

Venus Upadhyaya

Part of a Special Series

Family Memoirs,
Civilisational Heritage,
and Great Game
Competition for
Sanskrit Manuscripts



2023



Gurnal Project

Part of a Special Series entitled 'From Kashmir to Haridwar' based on family history, anecdotes, cultural linkages and ancestry, by journalist Venus Upadhyaya.

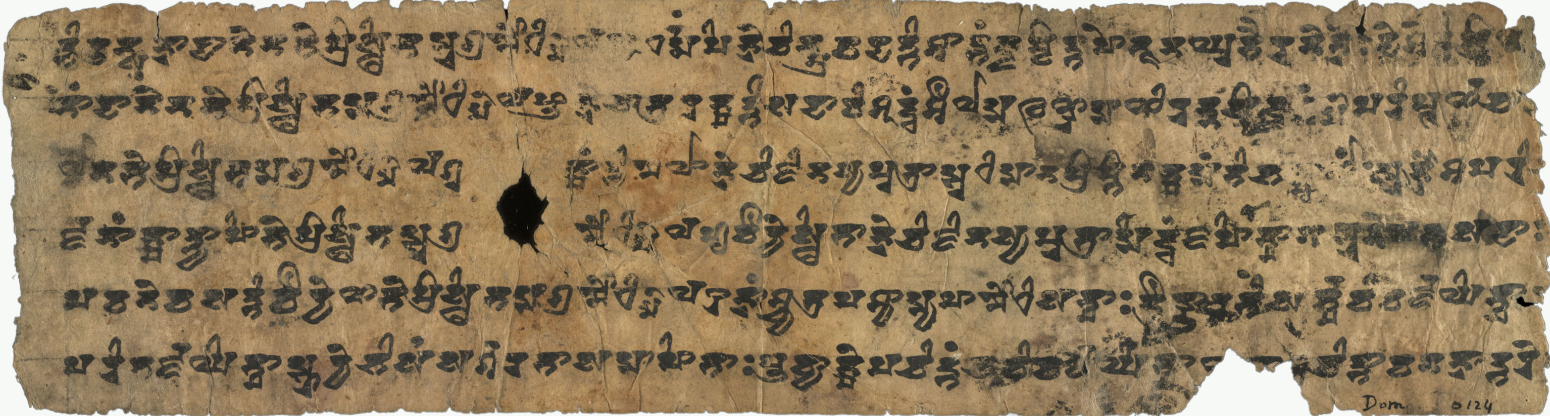
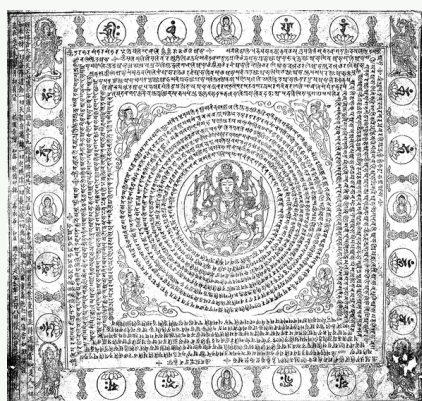


Photo courtesy: International Dunhuang Project from its digital collections, from original file BLI1_OR82121411R1. Catalogue entry: Or.8212/1411. This folio of the popular Saddharmapundarikasūtra (Lotus Sutra) is written in Sanskrit in an early form of South Turkestan Brahmi script. The manuscript originally comprised more than 350 folios, each consisting of two thin layers of paper pasted together. Leaves of this same manuscript are preserved in London, Munich and Berlin. Ink on paper.



Chinese Buddhism's dharani iconography with Siddham script in Sanskrit, Later Tang, 927 CE. Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

"The northern routes I took to retrace the journeys of my ancestors in North western himalayas have only become more revealing with each passing day. I call them civilisational routes."



Gurnal Project



Venus Upadhayaya is a Senior Reporter, India and South Asia for The Epoch Times. She was born in Jammu and her ancestral home is in a village in the lower shivalik ranges that are also home to the Dogra/Pahadi culture. Her ancestral home has always fascinated her and this series is her journey to discover her roots. The Gurnal Project is her brainchild.

Bridge India is a progressive non-profit think tank dedicated to discourse on public policy. Given its diversity, everything about India, and its polar opposite, is true in unison. Bridge India seeks to highlight and celebrate this nuance, to help India-watchers understand India better.

India's northern frontiers are a prime hotspot of human civilisation. Since ancient times, this region crisscrossed by major civilisational routes linking the east with the west has cultivated multiple knowledge communities connected among others, by rich Sanskrit based knowledge traditions.

I call this region a "civilisational hotspot" because it was home to communities which designed, equipped, nurtured and sustained some of the most refined knowledge traditions ever known to humanity. All of us have been knowingly and unknowingly, closely or distantly connected with this heritage.

This legacy should be documented and owned and stories can facilitate that.

In my childhood, whenever my grandfather visited us from the village, he frequented his nephew who had a small business enterprise in the crowded Pacca Dunga bazaar in downtown Jammu. The whole day the old pahadiya (mountain man) whose teeth were gone but whose feet were as swift as a teenager, would sit chit-chatting with many known and unknown curious bystanders joining them. In those days of no telephones, I was always sent to call him home before the sun set.

Little did I then know that my grandfather's sister was married in an illustrious family whose history was in many ways synonymous with the last few centuries of history of Sanskrit in the frontier. And while recently I dug into this family's heritage, I chanced upon a few archival events that were so strikingly juxtaposed with civilisational history, particularly of the Dogras.

Sanskrit communities in the frontier gateway to Indian civilisation were characterized during their golden period by heightened cognition and genius intellectual faculties. Probably during the Great Game period when the geo-political games between the Russian and British empire was at its peak, the competition to acquire Sanskrit manuscripts was to gather this genius for contemporary scientific and technological advancement.

The world still doesn't know the actual content and value of some of those manuscripts found in Buddhist caves of Central Asia that Russian and British intelligence gathered.

Remnants of this evolved culture are however openly exhibited in museums. They highlight the advancement in the art, literature and the scientific traditions of the time. They are also preserved in rare cases in varying degrees across family lineages as in the case of my grandfather's sister's family.

In the latter case it's difficult to preserve this heritage because unlike the material wealth that you can invest and multiply, what would you do with original Sanskrit literature you inherit from your forefathers! Moreso when you don't have their linguistic proficiency! This is the story of many families from across India, particularly from the Northern Frontiers of the sub-continent.

Loss of knowledge, traditions and heritage across family lines is the least understood in the sub continental nations born of a common civilisation but disconnected by antagonistic narratives. The linguistic proficiency retained by traditions across generations in certain families was exceptional and can't be matched today by mere academic achievement. Knowledge traditions passed down certain family lines in the region were of that rich order.

In this context least understood is the cultural and psychological loss that has happened due to its destruction and how it has contributed to the persisting conflict and unrest. Mind and spirit is obviously the crux of peace and conflict, evolution and devolution and how I wish we understand this cause and effect.

Kashmir and Gandhara

Some of the "civilisational regions" in the Indian subcontinent's northern frontier popularly known to contemporary historians are Kashmir and the ancient region of Gandhara. The latter overlaps today with regions around Peshawar in northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.

Kashmir and Gandhara were connected to knowledge centers all across the South Asian and Central Asian region. They have influenced my personal heritage too. While the south-asian sanskrit heritage is popularly known, not much is known about the Central Asian region. Infact geopolitically the latter is today mostly studied as the Chinese heritage.

According to noted oriental studies



Drona the Brahmin with Relics of the Buddha, Cave 224, Kizil in today's Xinjinag, China. Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

scholar, Late Prof. Raghu Vira who in his young days was a part of the legendary editorial team of Bhandarkar Institute's Mahabharata Division set up in Poona after World War one(4), Yajurveda (one of the four Vedas or ancient Hindu scriptures in Sanskrit) was taught across 101 shakhas or schools all across ancient India and much beyond its contemporary territorial borders, as far as Kashghar in today's Xinjiang. (1)

Exceptionally beautiful Buddhist wall murals and rare Hindu and Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts were discovered by Great Game explorers in the then central Asian region (today's Xinjiang) after the late 19 century onwards.

Kashghar and Khotan were important centers for Sanskrit studies in ancient times. At Kashghar, the Buddhist monk and renowned translator of Sanskrit to Chinese texts, Kumarajiva went to study.

This proves that Sanskrit was integral to these knowledge traditions of the northern frontiers and of the communities commuting on the Silk route. It evolved the overall phonetics and contributed to other language traditions of the wider region.



Seated Vajrapani, Cave of the Statues, Kizil Caves. 14C date: 406-425 CE.. Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

"This proves that Sanskrit was integral to these knowledge traditions of the northern frontiers and of the communities commuting on the Silk route. It evolved the overall phonetics and contributed to other language traditions of the wider region."

Great masters and pilgrims carried important Sanskrit texts disseminating knowledge to south, north east and north west beyond Gandhara. The discovery of important Sanskrit manuscripts from various sites situated along the Silk route and the Uttarpatha (ancient grand trunk road connecting Gandhara and Kashi) has empirical archeological evidence (1).

Chinese pilgrim, Fahsien who traveled to India in 400-414 AD mentioned that Indian script was being used in Shanshan, in Central Asia on the Chinese border (1). Shanshan was a kingdom at the north-eastern end of the Taklamakan Desert on the silk route between Khasgar and China.

The presence of a Vedic school in Central Asia tells us that despite their treacherous high-altitude topography, India's northern frontiers since ancient times were connected with a web of similar knowledge centres in the trans-himalayan region on one hand and to the Indian subcontinent on the other hand.

Human migration criss-crossing through this corridor made these connections even more dynamic. According to Lokesh Chandra, renowned historian and son of Prof. Raghu Vira, Central Asia had more than twenty *acharyas* (mentors) who were busy translating Sanskrit originals into Chinese, from the mid-second century to the seventh century. (1)

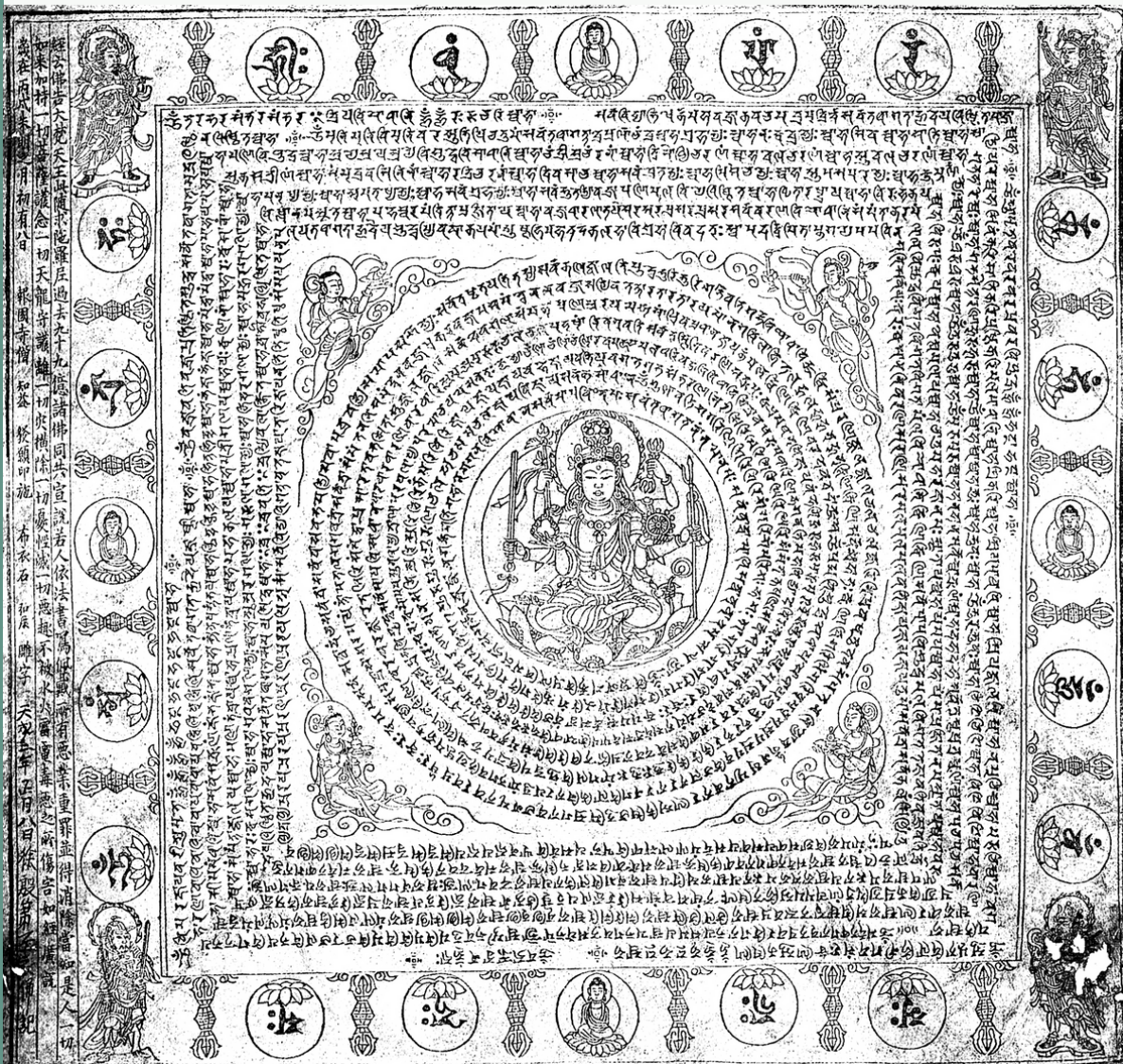
Manuscript Hunting During Great Games

Today, unfortunately, the same region is a massive unrested territory with militarised borders and nuclear war threats. In the ancient past this Himalayan and trans-himalayan region flanked by the mighty Indus and its basin was an amalgam of cultures—and was home to unparalleled human genius. This human

genius was constructive in its golden periods and destructive in the darker.

Today geopolitical analysts know that demographics is power. In demographics the challenge and opportunity is always the human resource and knowledge societies always yield power. The Great Games, or the geo-political conquest-hungry activities between the British empire and the Russian Empire that plagued the whole of India's northern frontiers, Central Asia and Tibet in the 19th century, played out even in acquiring and researching Sanskrit manuscripts.

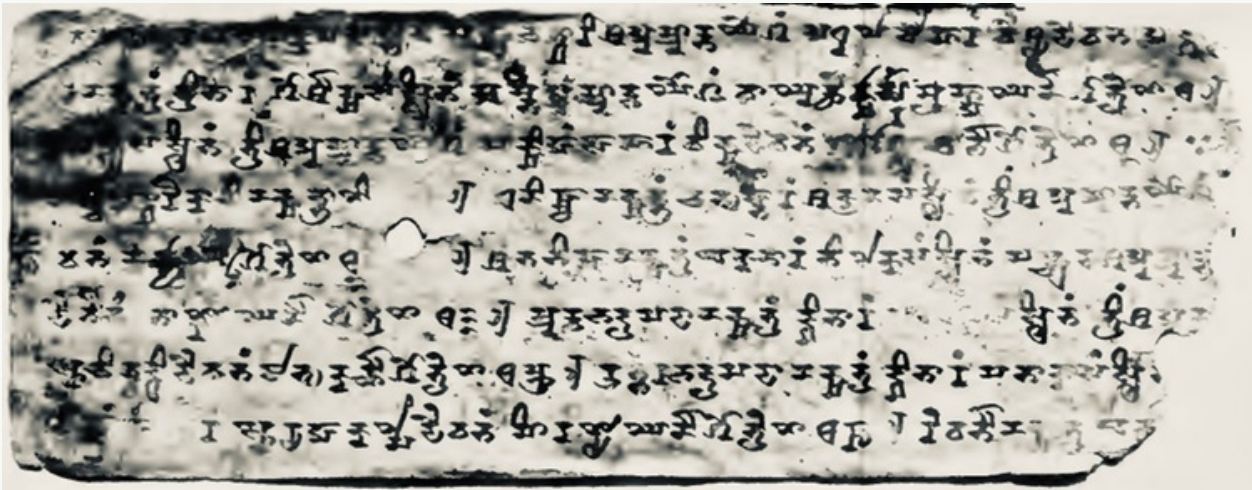
European researchers and prominently the British and Russian intelligence officers collected many of these manuscripts from so-called Silk route catchments in Central Asia and India's northern frontiers. The discovery of



Chinese Buddhism's dharani iconography with Siddham script in Sanskrit, Later Tang, 927 CE. Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

some of these manuscripts like the famous Petrovsky collection which were sent to St. Petersburg encouraged manuscript-hunting expeditions in this trans-Himalayan landscape after 1895.

Seishi Karashima, a professor of Sino-Indian Buddhist Philology at the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University in Tokyo, wrote in a paper that the manuscripts found then during the Great Games are today found in institutions in Ankara, Berlin, Harvard, Helsinki, Kyoto, London, Lushun (China), Munich, Paris, St. Petersburg, Washington and Yale (1).



This is a part of nine 5-6th Century Weber manuscripts discovered in the 19th-century in the region of Kucha that today lies in Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang, northwest China. It was analysed and published in 1893 by German explorer August Friedrich Rudolf Hoernle. Eight of the 9 manuscripts are in Sanskrit and the last is in a mix of Pali and Sanskrit. Of the nine, four manuscripts have been traced to be on paper made in Nepal, other five on paper made in Central Asia. Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

What is least talked about in this geo-political context is the Sanskrit manuscript collection of the Dogra kingdom, a state that came up during the Great Games period and was sandwiched right between the Russians and the British empire.

The second Dogra Maharaja, Ranbir Singh established a library of Sanskrit manuscripts in Sri Raghunath Temple in what's today's downtown Jammu during the height of the great game period in 1861 after the temple's construction was completed in 1860 (5). The library which today is known as Sri Ranbir Sanskrit Research Institute, Jammu, consisted of rare books including those from the private collections of families from the frontiers and the sub-continent.

It was renowned indologist, explorer and archeologist, Marc Aurel Stein (6) who got this library first cataloged after his visit to the collection in 1889. Stein was one of the most successful archaeologists of trans-himalayan civilisation and an ardent explorer of manuscripts on silk route during the Great Games (5).

Today in the Reference Library of the National Archives of India at New Delhi, there's a catalog called the "Gilgit File" that arrived in New Delhi in 1948 from the Dogra kingdom's collection. It contains rare manuscripts in four languages: Sharda (Sanskrit), Persian, Urdu and Tibetan. And the topics include History, Shivaism, Tantra and Mahayana Buddhism. I have checked this file myself – the manuscripts some of which are four centuries old are crying to be translated and digitized. The file had yellowing pages with hand written as well as (typewriter) typed contents when I referred it in September 2022.

Ancient Genius and Today's Artificial Intelligence

Today when Sanskrit has been recognised as the best language for artificial intelligence, the fact this language and its culture has cultivated cultural refinement and intellectual genius in Indian civilisation since ancient times can't be denied or countered by propaganda mongers.

If the most advanced computer technology finds Sanskrit perfect, it would have obviously cultivated something akin to computer-aptitude in the human mind that used it and refined it.

I have been a witness to extremely advanced linguistic traditions of Sanskrit in south India where they weren't threatened by invaders like they were in the Northern Frontiers in the past thousand years, including something called Anyonyam.

"Today when Sanskrit has been recognised as the best language for artificial intelligence, the fact this language and its culture has cultivated cultural refinement and intellectual genius in Indian civilisation since ancient times can't be denied or countered by propaganda mongers."

Anyonyam is an oral Rig-veda based debate between two schools of namboodris (Brahmins of Kerala) that communicates only through a highly evolved science of sign language. The event takes place in the presence of a classical pot drum called *mizhavu* (miravu) that is considered sacred and the forebearer of primordial sound.

The nature of the refinement of Anyonyam can't be comprehended without a live experience.

The Sanskrit human genius was not only characterised by evolved cognitive and linguistic abilities but also by eternal civilisational values or dharmic traditions. The genius can't evolve merely by scholarly proficiency,

the tradition does play a role too.

Take for example, Kashmiri Poet, Kalhan's definition of an historian/writer. Kalhan's consolidated work on Kashmir's history, Rajatarangini is one of the earliest known historical accounts in Sanskrit. Kalhana wrote:

**श्लाघ्यः स एव गुणवान् रागद्वेष बहिष्कृता। भूतार्थ कथने यस्य
स्थेस्येव सरस्वती।। राजतरंगिणी 1/7**

**वह गुणवान् (कवि/लेखक) श्लाघनीय (praiseworthy)
है जो राग, द्वेष से रहित होकर सत्य के निरूपण में
सरस्वती(मेधा) का उपयोग करता है। (2)**

Prof. Mahendra Pathak, an author of three books on India's ancient history and culture and an associate professor of ancient history at the Saket College in Ayodhya, says, Kalhana defines history [above] as a "fair interpretation" of the past and that a poet or author becomes praise worthy, when his interpretation goes past raga (attachment) and dwesha (resentment).

This definition may not fit today with the ideological or unrestricted warfare and geopolitics of this partitioned frontier, moreso due to what defines its conflicted status today.

But it was certainly the intellectual standard of Kalhana's time. I thus call Kalhan a civilisational stalwart of India's northern frontiers. He personifies the best of his times.

While Kalhan was from Kashmir, Panini, the Sanskrit grammarian was from ancient Gandhara--these two civilisational hotspots are more popularly identified in the contemporary milieu of historical narratives. Gandhara is termed an "intellectual capital of ancient India" and Kashmir is known as Sharda peeth or the abode of goddess Sharda.

Even older than the Taxila and Nalanda University, the latter highlights the purpose of ancient Sanskrit communities as feeders of knowledge and wisdom across regions beyond its periphery with wisdom and intellect.

How else would I describe the annual movement of Kashmiri pandas (brahmin religious guides) across generations from Mattan that houses the ancient Martanda temple (Sun temple) to my ancestral village in Jammu Shivaliks, in Billawar, or Villapur, as it was called in ancient times?

Generations of these pandas served generations of my family as religious guides—a tradition which I too have directly witnessed. (3)

So in civilisational regions while the kings kept changing and kingdom states territorially kept transforming all throughout history, civilisational wealth kept being sustained and shared between these knowledge hotspots within family lineages.

Sanskrit Traditions and Migration

My great grandfather Pt. Sant Ram Dogra, who codified the customs of the tribes of customs of Kashmir (4) on special duty in 1915 by Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh and whose story I have earlier discussed, was a polyglot.

But what's more interesting is that Sant Ram's son-in-law, Pt. Gouri Shankar was a polyglot too. Above all he was a meritorious Sanskrit scholar, the first Dogra to go for D. Lit, research studies to Oxford on a full scholarship. He was sponsored by the Punjab government while he was a lecturer at Lahore University.

I remember as a child visiting Pt. Gouri's home with my parents. It was in the neighborhood behind the Raghunath Temple and was an impressive building with a massive courtyard. I particularly remember some classical furniture in the courtyard. Even today whenever I pass by the Shalimar road in Jammu I'm intrigued by my memories and I remain in touch with his son and his grandson who have inherited his manuscripts.



Pt. Gouri Shankar at Oxford somewhere between 1931-32. (Photo courtesy: His son, Retd. AVM D.V. Sharma)

Pt. Gouri's family lineage is like an archive of landmark moments in the history of Sanskrit traditions of northern frontiers. Centuries ago, his forefathers who belonged to *Shandilya gotra* (patriline) of the same Brahmin stock as Lokmanya Tilak (14), migrated from Marahatta territory (Maharashtra today, over 1800 kilometers from Jammu on NH44) to the Dogra heartland near Akhnoor and became the *purohits* (priests of royal family) of Bhao Rajputs (14).

Noted historian, Padmashree Shiv Nirmohi says that among over four dozen *rajvadas* (royal lineages) of Akhnoor, there was also one maratha rajvada whose *vanshavali* (genealogy)



"Gauri Shankar's father, Pt. Kirpa Ram was a Sanskrit prodigy. At the age of eight he had learned Panini's Ashtadhyayi and many hymns from Yajurveda."

Pt. Kirpa Ram. Photo courtesy: His grandson, Retd. AVM D.V. Sharma.

is available and brahmins of Maratha stock are found also in Udhampur region of Jammu. There have been several waves of migration between the frontiers and other regions of the sub-continent, he says.

Larger Akhnoor region, on the bank of Chenab river, is an important civilisational spot on the Mughal road that connected Kashmir with Delhi until the alternate Banihal route opened in 1922. Akhnoor has the northernmost preccints of Harappan Civilisation and also a significant Buddhist site called Ambaran from Kushan period. It also has pre-kushan, Gupta period sites.

In ancient times if one wanted to travel from Kashi to Kashmir and further to Central Asia, the popular route definitely went through this region. Artifacts from Akhnoor excavated sites are exhibited in the National Museum, New Delhi.

Pt. Gauri Shankar's ancestral home was in a village called Flanwala about 10 kilometers from today's Akhnoor town and his father and grandfather were great Sanskrit vidvans (scholars) with recorded history. When the second Dogra Maharaja, Ranbir Singh decided to start a rare library of Sanskrit manuscripts in Raghunath temple in downtown Jammu in 1861, Gori Shankar's grandfather, Pt. Baldev Raj Sharma was chosen as its first librarian (13).

This library of manuscripts was one of the richest of its times and continues to be more so today. Pt. Baldev Raj had translated some Sanskrit books into Hindi but none of that is available today (13).

Gauri Shankar's father, Pt. Kirpa Ram was a Sanskrit prodigy. At the age of eight he had learned Panini's Ashtadhyayi (Sanskrit grammar by ancient philologist Panini) and many hymns from Yajurveda (13). Apart from his genius which was common in such

families, these facts clearly indicate that the family came from a Yajurveda tradition. Awareness of such Vedic inheritance is generally lost today in the family lines.

Pt. Kirpa Ram started his formal Sanskrit education at the Sri Raghunath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya that Ranbir Singh had established and he later authored, edited and published multiple books (original religious literature) including: *Shri Devika Lehri*, *Sanskrit Rattan Shaktam*, *Sri Panchayatan Dev Manaspuja*, *Stotra Pachansitam*, *Stotra Trayee*, *Satyam Param Dhimahee*, *Samaya Prakash* and *Shri Piyush Ganga* (13).

His translations from Sanskrit to Dogri include *Shri Shiv Mahimana Stotra* and *Durga Saptshati*. One of his works "*Dharamsar Sangrah*" is still unpublished (13).

Pt. Kirpa Ram's book, *Shri Piyush Ganga*, a 304 shloka (13) composition in praise of Lord Shiva was published in 1907, after three years of his death by his two sons.

The book is a masterpiece of Sanskrit literature according to records and was simplified by another Dogra Sanskrit scholar, Pt. Jaganath Vasisht of village Majus (13) in Jammu. Its first patron was the third Dogra Maharaja Pratap Singh and it was published by Shri Ranbir Prakash Press in 1911.

From Jammu to Lahore to Oxford

Pt. Gouri graduated from Prince Wales College Jammu and went for MA in Sanskrit to Lahore University. At that



Pt. Gouri Shankar during his college days at Prince Wales College, Jammu. Photo courtesy: Surinder Spolia).

time Lahore University was home to some of the best indologists of the world. He was sent on a full scholarship to Oxford for his D.Litt. and upon his return was appointed a Professor of Sanskrit, Hindi and Punjabi at the Government College Lahore (14).

My grandfather would visit Pt. Gouri at Lahore to buy costumes for the village Ram Leela actors and his sojourns through the colorful bazaars of Lahore forms the backdrop to my memory.

What I have recently dugout about Pt. Gouri has two important aspects: First Pt. Gouri's teachers and second his field of research at Oxford. His three teachers need a mention here because their backgrounds can share with us many significant things from history.

At the Prince of Wales college, Pt. Gouri (14) was taught between 1916-1920 by Padma Bhushan Dr. Siddheshwar Varma (7), a world renowned Sanskrit Scholar and Philologist who by his heyday had mastered 30 languages of the world (8).

At Oriental College Lahore, he was taught by Dr. A.C. Woolner (8) from 1920 to 1922 who was a legendary orientalist known for his untiring work at the Lahore University where he also served as the Vice-chancellor from 1928-1936. He's immortalised by the the Woolner Project which is an international cooperative project for digitisation and cataloguing of the Woolner Collection, between the University of the Punjab in Lahore, the University of Vienna and Geumgang University.

Pt. Gouri's third teacher was Prof. F.W. Thomas (14) from 1931-1932 from the Oxford University, London. Thomas had himself studied under the influential orientalist Edward Byles Cowell who was the first professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge University.

Prof. Thomas is remembered for his co-publishing of a collection of Old Tibetan historical texts. More importantly he was responsible for creating the catalogues of these Tibetan manuscripts from Central Asia brought to the India Office Library by Stein during the Great Game period. Thomas had served as the librarian of the India Office Library during the time of cataloguing.

It appears like a massive inter-connected karmic cycle—Stein facilitated the cataloguing of Sanskrit manuscripts at Jammu during the Great Game period. I have already discussed Pt. Gouri's grandfather's connection with the Dogra-established library. Decades later, Pt. Gouri's teacher at Oxford was responsible for cataloguing Stein's work. Even in that Google-less world, humanity appears to be so dynamically inter-connected. Probably even more so than it's today!

Pt. Gouri Shankar, while he was the Principal of Government College, Dharamshala in 1955. Photo courtesy: His son, Retd. AVM D.V. Sharma.

Research on Mahakavya from Kashmir

Pt. Gouri Shankar's research work at Oxford was on an extremely rare and difficult Sanskrit Mahakavya, Kappinabhudaya by Kashmiri poet, Sivaswamin who served in the court of King Awantivarman of Kashmir (855-884 AD).

King Awantivarman from the Utpala dynasty of Kashmir is described as one of the most able rulers of the Kashmir



valley ever, by author K.S. Saxena (10) and his period is termed as the “most flourishing period of the literary history of Kashmir” by Burrow, T. (1939) (11).

Kasmirabhatta Sivaswamin was one of the “gems” in Awantivarman’s court and he wrote seven Mahakvyas, several prose works, dramas and other writings but Kapphinabhudaya and a few stray verses is all that’s left to humanity.

According to Burrow, the existence of this Mahakavya was first noted in 1893 but editors were unable to work on it because of the “paucity and unsatisfactory” nature of the manuscript(11). The work was lost in Kashmir and was found by Pt. Gouri in Puri Temple’s library in 1933. He first learned the Oriya language and then translated it to Devnagiri to present it to the public and it took him five long years of research.

Editing classical Sanskrit manuscripts is considered tough because manuscripts are not original archetypes and in the course of centuries scribes introduce many errors. The editor needs to possess that level of proficiency to be able to extract the original autograph of the original poet.

Kapphinabhudaya or the Exaltation of King Kapphina is a story spanning narratives of at least 7500 years from the frontiers involving Kassapa Buddha and Buddha Sakyamuni. King Kapphina was the contemporary of the latter and his story is about the renunciation of his kingdom and his taking the path of dharma.

"Editing classical Sanskrit manuscripts is considered tough because manuscripts are not original archetypes and in the course of centuries scribes introduce many errors."

Kapphinabhudaya or the Exaltation of King Kapphina is a story spanning narratives of at least 7500 years from the frontiers involving Kassapa Buddha and Buddha Sakyamuni. King Kapphina was the contemporary of the latter and his story is about the renunciation of his kingdom and his taking the path of dharma.

Pt. Gouri's work is an analysis of the Mahakavya comparing Sivaswamin’s work with the narratives of the original story from the Dhammapada commentary (12). It also analyses the Sanskrit proficiency, background of the poet as well as what the literary masterpiece indicates about the religious and intellectual traditions of Kashmir of that time.

But for that he had to first piece it's scattered cantos together. The same work was later taken up by Prof. Michael Hahn, a German philologist who found certain missing portions of

King Kapphina expresses his desire to adopt the life of a monk but the Buddha says-

सत्यं सत्यां सत्यदृष्टौ सुदृष्टे पात्रं पुत्र त्वं भृशं भिक्षुवृत्तेः ॥

कालस्त्वस्यास्ते प्रतीक्ष्यः कियानप्यायातीच्छाप्राप्तकाला हि सिद्धिः ॥२०,३०॥

'It is true, my son, that endowed with correct vision to discriminate truth from untruth, a man like you is qualified for the Bhikṣu's mode of life. But you have to wait for some time before you attain it. Verily, consummation achieved by earnest desire is sure to come at its proper time'.

A screenshot of an excerpt from Pt. Gouri Shankar's work: Kasmirabhata Sivaswamin's Kaphinabhudaya or the Exaltation of King Kapphina.

the manuscript in Japan.

If we connect these dots together – Pt. Gouri and Prof. Hahn were both trying to get access to the poetic and linguistic genius of Kasmirabhata Sivaswamin who is a case story of Kashmir's literary genius from 1,100 years ago. For me it's a peek into each of these human minds.

Past vs Present: Heritage vs Narrative

To understand what has happened with the Sanskrit civilisational heritage across these northern frontiers we have to just look into how conflict has not only fragmented the region into destructive borders but also killed off its knowledge and linguistic traditions.

The exodus of these knowledge communities has kept happening since the onset of Gaznavide invasions thousand years ago to the exodus of a few decades ago. In this large span of time it's also true that the traditions only decayed and found themselves irrelevant in the larger milieu of social makeup and technological development.

However in its golden period it had contributed much to communities way beyond this border. Here's an example about what Chinese borrowed from Indian classical music traditions for their troops marching through the inhospitable regions.

Lokesh Chandra writes that a Chinese envoy was sent to Bactria in 128 BC to find out the Yueh-chis or Kushans and the envoy took "Mahatukhara raga" of Sanskrit back to China on which martial tunes were created for the Chinese armies treading long un-inhabited terrains. The name "China" is also attributed to the Sanskritised Yueh-chis (1).

Ravi Shankar Shukla, an accomplished pakhawaj (classical drum) player from Banaras Gharana of Hindustani classical music with whom I had the opportunity of interaction and whom I have directly witnessed playing music at Kashi a few times says that Mahatukhara is not a raga (musical mode) but a "nirgun bandish" which is based on a "eight matra taal" and has the capacity of elevating spirits. Bandish means melodic composition in Hindustani classical music and Nirgun

means "सर्वगुण संपन्न (sarvagun sampann)" or who has all elements of versatility and Pt. Shukla says music dedicated to महापुरुष: (great men) is written in Nirgun.

The Chinese envoy took from India music that "could motivate troops. Instill in them the spirit that they aren't alone and they should keep going further ahead."

Such was the power of knowledge-based Indian civilisation and Sanskrit was at its root. Many civilised practices were largely sustained because of this dynamic connectivity and patronage by rulers across ages, until the invasions rattled the society .

The invasions specifically and primarily targeted this culture in the Northern Frontiers and brutally targeted its objects and subjects, so much so that a lot got lost even from people's collective memory until western explorers started unearthing history in the region in the 19th century.

This forms along with the Great Game propaganda on heritage and civilisation of the frontiers, the basis of a severe loss of cultural heritage and also a deep rooted cause of the scale that

A donor inscription in Sanskrit from Bezeklik caves from Central Asia, decorated by the Uigur kings of Turfan. They are the only central Asian people to have written the donor inscriptions in Sanskrit. The Pranidhi scene shown here bears an inscription in the Central Asian Brahmi that says that the king Ananda Simha donated a parasol and a jeweled-staff to the image of Lord Buddha (1). Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

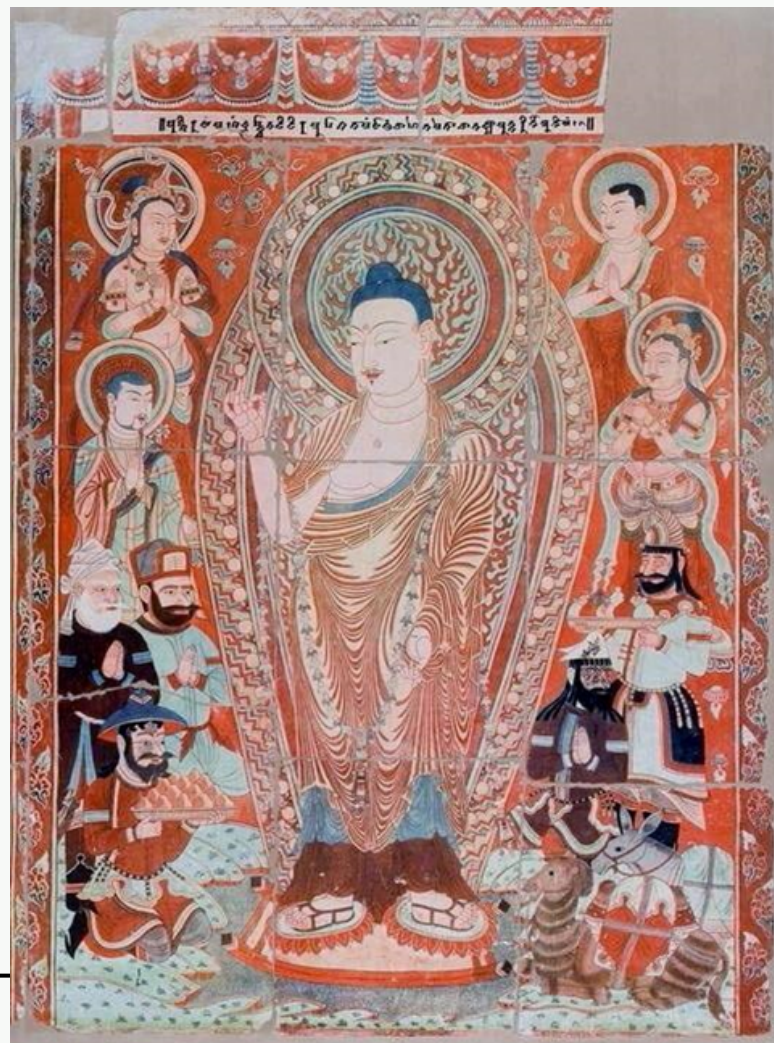
*Narendrena mayānanda-simha
simhaparākrama
Cchatrena ratnadandena pūjito
narapungavah//*

the conflict in this region has acquired today.

In order to understand the "heritage-of-sanskrit-genius" of India's Northern Frontiers that also housed my ancestral region, individual stories across generations can become a great means of contemporary heritage conservation.

This is because while the civilisational wealth has decayed from collectivememory, in many cases it's conserved and preserved in various forms including oral and written, along the family hereditary line. This preservation of knowledge, traditions and cross-generational stories has actually been the power of this civilisation.

The evolution of a civilisation is in the preservation and the evolution of its values, traditions and practices



because it's these together that influence cross-cutting skills, competence and knowledge and transform a society from a demography to a power.

We have to find ways to take these genius psychological faculties forward. We can't preserve something, if we don't evolve it. And evolution can't be faked like propaganda narratives.

Endnote

Ironically despite such strong Indian civilisational connections and Sanskrit hotspots in Central Asia, the Great Gamers termed the commuting route as "Silk Route", because geopolitically it meant connecting Europe with China which conceptually today forms the basis of Communist China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

While the truth is it was German geographer and traveler Ferdinand von Richthofen who first used the term "silk road" in 1877 C.E. to describe the well-commuted pathway of goods between Europe and East Asia. India should wake up to where it needs to narrate its story and own its history on the global stage of policy making.

This essay has been an emotional exercise because it made me delve deeper into my own personal heritage and the loss that I today personally endure.

We lost Sant Ram Dogra's massive library whose big teak wood almirahs were existent until my early childhood. Then they gradually got eaten by feuds that were as beguiling as the termites

that finally turned everything to dust. Then we threw it off the hill on which stood our ancestral homes.

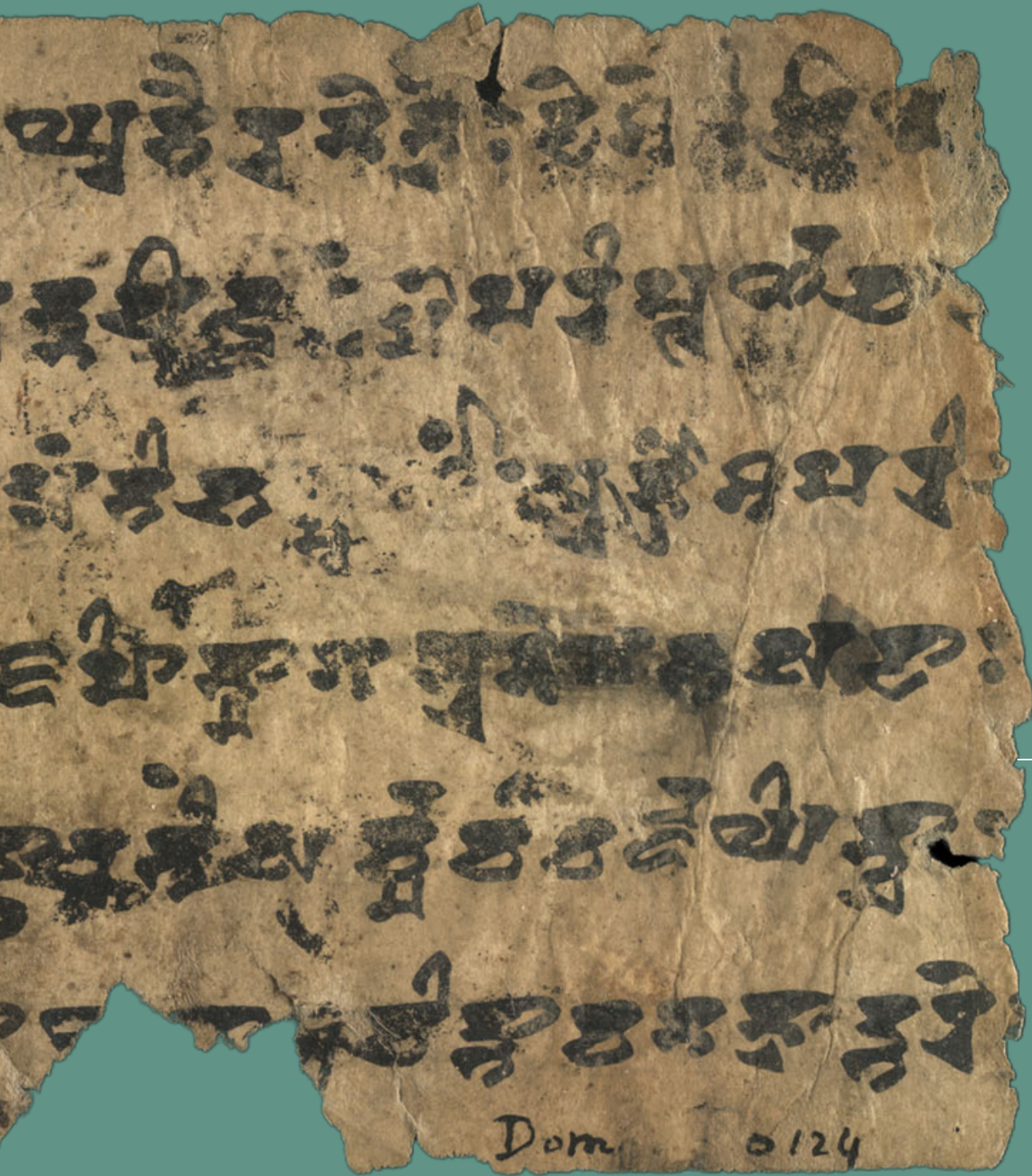
Pt. Sant Ram was murdered at 41 years of age in 1918. How I wish I had a wider peep into his literary genius. His daughter, Pt. Gauri's wife passed away four years after her father's death during childbirth. Pt. Gauri lost a lot of his work at his home in Krishan Nagar, Lahore during partition.

Today as a community we are dumbstruck about how much original literature that genius and gentle scholar left behind including the first Dogri commentary to Bhagavad Gita and original novels in English. The latter is unpublished.

I hope that this write-up will make people contemplate how important knowledge-heritage passed down family lines is in India. I hope that we as a civilisation across borders will relook into our collective Sanskrit and linguistic heritage. If not much, then at least we may want to dust off some ignorance that invites propaganda mongers.

Bibliography

- (1) Sanskrit on the Silk Route edited by Shashibala (Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan).
- (2) Venus Upadhyaya's interview with Prof. Mahendra Pathak.
- (3) www.bridgeindia.org.uk/is-my-jammu-village-standing-on-a-civilisational-catchment
- (4) Evolution of the Mahabharata and Other Writings on the Epic by SR Ramaswamy
- (5) sogdians.si.edu/sidebars/marc-aurel-stein
- (6) www.kashmirpen.in/aurel-stein-and-sri-raghunath-temple-sanskrit-manuscript-library-jammu
- (7) padmaawards.gov.in/content/notifications/PadmaAwards/1957.pdf
- (8) www.dailyexcelsior.com/a-forgotten-scholar-of-world-repute/
- (9) www.orientalthane.com/sanskrit/news_2011_01_12_A.htm
- (10) Ancient Political History of Kashmir B.C. 300–A.D. 1200 by K.S. Saxena
- (11) Burrow, T. (1939). Śivasvāmin's Kapphiṇābhyudaya or Exaltation of King Kapphiṇa, critically edited for the first time with an introduction and an appendix by Gauri Shankar. Panjab University Oriental Publication, Vol. 26. 9¾ × 6¾. pp. iii 2 2 lxxxviii 165 xviii, pls. 2, figs. 9. Lahore: University of the Panjab, 1937. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 71(3), 453-454. doi:10.1017/S0035869X00089383.
- (12) Sivasvamin's Kapphinabhyudaya 1937 Gauri Shankar Punjab University Lahore (Page xxii).
- (13) Article "Three Generations Which Served Cause of Sanskrit" by B.P. Sharma was published in Daily Excelsior on March 8, 1992.
- (14) Article "Professor Gauri Shankar a Many Splendored Life" by B.P. Sharma and published in Daily Excelsior after his death (August 7, 1991).



Find out more at
www.bridgeindia.org.uk