamic fanatic interpretation. Besides, they were the largest Buddha statues of the world and any malevolent act would attract universal attention⁵². Having a clear understanding of these parameters on the one hand and pressure of UN sanctions of December 2000 and recognition as illegal regime that occupied ninety percent of the country, Taliban leaders attempted to use Buddhas as a political tool to communicate with the world community to gain political legitimacy and removal of sanctions. In this situation, the Taliban planned to shock the world by targeting the Buddhas; first to put pressure on world community to negotiate and to the fundamentalists by depicting themselves as true and loyal to Islam by idol breaking (*But Shikani*) as it was performed at the time of the Haj pilgrimage⁵³. They sacrificed a number of cows as expiatory of delay in this destruction. Nevertheless, Taliban were thinking more about its political impact rather than its theological effect⁵⁴. Should we see Buddha's destruction in Islamic context and was it a successful project?

Destruction of Buddhas is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view⁵⁵. Firstly there was no Buddhist in Afghanistan and they were not religious icons. Moreover, they were exposed to Muslim iconoclastic act centuries before and now they were part of cultural heritage. As the Buddhas were not objected by Muslim *Ulema* or Sultans when Bamiyan was a great Islamic centre under Ghurid kings,⁵⁶ their destruction has no Islamic justification. According to Islam all those figural statues which were produced prior to the rise of Islam are part of history and should not be harmed. Meanwhile most of the Muslim countries preserve their pre-Islamic heritage as part of their history⁵⁷.

The legitimacy of Taliban's Islamic conclave (*shura*) is also controversial. Firstly the identity of these *Ulema* is ambiguous and their edict was not based on Islamic sources. Secondly, the Buddhas had already been recognized by the Muslim scholars as cultural heritage. Thus the view of these *Ulema* was rejected by Islamic countries⁵⁸. What Taliban gained was a large number of volunteers from various Arab countries, western region of Pakistan and more funds from extremist groups⁵⁹. Eventually none of the attempts to prevent the destruction of Buddhas could stop Taliban and even did not remove their regime which followed a policy of contempt for the UN and the world community. But this act certainly excluded the regime from the circle of civilized

humanity and illegitimized their regime in the minds of humankind⁶⁰. It was resonant of a universal countenance to remove this regime after September 11 attacks. In other words disingenuous plan of destruction of Buddhas under the name of Islam was almost an unsuccessful action which isolated the Taliban further.

From the point of view of international law, some features made it distinct from other cultural destructions and reported it as *criminal juris gentium* or crimes against peace and security of mankind⁶¹. Given the fact that the Buddhas were not demolished in war or accidentally shot and were not in enemy's territory or a military stronghold but were cultural monuments that were dynamited during the control of Taliban over Bamiyan valley by a pre-planned and systematic process and documented for universal broadcast, make it different from other cases⁶². As Boppearachchi has pointed out, "*it is the first time in human history, the state is taking the initiative to decree its subjects to destroy their own past*"⁶³. Moreover, it was an outrage to humankind's values not only by hurting the sentiments of the world Buddhist community and giving rise to the sectarian conflicts in the region but also unleashing a symbolic violence by erasing the icons of history and identity. The regional support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates which had already recognized Taliban as a legal regime in Kabul, established their political and economic relations and virtually functioned as a shield against the UN decisions⁶⁴.

HAZARA VIEWS ABOUT BAMBIYAN BUDDHAS: A FOLKLORIC READING

The Persian primary sources project a new picture of the Bamiyan statues which is tremendously distinct from what we had earlier; a transformation from religious cult to popular culture as they possibly depict the statues of Bamiyan Buddha as characters of a popular romance from 9th CE onwards. Perhaps, this could be an answer to the popular romance which was hegemonized by Arab romances like *Laila wa Majnun*⁶⁵. Historically the people of Khorasan (historical name of present day Afghanistan) appreciated the romances as the stories like *Wameq wa Uzra*⁶⁶, *Bizhan wa Manizha*⁶⁷ were well-known to them. Even, it could be an intellectual way of preserving them by folding them in layers of literature. Almost all the Persian primary sources refer to these statues as *Surkh-But* (red idol) and *Khing-But* (bright gray idol); the former as male, a lover and the latter, as female and the beloved⁶⁸. The terms are

Persian and precisely indicate the color of the statues. Bright gray can be identified with the color of Stucco used for drapery of statues, over the sandstone body and the red color could be the pigment on the bigger statue, which presumably could also have been painted just as the niches themselves had murals. This is a rational conclusion as painted niches and painted iconic statues are not sights which were abnormal⁶⁹ in those times, regions and art traditions.

The character of these Buddha statues is not identified as the historical Buddha in these Perso-Arabic sources but instead a love story had been fashioned which attracted even a person like Mahmud of Ghazna. While these Buddhist statues were just in the vicinity of Ghazna yet they didn't attract his wrath. Its public fame encouraged Unsori (poet) to compose it as a romance for the Sultan and this shows a deep shift in identifying these statues as an inspiring source for literature. However, we are not aware of what the story of this couple actually was, as one of the main works on this issue called *Hadith Sanami al-Bamiyan*⁷⁰ by Al-Biruni did not survive. The Perso-Arabic primary sources show that the romance of *Surkh-But* and *Khing-But* was popular in medieval Persian world. Practically, the reconstruction of the romance of *Surkh-But* and *Khing-But* from these fragments seems to be impossible but a popular Hazaragi story related to Bamiyan Buddhas and other sites around them help us to see a general view of the romance.

BAMIYAN BUDDHA IN HAZARA POPULAR CULTURE

According to Hazara folktales⁷¹, the larger statue is called *Salsal* and he was supposedly the son of a Pahlavan⁷². The smaller statue was called *Shahmama*, who was allegedly the daughter of the Mir of Bamiyan. Here we see that even across the genres and centuries separating Persian sources and Hazara folktales, still the gendered pairing of the two statues as a man and woman have remained the same; *Surkh-But* and *Khing-But* which were mentioned earlier are *Salsal* and *Shahmama*. The Mir of Bamiyan who knew of the love of *Salsal* for his daughter was unhappy as he was not impressed by *Salsal*. He suffered from two major problems in his territory; destructive floods and the double headed dragon that ate his people. *Shahmama* too was aware of this situation and loved *Salsal* but could not ignore her father. With the interference of nobles, the condition for marriage with *Shahmama* was declared to be a successful attempt at stopping the flood and killing the dragon. For achieving these

hard conditions, *Salsal* needed a legendary weapon which should be made of steel mined from Fuladi mountain and should be forged by a wise *pir*⁷³ at Ahangaran⁷⁴ in Ghur. The protagonist of this story, *Salsal* makes this extraordinary march and returns with the legendary steel sword. He first closed the river with a dam (*band*) and then in a deadly fight killed the dragon⁷⁵ (figure 1). He skinned the dragon and sent it to be used as a carpet for the day of marriage but he succumbed to the wounds inflicted by the demon spirit of the dead dragon (figure 2).

In a conclave of nobles, the Mir and his courtiers accepted him as the hero, who had earned the merit to marry *Shahmama* and thus the day of marriage was announced. The Mir and nobles ordered to carve two memorial niches for them on the façade of the mountain to celebrate their marriage and for remembering the triumph of *Salsal* over the dragon. The niches were painted⁷⁶ and the bigger one was covered by red embroidered curtains while the small niche was decorated with green curtains. The lovers were supposed to remove these curtains by sunrise to let the people see them as couples standing in the niches and then they should walk on the carpet made of dragon skin towards their future house. But it never happened. When the curtains were removed people saw *Salsal* and *Shamama* had turned into stones and were dead⁷⁷! The people screamed on seeing that and thereafter they lighted candles in those niches and recited tragic poems in their memory. They called it the 'niches of Love' and told this story to the travellers and also named their children after the lovers.

A critical approach to the story can take us closer to the origin of this myth. Firstly, the name *Salsal* means baked clay which technically is very close to the stucco artwork and has same meaning of *Khing-But* in Persian sources. Secondly, reference to Ahangaran in Ghur as the place providing the legendary sword confirms the quality of Ghurid weapons which have been mentioned in Persian sources of 10th century AD. This evidence, possibly thus takes the origin of this myth of *Salsal* and *Shahmama* back to the 10th century AD. Moreover, the same legend is also ascribed to the first Imam Ali⁷⁸ but there is a shrine with Timurid architecture in Band-i-Amir making the legend of Ali a later addition⁷⁹. But interestingly, the Hazaras hadn't associated these statues with any religion; rather they had been preserving them as constituent parts of popular myths and imagination. Indeed, we have a confluence of two gigantic statues, a natural lake and a dragon-shaped rock which lends credibility to this legend of the locals. The two natural sites of Band-i-

Amir and Dara-yi-Azhdar are associated with this story⁸⁰. The legend doesn't remember the face on these statues which suggests that the possible chronology of the myths was after Yaqub's iconoclastic act of 9th century AD. Alongside the name of Salsal, the Hazaras also often call it *Surkh-But* which encourages us to establish a link between their myths and 10th century Perso-Arabic sources.

Changing the character of Buddha from a calm wise man giving sermons and choosing the middle path for salvation of his followers is completely distinct from the mythical life of *Salsal*⁸¹ as a young Pahlavan, a lover, hero, warrior, a volunteer for achieving extraordinary actions. In fact, it is probable that the environment of Indian subcontinent would naturally create a peaceful character like Buddha and the harsh environment and rugged topography of Khorasan would create such martial myths like that of *Salsal*⁸²; the Khorasanis used to mix all extraordinary issues with the mythical characters⁸³. Here, the climax of the narrative is also different; Buddha enters *Parinirvana* while *Salsal* would remain standing eternally. Buddha becomes the central figure of a religion and stands as an icon for worship for the Buddhists but *Salsal* becomes a source of romance and an icon of love. Buddha becomes the main icon for religious art but *Salsal* appears as inspiration for folk literature. Distinctively, *Salsal* has a beloved and kills the demon dragon for her while Buddha left his wife, son and worldly pleasures in midnight. For Buddha, achieving the way for salvation of humankind was the driving force, while for *Salsal* it was his love for *Shahmama* and his sense of duty and responsibility. Indeed, the Hazara myths confirm the *Khing-But* and *Surkh-But* of the Persian sources and clearly show the transformation of a religious cult into folk culture; a syncretization of the Indian religious symbol and the Persian mythical essences and characters.

Another popular local story is *Buz-i-Chini*⁸⁴. It is a children's story and events take place in the caves next to the Buddha's niches. Through *Baba-yi Ghisagoy* (the old storyteller) the children would get familiar with the character of a smart goat that lived with his kids in a cave next to *Salsal* and *Shahmama*. The character of the goat and its life in peaceful pastures and the presence of a black wolf are not coincidences perhaps; instead it might have historical roots in the social problems of the region⁸⁵. Revisiting the story of *Buz-e-Chini* in the form of animation⁸⁶ has directly involved the Hazara children with story of *Salsal* and *Shahmama* as part of their cultural heritage through generations.

In essence, this longstanding association with Buddha statues established a sympathetic relation with them and placed them within their daily life tales; the grandmothers told this story with love to the children and they carried it to the next generation. As a result, any desire to damage these statues which had from time immemorial occupied position of central importance for the identity of the Hazaras of Bamiyan would be directly opposed by the people. Their interest for them would naturally almost reject any iconoclastic purposes as they had already internalized the statues as part of their folk identity, and immortalized it within their oral folk traditions, irrespective of its original religious affiliations or connotations⁸⁷. Moreover, the tomb of Mir Sayed Ali Yakhsoz⁸⁸, a Sufi saint and the two remaining domed Islamic tombs were probably part of an Islamic complex located exactly opposite to the statues. So, any local Muslim pilgrim while traversing the area would see the tomb of his *pir* on one side and the faceless statues on the other (figure 3). Thus perhaps it can be deduced that even the *pir* and his followers did not have any problem with the presence of the statues as to them they were only artworks, a source of a romantic story and absolutely a wonder of the world. It makes sense to state that they had more liberal⁸⁹ interpretation of Islam⁹⁰.

Ironic to the Islamic iconoclasm, the present generation of Hazaras believed that the statues were carved by their ancestors with Hazara facial features in antiquity. They therefore believe that these statues are the emblems of their identity⁹¹. They think that the statues were defaced by the Pashtun King Abdul Rahman in 19th century but the statues were defaced in the medieval era. In fact, their argument is rooted in the old stories of Abdul Rahman's subjugation of Hazaras in 19th century. They also knew that how Kabul government had superimposed the Pashtun *Kochis* (nomads) by gifting the Hazara lands and pastures to the *Kochis* through *Firmans*⁹². This has continued through formal broadcasting of wrong information by later Afghan governments⁹³. Therefore, the act of preserving the statues would be like protecting their own identity. During the civil war, based on their historical and cultural values, the Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari commissioned a group of soldiers to guard the statues in 1996 and even in spite of being an Islamic *madrassa* alumnus, he never objected to them⁹⁴. (figure 4)

For the Taliban, however, there was no better target than the Buddhas of Bamiyan, to cover its political desires. The Bamiyan Buddhas were historical symbols and icons of folk identity for Hazaras but were

opportunistically propagated by the Taliban as symbols of idolatry and the Hazaras were implicated in it as wrong-doers⁹⁵. Thus the Hazara soldier was not only fighting for his corporeal survival but also for his ethnic and folk identity too. Indeed the sensitivity of the issue would make them anxious to respond to the Taliban by singing (figure 5). *“If you are wishing to break the statues, then come to me first, come from the mount of Shibar”*⁹⁶

All this anxiety and anger to protect the Buddha statues proved unsuccessful as the Pakistani aircrafts opened the way of Taliban to the Valley of Bamiyan⁹⁷ in 2001 and soon the world was shocked by seeing horrible scenes of blasting of the statues. The catastrophe of the destruction was also accompanied by genocide⁹⁸ of civilian Hazaras, burning their houses⁹⁹ which brought about their exodus and exile from the Valley. In fact, they were massacred because of their Shia religion which was opposed to Taliban’s Wahhabi ideology.

AN ALTERNATIVE FOR BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

The Hazara response to iconoclasm and reaction to the destruction of Buddha could be seen in two main aspects- cultural and political. It was not only the condemnation statement released by the Hazara leaders but the intellectual stratum which tried to replace it with suggestions of an alternative, if the physical restoration was not possible. The idea of an alternative was strongly projected through individual works, particularly in the paintings. Among the leaders of this cultural group, Khadim Ali, Akbar Khorasani, Hafiz Pakzad and Awrang are known faces. On their canvas, a deep mourning is visible and an awareness of what they have lost. In Khadim Ali’s, words: *“To me Buddha is my past, my identity. When someone is standing to remove “my identity”, I must also stand to re-create it”*¹⁰⁰ As a person trained in modern art and fully aware of the inherent Islamic dislike for representational art, Khadim Ali went further to mix the Islamic symbols and script with Buddha images (figure 6).

His decision to show the Buddha within the Sanctorum of Kaaba¹⁰¹ is an absolute innovation. This painting is a loud appeal against the destruction of Buddha and projected the outcry that this loss was as much harmful for all the Buddhists around the world as the destruction of Kaaba could be for the Muslims. By writing the Islamic script upside down and from left to right (See, figure 6) he has tried to show how the

Islamic fundamentalists have often interpreted Islam in wrong ways. The red tulip flowers around Buddha (See, figure 7) have links with ancient Persian myths of blood of Siyawakhsh¹⁰² as this flower is also the symbol of martyrdom.

In his paintings, Khadim Ali has two main characters, Buddha in white drapery and a dark skinned, bearded and horned fat demon wearing bangles and anklets. Here, the white colour symbolizes innocence of Buddha and the demon represents a non-native *muzdur*¹⁰³ as his bangles suggest the sign of bondage, servitude¹⁰⁴ or being an attendant figure and his horn is sign of ignorance (figure 8). To him, the Taliban is an ignorant *muzdur* who has a wrong interpretation of Islam and his distinct clothing style, horns and bangles perhaps symbolize his different ideological affiliations. The other demonic figure is the Taliban's spiritual leader who confirms the destruction. By drawing the Twin Towers and crashing planes, he brings both events in the same context to show their link, as to him the Taliban is not only the enemy of art and culture but of also all human development. In contrast to other works, he shows Buddha with closed eyes and on one canvas, he paints a lock on the legend of Rostam and Sohrab and depicts the empty niches of Buddha beneath. By comparing the murder of Sohrab with destruction of the Buddha on the one hand and on the other hand the lock as well as the multiple bars across the Buddha in other paintings (figure 9), he attests metaphorically that with this destruction, a glorious cultural background has also come to an end.

Similarly, the Bamiyan born Hafiz Pakzad said that his heart blasted when he saw the images of destruction. He immediately felt that he should fill the empty niche. He wished to paint the Buddha in its original size and place it in Bamiyan¹⁰⁵. His large painted Buddha found a place in Guimet Museum to remind the visitors of Bamiyan's ancient glory. To Akbar Khorasani, collage of white, black and red colours within the niche represents three periods; peace, glory and violence¹⁰⁶. On the other hand Awrang tries to show the mystery of the statues through a combination of dark niche and compare its destiny with that of Hazaras.

Buddha became the subject of the Persian poems in two forms of classic and modern poetry. Hazara poets have composed many poems after the destruction. Mourning, and links with Hazara identity and wish for its restoration are common themes. Its existence in Hazara area is given as the reason of its demolition too:

The dark clouds appeared above the mountains,
It rained and the wind wailed from the darkness,
The rain stopped as the moon appeared shiny like the Christ,
It then resisted against the order of the darkness of the night
The Buddha torn into thousand pieces,
the Buddha shared the destiny of Hazara.
The shiny moon then fell into the depth of darkness of the night,
The sun came out in the morning
but the face of the mountain was frozen,
The sun died and the sky became cold and frigid.
Buddha did not exist anymore,
the throat of the valley got torn,
A loud voice was saying,
"May the idol die, May the Shias, the infidels die".
The satellites showed at night, the live images of
*what we have heard about the legend of Jihad*¹⁰⁷

Here, the dark clouds, the night and the loud voice represent the Taliban and the shiny moon symbolizes the innocence like that of Christ but it is covered by darkness which is that of bigotry and ignorance. He then tells about the link between Hazaras and the Buddha. Consequently, the world will see what they have heard in the legends about *Jihad*. To him this is a challenge as the days of traditionalism have returned.

It is not surprising for Hazara youths to perform the story of Salsal and Shahmama in the theatres. They are trying to say that the Hazara love for Buddha statues is for its cultural value and its position in human civilization. They were of course the mark of Buddhism in antiquity but now they are source of their legends, folktale and evidence of their ethnic origins. From the political point of view, a wide use of image of Bamiyan Buddha, signature campaigns for their restoration, creating websites, personal weblogs, etc are used to attract the attention of the people to their situation. The Hazaras began a non-violent movement to make this aim true and used almost all opportunities to announce it. To find out their origin, they called for a DNA project, the result of which is still under investigation. In their posters, they consciously filled the niche of Buddha with the face of a Hazara old man. They represented the lost Buddhas in the form of an old man to ask the new generation for this project and in fact they equalized the Hazara old man with Buddhas as both had suffered from discrimination and fanatic ideology (figure 10).

The Hazaras welcomed the Afghan government's conventions on reconstruction of Buddhas and supported this decision as they would see the icon of their identity again and certainly it would bless Bamiyan

valley by its tourist attraction. They thought that it would be compared with Mostar Bridge¹⁰⁸ in terms of reconstruction and were hopeful. Eventually, the polemic on reconstruction of Buddhas ended with the UNESCO's statement saying that the Buddhas won't be restored. The given reason was limitation of original materials and public dislike for a fake statue¹⁰⁹. This decision is supported by Afghan government as according to them there are urgent priorities which have preference to this project¹¹⁰. While some experts believe that the smaller statue could be restored¹¹¹. Calling it as a "shameful" decision, the Hazaras said that as the statues are located in Bamiyan, a Hazara populated area so any reconstruction will project the Hazaras and release them from its historical isolation which is not favoured by the Kabul government¹¹². They referred to the failure of Afghan government to even build a proper road to Bamiyan which was the most secure province in the country. Instead Kabul wished to support the restoration of tomb of Rahman Baba in Pakistan while monuments within Afghanistan are in danger¹¹³. The Hazaras welcomed the UNESCO's recognition of Bamiyan valley as world heritage site¹¹⁴, but do not expect any positive work from the government's side.

CONCLUSION

Apparently, the Taliban demolition of Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001 emphasised the Islamic hostility to representational arts, rooted in Semitic dislike for figural images. The surviving evidence from medieval Muslim territories shows that the nature of the so called Islamic iconoclasm was basically to remove the false gods and prevent idolatry. Theology, politics and economy were the impulses of iconoclasm. Moreover, it varied from individual to individual and location. Generally, piercing of eyes, defilement, mutilation and dispersal of the statues were known ways to inanimate the images and to prove that the idols were impotent false gods. Analogy of the medieval Muslim iconoclasm which affected Bamiyan Buddhas in 9th century AD with the Taliban action shows that the Taliban action did not have any resemblance to medieval Muslim iconoclasm. Besides, the identity of Taliban conclave which issued the edict of destruction for destruction of Buddhas remained obscure and its resistance against the recognized and prestigious Muslim scholars and the theologians undermined the ideological foundation of Taliban.

Clearly, the Taliban action is a modern phenomenon performed

under the name of Islamic Iconoclasm. The motivations behind destruction of Buddhas could be seen as a reaction against the UN sanctions against the Taliban regime, declaring Rabbani's government-in-exile as the Afghan legal government and the Taliban as illegal regime. It reflected the Taliban Pashtun values and their misinterpretation of Islam influenced by Wahhabism and also manipulation of Al-Qaeda and Pakistani fundamentalist groups. It was to take revenge as they were frustrated for their failure to get UN recognition on the one hand and depicting themselves as the most loyal and strong protectors of Islam to extremist groups on the other. Besides, obliterating the ancient history of a country which was once the hub of the image centric religion of Buddhism and centre of trans-culturalism in Asia under the name of Islamic purification was to create an Islamic Emirate modelled after Saudi Arabia but with Pashtun identity. It would also provide cover to the old ethnic hostility and traffic of pre-Islamic artefacts towards Pakistani markets from where they found their way to world art markets. In fact, while destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas delegitimized the Taliban regime further, it provided more volunteers and funds for them.

Contrary to the medieval iconoclasm, the Persian primary sources projected a new picture of the Bamiyan statues which is tremendously distinct from what we had earlier; a transformation from religious cult to popular culture could be an intellectual way of preserving them by folding them in layers of literature. Indeed, the story of *Surkh-But* and *Khing-But* composed by Unsori and Al-Biruni should have been known to the Persian world in 10th century, as it was a popular romance. Not only the ordinary people of Khorasan but even the courtiers and a zealous sultan like Mahmud welcomed it, because for them the statues were not religious icons at all. Except for few poems, most of the works related to the Buddhas are not survived. Therefore, reconstructing the myth of *Surkh-But* and *Khin-But* based on these few poems is a difficult mission.

The Hazaras preserved an old local story which can help us to see the myths of *Khing-But* and *Surkh-But* of the Persian sources which clearly show the transformation of a religious cult into folk culture or popular culture- a syncretization of the Indian religious symbol and the Persian mythical essences and characters. In essence, this long standing association with Buddha statues established a sympathetic relation with them placed them within their daily life tales. Their centric position in the Hazaragi folktales of Bamiyan preserved them for centuries. They remained intact under the rule of Hazara *Mujahideen* during the civil

war and a group of guards were commissioned by Hazara leaders for their protection. Their attempts to protect the Buddhas upon the arrival of Taliban in the Valley were defeated by the Pakistani aircrafts and this let the Taliban achieve their goal of destruction. The Hazaras reacted to the Taliban act through demonstration and cultural movement and tried to create an alternative in the form of art and literature. Not only in painting and poetry but they began a campaign for their reconstruction which was later rejected by UNESCO and the Afghan government. The Hazaras did not accept this decision and interpreted it as "shameful and discriminative decision"¹¹⁵.

Eventually, the Buddhas after centuries standing in their silent niches were the source of cult and cultural inspiration demolished under the name of Islam. As B. Flood concluded "worse still is the fact that to memorialize these events a just one more examples of Islamic iconoclasm would be to valorise the monuments to their own brand of cultural homogeneity that the Taliban created in Bamiyan"¹¹⁶. Indeed, the West's plan to revive the Taliban by giving them protection and position in Afghan government will be another page in which not only destruction of the remains of pre-Islamic art of Afghanistan will be repeated but the demolition of the Islamic monuments under the name of *Shirk* will also be added.



FIG 1. BAND-I- AMIR, BAMIYAN, A NATURAL LAKE WHICH IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN CREATED BY *SALSAL* ACCORDING TO MYTHS. LATER IT WAS ASSOCIATED WITH IMAM ALI (PHOTO BY REZA, 2006)

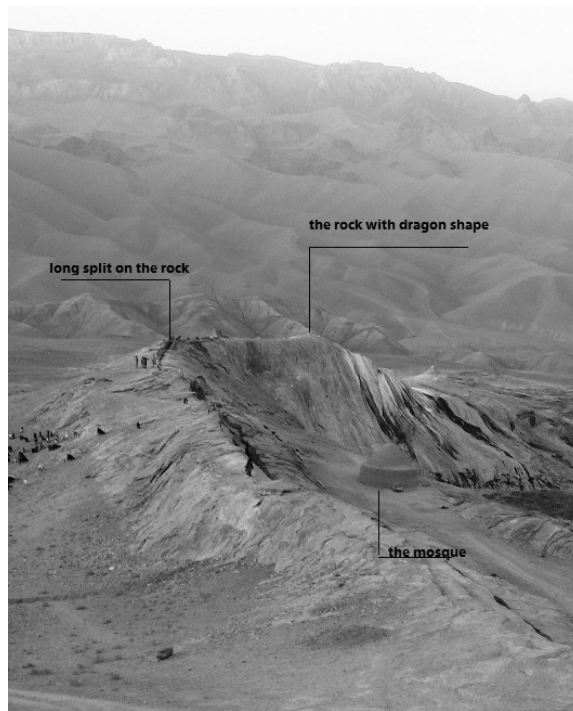


FIG 2. THE ROCK WITH DRAGON SHAPE LOCATED IN THE WEST OF THE CLIFF OF BUDDHAS (PHOTO BY SAID REZA 2006)



FIG 3. TOMB OF SAYED MIR ALI YAKHSUZ, OPPOSITE TO BUDDHAS, BAMIYAN (PHOTO BY SAID REZA, 2006)



FIG 4. THE HAZARA LEADER ABDUL ALI MAZARI IN BAMIYAN, 1996.
(<http://shojacee1362.blogfa.com>)

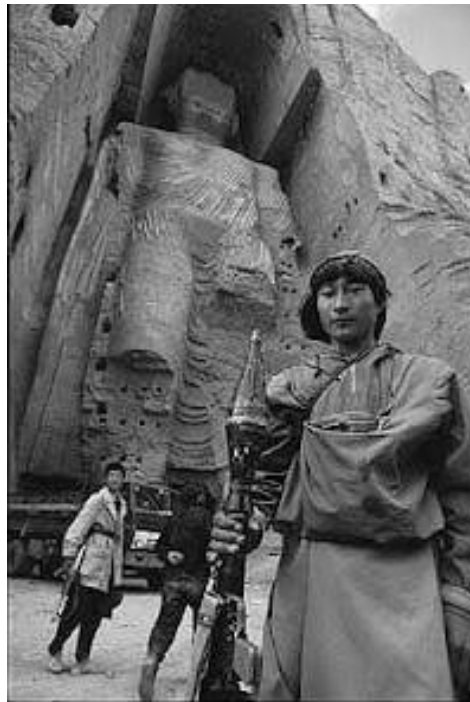


FIG 5. A HAZARA SOLDIER NEXT TO THE LARGE BUDDHA, 1995. THEY DID NOT HARM IT WHILE BEING ARMED AND RULED THE VALLEY FOR LONG TIME BUT PROTECTED THEM.
(PHOTO BY CIAO MARIA GRAZIA "ONE DAY IN BAMIYAN"
<http://www.raffaeleciriello.com/site/pw/46bamiyan.>)



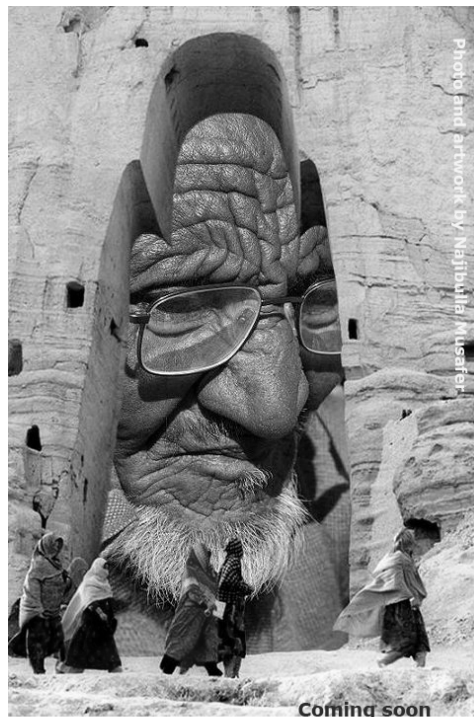
FIG 7. EXECUTION OF BUDDHA, OPAQUE WATER COLOUR AND GOLD LEAF ON WASLI PAPER BY KHADIM ALI, BAMIYAN SERIES. (<http://heritage-key.com>)



FIG 8. EXECUTED BUDDHA UNDER THE ARM OF DEMON BY KHADIM ALI, BAMIYAN SERIES. MINIATURE, GOUCHE ON WASLI PAPER. (<http://somehatmorefree.wordpress.com>)



FIG 9. BATTLE OF RUSTAM AND SUHRAB, KHADIM ALI (<http://www.canadianart.ca>)



Coming soon
A DNA Ancestry Project
Tracing Hazara People's Roots
www.HazaraPeople.com

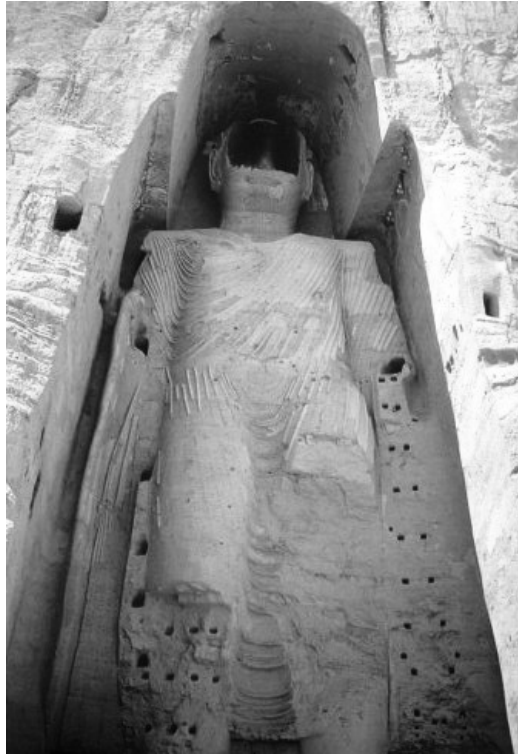
FIG 10. A HAZARA OLD MAN SHOWN IN THE NICHE OF GREAT BUDDHA, NAJIBULLAH MUSAFIR. (<http://www.hazarapeople.com>)



THE BUT-SHIKAN CALENDAR. (IN URDU LANGUAGE PUBLISHED IN PESHAWAR).
 SOURCE: K, WARIKOO. *BAMIYAN: CHALLENGE TO WORLD HERITAGE*. ISSUED UNDER THE
 AUSPICES OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION,
 NEW DELHI, THIRD EYE PRESS, 2002, p. 156.



GREAT BUDDHA BEFORE DESTRUCTION. (www.cais-soas.com)



GREAT BUDDHA, THE UPPER PART OF FACE IS BLACKENED BY TALIBAN IN AUGUST 2000.
SEE J. TUCKER, *THE SILK ROAD ART AND HISTORY*, LONDON, PHILIP WILSON
PUBLISHERS, 2003, P.181.



GREAT BUDDHA, THE HEAD AND THE LEGS BLASTED BY DYNAMITE.
(www.planckconstant.org)



THE LAST STEP OF BLASTING BUDDHA

SOURCE: K. WARIKOO, *BAMIYAN: CHALLENGE TO WORLD HERITAGE*. ISSUED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI, THIRD EYE PRESS, 2002.



EMPTY NICHE OF GREAT BUDDHA AFTER DESTRUCTION.

SOURCE: K. WARIKOO, *BAMIYAN: CHALLENGE TO WORLD HERITAGE*. ISSUED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH AND CULTURAL FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI, THIRD EYE PRESS, 2002.

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1. The term Bamiyan as challenge to world heritage was coined by Prof. K. Warikoo as title for his book which was a reaction to this vandalism and included various articles. I am grateful to him for his valuable comments and also his support for organizing the second seminar on Bamiyan Buddhas at India International Centre, New Delhi on 7 May 2012.
2. F. B, Flood. "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum". *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4, (Dec. 2002). p. 641.
3. D. K. Salter. *The Kingdom of Bamiyan: Buddhist Art and Culture of Hindu Kush*. Istituto Universitario Orientale Dipartimento Di Studi Asiatici Istituto Italiano Per Il. Naples, Rome, Medio Edestremo Oriente, 1989, p.26.
4. The Chinese monk Xuanzang recorded valuable information about Bamiyan's socio-political situation, its religion-based economy of 7th century AD which would be dependent on this network. Here, the constant visit of multinational devotees and dedication of charities, gifts and donations would economically enrich the shrines. See Shoshin Kuwayama, "Chinese Records on Bamiyan: Translation and Commentary". *East and West*, Vol. 55, No. 1/4, December 2005, pp. 139-161.
5. Salter has argued that these Buddha colossi are connected with the ritual of *Pancvarshika Parisad*. See D. Salter, *Meaning and function of Bamiyan in 7th-8th centuries*. In K. Warikoo, *Bamiyan: Challenge to World Heritage*. Issued under the Auspices of Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, New Delhi, Third eye Press, 2002, p. 35.
6. Based on Xuanzang's report and comparative historical analysis, Salter conjectured that the statues are representing the life of Buddha; she identified smaller statue with Buddha Shakyamuni and larger with Dipankara which resembled the Dipankara images from Kapisa. In contrast, Suzan Huntington argued that this huge statue is a transcendental image and could be of Vairocana. See S, Huntington. *Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*, New York, Weatherhill Press, 1985, p. 206. Referring to Xuanzang's report on dominance of Turks in Thokharistan and his statement that the statues were completed short prior to his arrival, Salter conjectured that the Buddhas could not be built earlier than 600 AD and by no one than the Turk Khaqan T'ung Shih Yebghu. See D.K. Salter, "Bamiyan: Recent Research". *East and West*, vol. 38, N. 1-4, December, 1998, p. 38. Related to chronology, of Bamiyan, if murals are compared with those of Kizil and Soghdian then the niches of Buddhas were painted not earlier than 7th century AD. This could be supported by existence of some images with Sassanian decorative elements. See Madeline, Hallade, *Gandharan Art of North India: and the Graeco-Buddhist Tradition in India, Persia and Central Asia*, New York, Harry. N. Abrams Publishers, 1968, p.157.
7. Hazaras are an ethnic group in Afghanistan and had occupied the central part of the country though there are remarkable Hazara populations living in west, north and south of the country. Their origin is controversial but recently Sayed Askar Mousavi argued that they can't be of Mongol or of Turk descent only but mixture of races having taken place in Khorasan continuously for a long time. So, they are most probably mixture of an indigenous population who mixed with Iranian, Turk, and possibly the Mongols. The idea of pure Mongol descent comes from the European writers like Armenius Vambery (1864), Alexander Burnes (1839), Mountstuart Elphinstone (1978), and with mostly colonial notion. See S.A. Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*,

London, Curzon Press, 1998, pp.21-24. The local inhabitants of the Bamiyan valley are dominantly Hazaras, speaking Persian in Hazaragi dialect and are Shia Muslim. They have preserved a romance about these statues which seems to have been derived from an ancient version of possibly the *Khing-But* and *Surkh-But* legend. Linguistically, the Persian words they use are traceable to the Persian sources of 10th century AD. Moreover, they use some words of Avestan language which are uncommon among the other Persian speakers today. Unlike the commonly known idea of descendance from the Mongols (which is not yet proved accurately), they are unfamiliar with the Mongol culture, but have strongly preserved some traits of Zoroastrian and Buddhist cultures. Their villages and places are deeply associated with Zoroastrian names. Their majority are of Shia Imami sect of Islam but there are minorities of Ismaili Shia and also some follow Sunni Hanafi faith. Their facial features and faith was the main issue for prejudice for the governments of modern Afghanistan and had become the tool for legitimizing political exploitation followed by misbehaviour and genocide supported by religious decrees. Rarely has their culture been introduced by the Afghan government, therefore, their story of the Buddha is still unreleased.

8. Mullah Omar's decree of 1999.
9. Jamal. J. Elias. "(un) making idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiyan". *Future Anterior*, Volume IV, Number 2. Winter 2007, p.17.
10. Iconoclasm means destroying the images and it is derived from the Greek term.
11. It is mentioned that the Prophet scratched the eyes of the idols by an arrow but Al-Bukhari accepted that the Prophet touched them with his steak. See *Sirat al-Nabi* (9th century AD), Arabic primary source on biography of Prophet Muhammad written by Abi Muhammad Abdul Malik ibn Hisham. Ed. Majdi Fathi al-Sayed, Cairo, Dar al-Sahaba Lil Turath be Tantana, 1416/1995, Vol.4, p.40.
12. It is in *Al-Isra*, verse 81 and it said: "Truth has (now) arrived and Falsehood perished: for the Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish". Ali, A.Y. (Tran.), *The Holy Quran*, New Delhi, Royal Publishers & Distributers, 2000, p. 266.
13. *Kitab al-Asnam* (9th century AD), Arabic primary source on Arab idolatry written by Ibn Hisham Kalbi. Translated by Muhammad Reza Jalali Naeeni, Tehran, Nashri-Naw Press, 1364/1986, pp. 273-76.
14. Chase. F, Robinson. *The Rise of Islam 600-705*. The New Cambridge History of Islam. Vol.1. The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries. Ed. Chase F. Robinson, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 222; Fred. Donner, *Modern approach to early Islamic history*. The New Cambridge History of Islam. Vol.1. The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries. Ed. Chase F. Robinson, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.629.
15. It is derived from the Arabic word "Shiraka" means associating something with someone implies associating Other Gods with God.
16. F.B. Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum". *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4, December 2002, p.641.
17. It is in *Al-Ikhlās*, verse 1 which said: "He is Allah the One and the Only". A.Y. Ali, (Trans.), *The Holy Quran*, New Delhi, Royal Publishers & Distributers, 2000, p. 605.
18. It is an emphasis on this issue as *Al-Imran* verse 19 which says: "The religion before Allah is Islam..." see A.Y. Ali, (Tran), *The Holy Quran*, p. 44. Also see *Al-Maidah* verse 3: "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion". *Ibid.*, p.93.
19. This verse dates to early years of Islam and is still controversial as according to

- that Muslims and non-Muslims can live together and the Muslim has no right to forcefully convert others to Islam. It is in *Al-Kafirun* verse 6 which says: "To you be your Way, and to me mine" see A.Y. Ali, (Tran), *The Holy Quran*, p. 604.
20. Mahmud's expedition to Somanatha in Gujarat was also a political motivation and theological impulse supported by economic benefits. R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, New Delhi, Penguin Book, 2004, p.51.
 21. Abubakr Narshakhi in his *Tarikh-i-Bukhara* mentioned that the many materials which belonged to pre-Islamic building used by the Muslims for building the mosque of Bukhara were built on an older Buddhist temple. The gates with figural images used for new mosque after defacing them. See *Tarikh-i-Bukhara* (4th AH/ 10th century AD), a Persian Primary source written by Abubakr Narshakhi. Tranlated by Abu Nasr al-Qobawi and summarized by ibn Umar. Ed. by Mudarris Razawi, Tehran, Saadat Press, 1317/1939, pp. 57-58. In other case the Muslim conquerors changed the Zoroastrian fire temple of Mughaki Attar in Bukhara or Jain temple of Delhi where Qutb Minar is standing and the Byzantium Church of Constantine to a mosque. See: J. Tucker, *The Silk Road Art and History*, London, Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003, p.646.
 22. F.B. Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum" *op.cit.*, p. 644.
 23. P. C. Graves, "From an Archaeology of Iconoclasm to an Anthropology of the Body: Images, Punishment and Personhood in England, 1500-1660". *Current Anthropology* Volume 49, Number 1, February 2008, pp. 37-38.
 24. Al-Baladhuri in his book *Futuh Al- Buldan* mentioned that Abdl Rahman ibn Samorah led the Muslim Army against the Kabul Shah and in a battle could conquer Rukhaj. There he came to know about the temple of Zur which its icon was well known. He mutilated the statue and removed the gemstones from its eyes and passed it to the local ruler of the area and said that he mutilated the idol to show that this idol has no power. See *Futuh Al-Buldan* (9th century AD), Arabic primary source on History of Islam, written by Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad Bin Jab Al-Baladhuri. Trans. by Azartash Azarnush, (Intisharat-i- Bonyad-i-Farhang Iran, Tehran, 1346/ 1968). p. 71. It should be noted that many of the Gandharan statues were decapitated during Muslim (Mahmud and his father) expeditions to India.
 25. P. C. Graves, *op.cit.*, p. 39.
 26. F.B. Flood, *op.cit.*, pp. 646-47.
 27. R. M. Riefstahl, "Persian Islamic Stucco Sculptures". *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 1931, pp. 439-40.
 28. The Umayyad palace of Qusayr Amra (Syria) and Abbassid palace of Jausaq, Samarra (Iraq) preserved their wall paintings which are showing some animal, human figures. All are decorative art and has not religious significance. See T. D. Rice, *Islamic Art* (Thames and Hudson. Revised edition, Printed in Britain, 1975).pp.26-32. It is also worth mentioning that the poets at Mahmud's courts left some poems showing that Mahmud had a garden at Balkh in which its chambers had been painted. Interestingly these paintings were all showing Mahmud in battlefields, on his throne or in party.
 29. F.B. Flood, *op.cit.*, p. 650.
 30. *Zain al-Akhbar* (1050 AD), Persian primary source on history written by Adul haiy ibn Zahak Garezi. ed. Reza Zadeh Malik, Tehran, Anjuman-i- Asar wa Mafakhir Farhangi, 1384/2006, p. 206.
 31. R. Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, *op.cit.*, p.59. Romila Thapar argues that Mahmud's raid to Somanatha in 1026 could be seen from politico-

- economic aspect as well, *Ibid.*, p. 51.
32. F.B. Flood, *op.ct.*, p. 649.
 33. *Mujam al-Buldan* (623 A.H/1225 AD), an Arabic primary source on Geography written by Yaqut Hamawi. Trans. by Alinaqi Munzawi, Tehran, Miraj Press, 2001, Vol.1, p. 419.
 34. F.B. Flood, *op.ct.*, p. 651.
 35. These motivations are suggested by Flood, Gamboni, Pirre and Francesco Francioni.
 36. D. Gamboni, "World heritage: Shield or Target?" *The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter*, Vol.6, 2 November 2001, p.11.
 37. Wahid Muzhdah says that many Afghan artefacts reached Peshawar, Dubai and London for sale immediately after the Taliban's announcement for destruction of figural arts. He states that some anonymous groups in the name of Taliban's delegations reached London with antiques for sale. See W. Muzhdah, *Afghanistan in five years of Taliban's sovereignty*, Tehran, Nay Publication, 1382/2004, pp. 84-87.
 38. P. Centlivres, "The Controversy over the Buddhas of Bamiyan", *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Special Issue - No. 2, 2008, p.7.
 39. Taliban established Islamic Emirate calling their leader as *Amir al-Mumenin* (commander of the faithful) which term was used by Caliphs.
 40. Destruction of Buddhas was a sheer obloquy to Buddhists of the world and forcing Hinuds (in Kabul and Jalalabad) to wear the distinct clothes or Hazaras to choose either reconverting to the Taliban's Islam or paying *Jazya* or chose death. Khaliqdad from Bamiyan, Abdul Ahad from Ghazni and other Hazaras from Mazar-e-Sharif are given the same words in this regard. Taliban indeed imposed their ideology on others. D. Gamboni, "World heritage: Shield or Target?" *op.cit.*
 41. Taleban defend statue destruction. CNN.com, 5 March 2001 <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/03/05/afghanistan.m5/index.html>
 42. John. Betlyon, "Special Report: Afghan Archaeology on the Road to Recovery". *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Vol. 67, No. 1, March 2004, p.59.
 43. D. Gamboni, "World heritage: Shield or Target?" *op.cit.*
 44. F.B. Flood, *op.cit.*, p. 651.
 45. The support even came from other known fundamentalist groups who fight against India. Kashmiri militant organization *Harkat-ul-Mujahidin*, supported the Taliban decision for destruction of Buddhas. "In an Islamic country there is no concept of idols and our holy Prophet taught us to break the idols", said a statement from the Pakistan-based group, which is fighting against India in Kashmir. See:http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/History/NATIONAL%20TREASURES/statues_destroyed/islamic_reaction.htm
 46. It should be mentioned that Maulana Fazl ur-Rahman the leader of JUI (F) while defending the Taliban's decision of demolishing the statues said that every government has the right to make decisions. "The Afghan government can understand whether this decision is in accordance with the Islamic injunctions or not. It is a matter of Islam and Afghanistan has all along remained an Islamic country. I do not know if there are any statues in Afghanistan but that country has a government, which makes decisions according to Islam. So, they should be left to make decisions on their own." (March 1, 2001, NNI) ISLAMABAD. See: http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/History/NATIONAL%20TREASURES/statues_destroyed/islamic_reaction.htm
 47. Taliban leader's statement insisted that they are not idol brokers but an idol breaker is comparable with that of Mahmud's statement at Somanatha.

48. This calendar was designed and published in large quantities in Peshawar to satisfy supporters of Taliban. But it was published in Urdu.
49. Interview with Khaliqdad resident of Bamiiyan (Name changed on request). The presence and involvement of Arabs and Pakistanis is reported by *Pak Tribune* as well. See Bin Laden's fingerprints seen on ruins of Bamiiyan Buddhas on 22 October, 2006. *Pak Tribune*. <http://paktribune.com/news/Bin-Ladens-fingerprints-seen-on-ruins-of-Bamiiyan-Buddhas-157871.html>
50. The Saudi Salafi Shaikh Mahmud Aqla praised the Taliban for such heroic action. Other religious fundamentalists mostly from Saudi Arabia appreciated Taliban but were unhappy over their delay in this mission. So, they recommended for giving expiatory which was later achieved by sacrificing the cows. W. Muzhdah, *Afghanistan in five years of Taliban's sovereignty*, *op.cit.*, p. 93.
51. D. Gamboni, "World heritage: Shield or Target?" *op.cit.*, p. 11.
52. J.P. Fishman, "Locating the International Interest in International Cultural Property Disputes", *The Yale Journal of International law*, Vol. 35, No. 347, 2010, p.361.
53. It is argued that Taliban's destruction of Buddhas was an action of their self-understanding and should be seen in the context of Muslim memory. For this argument see Jamal. J. Elias. "(un) making idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiiyan". *Future Anterior*, Volume IV, Number 2, Winter 2007, p.18.
54. P. Centlivres, "The Controversy over the Buddhas of Bamiiyan", *op.cit.*, p.7
55. The Taliban regime itself had earlier announced that the Bamiiyan Buddhas do not have religious significance and there was no Buddhist in Afghanistan. Therefore, the regime was responsible for their preservation as it could help the regime by attracting tourists. See "Katiba", *Journal of Association of Preservation of Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan*. No.6, May 2000.
56. See C.E. Bosworth, "The Early Islamic History of Ghur". *Central Asiatic Journal*, VI. The Hague-Wiesbaden, 1961.pp.116-133. *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1977.
57. No Muslim country reported such vandalism against the art works. The Islamic world admired the two sculptures almost from the day Islam became entrenched in the area around ninth century. See: *International Herald Tribune*, 3 July 2001.
58. On 11 March 2001, high Muslim delegation led by Qatar Minister of Foreign Affairs and some highly renowned Muslim Scholars from Al-Azhar including Shaikh Nasr Farid Wassel, Shaikh Muhammad al-Rawi and Shaikh Yusuf al-Qarzawi, the most popular preacher in Arab world visited Pakistan to convince the Taliban to stop the destruction as it was not only a sacrilege to the cultural heritage but would blacken the face of Islam in public imagination. Taliban did not respect the delegation's appeal and continued their work which was in reality a kind of ignoring the Muslim delegation. See Jamal. J. Elias. "(un) making idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiiyan", *op.cit.*
59. W. Muzhdah, *Afghanistan in five years of Taliban's sovereignty*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.
60. P. Centlivres, *op.cit.*, p. 16.
61. F. Francioni, "The Destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiiyan and International Law", *EJIL*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2003, p. 620.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 620-45.
63. Osmound Boppearachchi. "Recent Archaeological Discoveries from Afghanistan: Destruction of Cultural heritage in K. Warikoo (Ed.) *Bamiiyan: Challenge to World Heritage*", p. 54. One should point out that when the Taliban were destroying the Buddha statues in Bamiiyan, they did not think that these statues are part of their own past and instead would feel that these are idols and belonged to the Hazaras

- as they forced the locals to drill the statues and place dynamites.
64. F. Francioni, *op.cit.*, 619–651, p. 642
 65. *Laila Majnu*, is a well-known Arabic romance.
 66. According to Awfi, the romance of Wameq and Uzra was composed by Unsori for Mahmud. See Muhammad Awfi. *Lubab al-Albab*. A Persian primary source, with preface by Edward Brown, translated by Muhammad Abbasi, Tehran, Mumtaz Publication, 1983, p. 519.
 67. Ferdawsi composed this story in his grand epic called *Shahnama*. See Abul Qasim Firdawsi. *Shahnama*, Tehran, Amir Kabir Publication, 2006, p. 215.
 68. For the term *But* (idol) in Persian see H.W. Bailey, "But in Iranian language", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, University of London, Vol.6, No.2, 1931, pp. 279-283.
 69. The painted statues were found from Ghurband valley located in east of Bamiyan and also from Gandhara.
 70. This book has not survived but through other sources we are aware that al-Biruni researched on Bamiyan Statues. See Z. Safa, *History of the Persian Literature in Iran*, Tehran, Firdawsi Publication, 1991, Vol.1, p. 561.
 71. During my personal and independent research in Bamiyan, on the Hazara folktales carried out in 2004, I came across various oral traditions on these statues.
 72. *Pahlavan* is derived from *Pahlaw* in Parthian tradition and means the warrior and could be traced to Parthian myths. There is reference in *Shahnama*. Some elite families in Ghur would call themselves Pahlavan. And later in *Tarikhnama yi-Herat*, Saifi Heravi continuously speaks about the *Pahlavans*. See Saif ibn Muhammad al-Heravi, *Tarikh Namayi Herat*. (a Persian primary source 718-721A.H./1318-21 AD), edited by Ghulam Reza Tabataba, Tehran, Asatir Publication, 2005, p. 541.
 73. *Pir* in Persian means wised man.
 74. It was the capital of the Ghurids in Khorasan and due to plenty of ironsmiths it was called Ahangaran. See C.E. Bosworth, "The Early Islamic History of Ghur". *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. VI, 1961, pp.116-133. *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1977.
 75. The locals refer to the Band-i- Amir as the stone wall made by *Salsal*. Though there is another person who thought Ali achieved these two conditions for converting the locals to Islam. Though contrary to popular beliefs, geologists opine that the dam has naturally occurred and is not man-made.
 76. One may perhaps enquire as to the subject of these painted motifs, especially if these murals originally had Buddhist themes or secular representations from the folklore of *Salsal* and *Shahmama*. And if so, a persistent question arises as to the nature of affiliation between this folklore and that of traditional Buddhism. The only plausible explanation of this dilemma could be that, the frame, space and subject of the painted niche was adapted to local folklore and imaginative oral tradition in the manner of the folk romances with which the locals were familiar with.
 77. *Salsal* died due to the curse of the dead dragon's spirit but *Shahmama* died in the tradition of the faithful beloved who followed her lover even unto death.
 78. Ali was also the 4th Muslim Caliph. This later and alternative version of the myth which portrays Ali as a spokesman of the state religious institution of Islam in the region and his act of slaying the dragon and stopping the floods by building the dam, could be read as an attempt of creation of a hero out of religious leaders, in order to make mass appeal and mass acceptance of Islam amongst the civilians by bringing a Caliph from the lineage of the Prophet himself, closer to the common

- man. This could be a politically engineered motive behind ascribing a Caliph, Ali and not any other king, nobleman or common man with the hero-like status in popular imagination. This action was a reaction especially in reference to a place which had been the womb of other religions like Zoroastrianism and Buddhism and possibly the creators and propagators of this myth were aware of parallel folklore of *Salsal* and *Shahmama* but wanted to re-affirm the land's Islamic affiliation through the customized myth of Ali as the dragon slayer. However, no parallels have been drawn with Ali and the niches or the statue or the murals, possibly because of the un-idolatrous nature of the latter coming religion of Islam.
79. There is another Timurid shrine in Mazar-e-Sharif, called Mazar-e-Sakhi jaan which is allegedly the shrine of Ali. There are local stories which depict him as a great warrior who killed a big snake, which could be an alternative to the dragon, in the area called Gur-i-Mar in east of Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. Interestingly, the name Gur-i-Mar in Persian means the grave of the snake. However, one should also remember that Bamiyan and Mazar-e-Sharif are approximately 200 kms apart.
 80. N. Dupree, *An Historical Guide to Afghanistan*, Japan, Jagra, 1977, pp.170-71. And also see P. Levi, *The Light Garden of the Angel King: Journeys in Afghanistan*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill 1972, p. 66. A travelogue dated 1260/1844 mentions the story of this lake and connects it with Caliph Ali and says that this story was common even among the traders in Bukhara. See: *Safar namayii Bukhara* (travelogue of Bukhara), a Persian report written by an anonymous Qajarid ambassador in 1260/1844. (ed.) H. Zamani, (Pazhuhishhayi Ulum Insani wa Mutaliati farhangi. Tehran, 1373/1994).p.71. For common ideas on this lake and valley of Dragon see K. Yazdani, *Bamiyan sarzamine Shigiftiha: Bamiyan the land of the wonders*, Kabul, Matbaayi Tibaati wa Sanaati Ahmad, 1378/2008, p.63.
 81. Ascribing mythical proportions to the central character like *Salsal*, who was an ordinary person with extraordinary abilities, is perhaps a concept borrowed from the dramatic transformation of a historically existing young man, from a prince Siddhartha Gautama to a Shakyamuni Buddha who could also perform miracles or later as per the *Jatakas*, into a Dipankara Buddha.
 82. It is of utmost importance to note that the characteristic attributes of Buddha's principles of non-violence were not adopted in this region, especially in being more faithful to the popular romance or folk or epic traditions of martial prowess of the protagonist; a tradition with which this region was more familiar with, notwithstanding the early dominant presence of Buddhism in the region.
 83. For example, the central heroic character in Persian mythology is Rostam. His myths have intermingled with many local stories in the whole Persian world and often allegiance to him has been made with places like Takht-e-Rostam in Samangan, Afghanistan and Naqsh-e-Rostam, near Persepolis, Iran.
 84. *Buz-i-Chini*, is like a didactic moral tale and possibly this oral tradition might have been supplemented with ceramic or terracotta toy characters made for the children; thus perhaps the word *Buz-i-Chini*, which means the 'Ceramic Goat'.
 85. The hostility between the Pashtun residents of South Afghanistan with Hazaras goes back to early 18th century AD with the entry and encroachment of the Pashtuns on the Hazara dominant region of southern Afghanistan, wherefore the Hazaras were gradually pushed towards the north-west and towards the central highlands. For hostility of Pashtuns with Hazaras and their treatment, see Cole and R.I. Juan, *The Taliban, Women and the Hegelian Private Sphere*. In Crews, D. Robert and Amin Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, Harvard University Press, 2008, p.131.

86. Its availability with English sub-titles, suggests the growing popularity and demand of such Hazaragi folktales among the Afghan diaspora. *Buz-e-Chini*. Post. MM. Zers. A Hazaragi Folk story from the Bamiyan Valley. Story by Husian Yosufi and produced by Nasim Javad, is directed by Abbas Ali .see <http://urozgan.org>
87. Quite similar is the way the Greek *Aesop's Fables* share similarities in adaptations with the Indian *Panchatantra*, Persian *Kalila wa Damna*. It is also visible in Tibetan Folktales.
88. There is a circular tomb located to the east of the large Buddha and is ascribed to Mir Sayed Ali Yakhsuz from whom the Sayeds of Bamiyan claim descent. His arrival to Bamiyan from Sabzawar (a city near Nishapur, Iran) was mixed with mythical stories as it is said that he would make fire out of ice. The creation of such myths for a historical character is not surprising in Bamiyan. It is mentioned that Wahhabism already declared war against Sufism as the latter objected to the ideology of the Wahhabi school. The tomb of Mir Ali Yakhsuz has survived due to two possible reasons: firstly the Taliban focused on the demolition of Buddhas and secondly the shrine has no building and is an open tomb with old trees. The population also was not able to visit this site, so the site did not attract the attention of the Taliban and survived.
89. Admittedly, only such rich cultural background and peaceful nature could let the Hazaras to allow and elect a female governor like Habiba Sarabi, even amidst the religious and patriarchal society of Afghanistan. Earlier the Hazara women and men wished that their son would grow up and become the governor of Bamiyan. Now it is evident that they are accepting their daughters also in that position. It attests to the Hazaras' liberal and accommodating outlook towards many aspects of life.
90. S. Amin, "Papers on Arab Spring", Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, March 2012, p. 9.
91. Interview with Abdul Ahad Muhammadi, New Delhi, 12 April 2012.
92. The Pashtun king Abdul Rahman declared religious war against the Hazaras created increased the sectarian conflicts among the inhabitants of the country and remained as a legacy till today as the Taliban declared the religious war against the Hazaras during their sovereignty. See G.M. Ghubar, *Afghanistan dar Masir-i-Tarikh (History of Afghanistan)*, Kabul, Maivand Publication House, 1382/2003, pp. 669-70.
93. The census of 1978-79 depicts the Hazaras as minority in Bamiyan while recent census by International NGO's rejects it. See, World Food Programme (WFP) report on Bamiyan <http://www.foodsecurityatlas.org/afg/country/provincial-Profile/Bamyan>
94. Interview with Haji Fahimi, New Delhi, 27 April 2012.
95. It is common knowledge that Shia'ism (also practiced by Hazaras) is ideologically not considered a constituent part of Islam by the dominant Wahhabi group of Taliban and along with the territorial hostility of 18th century this was another reason for the Taliban targeting of Hazaras. Robert D. Crew agrees that faith and race were the major reason behind the massacre of the Hazaras in Afghanistan. See D. R. Crews, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 6.
96. According to Haji Fahimi a group of Hazara young men decided to stop the Taliban in an ambush to prevent destruction plan but they were mostly killed by Pakistani fighters and helicopters. It is a Hazaragi song accessed through personal interaction with the composer, beginning with, "Bud agar maida muni az kotali Shibar biyaÖ"

- (one of the ways to Bamiyan passes through Shibar Pass) and it was composed by Davood Sarkhush in 2001.
97. Telephonic interview with Khaliqdad (name changed on request), Bamiyan, 2012. Same was stated are given by Haji Fahimi as well.
 98. Taliban massacred many residents of Yakawlang with swords while being dressed in white clothes and riding horses to create the dramatic impression that they are the white angels of God and representing those who had helped Muhammad in the battle of Badr. Telephonic interview with Khaliqdad (name changed on request). Bamiyan. 2012. See Sinno, Abdulqader. *Explaining the Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns*. In D. R. Crews, and A. Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, p.59.
 99. Taliban burnt the Yakawlang bazaar. Telephonic interview with Khaliq Daad (name changed on request). Bamiyan 2012. The same narration was given by Haji Fahimi.
 100. Khadim Ali is a Hazara young painter who was born in 1978 in Quetta, Pakistan. He studied Art in Lahore College and later traveled to Bamiyan but then there were no Buddha statues any more. His interview was published in *Kabul Nath*, no.7, July 2005, see <http://www.kabulnath.de>
 101. Kaaba is the holiest shrines of the Muslims in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.
 102. A mythical person in *Shahnama* who was killed by Afrasiab.
 103. *Muzdur* literary means a hired laborer but in Persian it means hireling of the devil also. See *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* by F. Steingass, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2008.
 104. Serving whom? Perhaps to the phantom presence of the horned golden demon in one of the paintings who sits facing a bleeding disemboweled *Parinirvana* Buddha with a displaced halo, out of whom another haloed *muzdur* is superimposed, while this golden silhouette is crowned with a black lotus-motif halo.
 105. Source <http://naweederooz.com/in/29.html>
 106. Personal Interview with Akbar Khorasani, Kabul, 5 August 2009.
 107. Ali Baba Awrang painted Buddha and combined it with this poem in Nastaliq script. This painting is in Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan (CCA) collection which I personally visited on 7 August 2009 and had a conversation with Awrang. The original Persian poem is :
Abre siah amad o bar koh istad, Öbaran girift o zuzayi zulmat kashid bad
Baran nishast o mah masihayi pak shod, Ö.angah dar barabari hokmi shab istad,
Buddha hazar para o Buddha hazara shod, Ö,mahi hazar para ba ghari shab uftad,
Sobh aftar amad o yakh bast roye koh, Ökhorshid mord o raft ofogh rob a injimad,
Buddha nabud o darra galu para karda bud, Ö."But murda bad, Shi'a o Kuffar murda bad",
Shab chand bar pakhsha shod az mah vara ha, Ötasvir hayi zinda az afsanayi Jihad.
 108. Mostar bridge is located in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was built by the Ottomans in 16th century AD, it was destroyed by Croat forces in 1993 and restored in 2004.
 109. See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/experts_outline_plans_for_preservation_of_bamiyan_buddhas_world_heritage_site
 110. Bamiyan governor Ms. Habiba Sarabi has stated that are several countries with willing to reconstruct the statues technical possibility of reconstruction and funds, but there is no interest shown by the Afghan government for their reconstruction yet. See Qiyam, M. Barg namayi Fanus-i- Hunar, <http://garderah.persianblog.ir/post/53>
 111. Erwin Emmerling of the University of Munich said that it is possible to restore the smaller Buddha.

112. Interview with Abdul Ahad, New Delhi, 2012.
113. see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/experts-outline-plans-for-preservation-of-bamiyan-buddhas-world-heritage-site/>
114. F. Francioni, "The Destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and International Law", *op.cit.*, p. 621.
115. Interview with Abdul Ahamd Muhammadi, New Delhi, 2012.
116. F.B. Flood, *op.ct.*, p. 655.

BAMIYAN BUDDHAS: VIEW FROM HAZARA

RASHID AHMADI

Bamiyan is a province in central Afghanistan, where Hazara people are the main dwellers. This province is famous for its high mountains, deep valleys and cold weather, and obviously for the biggest statues of Buddhas which were destroyed by the Taliban regime in 2001.

These two huge Buddhas were located in the northern parts of Bamiyan. The smaller Buddha was about 33 metres and is called *Shamama* by the local people. The bigger one was about 53 metres and people of the valley call it *Salsal*. There are lots of caves in the same cliff where these huge statues were located. Till the year 2004, people used to live within these caves, but due to UNESCO's plan for the reconstruction of the destroyed Buddhas, people have been shifted to other places. Unfortunately even after the lapse of about 10 years, no considerable work has been done by UNESCO and other stakeholders of the planned project.

Based on my own experience during my stay in Bamiyan and listening to the local voices on the Buddhas, there are three perspectives on the issue:

1. Religious and sectarian point of view
2. From economic and geographical perspective, and
3. Political side

1. Religious and sectarian point of view

In Bamiyan, the most obvious social fact about the Buddhas is that the local people never thought and imagined that the existence of these statues was in conflict with their religious beliefs. Majority of the people saw the Buddhas as historical and artistic artefacts which had increased the beauty of the Bamiyan Valley. Over the centuries, famous local religious scholars and evangelists visited Bamiyan, but none of them had a bad feeling about the Buddhas and they did not preach a single

word against the Buddhas. Even during the civil war, no one wanted to damage this precious and historical heritage. For instance during the civil war, Bamiyan was the main headquarters of *Hezb-e-Wahdat* (Wahdat Political Party). Shahid Abdul Ali Mazari was the leader of this party. Though he was a rigid religious scholar, he did not think of destroying the Buddhas. When the previous leader of *Hezb-e-Wahdat* was killed by the Taliban, then Karim Khalili the current Vice President of Afghanistan came to power in Bamiyan. In order to save the Buddhas he ordered the local people to shift the shops which were built near the Buddhas so as to protect this historical heritage. But as soon as the Taliban arrived into Bamiyan, they started criticising the existence of the Buddhas.

2. Economic and geographical perspective

Based on local views, ethnic conflict in Afghanistan is another reason of the destruction of the Buddhas by the Taliban. Since other ethnic groups, particularly Pashtuns could not bear such exceptional source of income and attraction of national and international tourism to Bamiyan, hence the Taliban destroyed the economic sources of the Hazara people giving a religious justification. They not only destroyed the Buddhas, they also stole on a large scale and committed massacre of Hazaras in Bamiyan.

Another reason for the destruction of Buddhas was that the Taliban and Pakistan wanted to destroy the historical identity of Hazara ethnic group who have existed in Bamiyan for thousand years. As regards the facial features, the Buddhas looked like local Hazara people. The Taliban who are mainly Pashtuns wanted to eliminate the cultural elements of other ethnic groups in order to prove themselves as aboriginal inhabitants of Afghanistan.

3. Political conflict

To trace back the root of the conflict which resulted in the destruction of Buddhas, it goes back to the time of Pashtun rulers in the past decades. During the kingdom of Abdur Rahman Khan, 62% of Hazaras were massacred and most of their agricultural lands were occupied. And the last vital attack on Hazaras was to destroy their Buddhas. While it was celebrated by the Taliban, at the same time it was the saddest moment of Hazaras in their history. Each year Hazaras of Bamiyan conduct a memorial ceremony in Bamiyan city, when high officials from government and non-governmental organisations participate and remember the sad day when Buddhas were destroyed.

ECHOES FROM THE EMPTY NICHE

BAMIYAN BUDDHA SPEAKS BACK

ANKITA HALDAR

BAMIYAN BUDDHA: SOME REPRESENTATIONS UNLIKE SANDSTONE

In the aftermath of the Taliban iconoclasm of Afghanistan's national heritage in 2001, the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan though were obliterated by tonnes of dynamite yet the Taliban hatred could not stop the recreation and reconstruction of these icons in the verbal and artistic imagination of civilians, poets and artists. Even though the culture was held hostage by the Taliban yet their venom could not stop the human spirit from hoping and persevering. In what seems to comment on the contemporary situation in which Bamiyan valley has found itself now, the poet W.B Yeats had once said,

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is
loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the
ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand; surely the Second Coming is at hand...
... The darkness drops again but now I know, that twenty
centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,¹*

Often called as 'the graveyard of empires²', the 'land of the bones³'; all such epithets are ascribed to Afghanistan; the land which had given refuge to Buddhism long after the faith had dissolved from the land of its birth in India, and had been the birthplace of Rumi⁴, and the land which conceived numerous Gandhara idols has but now become the tomb of the Gods! Afghanistan has since then featured as a narrative

trope in many contemporary English works of fiction, memoir and poetry. Khaled Hosseini's⁵ *The Kite Runner*⁶ (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*⁷ (2007) and Atiq Rahimi's⁸ *The Patience Stone*⁹ (2008), *Flashman*¹⁰ (2005) by George MacDonald Fraser, *The Afghan Campaign*¹¹ by Steven Pressfield (2007), *The Sound of Language*¹² by Amulya Malladi (2008), *Afghanistan, Where God only comes to Weep*¹³ (2002) and *Samira & Samir*¹⁴ (2005), by Siba Shakib, *Thunder over Kandahar* by Sharon E. McKay¹⁵ (2011), *For the Love of a Son* by Jean Sasoon¹⁶ (2010), *The Bookseller of Kabul* by Asne Seierstad¹⁷ (2002), *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam¹⁸ (2008), *Forbidden Lessons in a Kabul Guesthouse* by Suraya Sadeed¹⁹ (2011), *The Kabul Beauty School* by Deborah Rodriguez²⁰ (2007), *Lipstick in Afghanistan* by Roberta Gatley²¹ (2010) are some of them. Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner*²² is a trilogy for children on the lives of Afghans. But many of these fictional narratives seem to revolve around the Afghan capital, Kabul. Although an illustrated bilingual (English-Dari) children's book called *I See the Sun in Afghanistan*²³ by Dedie King, introduces the Afghan culture of the Bamiyan valley, through a young girl child protagonist Habiba who has been named after Afghanistan's only woman governor, Habiba Sarabi²⁴.

Bamiyan has also attracted much global attention in academic circles but mostly in the field of political and scientific research and reportings in the nature of motives behind the Iconoclasm from political dimensions (Warikoo, Elais, Klimburg, Mathew Power) on the study and restoration of the Bamiyan murals and statues (Gruen, Remodino, Janwoski, Lawler, Zhang), on the issue of Bamiyan statues as cultural property and laws related to it (Fishman, Gier, Kruti Patel), on UNESCO mandates (Manhart), on Bamiyan in historical times (Dupree, Burnes, Eyre, Kuwayama), on geotechnical aspects of Bamiyan terrain (Margottini), and Bamiyan from art historical and archaeological views (Bopearachchi, Flood, Gamboni).

Though geographically far located from the site which saw the enactment of tragedy, still the manner in which the colossal legacies of Buddhism have been conjured up in the valleys past folk history is now worth mentioning. The most popular imagination of the local inhabitants of Bamiyan, was to call two of the standing statues as *Salsal*²⁵ and *Shahmama*, not perhaps knowing their Buddhist and exclusively masculine affiliations or assimilating Buddhist mythology into folk imagination. Captain P. J Maitland also mentioned in his notes on Bamiyan that the other travelers have known the two standing idols as

male and female and as SalSal-Shahmama²⁶. But another legend aligns these two standing idols with the Muslim belief of *Keyumursh* and his consort (Adam and Eve)²⁷ and the third small one as their child *Seish* or *Seth*²⁸. But, perhaps poetic licence in the folk history can be pardoned because the history of Buddhism and these idols identity hasn't been constant in the region. Their memory has been oscillating between Hieun Tsiang's 7th century references, then resurfacing in Tamer Lane's historian Sherif-o-Deen's reference to them as *Lat and Munat*²⁹ in the 13th-14th century and then Akbar's Wazir Abul Fazl noting their existence in the 16th century³⁰. It is only in the 19th century that there started a massive revival in the scrutiny of the Bamiyan Buddhas which has continued till today.

Now, that the valley has been gouged out mercilessly by the Taliban on grounds of condemning Idolatry and the land has been perpetually emptied out of idols³¹, of peace and of innocent people, and when '*things fall apart and the centre cannot hold*' and till the niche remains empty, it is perhaps time to, "*Listen to presences inside poems, Let them take you where they will...*"³² Many opinions and reactions came up, however, the highlight of this paper is to engage with the contemporary literary reactions and responses to this act of iconoclasm through the lens of poems and fictional narratives³³. This paper thus analyses the themes used by poets writing on the Bamiyan Buddha in English. Some of these poems are from anthologies, while some are published individually online as well. It is very important for us to give attention to these poems because these are the woes and grieves of philanthropists worldwide who were devastated when the Taliban blew the statues. Because, "*Stones wound temporarily. Words wound permanently.*"³⁴ Anders Widmark³⁵ had commented that,

In a 'poeticized community' such as Afghanistan, much of what is written, especially poetry, is in one way or another related to politics; not necessarily being political or ideological, but politicized to various degrees. When one considers the nature of poetry and fiction produced over the last three decades of war and conflict this becomes clear. What is also interesting and can be said to epitomize Afghan literature of today, is its high degree of responsiveness and immediacy—in many other literatures a national trauma often demands some sort of 'incubation period' before the topic can be processed; in Afghanistan, traumas are attacked by the pen simultaneously as they occur. '*The Idol's Dust*'³⁶ by Zalmay Babakohi,³⁷ as an example, was written only a month after the destruction of the Bamiyan statues in March 2001.³⁸

Since, the Bamiyan Buddhas are situated in the Hazarajat province of Afghanistan and the Valley's cultural heritage had been under the sole supervision of its local population, the Hazaras since a long time, hence it will be fairly unjust to read and analyze the essence of all literary events being narrated on the Bamiyan Buddhas in the successive pages, without correlating the issues with the Valley and its people's historical and cultural past. That is not to overlook the histories of persecution and ethnic marginalization of the Hazaras by primarily two factions-Pashtuns and Taliban. And moreover, it is a well known historical fact that the Shia'te Hazaras were persecuted by Sunni Pashtuns during the 'Iron Amir' Abdur Rahman Khan's time ³⁹ and that 'ritual' has only been continued by the Taliban now. Thus, most of the literature in verse and prose that one will be reading will seem to address the general Afghan situation; however this legacy in sandstone being in situ in Hazrajat province and these folk legends being a unique brainchild of the Hazara folk tradition, hence there will be a conscious attempt to read Hazara marginalization and ethnic cleansing motives into the matrix of these creative works.

BAMIYAN BUDDHA IN CINEMATIC AND DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS

However, in recent years, especially after 2001, there seems to have been a slow yet strong consciousness growing among people on the issue of Bamiyan Buddha detonations in the field of contemporary popular culture and literature. The valley of Bamiyan has been a witness to a lot of activities and invasions but the blood-curdling event of Taliban destruction of the colossal Buddhas remains one of the most horrific crimes ever perpetrated against mankind and human culture. Apart from a repertoire of poems on the blasts which will be discussed in great detail subsequently in this article, three notable movies have been directed which are worth mentioning because they are shot on the Bamiyan Buddhas; Swiss war photographer Christein Frei's *The Giant Buddha* (2006) is a documentary which showcases the blasts being witnessed by a local Hazara man who was a resident of the Bamiyan niches. Iranian director Hana Makhmalbaf's *Buddha Collapsed due to Shame* (Persian *Buda az Sharm Foru Rikht*, 2007) narrates the story of a young Hazara girl living in Bamiyan niches, in post-blast time, wanting to go to school and how the local Bamiyan children's psyche has been affected by their repeated witnessing of the Taliban wars and foreign military occupations. British

director Phil Grabsky's *The Boy who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan* (2003) charts the lives, hopes and despairs of a young Hazara boy Mir who lives with his family in the Bamiyan niches in post-Taliban Afghanistan.. Apart from these, a bilingual Hazaragi⁴⁰-English animation video by Hazaragi Animations from Afghanistan has also been made titled *Buz-e-Chini*⁴¹ written by Hussain Ali Yousofi⁴² and directed by Abbas Ali. The uniqueness about this animation is that the moral tale of a wicked bad wolf being punished by a goat happens right against the backdrops of the Bamiyan Buddha and interestingly the Buddha icons are intact and have a face! Shimorgh Films and Cultural Association of Herat under the direction of Monireh Hashemi, directed a play called *SalSal Shahmama*, which is based on the local Hazaragi folktales and oral traditions. It was screened in Leela South Asian Women's Theatre Festival in Delhi, in 2010 and talked about two sisters who witness the Bamiyan blasts and they go back in time and live among the idols called *Salsal Shahmama*.

BAMMIAN BUDDHA: IN EPIC PROPORTIONS

Thousand splendid suns⁴³ have risen since the time of Hieun Tsiang's⁴⁴ pilgrimage of the Buddhist sites in Bamiyan and a thousand splendid suns have set on the empty niches of the Bamiyan valley, since the Taliban detonation of 2001. Recently, an Indian-born, Jakarta-based writer-poet Amol Titus⁴⁵ has tried to convey his feelings post-blast, in the form of this contemporary epic of 160 stanzas and 640 lines, *Darkness at Bamiyan*⁴⁶, composed in 2003-04, in the aftermath of the colossal iconoclasm⁴⁷. The poet by using his sources on the folktale thus not only revives the legend of *SalSal* and *Shahmama* but also gives voice and agency to the legendary figures by making them commentators. His epic is not just a dialogue between sandstones but is a soliloquy of the creed of the silenced. By making the twin legendary figures of *SalSal* and *Shahmama* converse and comment among themselves on the events happening around them, the poet breathes life into the silent idols. He animates the legends and gives physical shape to the oral traditions of fables and storytelling which had always been an integral part of the Afghan life. Buddhism had called them Vairochana⁴⁸ Buddha and Buddha Sakyamuni, and then folk imagination called them *SalSal* and *Shahmama*, then Taliban called them 'false idols' and destroyed them; but now through the tradition of storytelling, a restructuring of the statues is being attempted.

Titus's epic poem opens with a premonition of looming doom for

the icons: “Wake up SolSol,⁴⁹ for I have heard a rumble/ Portending a terrifying menace of the unknown”. This modern epic seemingly talks not only about the companionship of *Salsal* and *Shahmama*, but possibly also of the model of the institution of the Buddhist *Sangha* which had successfully united followers across the globe. The way the legend of *Salsal Shahmama* had bound the Hazara community for so long, this legend being unique to them only; within this legend is also a message for the virtues of unification, of national unity, brotherhood, ethnic unity. In trying times of today there is a strong need for national consciousness, and a need for Hazaras to recognize their rights just as they have recognized their national cultural heritage even in the un-Islamic *Bots* (idols) of Bamiyan⁵⁰. Also there is a need for understanding responsible citizenship among all the ethnic tribes of Afghanistan, which should stay above marginalising politics.

*Sculpted in togetherness, chiselled into grim rock face
United in curious spirit, two of a reflective kind
Inspired by Him to watch the theatre of race and space (I vii)
If it exists, Sol Sol, you are also the duality of my soul
The polarity of perspective that I have known only
For me a part integral to deciphering the puzzling whole
On this earthly sprawl, my sole respondent when lonely (I xiii)*

This duality always travels together, like *Shahmama SalSal*, like the Buddha’s realization of pain and its cause, like his discovery of the Middle Path, like the presence of form-void, of iconism-aniconism, of violence-peace, of mortality-immortality, and of the synonym-antonym-like state of ‘Buddha’ and ‘*na-Buddha*’⁵¹ in the Bamiyan niches. The poem also shows that parables and storytelling are very important cultural revivalist activities in the Afghan folk culture and among the Hazaras of Bamiyan, it has remained as the only way within oral tradition to preserve and propagate their unique ethno-cultural identity which is intertwined with that of the legends of *salsal-shahmama* through folk songs and poems. Storytelling is a unifying factor and thus binds communities together. The way knowledge and identity have been propagated since time immemorial has always remained the same, be it the transmission of Buddha’s teachings through the oral traditions, through the Buddhist Councils, or through *Jatakas*. Oral tradition is a means of cultural revival and continuation when it yields itself to replication orally or materially through written literature or through visual representation or performative representations. *Shahmama* bemoans,

*I am struck, Sol Sol, that was no thunderous clap
 The inimical aim has shattered my shoulder right.
 Aren't we now like the hounded, the cornered in a trap?
 Two convicted heretics to be punished with fright
 For this bodily appendage of rock over ages sunburned
 I am grateful, and hope it acts as your protective shield
 May all ammunition from vindictive minds churned
 Be exhausted on me, in dusty ashes you lie concealed (III i-ii)*

The epic also enacts the moment of assault when the Taliban started blasting the statues. The smaller statue of *Shahmama* recounts her martyrdom at the hands of the Taliban; the woman's selfless love and sacrifice for her companion, symbolic of her family. Her voice seems to also resemble the questions of the Hazaras who feel trapped between the identity of being descendants of the Great Mongol and that of being Afghans or Persians or Khorasanis. And this chimera in their own historical identity has made them vulnerable to marginalisation and persecution by the Taliban. There are stories of Hazaras challenging the iconoclasts to first destroy them and then move towards the idols; such rare valour and loyalty to one's national culture and heritage was sadly not recognized by the 'vindictive minds' of the Taliban. There is also faint recollection of the many times like *Shahmama* in this epic, the Hazaras had also fought for the country's peace and security, yet they largely remain at the peripheries. The epic in the portion titled 'Souls in Stone', introduces the existential questions and queries of faith and doubt and choice and freewill and the fetters of consumption and material culture which prompted Siddhartha Gautama to denounce a princely life in favour of asceticism and thus the poet discusses the themes of introspection, self-interrogation, meditation, self-control, *Nirvana* (enlightenment), and *Moksha* (liberation, detachment).

*Each passing moment sacrificed to supremacy of wants...
 Discontented, the blind yearning for earning, man flaunts
 On the narcotic fodder of image, ever hungry he feeds
 Does the consumed caterpillar actually evolve?
 Is molting a hopeful celebration or a revolting big lie?
 Is the chrysalis shedding potential only to dizzily revolve
 Around flowers of fancy, merely a fluttering butterfly? (II 2 vii-viii)*

The poet also shows how we tried to bind Buddha exactly in those very material fetters which he detested and denounced. Our nature of Buddha worship changed from aniconism to iconism with due respect to the ideology of the teachers, then we started embellishing him with jewels,

we began casting him in gold and preserving his relics. The proponent of non-violence would have shuddered at the arms race and drug trafficking which are also part of the material culture, going on in the world and in Afghanistan itself; both of which are destructive, malevolent forces. Also, the smuggling of antiquities or selective-dismembering of artefacts by educated people is also rampant and is fed by the voracious appetite of material culture, which with due respect to art-collectors is sometimes obsessed to 'possess' a Gandhara Buddha head for the living room or a painted mural scrapped from the walls of the Bamiyan grottoes for wall-mounting in a private bedroom. Similarly, the metaphor of 'a consumed caterpillar' points out how ideology driven minds of the Taliban, for example waste their precious living moments to fuel the '*supremacy of wants*' and '*hierarchy of needs*'. The Taliban along with the suicide bombers in Islamic militant outfits, they renounce and reject every beautiful thing in life like music, beauty, love and art while they are alive here on earth, but blindly long for and dream of those very things in the afterlife. They believe if they serve some of the fanatical ideologies faithfully on earth now, heaven and all comforts of life will be promised for them and thus they go about doing these misanthropic crimes, against humankind; just to '*earn*' merit, a place in heaven in the afterlife! These Taliban are like the caterpillars gorging on extreme ideologies and get consumed with the idea of becoming a beautiful butterfly with beautiful wings later. The poet thus questions those zealots who give the dream of heaven to the young people and turn them into Taliban and accuses them of lying to the young minds. There is something dizzily mechanical about this '*fluttering*', both of the leaders as well as the followers of Taliban ideology. It becomes a '*yearning*' for a Paradise for the young chrysalis, and the grown up butterfly flutters its own beautiful wings and shows the promise and virtues of '*fluttering*'. When the Taliban kills himself, leaving his cocoon, there is no celebration in his own family! But the poet asks the question, for them, does then this metamorphosis actually happen? Do they moult successfully? Do they get their heart's desires? Nobody has asked the butterfly, but nobody ever even got the reply from a dead Taliban suicide-bomber, whether he reached Paradise or not! Whether the young caterpillar could recognize and realize whether it could become a beautiful butterfly or not! Perhaps, we will never know. The portion named "Porters of Guilt" discusses the theme of guilt, ideally supposed to come up from persistent undermining of the womenfolk, their use and abuse in every patriarchal society as that of Afghanistan.

*Why are so many lives frittered between use and abuse?
 Freedoms of normalcy unequally shared, routinely deprived
 Protesting spirits bowed under social mores, religious ruse
 Gender rendered secondary through inferiority contrived" (II 5 vii)
 ...Bowed mules with the conditioning of the schooled
 A vacuous living, consequences seldom pondered (II 5 xiii)*

The sources of guilt should ideally also arise from stoning of women, from indulging in iconoclasm, from marginalizing fellow countrymen and Muslim brothers, the Hazaras. Under the Taliban, women were barred from going to school, had to compulsorily wear *burqa* (veil), and were prohibited from going outside unaccompanied by a male relative. The protesting spirits in the poem are that of the Hazaras and women, both marginalized in the Afghan land. However, this guilt is not felt in this land because of the nature of its tribal punitive laws, and neither is it reaching fruition as the groups who are undermining the females are not feeling the guilt and hence it's frustrating. This frustration makes the poet angry at the passivity of the victimised. He perhaps calls both mule-like, those who blindly teach fanatic ideology and also those who blindly learn, carry the burdens and follow this ideology unquestioningly. It's an assault on the Taliban's religious leader, the Taliban themselves as well as those civilians who follow each other in a linear manner, without grouping together in unity and overturning the rule of the few. *Solsol* addresses *Shahmama* and reminds her of the story of the blind men trying to describe an elephant and each believing a part of the elephant representing the whole.

*Remember Shahmama, His tale of the gathering of blind
 Guessing as over an elephant's body, fingers they ran
 With narrow perspective, real form struggling to find...
 ÖGroping in isolation incapable, unwilling to connect
 Reactionary outlook governed by stifling stereotype
 Choices constricted, restricted by viewpoint of sect
 Own perspective gloating, bloating on wings of hype" (II 3 vii-viii)
 "Yet followers hollow of every faith we have known
 Godly tales of sacrifice and suffering having misread
 ...Are we too progeny of some propagandist's zeal?... (II 3 xvi-xvii)*

The poet thus possibly calls the Taliban and all those people who infuse sectarian rifts, as those blind men, who think a part stands for the whole. Without knowing completely in all its contours and appendages, the 'elephant' which could be symbolic of any religion or ideology or culture, they form rigid dogmas and conclusions. The Buddha of Bamiiyan are

not merely idols, they represent the philosophy of successive stages of human civilization and evolution in human thought and ideology, worldview. These idols were part of the folk imagination of Afghanistan which saw them as Islamic characters of *SolSol Shahmama*, and enacting their lives in Afghanistan's soil presently. *SolSol*, says, he has looked through the hypocrisy of those who claim to be faithful. Perhaps, she means that they perform penances and fasts and take hardships to perform pilgrimages and give sacrifices of animals⁵² for proving their religious fervour, yet inside their hearts are hollow, full of false pride of their superiority and full of hatred for their Hazara Muslim brothers, as well as for the inanimate, still idols of their brothers from a different faith. The poet also perhaps draws attention to the kind of separatist forces acting within the land in the name of stereotypes. In this Islamic land now, there is fragmentation in inter-ethnic affiliation and bonding, gender segregation, separation of national and ethnic culture, erasing of communal memory, and hatred being sown in the name of religion. No God teaches hatred for fellowmen. The poet also refers to excessive ritualism and dogmatism of the Taliban religious fundamentalists. The Afghan landscape reeks of Taliban's oppressive ideologies, their rhetoric in favour of religious ideologies, and what rules is the dogma of the gun, of fundamentalist ideology, the brawn of muscle power/ gun power/and thought of intolerant and uncultivated minds. *Shahmama* then talks about uncertainties, of life, of this Afghan terrain which is treacherous, and the possibility of this iconoclasm which was similarly also incredible. And she fears what endgame will follow next?

*Long after our destroyers have triumphantly sniggered
Moments of madness erasing what for centuries had lasted
With what potency will the chain reaction be triggered?
What endgame will follow our fallen trophies blasted? (II 3 iv)*

ICONOCLASM OF MATERIAL CULTURE, ETHNIC HUMAN CULTURE AND COMMUNAL MEMORY

The poet Tom Savage⁵³ in his *Bamiyan Poems*⁵⁴ alludes to the early iconoclastic assaults⁵⁵ on the Bamiyan Buddha which happened in the historical past when the Great Mongol⁵⁶ Chingez Khan and his marauding armies robbed the jewels supposedly adorning the statues and also the curtain of bullet holes drilled into the statues in successive years by the Taliban.

*Buddha, I bring you my body but you are blind.
The Mongols stole the jewels from your eyes and so now, without eyes,
and only stone, after all, what can you be to me?
Is there no peace anywhere?
...Perhaps in unrestored stone there's peace...*

But why does the poet 'bring his body' to Buddha? Is it simply to highlight the post-detonation situation of the 'emptied out' niche, where Buddha is bereft of a body and dismembered? The poet focuses much attention to the body of the Buddha and thus stresses the fact that the form itself was objectionable to the religion of the iconoclasts. Is he questioning the iconoclast's belief that faith of the non-believers would cease to exist when the 'Body' of the idol would cease to exist, hence their defacement and mutilating the face is justified? Thus without eyes the Buddha is just stone⁵⁷. The poet speculates that there may be peace now in the unrestored stones as there is nothing corporeal left for the Taliban to destroy but it also suggests optimistically that the faith of the believers does not end even when the 'form' or 'idol' of their belief is destroyed. Faith cannot be annihilated. Or does it suggest that the poet-speaker's body is representative of one among the many people who were killed periodically in the Bamiyan valley during one of the acts of persecution of the locals, or does he represent one among the many casualties of the occasional military bombardments which have haunted the locals in the contemporary past? Is there an attempt to pacify the aggression by offering yet another 'body'? But is the Body of the Buddha then replaceable after all? As a part of religious iconography and faith, certainly yes; but the loss of the 'Bamiyan Buddha's' body is a tremendous loss to art history⁵⁸ also, especially since it spoke volumes about the minds and lives of those who lived and died carving these colossal statues. Needless to say, one thing that will not come back again is when these statues began to be carved and when they were revealed to the world. The poet by mentioning 'different coloured eyes' alludes to the different ethnicities and genealogical variations of the local Afghan residents in Bamiyan and also nationalities of all those tourists and visitors of the likes of Hieun Tsiang, Mongols, Mughals, Arabs, French archaeologists, German tourists, Indian merchants and art conservationists and sculptors of the Graeco-Roman art who have been thronging the Buddha niches since time immemorial and till today; sometimes in faith, sometimes for carving, sometimes for excavation and sometimes for desecration. This again recalls the multicultural essence of Bamiyan which was the

recipient of Buddhism through the Silk Route⁵⁹. Further the reference to the Sun is perhaps not only to the fact that the Buddha not being there now in the niches is thus not being touched by the morning sunrays as it used to be till pre-March 2001⁶⁰. It could also be a reference to the now destroyed magnificent mural of the Sun-God⁶¹ guarding protectively over the head of the colossal Buddha statue. The poet assumes the voice of another Buddha statue which perhaps like all the idols in the country and like the Hazara inhabitants are persecuted by the iconoclasts. Is it simplistically a religious iconoclasm of statues? Can't it be an iconoclasm at sectarian levels? Could it not be hiding the motive of attempts at erasing of ethnic identity of one tribe, the Hazaras because they were the keepers of the Buddha until the Taliban came and struck the death blow. It seems the Hazara grottoe dweller says,

*Buddha, I am lonely...I move from cave to cave away...
...None seems a home for me unlike those long dead monks
who'd sit in a single space for days breathing softly...
but it seems better to have caves with no Buddha than to
have no Buddha at all...*

Similarly the Hazaras also have borne the blow of Taliban discrimination who are trying to erase their presence from communal memory, just as they have attempted with the Bamiyan Buddha. Just like the way the Buddha has been rendered 'homeless' by the Taliban's act, similarly the Hazaras also have been pushed by the Pashtuns and the Taliban because of which so many of them have left their homeland and sought refugee status in different countries⁶². There is a pacifist reaction when the speaker says, it was better to have caves without Buddha than to have no Buddha at all because it could either have fended off such persecutions or at least the caves with their Buddhist murals still retain an objective-correlation with the Buddha. It also seems that the characters in the murals are speaking to the Buddha.

*Buddha, clear my lungs at last. Buddha, don't ask me to suffer.
Relief me of this living word that clings to people who are only memories.*

It may also refer to the lamp black released from the people's fire torches covering and destroying the murals; which is another form of iconoclasm. And the fire and smoke from these guns and torches seem to suffocate the characters in the murals just as it would have had suffocated the resident monks during Islamic persecution and the Hazara cave dwellers during the Pashtun and Taliban persecutions.

The statues have been victims of graffiti artists and vandals also along with the murals. It seems one of the observant figures from the murals asks whether Buddha cried with pain when Frenchmen carved their names on his legs? *"When Frenchmen carved names in his leg, did Buddha cry with pain?"* This iconoclasm of the idol-breakers destroys so that people forget and it is thus antithetical to the concept of memory which wants to preserve and conserve. However the graffiti writer mars the idols with his name and identity so that people will remember him. It's also in a way giving acknowledgement to the historicity and importance of the idols or monuments by showing that the visitor was 'here', within history, within fame and thus the visitor also tries to assume a bit of 'historicity' and thus 'immortality' by associating his name with that of the historical object. An excerpt from his, *Last Bamiyan Poem*,⁶³ seems to give a cynical yet paradoxically pacifist and yet premonitory voice to the Bamiyan Buddha, who says,

*We will not miss being dead statues
There solely to have others read their own
Perceptions and interpretations onto us.
We have achieved total egolessness and nonbeing...
...Now we are rubble as much of
the Muslim world may be rendered soon.
We are happy to have achieved perfect nonbeing
Even if it happened with a bang*

*Bamiyan Buddha*⁶⁴ by an Indian poet Pravin Gadhvi⁶⁵ also comments upon the obsession of the believers and the iconoclasts both, with material culture in which historical Siddhartha had renounced his royal and familial life to seek detachment from corporeality of every kind yet, his followers sculpted and bejewelled him for veneration and the iconoclasts tried to destroy that very corporeality, thus unwittingly themselves believing in the corporeal form having some agency to influence!

*I had left leaving gold, gems, pleasures of life...
I had left to free myself from two ends of birth and death
I wanted to be formless
Now you see, both are blind by birth.
Those who are chiselling my statues, And decorating with golden ornaments.
And those who are destroying my statues.*

VENERATING BODILY APPENDAGES OF ROCK: BAMMIYAN BUDDHA AS RELIC

The well known contemporary American poetess Eva Salzman in her

poem *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*⁶⁶ compares the mutilated Buddhas to the figure of the Venus de Milo⁶⁷ with amputated arms, both of whose aesthetic appeals are enhanced in the poet's eyes because of their state of incompleteness or rather state of mutility or lack of intactness. She points to the post-detonation situation when even the feet of the statues showed signs of being affected with the fatal blows from Mongols, Mughals and the Taliban. Earlier looking from beneath the Buddha's feet, the gaze was always arrested or interrupted by the sliced yet majestic visage and colossal body contours of the Buddha. But now there is nothing to stop the gaze from climbing high, and even the overhead murals are gone! So the upward gaze as if searching for that colossal divinity, is just arrested by the ceiling of the niche.

*The Buddhas of Bamiyan like the Venus de Milo,
are much more beautiful without their feet but if your gaze
soars upwards how not too upward...
The Buddhas of Bamiyan cannot compete with an authentic God,
should never bear the face of even the false God';
...You, who can meditate only bodily, don't deserve the pelvis of Buddha.
God is the greatest practitioner of art and her favourite
sculpture is a modest man.*

The poetess, now asks those who are idolators among the Buddhists and says, even they love the Buddha more in his physical form, in his statues and their meditation and faith is arrested only till the presence of the Buddha body is there; again playing with the metaphor of the upward soaring gaze and she seems critical of such faith. Perhaps it's also a critique of the relic-preserving traditions in various religions of the world and she says such people "don't deserve the pelvis of Buddha", or his relics because it's a limiting vision of divinity. Further now that the Buddha has been dismembered, there is a possibility of a race for acquiring a 'piece of the Bamiyan Buddha' and this though had started in the form of the unofficial and also systematic vandalism and looting of excavation sites for salvaging artefacts and selling them in the antiques market; similarly, now, post-blast, people may flock to the site and collect souvenirs⁶⁸ and thus may be another relic-worshipping institution or practice may start, which in the minds of commercial art collectors and religious zealots may encourage more such dismemberments of religious idols and encourage antique smuggling too, all in a bid to acquire a piece of culture and heritage, of history and of fame. This could also be a barb against those iconoclasts whose attention or meditation is only on the

body of the Buddha, hence momentarily metaphorically even they become idolators while they meditate on the visible form of the Buddha and speculate ways of destroying it. This is another kind of idolatory. She also mocks the iconoclasts as well as the idolators when she says, 'God is the greatest practitioner of art and her favourite sculpture is a modest man'. Thus, no matter how much the idol-maker tries with his art to imitate God, and how much ever the iconoclast keeps breaking the idols and mortal man's artistic creations-the idols; still God keeps making masterpieces of creation, one after another. It thus mocks the iconoclast that his victory is only with the mortal artist, not with the immortal and ultimate artist, master craftsman. And a humble and modest man is the best creation of God. This is one artifice which the iconoclast cannot destroy ever. "Like the Venus de Milo...the twin Buddhas of Bamiyan, armless, can still embrace Afghanistan unbroken, embrace those who would rather die than keep each Buddha from divinity" Just as the Venus de Milo has still managed to captivate the minds of numerous art lovers and 'believers of art' throughout history even with her missing arms, in the same way the Buddhas of Bamiyan with their amputated arms and legs and sliced off visage and gunshot-riddled robe can still embrace the land, Afghanistan, in spirits, in undying energy, in endless hope and faith and courage. The poet berates the misanthropic human spirit in the iconoclasts and asks if they can also think as lofty as the Buddhas are, if their thoughts can ever rise above defacing icons and breaking idols.

*You who have a mind to, who can think as loftily
as the Buddhas of Bamiyan, can miss them but let them go.
Imagine all the fragments whole again, and our signature on the empty sky.*

Also if the iconoclasts are also those misanthropes who are involved in genocide and ethnic cleansing which is another kind of iconoclasm, then the poet asks those iconoclasts also if they can ever rise above sectarian and religious intolerance. The poet says, just as the minds of the patrons, followers and sculptors of the Bamiyan Buddhas were thinking high and imagining divinity in such leviathenic proportions, similarly the believers' minds are also very lofty. Therefore, even if the iconoclasts could dismember the Buddha, still human mind's imaginative and creative powers are so strong and high flying that they can conjure a Bamiyan Buddha even in the sky! This imagination of divinity, of faith, of hope is the 'signature' of the human's undying spirit. Can the iconoclast destroy the mind's image?

The Irish poet Donall Dempsey in his poem *'The Buddhas of Bamiyan'*⁶⁹ tells that the Buddhas of Bamiyan have been the sentinels of the Valley for so long but in the mortal world nothing seems to cohere and stay. Buddha exists in eternity but not in the mortal world. Just as we die, we believe that our gods also die. This is a limitation of the thought of the human mind, especially of all of us who try to resurrect our dead gods through idols and images. Although the idolatrous people are condemned by the non-idolatrous for their idol worship yet, even non-idolatrous mortals also perform some kind of idolatry, perhaps like when they enshrine their Prophets in tombs and their relics like hair⁷⁰ or footprints in monuments, and do pilgrimages of those tombs and shrines which is a way of reviving constantly the memory of the messiahs or Gods. The poet is also sarcastic about the human need to hold on to 'physical reminders' of their Gods, which became institutionalized in the practice of relic preservation and worship.

*The Buddhas of Bamiyan guard the valley as they have done for 14 centuries
gazing through time beyond into eternity. But nothing lasts forever, not even eternity.
I laugh to find there is a relic of the finger of the Buddha
hastily scraped out of his funeral pyre, this human need to hold all that is passing.
This of all faiths pointing out the impermanence of things, clinging
to the Buddha's finger.*

Perhaps his poem is a reminder to our religious practices. We mortals don't even allow our 'Gods and Holy Men' to be cremated in peace and dignity, for we scramble hurriedly for scraps of their bones and teeth among the ashes for making relic shrines. We dismember their bodies even after their death and cremation and distribute and re-distribute their body parts among devotees and followers⁷¹. Aren't we also iconoclasts of some kind? We say with pride, here is enshrined Buddha's tooth or bone. We believe Buddha lives in that relic, in the claustrophobic air-tight relic casket, buried in a stupa, under mounds of stones and mud, under centuries of dampness and decaying undergrowth. We don't even let our dead messiahs rest in their graves in peace. We build mausoleums on their graves and encourage a melange of followers to walk around in crowds and disturb the peaceful repose of the Gods or messiahs. We make it into a pilgrimage-cum-tourist spot. Does our prayer reach to him across those piles of mud and bricks? We build memorial shrines on all those places where our Gods and holy men walked or stopped and we call it pilgrimage. Do we ever wonder that our Gods perhaps would have wanted us to instead make our own paths and walk

on them to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are living in distress and need our help? We go on annual pilgrimages with lot of pomp and splendour and dignity believing we are earning merit in heaven and are becoming dearer to God but on the way we choose to remain non-chalant and blind to the deplorable condition of our countrymen and neighbours who are living in the vicinities of those pilgrimage spots. The same can be said of the pilgrim sites in India as well. God would not have wanted us to 'purge' his 'Created Land' from his 'Creations'; the Hazaras and other persecuted minorities who have been victims of genocides throughout history are also God's creations. The Hazaras in Bamiyan grottoes are those people who need no charity but capacity building and capital infrastructure and need to be recognized as indispensable human resources, as manpower of the country and not targets for the Taliban ethnic-cleansing shooting-range practices. Idols are also like relics, belonging to God, resembling him, housing the God's agency in a body created out of perishable material. So, the Taliban iconoclasts are also ironically believers in relics and idols as they feel the 'false god' ceases to exist after defacement, which unwittingly acknowledges that the 'false gods' are 'living' and have potential to exercise some power over their believers even through the stone and mud frame hence ought to be destroyed!

The Taliban thought that they have destroyed eternity by destroying the false gods of a bygone era, perhaps the time of historical Buddha. But this act has unintentionally provoked the faith of the diasporic followers of Buddhism in the rest of the world.

*Now the kohl-eyed Taliban reduce the giant guardians to nothing
giving the world's press a front seat as eternity is destroyed.
The statues coming alive in their very death
burning into men's minds, living for ever in their destruction.*

Thus Buddhism though long had perished in Afghanistan, yet witnessed a wave of resurgence in faith which originated from its own soil, from Bamiyan. The Taliban could comb out idols of false Gods from the niches, mountains, caves and excavation sites of Afghanistan but what about their own Afghan soil which is mixed with non-Islamic relic materials, their dust and smashed debris? Can they sieve out these 'impurities' from their own Afghan soil? Can they erase communal and historical memory completely of those countless Buddhist followers and pilgrims who once came here, were born here, preached here and breathed their last here? Unfortunately, the Taliban and Pashtuns think they can wean

away memory from the age and that's one reason why even inspite of being Afghans, and Muslims, the Hazaras are being persecuted. Is it because these Bamiyan Hazaras have dared to spun tales on the idols about *Salsal* and *Shahmama* and assimilated these idols into their own culture and folk memory? What about the relics of countless Hazaras of Bamiyan who slept and dreamed between the Buddhist murals of the grottoes? The Hazaras of the Valley in full observance of their Islamic affiliations have incorporated the idols in their folk identity by changing its identity and they even used to plaster the murals' faces inside the grottoes so that while living there, they do not unintentionally do idolatry. But, the only eye sore for the Taliban and Pashtuns was that these Hazaras would still call the idols as '*bot*' and in post identification of them as Buddhist icons, as Buddha and that's understandably one reason why the Hazaras are persecuted as it's un-Islamic to live among '*bots*'! The Taliban have earned themselves media space but the empty niches have now themselves become relics, a part standing for the whole; of the missing Buddha, the absent Buddha. Hence, unknowingly the Taliban have created relic shrines for the '*absent*' Buddhas of Bamiyan! What about those Taliban themselves who have unwittingly touched the Buddhas and the murals and unconsciously awed at it before fanatic ideology was poured into their ears? Certainly, human mind would have marvelled at the gigantism and grandiosity of these idols while they tried to vandalize it fatally. And what of the Buddha dust coming and covering them after the detonation? Can they ever purge out from within themselves the Buddha particles which they inhaled and ingested that fateful day in March 2001? The Taliban would have to blow themselves up in order to '*purify*' their bodies from the Buddha's '*bot*' contamination!

TOUCHED BY BUDDHA'S DUST: *Khak-e-Bot*

In line with the previous poem by Dempsey, it is perhaps an opportune moment here to analyze Zalmay Babakohi's Dari short story, *Khak-e-Bot* (The Idol's Dust). The short story starts with the detonation of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the overwhelming glee of the Taliban leaders, who for a moment got so much absorbed in the naked dance of destruction that they even forgot to raise their communal cries of *Allahu-Akbar* (God is Greater). So for a moment their attention became subservient to the Buddha, instead of their God. This is a sharp comment on the hypocritical way of the religious fanatics who are more engrossed

in the enactment of the dictats and the self-assuming feeling of pride and achievement which they get for propagating their religious ideology. “...Mullah Janan was pleased now that the idol had been destroyed at last, and the object of the idol worshippers was laid out on display...”. The Taliban shovel away the dust of the Buddha but,

“Their faces, noses, and ears were all white with dust and soil, which made them look like plaster statues. One of them addressed the others saying: The idol’s dust has stuck to your faces and hair, you have turned into idols. You must also be destroyed, ...they ran off toward the river...But the idol’s dust remained stuck to their hair and faces as if they had been whitewashed, as if their faces had been covered by masks of plaster...they all appeared monochromatic and of a similar kind...a Talib informed Mullah Janan that some of the Talibs had been changed into idols.”⁷²

This is a surrealistic situation, almost a dystopia for the Taliban Iconoclasts but it’s a political statement which arose out of common obvious phenomenon; when stone will be blasted, dust will fly and cover up everything in reach. But the object of loathing for the Talibans has itself turned them into the loathsome. The next scene shows Mullah Janan washing with his own hands the face, hair and bodies of the idols who are literally petrified Talibans. Mullah is unwittingly doing idolatry by washing and tending to the idols! He wonders why the water did not make them clean!⁷³

“...they were afraid to even touch the water. For them, the water had turned into poison... what will happen if the water cannot clean them?” Suddenly a Talib comes and “...put a small fragment of stone in his hand...The stone fragment was a little Buddha, resembling the one who had been destroyed. The young Talib said that every fragment of stone in the pile from the ruined Buddha statue had the same shape as this little Buddha... The little Buddha was passed around amongst the Talibs...” and by passing the small idol stone around and by touching it and gazing at it all the Talibs are indulging in idolatry.⁷⁴ “Mullah Janan Akhund raised his voice,...It is magic, they are talismans...Now when the great Buddha had been demolished, what should they do with all these small Buddhas? What should they do with this pile of Buddha dust with which everyone’s faces had become defiled? And what to do with all those Talibs that had been transformed into lime figures?...The Commander of the Faithful ordered them to scatter the dust from the idol... and trucks transported and unloaded the idol’s dust all over; in the river, the ravines, the desert lands, and on the mountain slopes..Something was making a sound inside of him; a rustling sound...”

Evidently the mullah himself is feeling like the niche and the calm valley before the detonation; it reminds one of the rustling of the detonation preparations and feet of Taliban bringing ammunitions and then the blast, then crumbling and then silence in the niches.

"The river water had dispersed the idol's dust over the valley and...all across the Taliban realm..." and the rivers were 'polluted' with Buddha dust. Mullah "...took out his rosary to play with the beads. The prayer beads had turned into stone...His fingertips felt as if they had frozen...had turned white; white as limestone. As the plaster hands of sculptures...People came in and delivered the news that those four Talibs whose faces had turned into idols, had now gradually been transformed into full statues..."⁷⁵ It is like a curse of the statues on the iconoclasts. The Mullah ordered, "Destroy everything that either is an idol, or resembles an idol. All idols must be destroyed. Everything, with or without a soul, that either is or has become an idol must be demolished", but "They were all stone...the Talibs started beating at them with shovels and pickaxes. They were shattered like plaster sculptures and fell to pieces. No blood was seen coming out of their bodies. Their insides were filled with dust and ashes which was carried away by the wind."

It's a very scary situation for the Taliban and is a moment of faith and doubt for them. This story is very unsettling thus, yet sounds just. The whole atmosphere, even clouds had taken up Buddha shape as though, "...these idols were in motion; they passed by, vanished in the distant horizons, before they reappeared". These moving cloud-shapes remind one of the Buddhist monks passing with the caravans on the Silk Route. "Mullah Janan had become tired from seeing all the cloud idols in the sky and stone idols on the ground. He was anxious...as the fear of being completely transformed into stone grew stronger." The Talib doubts his own God now and is scared of the false idols! He goes to meet the Commander who is praying and the climax of the story is that, "He looked up and opened his mouth to greet the Commander of the Faithful, but all of a sudden, instead of a Salaam', a scream left his throat:...the idol's dust...on the forehead of the Commander of the Faithful..."⁷⁶ Thus all Taliban are slowly turning into idols themselves! It's a scathing comment on the Taliban's fundamentalist ideologies; because just as the events in this story seem irrational and not logical, unreasonable, similarly the Taliban have also been zealously driving ideologies which are similarly unreasonable!

JUST ICONOCLASM OR ETHNIC CLEANSING TOO?

Noted Indian poet R. Parthasarathy's⁷⁷ poem, *The Stones of Bamiyan*⁷⁸ speaks about the peaceful times when the Buddhas towered over the Bamiyan skyline but when the Taliban destroyed them, the world community of believers and non-believers were all provoked, some in angst, outrage and some in celebration. One such soldier who helped in this iconoclasm says,

*We don't understand why everyone is so worked up; we are only breaking stones,
chuckled the soldiers as they blew up the statues, leaving a gap in the world.
The fabled Silk Road hangs in tatters now.*

The Taliban reasoned that these idols have no religious character and hence are false idols, for them so it's like breaking stones but in counter-attack one could challenge their stance by asking, if these idols are just stones then why are they so much besotted with breaking these just stones?⁷⁹ The Bamiyan Buddhas were living testimonials to the Silk Road transmission of Buddhism in the region and from here to Far East. Because of the Buddha's presence there, a regular pilgrimage trail had started from the Far East till Bamiyan and had sustained the multicultural flavour of the region through trade and exchange of ideas, artistic styles and skills. The detonation of 2001 has thus severed the Silk Route linking Afghanistan to Central Asia and China. Whatever contemporary tourism potential was there earlier due to the Buddhist pilgrimage trail would now be 'in tatters'. The poet says, "Who will stop the Hun from knocking on our door?" It recalls the historical reference of the invading Huns but in contemporary times also possibly refers to the fact that the message the Taliban have given to the world by having access to the Bamiyan Buddha, and by detonating them, they have thus tried to exhibit their naked power to the world community and in this process they are seeking 'official recognition', that they matter, their ideology, power and membership matters to the global community and this they tried to achieve by force, by violence at ideological cultural level. They not only struck the very heart of religious ideology which was entwined with man's artistic and religious evolution but by erasing cultural reminders of the Hazara ethnic identity, the Taliban also tried to strike a death-blow to the Hazaras as the Buddhas were emblematic of the Hazara folk culture. It is said in Persian that 'a Nation stays alive, when its culture and history are kept alive'⁸⁰ and the oppressors are exactly targeting to exterminate Hazaras and their culture from communal and national memory and from state archives. This easy access to the statues with the help of foreign allies thus thrusts up a vital question in the world community; Are we secure? Is our national heritage, folk culture, human culture secure? After what happened at the hands of the Nazis in Germany, Pol Pot in Khmer and in Gaza, will a particular human civilization be not hunted down again and be exterminated from the face of the earth on the pretext of 'purification' or ethnic cleansing? How will human anthropology and history record these gaps in human evolution and human lives where

many such 'emptied out niches' exist because of 'easy accessibility' of people like the Taliban, these iconoclasts of mankind! The reference to the Huns⁸¹ in the poem is a historical fact but is also suggestive of the invading and intruding forces, may be the Taliban again, or similar iconoclasts of idols and human culture, or even other such misanthropes who will trespass on the country's security and culture. This message of the Taliban is an open challenge to the world community that what they could do in 2001, can be repeated again by groups who think with them or think like them. Further, this blast highlighted the vulnerabilities of the Afghan nation which has witnessed the ethnic fragmentation and incessant civil wars among the tribes. There is a need for unification among the tribes, just as the way the Mongols became unified under Chingez Khan. Once the Huns came, now the Taliban struck, who will come next to strike a fatal blow to the land? But physicist-poet Jon Wesick⁸² takes a pacifist attitude in his poem *Bamiyan*⁸³, and says,

*...Maybe the destruction will release the love
stored in the statues, and the dust of compassion
will settle on the widows forced to beg for food
and their daughters, who can't attend school.
I fear humanity has only lost a doorway to liberation.*

American poet Kirk Lumpkin⁸⁴ in his poem *The Lakes of Band-I-Amir*⁸⁵ mentions the Bamiyan Buddha situated near the lakes of Band-e-Amir. Perhaps he alleges that by this iconoclasm the Taliban inadvertently helped USA, whom he calls the 'modern God of global economy'. The Taliban came and blasted the Buddhas and had been persecuting the Hazaras for some time and also unofficially excavating archaeological mounds and facilitating the export of un-Islamic artefacts. However, the situation worsened when the USA came in pursuit of them post-2001 event and added to the miseries of the grottoe residents, the Hazaras, as their artilleries showered the grottoes in search of hiding Taliban while killing many locals. And the US drones carpet-bombed the terrain trying to poke out the hiding Taliban, but in the process also destroying many irreplaceable sites of archaeological importance.

*....Where the Taliban did ethnic cleansing
and destroyed the world's tallest statues of the Buddha
and helped destroy the world's tallest temple
for the modern god of the global economy,
Where more recently U.S. bombs smashed rubble and people into even smaller pieces.
And the local villagers (Moslems, in this era), tough, poor, and proud
must fear landmines, warlords, and yet another invader,*

*this time from the other side of the world.
Here, in the nation of my birth people are frightened, angry,
pained, and confused by the molten hatred of those
that would gladly die to kill us, or kill what we seem to stand for.*

In her poem *The Museum of Stones*⁸⁶ American poet Carolyn Forché⁸⁷ conjures up a museum made up of stones collected from various places and situations. In the history of iconoclasm perhaps one can assemble all such pieces of stones and create a museum of stones. But one quality of this museum is that there is no classification and hierarchy in the collection. Here stones that once constituted divinity are housed with ordinary stones from the roadsides. It's a museum of diminishing values, where value of divinity is undermined. It's a comment on the humbleness and temporariness of everything, of idol of God, of statue of man, of art and even of stones. It could also be a critical comment on the futility of all manmade creations with perishable and disintegrating material culture. Man makes statues, idols and houses and shrines for his gods and messiah's and sanctifies them, exalts them with his faith and belief but in the end when all materials erode and crumble to the ravages of time and age, each grain of sand intermingles with the soil, then one cannot distinguish from the handful of soil and fistful of stones, whether it once was used for making the idol of the god of the believers or the shrine of the non-believers, or it was used for building a Buddhist kingdom earlier or an Islamic Republic.

*These are your stones,... collected from roadside, culvert and viaduct,
battlefield, threshing floor, basilica, abattoir-stones,
loosened by tanks in the streets from a city...*

There could possibly be a reference to the state of stone-like stillness of our minds also when we cease to think while carrying out iconoclastic or destructive acts; we become stone-like, and our minds become stones, still, unthinking. This also could be a barb on the unmalleability and non-relenting nature of our minds when we cling to our fanatic ideologies. When our minds stop thinking logically and when they stop accommodating alternative versions of living, of multiple versions of existences, of ideologies; then we have "...stone of the mind within us carried from one silence to another..." This silence comes when two stones don't strike each other, when two stone-dead, closed minds stop recognising the other's existence, when they stop listening to the other, when they don't communicate and don't allow any comprehensible communication as is being done by the Wahhabi Taliban who refuse to accommodate

the Shia Hazaras within the Afghan society.

*... fragments of an abbey at dusk, sandstone toe of a Buddha mortared at Bamiyan,
stone...from a chimney where storks cried like human children,
stones newly fallen from stars, a stillness of stones, a heart,
altar and boundary stone,*

The poet says among all these types of stones like schist, shale, and marble there are also stones from the temples, tombs and fragments of the dismembered body parts of the Bamiyan Buddha. And possibly also hints at the meteor stone which is enshrined at Kaaba. These stones had once made the form of the Buddha, in idol form with stucco and mortar over sandstone and now because of this form itself, Buddha is martyred. “... paving stones from the hands of those, who rose against the army, stones where the bells had fallen,...”. Just as there are “... stone from the tunnel lined with bones, lava of a city’s entombment,...”, and stones from the blown up bridges, landmines, buildings, there are also stones from the tombs of those including the countless Hazara massacres⁸⁸, where they were martyred in the cause of resisting the oppression. The falling bells could be the grenades and bombs which ring out during explosions. Just like the way the shrieks of the birds or storks is absorbed by the stones on which they are roasted, similarly there are also stones which resonate with the screams of massacred civilians and children.

*... first cast, load and hail, bridge stones and others to pave and shut up with,
stone apple, stone basil, beech...concretion of the body,... as blind as cold as deaf,
all earth a quarry, all life a labor, stone-faced, stone-drunk
with hope that this assemblage of rubble, taken together, would become
a shrine or holy place, an ossuary, immoveable and sacred .*

Along with the lodestones⁸⁹ and hailstones, the ‘*first cast*’ perhaps refers to the old practice of casting stones at people, of stoning women. Then she refers to the ‘*concretion of the body*’, in the manner of life carved in stone for decorative purposes but it’s a reference also to the petrifying of ideologies, of religion, of human mind. Also, it’s perhaps a critique of the tendency of man to make a replica of everything, of trying to hold captive creation of God, of Nature in stone. It’s also a critique of man imitating ‘Creation’, of attempting to mimic God, Nature; the ultimate master craftsman, artist, sculptor. It thus could also be a critique on idolatry. But it also suggests that just as for the sculptor artist it’s a lifetime of labour to keep chiselling stone and modelling idols out of them, similarly it’s a lifetime of labour even for the Iconoclasts to keep hunting down life depicted in stone and smash the stone idols. It’s a

vicious cycle, stone lifted from the earth and given a face, then smashed and returns to the earth as sand again to be lifted and moulded into idols. Quite like a poem written by Arunansu, a new Indian voice, there seems to be an implicit warning in his verses which spring forth from a deep dwelling fountain of angst located within the self, but the poem also points out, perhaps to the land's alleged preservers of ethnic and religious purity, the innate secular and multi-religious nature of the land which had nourished Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam on the same soil. Yet, they who broke the idols seemed to be apathetic to one from their own erstwhile brethren from same land.

*Digging into Afghanistan's soil
I recovered tombs of Bible, Koran and Bhagvad Gita lying in a row.
I engraved roses into the earth's skin, beside each holy scripture and scribbled a note:
To whoever reading this, Pray,
that your Gods do not tremble with the scream of each missile.⁹⁰*

MARCHING ON THE SILK ROAD: BUDDHISM AND MILITARY OCCUPATIONS

'On the Destruction of the Buddhas in Bamiyan'⁹¹ by American poet Henry Weinfield⁹² talks about various foreign invading and occupying forces which have persued the land since ancient past. The poet feels the Buddhas of Bamiyan could not see the woes of the inhabitants because of their loftiness. Perhaps it's a barb on the obsession of man to exalt religion and God and Godliness and shower money, attention and labour on serving God, or on doing rituals and in observing religious dogmas dutifully and blindly, so much that we tend to overlook the sufferings of mankind. Our gaze is always upwards and thus we forget those whose hands are suppliant to us, and are asking us for help, for love, for attention. Instead of serving mankind, we choose to serve idols. It also might come from the words of the Taliban who got irked when they saw the world community rushing with financial aid to restore and preserve the Buddha idols and make them cultural heritage, while as they claimed many Afghans were starving and dying due to lack of basic infrastructure and facilities. The Taliban were themselves against developmental works but their ruse was the unnecessary occupation of the foreign forces and the liberalisation of Islam which had started in some Islamic countries. The Taliban were against that but they made scapegoats of innocent civilians in order to prove their point. And certainly, US and USSR had

failed the Afghan civilians.

*In Bamiyan, Afghanistan, The lovely Buddhas stood so high
That almost reaching to the sky, They overlooked the woes of man...
A new millennium began , and also in Afghanistan, Ruled as it was by the Taliban.
The people lived in poverty; Incessant war had bled them dry;
And Soviet and American money had done what money can
To make their lives a misery.
The ruling ideology required a religious enemy; And so what neither Genghis Khan,
Aurangzeb, nor the British crown had yet accomplished, soon was done.
The lovely Buddhas standing high And almost reaching to the sky
Were blasted down—by TNT...
...The Buddhas that in Bamiyan once overlooked the woes of man
With perfect equanimity, Are gone, and will not come again.
But there are those who would maintain that, in their absence they remain Present,
and to the inner eye , in Bamiyan still standing high....*

*Requiem for the Buddhas of Bamiyan*⁹³ by Polish-American poet Karen Kovacic⁹⁴ refers to the Bamiyan Buddhas being witnesses of the continuation of the Silk Road. They saw multiculturalism and plural religions arrive, stop, settle and leave the Afghan soil. They encountered the wrath of the successive invaders from the Mongols to the Greeks in ancient times, to the Mughals to the British, in medieval times and the Soviet and Americans in modern times and the Taliban in contemporary times.

*Between the empire of China and the empire of Rome, in an oasis along
the Silk Road,
ÖChinese generals, Persian merchants,...all conducted their
commerce in your shadow: you
who saw monasteries cut from mountains, you who were sculpted out of sandstone,
Ötravelers who'd thirsted through the Taklamakan Desert, gave thanks to plural gods.
You who survived Genghis Khan's cannon, who saw the British retreat,
then Soviets and Americans, you whom the Taliban ringed
with burning tires blacking your face,
you with dynamite in your groin, you witness to starving farmers,
to secret schools for girls:
for fourteen centuries you stood fast ...as much a part of this valley as the wind.
Who will know you now by your absence, remembering your before?
When the night comes, who will know you? When the ash falls, who will know you?
After earthquakes and eclipses, whenever there is fire, how to feel you filling us and
leaving us, abiding in the grottoes of our breath?*

She acknowledges that the Buddhas of Bamiyan are as indigenous and native to the Afghan soil as the land's own ethnic tribes like the Hazaras, Tajiks etc. or the land's own mountains and rivers. This could also be a

hidden barb at the cross-border ethnic migration of those Pashtuns who are arriving from outside Afghanistan, possibly Pakistan. The later part of the poem seems to be the voice of the inhabitants of the Bamiyan grottoes, the keepers of the Buddhas- the Hazaras. They speculate and ask the Buddha, that if they are 'purged out' from the land, then who will tell about the chronological past of the Buddhas of Bamiyan from ancient to contemporary times! The identity of the Buddhas is grafted with the folk-identity of the Hazaras, and with the extinction and expulsion of this ethnic group now inhabiting the land, the syncretic and creolized identity of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in folk memory and folklore will also be erased. The generation of Afghans post-2001, at home and in diaspora would never know the Buddhas of Bamiyan, for there is now only emptiness there, *shunyata*⁹⁵. The Bamiyan grottoes once used to be illuminated with oil lamps at nightfall because of the residing Hazara population and hence the Buddhas would be easily noticeable even in the darkness. But the Hazaras have been persecuted by the Taliban and artilleries of military operations of foreign occupying forces, have made them desert the grottoes. In this situation, now when the Buddhas are not there and would not be illuminated any more. The grottoes painted with Buddhist themes used to fill the waking and dreaming hours of the inhabitant Hazaras. Their breaths used to sound of the reverberation of chanting monks. But they still co-existed with the vision of the 'non-believers'. However, now with the niches hollow, the Hazaras feel life has also left the grottoes of their breath. That life was their shared folk identity with the *bot*, the Buddhas who were merely folk cultural symbols for them. Needless to say, the Hazara worldview has remained one of the most secular and tolerant. They are a race of philanthropes who love mankind and are very close to Nature.

*The Buddhas of Bamiyan*⁹⁶ by Sri Lankan-Canadian poet-diplomat Asoka Weerasinghe⁹⁷ chronologically charts the history of the Bamiyan Buddha since the entry of Buddhism in the Valley through the Silk Road, to the repeated attempts of various Iconoclasts throughout history, till the fatal blast of the Taliban in 2001.

*We are Buddhas of the Bamiyan, ...we have stood tall in the sun,
...And now the Islamic Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar says
we should be blown up and destroyed...
"the statues violate the tenets of Islam as laid down in the Koran"
the Talibanis say in a hurry.
But then Islam entered the valley only in the ninth century,...*

The poet points out an obvious fact which is not acceptable to the Taliban, which is that Islam arrived in Afghanistan in 9th century while Buddhism and these Bamiyan idols were predating the valley since 6th century, hence how could they violate the tenets of Islam!

‘NOTHING’ CAN’T BE BLOWN UP: ON TRANSCENDENCE

Scottish poet Charles Cameron⁹⁸ in his poem *Trikaya at Bamiyan*⁹⁹, speaks about the impermanence of the Buddha body.¹⁰⁰ Stone and other structural materials out of which the Buddha Body is moulded are vulnerable to wearing due to disuse, neglect, and weathering and to the frictional rubs of hands of devotees and also to the defacement and mutilation of iconoclasts, to the Talibans. In juxtaposition to this impermanence of the material culture which the Taliban have pursued to destroy with a vengeance, is the Buddha’s mind which is ‘*inherently condensate...it accrues, it deepens, enriches as time echoes it back on itself...*’.

*There’s something inherently evaporative about a Buddha’s body, it erodes –
through neglect, the silk scarves of devotion, the weather, the Taliban –
something inherently condensate about a Buddha’s mind,
it accrues, it deepens, enriches as time echoes it back on itself –
there is no mirror such as the Buddha’s mirror.
Left in that cleft in Bamiyan’s rock face, then, are our memories –
for some, joy in purification, for some, grief at loss,*

The poem’s title keyword *Trikaya* which means 3 bodies in Sanskrit, are thus the Buddha body, Buddha mind and Buddha mirror. This Buddha mind is the philosophy, ideology, teachings and wisdom inherent in the religion, in the mind of its propagators, believers and followers, which is written in indelible ink and is hard to destroy, even by the Taliban. However, this poem also shows how religious ideology often grows deep roots and has the tendency to become puritan and fundamentalist as what happened in the case of the Taliban ideology for religion and they thus stopped developmental issues in the society under the name of ‘traditionalism’. The Taliban believed they purged out the false gods, they purged out idolatry when they purged out the Bamiyan Buddhas from their niches. But can memory actually be purged out completely? The Bamiyan niches have been emptied out but the nature of human mind and memory is such that it refuses to be emptied out, especially if there are scars and wounds and pain involved. The memory of Bamiyan is present for both the iconoclasts and the victims. The Hazara inhabitants

of Bamiyan, especially those living in the grottoes and growing up playing among the Buddhas intact statues, would feel grief at the detonation of the idols. Because, for them the loss is not only that of the *bot*, the Buddha, of *Salsal* and *Shahmama*, of their national cultural heritage, of the fountain spring of their folklore, folk identity. The Taliban will also always remember the empty niches with memories of ideological victory and celebratory joy as they believed they purified the Islamic land thus. But there is also camouflaged inside this cleansing motive, an ethnic cleansing of the Hazaras, thus making the Taliban regime similar to other Zionistic regimes.

In her short poem *Bamiyan*¹⁰¹, Chinese-American poet Shin-Yu-Pai¹⁰² also seems to echo the same sentiment that human faith and spirit cannot be broken. So, if the Bamiyan Buddhas were symbols of the Buddha's philosophy of *Shunyata* (emptiness), then it's thus true that, 'Nothing', can't be blown up!

*...spent rocket casings, steel support rods
& shrapnel surround a pair of yawning outlines
carved from rock, cave murals coated in dust & soot,
...assailed by artillery & heavy canon fire,
faces hacked off, then dynamited under Talib rule
And yet it remains: nothing can't be blown up.*

The poet Sudant¹⁰³ in his poem *The Bamiyan Buddha will Smile again* recalls the glorious period of reigning Buddhism and peace which existed from Karakoram to Mongolia. He refers to the world's first Buddhist university in Taxila¹⁰⁴, which spread lessons of peace and happiness. Similarly, to this caravan of peaceful transmission of Buddhism and Buddhist ideology, common principles for mankind like peace, humanity, compassion were also propagated and exchanged via the Silk Route along with the goods of trade and exchange. The poet bemoans the epitome of peace which used to reign on this land, to have fallen.

*Then why the pinnacle of peace crumbled down?
Why the brave people of the valley became dumbfound?
To the entry of intruders,...To the tyranny of own people*

He questions the brave people of the valley of Bamiyan, the local Hazara ethnic groups as to why they remained dumbfound at the entry of intruders! These intruders are possibly the Taliban in contemporary times who destroyed the statues. The poet mentions the '*tyranny of own people*', which could mean both the Taliban and the Pashtuns who are staying in the same land and yet persecuting viciously their own brethren- the

Hazaras! The poet challenges the Hazaras to resist these malevolent forces. He moans that just the way the destruction of the Buddhas has erased one proof and artefact of human civilization, thus with the demise of the Bamiyan statues, and with the demise of the courage of the Hazaras who are flag-bearers of a unique ethnic syncretisation in gene pools, in cultural pools; this twin demise will thus threaten civilization not only of the Buddhists who were here earlier, but also the civilization of the culture-bearers of Afghanistan's ethnic diversity; the Hazaras who were keepers of the Buddha in the region. As visible from the real mass exodus of the Hazaras happening in the valley since a long time because of the Taliban and Pashtun persecutions as well as because of the warfare being carried out by intruding forces of the military occupants, the poet feels the whole generation of the Hazaras will go to the '*grave of civilization.*'

*You all are heading to, towards the grave of civilization
Not alone but with whole generation
When there is no way ahead Stop, Turn within
O! My fellow beings
You would still find a Bamiyan Buddha
Rising from ashes and Smiling on you
Stretching his arms for embracing you.*

The poet suggests to the Hazaras that instead of leaving their country, and seeking asylum or refuge in other countries, they should look within and gather their courage from the Valley's past long history of peace and remember that they had been the preservers of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, of the last colossal vestiges of the Buddhist legacy. They should draw strength from their national cultural heritage even if the faith of that heritage is different. What matters is the presence of universal values like human sentiment, faith, reverence, appreciation of art, aesthetic value and common belief in a force greater than man himself; these are the things which should be visible when one talks about a cultural and national heritage which contains religions where different languages are used for calling God. Thus the poet beckons the Hazaras to rise above notions of idolatry as they had always done when they chose to stay in the house of the Buddha, among Buddhist murals, even though they used to smear the faces with little mud paste so as to be loyal to their own faith; still they didn't destroy irreversibly the murals and the statues intentionally, justifying the act with faith as the Taliban would do later. And thus the poet asks the Hazaras to return back to their niches and muster strength and courage from their national heritage and folk

tradition which had accommodated the idols for so long. If the Pashtun and the Taliban are petrified with fanaticism, enough to not settle down to a peaceful truce with the Hazaras, then Hazaras should unite with other tribes within the land and perhaps the aggressors could be rendered as 'the rule of the few', but definitely ethnic unity is the need of the hour in this land.

CONCLUSION

One can certainly see that the Bamiyan Buddhas have more believers globally amongst different religions and nationalities as the range of the poets and the themes of all these poems and short stories show us. The popularity of the icons in folk imagination and the impact their demolition had on world community is overwhelming! Ironically, the Taliban act has not made people cower in fear but has seemingly amplified their angst against the senseless destructions. The immediate reaction was of disbelief at the scale of the crime and then angst surfaced up against the perpetrators of the violence. Slavio Zizek¹⁰⁵ has drawn out an interesting relation on fundamentalism and culture with respect to the Bamiyan iconoclasm.¹⁰⁶ He says often people carry out religious and seemingly religious actions not because they believe in it but because they do it out of respect for their culture. Perhaps, this was what made the Hazaras of the Bamiyan valley protect these statues as they believed it was part of their culture and heritage. But, here is the niche emptied out by the Taliban but slowly filled by the words and poetry of writers from Poland, Ireland, America, India, Canada, Indonesia, Taiwan, Sri Lanka! Further, the nature of the poems shows that iconoclasm is not the only issue here, though predominantly all poems are arising out of it, yet, there are critiques of universal human values, of religion, of cultural materialism, of arms race, of drug-trafficking, of ethnic violence, of women's misery, denial of rights to the marginalized, of blood money, of religious fundamentalism, of misanthropism, of xenophobic minds. But there are also poems encouraging the pride and courage of the righteous and the deserving and just, of celebrating the strength of stone and the spirit of man, of need for responsible behaviour, tolerance and decolonizing of the minds from Zionist, xenophobic and fundamentalist ideologies. And of course, whenever iconoclasm has happened, it has also defaced and demolished the face of a culture, a community, a value. There is need to be unrelenting and strategic with it. Octavio Paz¹⁰⁷ had

once commented on the iconoclastic defacement of Elephanta caves¹⁰⁸ and perhaps that is applicable for the Bamiyan iconoclasts also; especially its harsh condemnatory tone:

*I condemn them to be reborn a hundred times on a dung heap,
and as for the others, for eons they must carve living flesh
in the hell for the mutilators of statues.*¹⁰⁹

What has been done cannot be undone but one should also note that any new attempts at rebuilding the Bamiyan Buddhas also means to destroy the infamous history of what the Taliban did to the Afghan national heritage! Mankind must never forget such people who have been raping the Afghan national identity and cultural heritage. They took the country's culture as a hostage and have used the pretext to carry on their xenophobic activities on their own brethren. They are engaging in fratricidal wars and are guilty of genocides. Though there have been umpteen discussions on rebuilding the idols between the Afghan government and UNESCO¹¹⁰ and the Thai government has also offered to undertake the reconstruction¹¹¹ yet so far the plans haven't been feasible. Although, there is also the lucrative possibility of the rebuilt idols attracting more tourist exchange and monetary benefits which could improve the infrastructure of the Valley, yet what perhaps could be done is either restore whatever can be salvaged and restored and if rebuilding is the common consensus then perhaps it is aesthetically and ethically appropriate to not rebuild them 'in situ' of the destruction. They could be perhaps carved out afresh on some other site in Bamiyan itself, provided the nature of the remaining terrain is favourable. It would perhaps pacify all sections. Prof. Zemaryalai Tarzi¹¹² who has been instrumental in the excavations and restoration works in Bamiyan has challenged to offer the still unexhumed 1000 foot long Reclining Buddha (*Parinirvana*) in Bamiyan's alleged Eastern Monastery¹¹³ to the Taliban as an answer to their act of 2001, but perhaps times are not favourable for proving hypotheses and challenges; not until the situation in the country and its government stabilizes democratically and not through the dogma of the gun and fanatic ideology. Practically speaking, who will guarantee that the new excavation digs will remain unthreatened from such acts of cultural-terrorism and vandalism? One should not perhaps then offer one's most treasured and priceless heritage and cultural assets for 'safekeeping' to those who are visually and ideologically challenged; that is to say those people whose vision is impaired and clouded by

zealous ideologies and whose reasoning is degenerating such that they cannot and do not want to 'accommodate any other'. So, one should wait practically till regimes change, psyche of the rulers change. The empty niche is a ruin now and it could be a memorial to the memory of the Buddhas of Bamiyan. Let them reverberate with emptiness when the winds blow. Anais Nin¹¹⁴ had once said, "If you do not breathe through writing, if you do not cry out in writing, or sing in writing, then don't write, because our culture has no use for it." Let the empty niches echo the tales of wonder and horror for this re-telling from the empty ruins is also going to become a part of the Afghan national culture and contemporary folklore. In all the above literary and artistic works, one can definitely see that there is a persistent attempt in revival of the Buddhas through words and images. They have been animated, given voices ranging from feminine, compassionate, complaining, cursing, wrathful, avenging, vindictive, forgiving; a whole lot of universal human emotions have been superimposed on the Buddhas of Bamiyan and it is in this canon of the literary, that the empty niches of the Buddhas are speaking back to mankind.

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3. Frank Holt, *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan*, London, University of California Press, 2006.
4. Maulana Jalalluddin Rumi, a famous 13th century. Persian Sufi poet was born in Balkh, Khorasan.
5. Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American writer and physician, born in Kabul who lives in America.
6. Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, Toronto, Anchor Canada, 2004. <http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/afghan-literature-survives-wars-152805.aspx>
7. Khalid, *Thousand Splendid Sins*, London, Bloomsburg, 2007.
8. Atiq Rahimi is a French-Afghan writer and film maker, born in Kabul who sought political asylum in France. *The Patience Stone*, London, Vintage, 2011.
9. *The Patience Stone*, originally written in Dari as *Sang-e-Saboor* is translated into English by Polly Mclean.
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12. Amulya Malladi, *The Sound of Language*, New York, Random House, 2008.
13. Siba Shakib, *Afghanistan, where God only comes to weep*, London, Century, 2002.

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15. Sharon McKay, *Thunder over Kandahar*, Noida, Om Books International, 2011.
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17. Asne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, Tran. by Ingrid Christophersen, New York, Backbay Books, 2004.
18. Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, London, Faber & Faber, 2008.
19. Suraya Sadeed, *Forbidden Lessons in a Kabul Guesthouse*, London, Virago, 2011.
20. Deborah Rodriguez, *The Kabul Beauty School*, London, Hodder, 2007.
21. Roberta Gately, *Lipstick in Afghanistan*, New York, Gallery Books, 2010.
22. Deborah Ellis, *The Breadwinner*, Oxford University Press. March 2004
23. It is illustrated by Judith Inglese and is a part of the children's book series meant to introduce different cultures to children. Dedie King, *I See the Sun in Afghanistan*. Hardwick Massachusetts, Satya House Publications, 2011.
24. Habiba Sarabi is the Governor of Bamiyan in Hazarajat Province.
25. *Salsal* means, 'year after year' while *Shahmama* may refer to 'King mother' but speculations are rife on this issue as *Salsal* also denotes 'baked clay'. According to an Afghan friend from Balkh, Said Reza Hussein, a student of History and himself a member of the Hazara ethnic community, who had undertaken an extensive personal and independent research on this Hazara oral folklore in 2004 in the Valley as well as in various regional literary sources, *Salsal* in the local Hazara folklore was the son of a Pahlawan and had fallen in love with *Shahmama*, who was the daughter of the Mir of Bamiyan and their romance was told about in the manner of many medieval Perso-Arabic romances.
26. Cited in Cathrina Blansdorf, Michael Petzet, 'The Giant Buddha Statues in Bamiyan: Destruction, History and State of Conservation before the Destruction in 2001', in *The Giant Buddhas of Bamiyan: Safeguarding the Remains*. Edited by Michael Petzet, Berlin, ICOMOS, 2009.
27. Cited in "The Origin of Pagan Idolatry: Ascertained from Historical Testimony and Circumstantial Evidence" by George Stanley Faber. London, A. J Valpy, 1816, p.194.
28. "A Ruin Destroyed" in Shifter Magazine. Eds. Sreshta Rit Premnath, Matthew Metzger. 2004 Issue, 21 January 2007. <http://ritpremnath.blogspot.in/2007/01/ruin-destroyed-birth-of-neo-liberal.html>
29. *Lat* and *Mumat* were the two among three alleged daughters of Allah and were worshipped as pagan goddesses in pre-Islamic Arabia and according to Burnes, Tamer Lanes's historian mentions them as *Lat* and *Mumat*. Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, London, John Murray, 1834, Vol III.
30. Abul Fazl's *Ain-e-Akbari* is referred to in this regard in Quintin Craufurd's, *Researches Concerning The Laws, Theology, Learning, Commerce, Etc. of Ancient and Modern India*, London, Strand, 1817.
31. Rumi, a Sufi mystic poet and philosopher from Balkh, Afghanistan had however once said on the concept of idols that,

Your Self (*nafs*) is the mother of all idols:
 the material idol is a snake, but the spiritual idol is a dragon.
 'Tis easy to break an idol, very easy;
 to regard the self as easy to subdue is folly, folly...

The Carnal Soul by Rumi, <http://www.katinkahesselink.net/sufi/poems.html>
32. From 'The Tent', "The Essential Rumi", Translations by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, San Francisco, Harper, 1994.
33. I am not using much regional or Dari poetry or sources as perspectives have already been shared on them. Hence, I will be considering mostly fiction and poetry written in English here.

34. Margaret Mills, a folklorist from Ohio State University, opines that “*inside Afghanistan literary sensibilities are irrepressible even in everyday speech*” Interviewees of all educational backgrounds repeatedly offered proverbs and aphorisms, some with evident literary sources, to describe life amid war.” Quoted by Kevin Matthes, in “*Writers in Exile: Scholars keep Afghan Literature Alive.*” <http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/afghan-literature-survives-wars-152805.aspx>
35. Anders Widmark, lives in Stockholm, Sweden. He is researching on Pashto short story in Uppsala University, Department of Linguistics and Philology, and also teaches Persian and translates Persian/Dari/Pashto literature. <http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-view-from-within-an-introduction-to-new-afghan-literature>
36. *Khak-e-Bot* (The Idol’s Dust) by Zalmay Babakohi. Translated from Dari by Anders Widmark. <http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-idols-dust>
37. Zalmay Babakohi, is a writer-poet and the publisher of the magazine *Zarnegaar*, a Dari-language magazine published in Toronto, Canada. He was born in 1951 in Mazar-e Sharif in Afghanistan but migrated to Canada in 1980s. His story *The Idol’s Dust* was written shortly after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, in March 2001. <http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-idols-dust>
38. Anders Widmark, ‘*The View from Within: An Introduction to New Afghan Literature.*’ <http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-view-from-within-an-introduction-to-new-afghan-literature>
39. The Hazara uprisings which took place in retaliation to the Amir’s discriminating atrocities were in; 1888-90, 1890-93 but were crushed and approximately 60% of the Hazara population was exterminated over this time, not including those who were maimed, raped and oppressed to the point of undergoing permanent psychological shocks and migrating as refugees to other lands. Sayed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998.
40. Hazaragi also connotes to another local dialect of the Hazaras of particularly Hazarajat province of Afghanistan of which Bamiyan is a part.
41. *Buz-e-Chini* in Persian means the Chinese goat.
42. Hussain Ali Yousofi was an ethnic Hazara politician in Balochistan, and chairman of the *Hazara Democratic Party* and wrote Hazaragi plays. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hussain_Ali_Yousafi
43. The words ‘thousand splendid suns’ are taken from Afghan writer, Khaled Hosseini’s novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.
44. Hiuen Tsiang (629 AD), *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Translated from the Chinese by Samuel Beal, London. Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh and London, Trubner 1884.
45. Amol Titus, in his own words in the Foreword of the epic says, “*Darkness at Bamiyan* was the only method I could grasp, that would tell of the ache I felt when these statues were destroyed...I chose the epic poetry form to tell the stories of Sol Sol and Shahmama as a conversation between the two monoliths that had stood side by side for more than 1,000 years” http://amolbtitus.com/books_darknessatbamiyan.html
46. Amol Titus, *Darkness at Bamiyan*, Jakarta, 2006.
47. Amol Titus in his own words, “*Like many ordinary citizens living in these troubled times I, though physically far removed from Bamiyan in Afghanistan, too was pained by the senseless acts that culminated in the destruction of the ancient statues called Shahmama and Sol Sol. The horrific acts and as yet ominously inconclusive chain of action and reaction*

poignantly highlights the state of the troubled human condition today. A condition I have tried to explore through an imagined dialogue between the two protagonists while weaving into the communication certain illustrative tenets and symbols of Buddhist learning."
http://amolbtitus.com/books_darknessatbamiyan.htm

48. Vairochana Buddha, embodies the Buddhist concept of *Shunyata* (Emptiness) and his statues often are subjected to massive size and brilliance but that is only set as a reminder that all conditioned existence is empty and without a permanent identity and temporary. Though some also call the larger one as Dipankara Buddha.
49. Solsol is the spelling the poet uses.
50. Khaled Hoseini, in his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, makes his character Babi say to Laila when they go to see the Bamiyan Buddha, "I also wanted you to see your country's heritage, children, to learn of its rich past..." (p.147) This iconoclasm proved that apart from the Hazaras, not many saw these idols as part of Afghan national cultural heritage.
51. *Na-Buddha* in Dari, meaning 'No-Buddha' is the colloquial way of referring to the contemporary empty niches by the local Hazaras of Bamiyan.
52. The Taliban sacrificed hundred cows after the blast. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1229256.stm
53. Tom Savage, *Bamiyan Poems*. Sisyphus Press, 2005. http://www.pw.org/content/tom_savage_2
54. *Bamiyan Poems* was written in Afghanistan during a trip to the Bamiyan Buddhas in 1970. http://culturecatch.com/literary/tom_savage
55. See Finbarr Barry Flood, 'Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum. *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4, December 2002.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Notably, most acts of iconoclasm on statues, mutilate primarily the face.
58. Kruti J. Patel says, "Conflicts between cultures are far more dangerous than conflicts between states because, while states understand the language of diplomacy, parties involved in a cultural conflict often do not... because the goal of the conflict is to attain victory by eradicating of the conflicting culture... Attacking the physical manifestations of the conflicting culture is one of the most tempting tools of cultural warfare" This is what also happened in the case of Bamiyan. In '*Culture Wars: Protection of Cultural Monuments in a Human Rights Context*' www.kentlaw.edu/jicl/Articles%202011/Patel_Note.pdf
59. Jonathan Tucker, *The Silk Road: Art and History*, Chicago, Art Media Resources Limited, 2003.
60. In fact, Hieun Tsiang's travelogue mentions a metallic golden glow coming off from the Buddha statues, which brings into mind the contested fact that the statues were possibly coated with a metallic polish, possibly brass, thus giving a golden sparkle from far whenever the sunrays fell on them.
61. "...overhead of Sakya was necessary to be the symbol of transcendence ...the sun could absorb everything as the symbol of omnipotent invincible divinity. The traditional sun worship of the nomads and also Buddhist symbolism which metaphorically compared the transcendence of Sakya to the sun, both of them could be represented here by the sun as the epiphany of super divinity." From, "*The Mural Paintings in Bamiyan: The Great Composition of the Sun God on the Ceiling of the Eastern Colossal Buddha*". www.isca-japan.com
62. The Hazara diaspora are settled as refugees in America, Canada, Australia, India, Balochistan (Pakistan), Iran and Europe.
63. Tom Savage, *Last Bamiyan Poems*, http://culturecatch.com/literary/tom_savage

64. Pravin Gadhvi, Bamiyan Buddha. March 2012. <http://www.slideshare.net/parthbbhatt/2202bhattparth>
65. Praveen Gadhvi, an IAS Officer in the Government of Gujarat, is also a distinguished name in Gujrati Dalit literature.<http://786ram.wordpress.com/2010/07/10/cry-for-defenceless-and-voiceless-dalits-in-praveen-gadhvis-poetry-volume-the-voice-of-the-last/>
66. Eva Salzman, "The Buddhas of Bamiyan", in *One Two II*, England, Wrecking Ball Press, 2002. <http://www.wreckingballpress.com/books/onetwo.php>
67. The marble statue of the Venus de Milo was sculpted by Alexandros of Antioch around 130-100 BC, believed to depict Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty (Venus to the Romans). Her arms and original plinth were lost. Now it's in Paris at the Louvre Museum.
68. It was reported that pieces of the Bamiyan Buddha rubble are turning up in Peshawar, Pakistan for sale. "Bamiyan relics up for sale in Peshawar", *The News Jang*, 2 April 2001. <http://www.rawa.org/statues2.htm>
69. Donall Dempsey, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*, 26 January 2008. <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-buddhas-of-bamiyan/>
70. Hazrat Bal shrine in Kashmir, is believed to have the hair relic of the Prophet Mohammad Al-Masjid-an-Nabawi in Medina has the body of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and of Umar. Even Adam's Peak or Sri Pada in Sri Lanka has footprints which are venerated by Muslims and Christians as that of their First Ancestor Adam's when he set foot first after being expelled from Paradise.
71. Ashoka exhumed the relics of the Buddha and redistributed them all over the continent.
72. Zalmay Babakohi, *Khak-e-Bot*, p.2.
73. Water is very important for purification rituals, even in Islam for doing *wazoo*, ritual cleaning ablutions prior to prayers.
74. Zalmay Babakohi, *op.cit.*, p.4.
75. *Ibid.*, p.6.
76. *Ibid.*, p.7.
77. R. Parthasarathy (1934) is an Indian poet, translator, critic, and editor. He is Associate Professor of English and Asian Studies at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, USA.
78. R. Parthasarathy, *The Stones of Bamiyan, Poetry*, September 2007, Vol. 190, Issue 5, p.396. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/toc/1125>
79. Pierre Centlivres, 'The Controversy over the Buddhas of Bamiyan', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Special Issue - No. 2, 'Outraged Communities': Comparative Perspectives on the Politicization of Emotions in South Asia.', 2008. URL: <http://samaj.revues.org/document992.html>.
80. This quotation also greets the visitors while entering through the door of the Kabul Museum.
81. See Finbarr Barry Flood, *op.cit.*, Pg.648.
82. Jon Wesick has published close to a hundred poems in small press journals such as *American Tanka*, *Anthology Magazine*, *The Blind Man's Rainbow*, *The Three Treasures Zen Community Newsletter*, *Tidepools*, *Zillah*, and others.
83. Jon Wesick, *Bamiyan*. http://www.tztc.org/art_gallery/wesick/wesick.htm#bio_March_2001.
84. Kirk Lumpkin is a poet/lyricist/songwriter/vocalist/spoken word artist from San Francisco Bay Area. <http://www.kirklumpkin.com/>
85. Kirk Lumpkin, *The Lakes of Band-i-Amir*, in *Candles in the Preaching and Poetry in*

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- Times of Crisis*, 2003. Kirk visited Band-I-Amir and Bamiyan in Afganistan in 1971. This was published as a poem in his first book, *Co-Hearing* in 1983. <http://www.kirkklumpkin.com/>
86. Carolyn Forche. *The Museum of Stones*, 26 March 2007. http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/poetry/2007/03/26/070326po_poem_forche.
 87. Carolyn Forche is a well known American poet, editor, translator, and human rights advocate. <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/214>
 88. Two thousand Hazaras were killed in 1998 in Mazar-e-Sharif. Cited in Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, 1 February 2001. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a87c4.html> [accessed 6 June 2012]
 89. Lodestones, having magnetic properties were believed to have alchemical properties.
 90. Arunasu, "*In Memory of Bamiyan Buddhas*", 22 February 2010. <http://www.poetsgraves.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=12443>
 91. Henry Weinfield, "On the Destruction of the Buddhas in Bamiyan", in *Without Mythologies: New and Selected Poems and Translations*. Dos Madres Press, 2008. <http://www.poetryporch.com/doreskionweinfield09.html>
 92. Henry Weinfield is a poet, translator, and literary scholar. <http://pls.nd.edu/faculty/henry-weinfield/>
 93. Karen Kovacik, "Requiem for the Buddhas of Bamiyan", From *Metropolis Burning*, Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2005. <http://cosmopolitanreview.com/articles/41-reviews/372-metropolis-burning>
 94. Karen Kovacik was born in East Chicago and grew up in Highland, in Lake County and is of Polish origins and is the Poet Laureate of Indiana. She's professor of English at IUPUI, where she directs the creative writing program. <http://www.in.gov/arts/2392.htm>, <http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/directory/bio/kkovacik>
 95. *Shunyata* means emptiness/ void/ non-existence of the self. After the Buddha, emptiness was further developed by Nāgārjuna and the *Mādhyamaka* school, an early Mahāyāna school. The *Suñña Sutta*, which discusses it is part of the Pāli canon. Thomas J. McFarlane. '*The Meaning of Sunyata in Nagarjuna's Philosophy*' 1995. http://www.integralscience.org/sacredscience/SS_sunyata.html
 96. Asoka Weerasinghe, "The Buddhas of Bamiyan", in *The Taliban Trilogy*. From, "*A Buddhist's Curse to Islamists' Bigotry*", <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=8,2318,0,0,1,0>. In a letter to The Editor, *Asian Tribune* Asoka Weerasinghe writes, "And if I am expected to cultivate religious tolerance and be respectful of others religions, then I expect others to do the same towards my beliefs as a Buddhist." In his letter he further reveals his frustration and anger, "by writing a therapeutic *The Taliban Trilogy* and not going around burning places." <http://www.asiantribune.com/buddhists-curse-islamists-bigotry>
 97. Asoka Weerasinghe was former Deputy High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Canada and is an award winning published poet. <http://www.island.lk/2006/02/19/features2.html>
 98. Charles Cameron (1943) is a professional freelance writer, poet, and teacher. <http://home.earthlink.net/~hipbone/ChasCBio.html>
 99. Charles Cameron, "Triakaya at Bamiyan", in '*The Buddhas of Bamiyan, 10 Years Later*', <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2011/03/buddhas-bamiyan-10-years/March31,2011at3:59pm>
 100. *Triakaya* in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, says Buddha has 3 bodies, *Dharmakāya* or *Truth body* embodying the very principle of enlightenment and knows no limits

- or boundaries; *Sambhogakāya* or *body of mutual enjoyment* which is a body of bliss or clear light manifestation; *Nirmānakāya* or *created body* which manifests in time and space. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trikaya>
101. Shin Yu Pai, "Bamiyan", in *Adamantine*, New York, White Pine Press, 2010. <http://www.whitepine.org/catalog.php?id=232>
 102. Shin Yu Pai was born in 1975 in Southern California. She studied Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has authored seven books of poetry. She has served as a poet-in-residence for the Seattle Art Museum and is currently associate director of the Hendrix-Murphy Foundation for Language and Literature at Hendrix College. <http://www.shinyupai.com/>
 103. Sudant, 'The Bamiyan Buddha will Smile again'. In poet's own words, "This tiny poem is a stroke of that compassionate heart, which bleeds with every bullet that pierces my fellow beings. It is an appeal to all for marching on the path of righteousness." http://pdfcast.org/pdf/bamiyan-buddha-would-smile-again,9_May_2011.
 104. Taxila is in Pakistan
 105. Slavoi Zizek is a Slovenian philosopher, cultural critic and has been working in the Hegelian, Marxist and Lacanian Psychoanalysis traditions and has notable contributions to political theory, film theory and theoretical psychoanalysis.
 106. Slavoj Zizek, "Passion In The Era of Decaffeinated Belief". <http://www.lacan.com/passion.htm>
 107. Octavio Paz is a Mexican poet, writer, diplomat and was also the recipient of the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature.
 108. Elephanta Caves (5th-8th century) are in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.
 109. Octavio Paz, 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta'. <http://the-grynne.livejournal.com/800693.html>
 110. UNESCO has cited the issues of finance and irreplaceable authenticity and historicity as the reasons for not rebuilding the idols. <http://www.thehindu.com/arts/history-and-culture/article2904537.ece>
 111. <http://www.afghanembassyjp.com/en/news/717>
 112. *Bamiyan*, Professor Tarzi's Survey and Excavation Archaeological Mission, 2003. <http://silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/december/bamiyan.htm>
 113. Hieun Tsiang's travelogue mentions the Eastern Monastery which contains the 1000 feet Reclining Buddha, a miniscule part of what has been claimed to be excavated by Prof. Tarzi and his team but which had to be stopped due to reasonable constraints.
 114. Anais Nin was a French-Cuban woman author, diarist from America and wrote *The Delta of Venus*.

WHEN THE NICHES TREMBLED IN BAMMIYAN*

ANKITA HALDAR

The womb of the mountain trembled,
And its water broke.
Amniotic juices spread far and wide
like hate, like intolerance, like black smoke.
They covered the Bamiyan skyline in grief.
The miscarriage happened at gunpoint
And Gods were aborted that day,
1250 tonnes of dynamite
The labour was excruciating but brief.
The empty niches now endlessly echo.
Their lament drapes the valley like a shroud.
The wind of the Great Route
Blowing from distant lands
carries with it wisps of the
faith of the non-believers
which had coursed through
the veins of the gods
and sustained them till now
in the midst of dust,
now is drenched heavy with
screams of the keepers, massacred locals.
The body lies in chunks
bereft of flesh and blood
shorn of divinity, congealed spirituality.
When faith changes to stone rubbles
And stone changes to dust

* Original and unpublished poem

The time will come for the next one.
The wind will blow again,
Divinity will glow again,
faith will flow again
Up he will rise again,
Phoenix-like from the fire, dust,
 smoke and rubble.
Born of Maya once,
He will choose his niche again,
He will choose his womb again...

THE CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN AND HUMAN SECURITY (*SEMINAR REPORT*)

Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation (NGO) in association with Al Hakim Foundation (NGO) and Rencontre Africaine pour la Defense des Droits des l'homme (RADDHO) (NGO) organised a seminar *The Conflict in Afghanistan and Human Security: Impact upon Central and South Asia* at the Palais des Nations, Geneva on 12 March 2012. Main speakers included Dr. Charles Graves, Biro Diawara, Prof. K. Warikoo, Prof. Riyaz Punjabi and Mr. Yerlan Alimbaev of the Embassy of Kazakhstan.

Dr. Charles Graves in his presidential remarks made the following statement : “Being located at the cross-roads of South, Central and West Asia, Afghanistan occupies a unique geo-strategic location. In the post-Cold War period, which witnessed the demise of USSR, establishment of an Islamic state, rise of Taliban, 9/11 and the Global War against Terror, Afghanistan has remained at the centre stage of regional and international politics. Even though War against Terror in Afghanistan was launched over 10 years ago, many basic freedoms- from insecurity, fear and poverty are yet to be achieved. The battle between the forces of democratization and peace and those of destabilization and insecurity is still continuing. The situation in Afghanistan remains unstable due to increasing insecurity and rise in deadly attacks by the Taliban, who have not only regrouped and strengthened but have been emboldened by the US announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan and the ambivalent policy of the international community.

The resurgence of Taliban poses a direct threat to human security in South, Central and West Asia in particular and the globe in general. This meeting aims at deliberating the security situation in Afghanistan

and its implications. Noted academics and area specialists, human rights defenders and diplomats have met here to give their experts analyses and exchange views on such an important issue.

The other main issue for our consideration today is the question of political and economic power. This question cannot be avoided since Afghanistan has had power vacuums through centuries and many outside nations have tried to fill them – more recently the British Empire, the Soviet Union, the USA, NATO forces and now Pakistan. Ten years ago the Taliban tried to fill the gap imposing their type of political and economic rule. The present Afghan conflict began in order to oust the Taliban and replace them with other kinds of political power. Today we are witnessing an attempt to replace the Taliban with structures more in line with the expectations of the global community.”

Dr. Graves posed the question: “What are the present challenges face to face with the rise in violence, in order to guarantee viable and durable human security in Afghanistan and with its neighbours?”

Mr. Biro Diawara, representative of Interfaith International and Programme director of Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l’homme (RADDHO), stated that it is the responsibility of the civil society to promote a dialogue which assists governments to take adequate measures protecting civilians and guaranteeing respect for the instruments of law valid both in peacetime and wartime. He made a plea for political solution allowing all the elements of Afghan society to associate themselves with a transition toward the stabilization of their country, so that they extricate themselves from violence, and enjoy all their fundamental rights.

In the opinion of Mr. Diawara the following measures are necessary for national reconciliation and emancipation of the people of Afghanistan:

- a) mobilize indigenous capacities to promote intra-Afghan dialogue in the face of continuing campaigns of intimidation and violence used by the Taliban;
- b) uproot the sanctuaries of the Taliban and their colleagues outside;
- c) reinforce regional cooperation against drug trafficking;
- d) improve transparency in the use of foreign financial aid;
- e) enlarge technical assistance in the promotion and protection of human rights at the local level;
- f) invest in basic local social services

Mr. Yerlan Alimbayev of the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Geneva,

detailed the initiatives taken by Kazakhstan on Afghanistan. He said, "During Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of OSCE we have been pushing for the Organization to play a greater role in addressing the Afghan problem. Afghanistan has been a top priority of our Chairmanship in the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as well." He acknowledged the role of the OIC Special Trust Fund and the OIC Secretary General's Special Representative on Afghanistan.

Stating that, Kazakhstan stands side by the people and Government of Afghanistan in their efforts to build a better future for the nation," Mr. Yerlen put forth Kazakhstan's vision of tasks required to be realized in Afghanistan:

- a) Continuing a broad dialogue on reconciliation;
- b) Ensuring conditions for normal domestic political life without external interference;
- c) Coordinating the efforts of international community to restore Afghanistan's economy;
- d) Engaging Afghanistan in regional development.

In terms of economic cooperation, Kazakhstan supports regional and international projects in the field of energy. The expansion of the Special Programme for the countries of Central Asia (SPECA) to include Afghanistan will provide additional opportunities in this direction. We consider the "New Silk Road Initiative important for development of Afghanistan and the entire Central Asian region. Kazakhstan wants Afghanistan to have access to international markets including through the Europe-Western China transport corridor –in which Kazakhstan has invested approximately three billion US dollars. Water and energy supplies need to be seriously addressed in the region. The World Bank could take a coordinating role in this sensitive issue.

Combating illicit drug production and drug trafficking are among the main challenges of regional development. In our opinion, the Almaty based Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for combating illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors should continue to play an important role in this regard. This unique structure, developed in cooperation with the UNODC, has already proved itself as an effective mechanism in combating cross-border drug trafficking in the region.

Every year up to 200 Afghan students study in Kazakhstan. A total

of 1,000 Afghan students will get education as doctors and teachers at Kazakh universities under a special programme that runs from 2010 to 2018. Kazakhstan has allocated 50 million US dollars for this programme. Over the past few years Kazakhstan has continuously sent humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and will continue to do so in the future. Kazakhstan is ready to provide more grain, flour and food products for Afghanistan under the procurement programmes of Food and Agriculture Organization as well as the World Food Programme.

With regard to mechanisms of interaction, Mr. Yerlan stated that the idea of strengthening confidence –building measures can be implemented within one of the existing platforms-specifically, within the framework of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence – Building Measures in Asia (CICA). In November 2011 Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, hosted the 12th Session of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan. Also, during the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn on 5 December 2011 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan made the following proposals:

- i) Kazakhstan stands ready to guarantee the delivery of certain volumes of grain and fuel and lubricants using the mechanisms of the FAO and the WFP. The only thing we need –the guaranteed and free transit to Afghanistan.
- ii) In the security sphere, Astana stands for the wide use of regional cooperation mechanisms to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and trans-boundary crime. We reaffirm our proposal to use the CICA mechanisms.
- iii) Kazakhstan welcomes new economic initiatives related to Afghanistan. In particular, we are ready to discuss various transit and transportation projects, one of which would be the creation of a transport and logistics center at the Seaport Aktau Special Economic Zone.

In conclusion, we are confident that only common efforts of the international community will lead us to success in building stable and prosperous Afghanistan.”

Prof. K. Warikoo made the following statement:

“Even after ten years have lapsed since the US led forces led the war against terror in Afghanistan, this country is still reeling under insecurity, fear and under-development. The Taliban have not only regrouped and strengthened, but have been operating both from their

strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There has been rise in the deadly attacks by the Taliban – ambushes, killings, rocket attacks, bomb-explosions etc. are occurring causing heavy casualties. The civilians including government officials, teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal and community leaders, children and aid workers have been targeted and killed.

Drug production has increased phenomenally. Drug trade of Afghanistan is several US billion dollars producing 82% of world's opium and 93% of world's heroin. Over 1 million Afghans are reported to have become drug users. So is the case with Central Asian countries, Russia and Europe, which receive the drugs from Afghanistan. About 30 to 40,000 lives are reported to be lost in Russia each year due to drug addiction. The resurgence of opium production and drug trafficking is directly benefitting the drug barons, warlords and the Taliban. In the words of Armen Ogenesyan (Editor-in-Chief of *International Affairs*) who wrote last year, "The war will go on as long as drug barons find it profitable. They should be stopped". There is need for well coordinated and determined anti-drug operations and destruction of heroin laboratories in Afghanistan. There is urgent need to revive the age-old agriculture and horticultural practices in Afghanistan. In the past, Afghanistan lived on its agricultural products.

While we discuss the current situation of human rights in Afghanistan, we must acknowledge the improvement in the human development indicators since the Taliban were routed in 2001. By late 2008, 80% of people had access to basic health services, up from 8% in 2001. Infant mortality rate fell after the fall of Taliban, school enrolment shot up from 1.1 million students in 2001 to 5.7 million in 2008, a third of whom are girls. Roads have been repaired and built. There are about 10 million mobile phone subscribers. Construction industry has developed well. But the fact remains that even after about 60 billion dollars of international aid over a decade, Afghanistan is yet to achieve peace, security, political stability and sustainable economic development. The problem is compounded by the rampant corruption at various levels. Transparency International 2009 Corruption Index puts Afghanistan at 179th place out of 180 states, meaning that Afghanistan is perceived to be the world's second most corrupt country after Somalia. Pino Arlacchi, a Member of European Parliament, has estimated that upto 80% of aid given to Afghanistan has been lost to corruption.

But the problem remains that of insecurity and growing threat from

the Taliban. The year 2011 witnessed deadly attacks on such high profile targets in Kabul – the Intercontinental Hotel in June 2011, British Council in August 2011, the US Embassy and NATO Hqs. in September 2011, which have exposed the extreme fragility of security in Afghanistan. The US announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan has only boosted the Taliban who seek to return to power either through force or through a negotiated process in the name of reconciliation. The weak resolve and disjointed efforts of international community have only resulted in lowering the morale of anti-Taliban elements in Afghanistan, with the active Pakistani support. I quote Robert Blackwill the former Deputy US National Security Adviser for Strategic Planning (2003-04) who wrote last year, “The Pakistani military will not end its support for and provision of sanctuary to its longtime Afghan Taliban proxies or accept a truly independent Afghanistan. Washington should accept that Taliban will inevitably control most of the Pashtun south and east. US and its partners should simply stop dying in the south and east, and ensure that north and west of Afghanistan do not succumb to the Taliban as well”.

CIA Director Leon Panetta is emphatic saying that “we have seen no evidence that the Taliban are truly interested in reconciliation. I think it is very difficult to proceed with a reconciliation that is going to be meaningful”. So ensuring sustainable security and peace in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community. This can be achieved only by total destruction of Taliban and Al Qaeda network and their infrastructure still existent and operational. International community needs to evolve a concerted strategy to curb terrorism and extremism in and around Afghanistan by stopping their sources of funds, arms, logistics and training and ideological motivation. The future of Afghanistan with guarantees of peace, security and well being of its people hinges upon the success of the de-Talibanisation process, success of reconciliation between rival ethnic/regional Afghan political groups and commanders, emergence of a balanced and broad-based stable government, setting up and effective functioning of local law enforcement agencies, on the speedy implementation of reconstruction of social, economic, education and health sector and on elimination of drugs production and trafficking from Afghanistan”.

Prof. Riyaz Punjabi made the following statement:

“Afghanistan is crucial for stability in South Asia. It has the potential to disturb world peace. In spite of best efforts of last 12 years, peace is

eluding Afghanistan. Former President Rabbani was killed by the suicide bomber. He was highly educated and well meaning person. The problem in Afghanistan is a hard mix of religious fundamentalism, tribalism and extremism, based on ignorance. Extremist forces represented by Taliban should not have the last word on Afghanistan. The negotiations will be at the cost of Karzai, where the Taliban will have an upper hand. International community has to see if the Taliban can be given such a role. Different linguistic and cultural groups need to come together and have a confederation, where rights of all peoples, women and children are respected. Tribal code prevalent in Afghan society supersedes everything. Tribal relationship and connectivity comes to fore”.



FROM THE LEFT PROF. RIYAZ PUNJABI, MR. YERLAN ALIMBAEV, DR. CHARLES GRAVES, MR. BIRO DIAWARA AND PROF. K. WARIKOO AT SALLE XXIII, PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA



A SECTION OF THE AUDIENCE

REMEMBERING THE BAMMIYAN BUDDHAS (SEMINAR REPORT)

Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation (HRCF) in association with India International Centre (IIC) organised a round table *Remembering The Bamiyan Buddhas* at Conference Room II, India International Centre, New Delhi on 7 May 2012. Main speakers included Ambassador Chinmoy R. Gharekhan, Dr. Lokesh Chandra, Prof. K. Warikoo, Dr. Mondira Dutta (both from JNU), Mr. Said Reza Husseini, Mr. Rashid Ahmadi and Mr. Mansoor Hussein (all from Afghanistan and Ms. Ankita Haldar from JNU).

In his welcome address Prof. K. Warikoo recalled the previous international seminar *Bamiyan: Challenge to World Heritage* which was organised by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation at IIC in September 2001 and the subsequent publication of a book of the same title. He stated that the present seminar reflects upon the importance of Bamiyan Buddhas in the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. And it is for the first time that three Afghan scholars from the region are giving the local Afghan view about the Bamiyan Buddhas and their demolition by the Taliban.

Ambassador Chinmay R. Gharekhan, President of Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi, in his presidential remarks made the following statement:

“Bamiyan, a valley in Afghanistan is important because of its strategic geographical position and also because it was a flourishing centre of Buddhist art for many centuries. The name Bamiyan has been transcribed as Fan-yang in the Annals of the Northern Wei, China (386-556). The area contains numerous Buddhist monastic ensembles and sanctuaries, as well as fortified edifices from the Islamic period. The heritage resources in Bamiyan Valley have suffered from various

disasters. The site is also testimony to the tragic destruction of the two standing Colossal Buddha statues, which shook the world in March 2001. However, a significant proportion of Buddhist and Islamic architectural forms and their settings in the Bamiyan landscape, remain intact at important sites, including the vast Buddhist monastery in the Bamiyan cliffs which contained the two colossal sculptures of the Buddha. Cultural landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley represent the artistic and religious developments which flourished from the 1st and the 13th centuries.

In tracing the migration of Indian culture to West Asia, Central Asia and China, the role of Bamiyan can be hardly over-emphasised. It is the first way station on the route traversed by the pilgrims and merchants from Gandhara to Central Asia and China. Another reason behind Bamiyan's importance is its geographical situation as mentioned above. It is situated high up on the mountains at the intersection of two migrant routes; one comes from China to Iran through the Pamir and the Hindukush mountains and the other route runs from the Gangetic valley to Balkh. Classical writers described Bamiyan's as the frontiers of languages, civilizations and religions and the cross roads of Central Asia". The route from India to Bamiyan was known as the "Great Royal Way". These trade routes were followed by the conquerors and their armies, Cyrus, Alexander, the Seleucids and Caliphs, Jenghis Khan, Timur, Babur and many others.

Being the meeting place of various races and cultures, Bamiyan encountered various art traditions, such as the Iranian, Gandharan, and the Indian including the Gupta and the Vakataka (Ajanta) styles or idioms. It is well known the Bamiyan served as the gateway through which foreign ideas came to India and Indian thoughts and ideas found an outlet to the western and northern countries.

Two masterpieces colossal figures of Buddha, 55 and 38 meters in height, were hewn out of the rock at Bamiyan. The colossal Buddha images at Bamiyan followed closely the Gandhara ideal and were probably carved by the pilgrims who traveled through the region and whose cave sanctuaries can still be seen cut into the cliffs. The Buddhas were carved into the rock face of the cliff in a somewhat crude fashion and then covered, first with a layer of mud and then with a thinner layer of stucco, moulded to create garment folds. The caravans on the Silk Road invariably made a stop in this valley. The immense Buddha images at Binglingsi, Longmen and Yungang in China may well have been

inspired by the Bamiyan Buddhas.

A graphic picture of Bamiyan in 632 AD is provided by the Chinese pilgrim monk Xuanzang well known for his writings on the sites of Central Asia and India during his travels from China to India and back to China during the years from 628 to 645 AD. Records by Xuanzang on Bamiyan captures the sense of awe with which they were narrated:

‘To the north-east of the royal city there is mountain, on the declivity of which is placed a stone figure of Buddha, erect, in height 140 to 150 feet. Its golden hues sparkle on every side, and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness. To the east of the convent there is a standing figure of Sakya Buddha, made of metallic stone, in height 100 feet.’

Xuanzang has described Bamiyan as a centre of Hinayana Buddhism because there were some tens of Buddhist monasteries with several thousands of brethren who were adherents of the Hinayana school which declares the Buddha as transcendent, i.e. the *Lokattara*. However, the valley grew also a stronghold of the Mahayana faith or doctrine, as some artistic evidence would tend to show.

The entire Bamiyan valley had been the scene of ferocious fighting between the Taliban and opposition groups. The Buddhas were damaged during these years but were not finally destroyed until March 2001, when they were blown up by the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan in one of the most colossal acts of stupidity of recent history. The large roundels above the head of the large Buddha still remained which give an idea of how beautiful the site must once have appeared.

The demolition of colossi Buddhas destroyed the human creations and dealt a big blow to the ethos of the land. Prof. Rhie said despite the shock of the world at the needless and heartbreaking destruction of the two Buddha colossi at Bamiyan in the spring of 2001, we need to continue to study and work for solutions to the many problems still surrounding their make, their influences and many other topics, such as their iconography, religious and cultural significance, historical and artistic connections. In this we can also help to keep alive these greatest of all colossal standing Buddhas known from the Buddhist world that stood along the Silk Road passage between the West and the East”.

Dr. Lokesh Chandra presented a detailed historical perspective of the Bamiyan Buddhas, explaining their significance. Dr. Mondira Dutta gave an update of the gender situation in Afghanistan highlighting the travails of women there.

Rashid Ahmadi who is a native of Bamiyan, provided a local

perspective on the Bamiyan Buddhas recalling the efforts of local Hazaras to protect the Buddha statues.

Said Reza Hussein from Afghanistan analysed in detail the Taliban iconoclasm in a historical perspective, and the subsequent reaction of the Hazaras to the demolition of Buddhas statues in Bamiyan.

Ankita Haldar, a young scholar from JNU provided a comprehensive and analytical review of the reflections and reactions which have appeared in many contemporary English works of fiction, memoirs and poetry. She concluded her presentation reciting her own poem “When the Niches trembled in Bamiyan”, which she had composed especially for this occasion.



FROM THE LEFT MANSOOR, CHINMOY R. GHAREKHAN (PRESIDENT, IGNCA), RASHID AHMADI



FROM THE LEFT PUNIT GAUR, S.J.S. CHHATWAL, AMB. CHINMOY R. GHAREKHAN,
PROF. K. WARIKOO



A SECTION OF THE AUDIENCE



A GROUP PHOTO OF SOME PARTICIPANTS

HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES is a quarterly Journal published by the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, which is a non-governmental, non-profit research, cultural and development facilitative organisation. The Journal is devoted to the study of various issues pertaining to the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan region in South and Central Asia or parts thereof, connected with its environment, resources, history, art and culture, language and literature, demography, social structures, communication, tourism, regional development, governance, human rights, geopolitics etc.

While the principal concern of the Journal will be on its focal area, i.e., from Afghanistan to Myanmar including the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Himalayan States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttaranchal and North East states; papers with a broad sweep addressing environmental, social, cultural, economic, geopolitical and human rights issues are also welcomed.

The objective is to make a scientific appraisal of the issues confronting the Himalayan and adjoining region in South and Central Asia or parts thereof, and to make specific policy oriented studies and need based recommendations as the means to promote the human, educational and economic advancement of the peoples of the region besides preserving and enriching their ethno-cultural, literary and historical heritage. Promotion of human rights, social justice, peace, harmony and national integration are the other key areas in which the Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation has been active.

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