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## RESEARCH PAPER

### Gandhara in Pakistani Imagination: Ahmad Hasan Dani's View

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#### ABSTRACT

Gandhara mesmerizes not only general public but Pakistani academics as well. Academic interest in Gandhara can be viewed as purely academic and historical or nationalist and economic. Ahmad Hasan Dani stands unique in this respect. His approach towards the utility of history and heritage in modern state politics is interesting and vital. This paper aims to explore his perspective on Gandhara with a focus on themes such as historical roots of Pakistan, place of heritage in national economy and cultural diplomacy across the entire Asia. This study connects to some recent works on Gandhara and Buddhism in Pakistan which focus on analyzing the politics of archaeology and heritage in Pakistani scholarship. In an interpretivist endeavor, Dani's ideas have either been quoted in original from his texts or reproduced in summarized form. What becomes obvious from the work is Dani's intellectual representation of Pakistan based on his life-long association with Gandhara.

**Keywords:** Archaeology, Culture, Gandhara, Heritage, History, Pakistan, State

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#### Introduction

Modern nation states stand in need of many fundamental ingredients for their existence, justification, survival and even development. And both history and heritage get crucial place in such national pursuits and concerns (Anderson 2016). Recently cultural and historical memories have also been assessed for their crucial role in identity construction and state building (Misztal 2003). We hardly know about any country which would not claim and devise historical roots for itself. This is true in the case of all the countries and states which exist continuously for many centuries. And we have good examples of young states which try to locate themselves in the deep history of their respective geographical positions. Pakistan qualifies the second category of states having its birth in the mid-twentieth century. It is a well familiar historical fact that the political context of the creation of the country was the communal rift and economic competition between Hindus and Muslims, the two dominant communities in the Subcontinent. However, once the country was created, efforts began to be made, at least by some scholars and thinkers, to add a deep historical character to Pakistan. Interestingly, one of the popular names of the first generation Pakistani historians, Ishtiaq Hussain Quraishi, tried to explain the emergence and development of Buddhism in the modern-day political context of South Asia (Amstutz 2019). We shall also note that Buddhism and Gandhara was a colonial construct being made since the mid-nineteenth century (Ray 2018).

#### Literature Review

This study relates to the very few recently appeared works showing Pakistani scholars' involvement in appropriating history and heritage in the best interest of state politics in country. Andrew Amstutz (2019) has shown the political and diplomatic concerns of Pakistani intellectual, I. H. Quraishi, centred on Buddhism and Gandhara in Pakistan. Others have also worked on nearly the same line with a focus on Dani (Khan & Shaheen 2015, 2017). But there is no specific study so far to illustrate Dani's preoccupation with Gandhara from nationalistic point of view.

## Material and Methods

In this paper the concern is to cast light on Gandhara in the intellectual thought of Pakistan. The focus is on the ideas of Professor Ahmad Hasan Dani, a widely-read Pakistani historian and archaeologist. Since the paper deals with intellectual thought, published works of Dani have been perused for procuring data. What is tried is to know the articulation of his ideas around archaeology and heritage in the context of the politics of modern nation states. Passages have been reproduced from his writings in order to demonstrate Dani's political involvement with Gandhara. All this has been done within interpretivist framework so as to illustrate the context and meaning of his text. In this way, Dani's intellectual endeavours to define and represent Pakistan come forth.

## Dani's Views on Gandhara

Ahmad Hasan Dani stands unique amongst the Pakistani scholars. He was born in 1920 and completed his education in 1944. He specialized himself in languages and archaeology and joined the Archaeological Survey of India as an officer a little before the partition of the subcontinent. In the wake of independence, Dani migrated to East Pakistan to continue his service in the Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan. He also kept himself busy in teaching and research over there. In 1962, he joined the Archaeology Department of the University of Peshawar, and carried out many excavations across Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa including Shaikhan Dheri in Charsada and Andhan Dheri and Balambat in Dir. In the early 1970s, Dani left Peshawar and joined Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (known at that time as University of Islamabad). It was here that he spent the rest of his life until his death in January 2009 (Olivieri 2009).

Ahmad Hasan Dani's works and views about the uses of history and heritage in the context of modern nation states are interesting and vital to understand (Khan & Shaheen 2015). His perspectives on Gandhara in terms of the historicity of Pakistan and its socio-political utility need to be explored and understood for our present-day practical purposes, problems and concrete solutions.

Dani has always tried to represent Pakistan in a historical context in contrast to efforts concerning the exclusive Islamic character and origins of the country. For this, he adopts a geographical approach. He conceptualizes Pakistan as the "Indus land or country". The concept is contrasted with what he calls Bharat-kand or the Gangetic country. The Indus country, according to Dani, is traversed by the mighty Indus along with its tributaries in Balochistan, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and the Punjab. And all this till the joining up of the Indus with the Arabian Sea makes a unique geographical unit. Dani argues that the cultures which this land has produced exhibit an undeniable historical peculiarity. He writes:

Pakistan is a young state but old country. As an independent political state, Pakistan was born on 14th August 1947 and the very name Pakistan was coined in the thirties of the present [twentieth] century. However, geographically the country of Pakistan has been in existence from time immemorial under different names. Geographic Pakistan is almost coterminous with Indus country as the valley of the Indus river and its tributaries form by far the major territorial ground of the country (Dani 1989, 109).

Dani is of the opinion that there is a sort of cultural continuity in what has made Pakistan. In this context, he also feels the need to define what is, or ought to be, Pakistani culture. Ideology apart, and similarly things which are very clearly un-Islamic, Dani observes that when a certain thing or practice does not contradict the clear Islamic injunctions may not be dubbed as un-Islamic (personal comm., Rafiullah Khan, February 3, 2022). Let us refer here to another fundamental question Dani raises: 'Has Pakistan no ancient history or no ancient heritage?' He proceeds on to state, 'A negative answer will be denying the history of their own ancestors' (Dani 1989, 122). Articulating his argument,

Dani includes lifeways, institutions, values etc. from the ancient period of Pakistan into what, according to him is Pakistani culture. Apart from the Indus/Harappan period culture, Gandhara is also pivotal in all this argumentation and discussion. In his last book, *History of Pakistan: Pakistan Through Ages*, Dani equates Gandhara as to the land of the Pashtuns. He discusses its various cultural zones from the north to the south and relates here and there people and things to the historical period what we call Gandhara. He writes, "The tribes have characteristically preserved the new old names in new dialectical phonetics, such as the Mohmands, the Shinwaris, the Afridis (Apriti of Herodotus), the Bangash, the Waziris and Mahsuds" (Dani 2008, 10). Dani further states, "The entire land of Gandhara reverberates with the heroic history of the past — a heritage which the proud Pashtuns own and mingle with their own oral account of individual heroes" (Dani 2008, 12).

It is to be noted that Gandhara in Dani's historical reconstructions makes sense in the framework of the Kushana empire and civilization. Though originally spread over a wider area, Dani maintains that primarily the Indus land was pivotal to cultural and political developments in the Kushana period. And in this way, Gandhara was the area which saw unique cultural developments characterized by the Mahayana school of Buddhism and supported by the rich people of the area living in a peaceful and prosperous environment (Dani 1969). Since Dani believes in cultural continuity, which makes sense in his ideational configuration of the Indus land/country, he also links various social and cultural indices of the present-day Pakistan with the deep history of the land. Let us quote a long passage from his article about the Kushana civilization in Pakistan:

In the meanwhile it is necessary to record a few more elements that became permanent features in Pakistan. The most important are the dress and ornaments. Some of the gold ornaments, worn by the goddess Hariti can be seen decorating the ladies to-day. But the most important are the tight-fitting long heavy coat, the long trousers and heavy boots worn by the Kushana emperors. This long heavy coat, is, no doubt, the predecessor of modern shirwani, a part of the Pakistani national dress. Similarly, the trouser has come down to us as a shalwar so popular throughout West Pakistan, worn both by men and women. We may also note the continuity of the old chapals, a comfortable open foot-wear with leather strings to fasten to the feet—, peaked caps, called to-day Kulas, and used under the turbans, and above all the style of the turban itself with its tall standing fan-shaped crest so well familiar to us from the Gandhara sculptures. The high-backed chair, so well known to us from the Kushana coins and from the sculptures, can even now be purchased from the shops in Dera Ismail Khan. The takhti (wooden board) used by the boy Siddharta for learning lessons is even today current throughout West Pakistan at the primary stage of education. The wrestling match, which depicts Siddharta for testing his physical ability in Gandhara sculpture, is a common exercise in the akhadas (clubs) of the Punjab. When we come to the materials of every day use we can start with the bullock—driven ploughing contrivance, which has survived in the same fashion till today. The hand-grind mill for crushing wheat, as recovered by us from our Shaikhan Dheri excavation, can be seen in the villages of West Pakistan. The pear shaped vase so well-known in the Kushana period, is commonly used now for drawing water by the so-called Persian wheel. A narrow-mouthed circular wine-flagon with side handles has survived in the Peshawar region, where it is used today for carrying liquid curd or simple water. There are many other items of daily life, which has come down to us as a heritage from the Kushana civilization (Dani 1969, 15–16).

All this sufficiently shows how Dani contextualizes Pakistan in the cultural process of the various long historical periods of the area.

Another dimension of A.H. Dani's intellectual representation of Pakistan through Gandhara is pan-Asiatic in nature. Gandhara as a culture developed in the broader cultural and economic networks represented by the Silk Road. Interestingly, it is this internationalism which always preoccupies Dani. He idealizes a wider human communion without letting it cause any harm to the sanctity of the present-day political sensitivities (Khan & Shaheen 2015, 119–122). Such ideas were presented in September 1997 before an audience of the Pak-Japan Colloquium on Significance of Gandhara to Human History (Dani

1998). The Colloquium was hoped to be able 'to open up new vistas of active cooperation among scholars and revitalize the channels of activity that have been lying dormant.' The event was "not only meant to throw light on the past of Gandhara but also to push forward the land and people of Gandhara towards newer and newer goals of activity in the new historical context of Asian history" (Dani 1998, 155). Dani considers Gandhara as being "at the cross-road of this history' but to his disappointment this legacy and heritage have not been made part of our thought and learning. It is through academic activities that Dani hopes to create mutual appreciation and establish venues for cooperation amongst Asian peoples and states. He reminds us of the importance of the rock art depicting the Buddha and other Buddhist divinities in the context of peace and moderation and "for striving towards better and better humanism in the world to come" (Dani 1998, 155). Dani also uses rhetoric for the purpose of articulating his message. He writes, "This hope for a better life in the coming years is the richest contribution that Gandhara has made to the world civilization. And that is permanently enshrined in the works of Gandhara art" (Dani 1998, 155).

This humanistic and idealistic perspective on Gandharan heritage was fundamentally embedded to Dani's considerations of progress and development of Pakistan. But he was also fully conscious to the fact that the material development should be accompanied by moral accomplishments of human beings. And heritage, especially of Gandharan or cognate character, should have to play a role in all this. In September 1983 an International Conference on Karakoram Culture was held to which scholars from across the globe were invited. Beside the scholarly interest and motive of the event, Dani also saw opportunities through the publicity of the Gilgit-Baltistan's recently explored heritage for the well-being of the area's people. He explained that the so far isolated communities of the area would receive a boost in their economic life through such openness to the world. Tourism in this context was potentially appreciated. All this can be better appreciated in the light of his "pan-Asian ideal and cultural tourism . . . From this standpoint, his target audience is much more diverse. He wanted to revive an era of socio-cultural contacts, which had long been dead, between the peoples of Asia and it needed willingness of socio-political elites of different states. Thus Dani's popular writings seem as a persuasion tool so that a common cultural and political understanding, in the best interest of the people, may be developed" (Khan & Shaheen 2015, 125).

## **Conclusion**

Let us conclude that there are certainly great and valuable ideas in the works produced by Ahmad Hasan Dani about Pakistan. He has developed a balanced approach towards the role of history and heritage in the context of modern state politics. Gandhara and its heritage bulk large in all this. Dani's works and views are greatly in contrast to the overly political intellectual representations of Pakistan by I. H. Quraishi on the one hand and the purely Islamic characterization of the country by many others on the other hand. We can rightly share with him the hope he has expressed in these words: "Gandhara has the potential of reviving the dead channels of history . . . Let Gandhara of the past stand as a solid foundation for the better Gandhara of the future" (Dani 1998, 155).

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