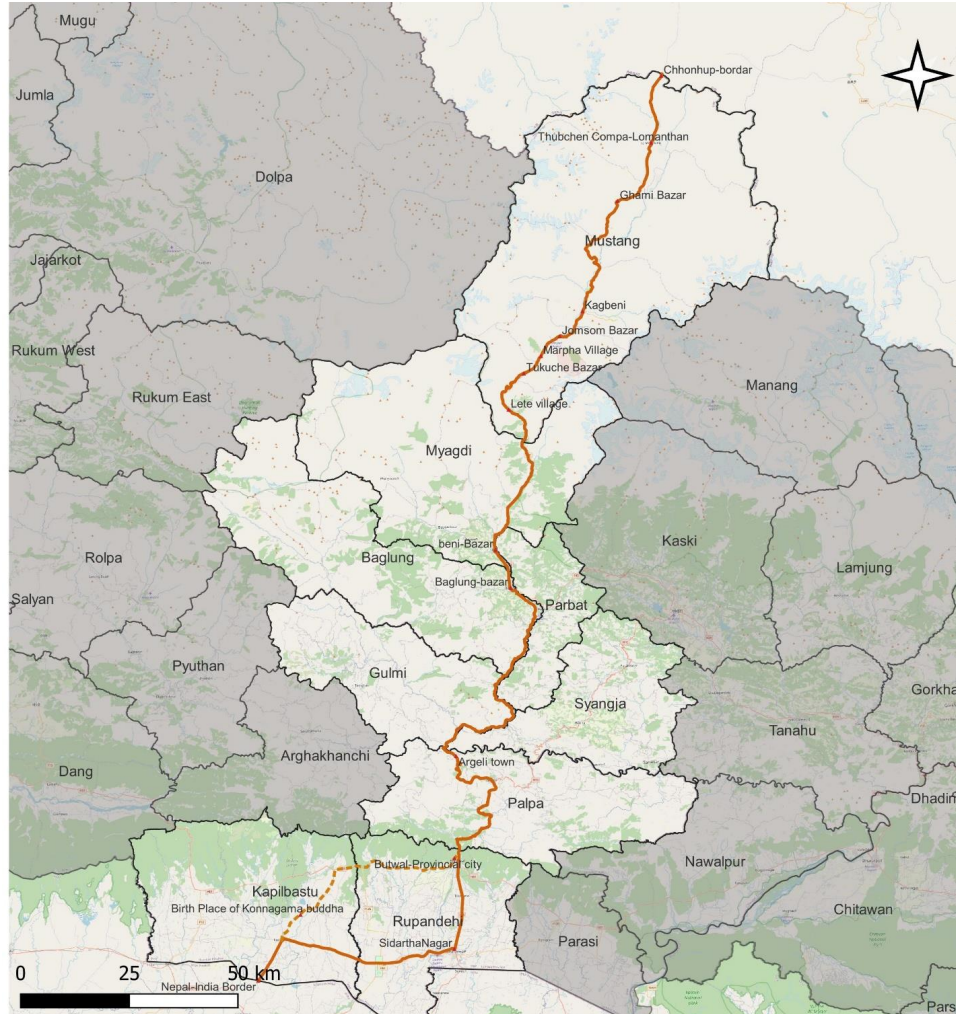


**A REPORT**  
**ON**  
**LUMBINI – LOMANTHANG SILK ROAD CORRIDOR OF NEPAL**



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# **Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road Corridor of Nepal**

## **Identification of the Nodal Towns**

### **Chapter: One**

#### **Introduction**

##### **1. Introduction**

The Silk Road is an ancient road network which, using trade and religion as a means, caused the expansion of multi aspects of civilization in the region from Eastern Asia to Western Europe and the land in between. It is a network of trades, exchanges, relations and meetings of the East and the West. This road played an important role for the advancement of human civilization for two thousand years. The term 'Silk Road' has been established with its broad meaning as a medium of cultural exchange and development, however, the name 'Silk Road' was derived from the ancient trade route of high standard Chinese Silk that expanded from China to Europe.

Nepal does not seem to have been connected to the main stream of the Silk Road. However, Nepal had a relationship with India, China and Tibet since ancient times. These countries, using different roads, dealt with each other in terms of trade, religion and other issues in the ancient and medieval period. This indicates that the branches of the Silk Road were connected to Nepal through various routes. The Kaligandaki Corridor is one of the most important routes among them. The Mustang, an independent historical Kingdom from early 14<sup>th</sup> to the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century in the North and Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha in South, seems to have played a pioneer role in developing the Kaligandaki corridor as Silk Route in Nepal.

The study covers, with its major focus, the expanded geographical area of Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor starting from upper Mustang to Lumbini-Kapilvastu capturing all the history of political and religious affairs that occurred in the area as well as the various cultural activities found along the corridor.

The main stream of the Silk Route is extended from Xian of China to Europe passing through various countries in Middle East. The road was not limited to trade but became greater means of religious and cultural exchange and expand. Therefore studies have been done in various dimensions of culture along the Silk Road. In the later period, especially from around the year

of 2nd millennium, experts have expanded their study of exploring Silk Road also in East and South East of Asia. In this context Nepal also has been a place of focus.

Nepal is a multi-religious and multi-cultural country with a lot of natural and geographical variations. This specialty, the historical evidences have shown, has prompted since ancient time the frequent religious or trade movements to expand up to the remote corners of the country. Apart from internal exchanges or give and takes, Nepal had had relations with Tibet and China in the North and with India in the South since ancient times. Among the various dimensions of relations among these nations, the exchange of trade and religions is one of the most important dimensions. For the purpose of these trades and religious pilgrimages, some of the old routes were very important. Among them, the route which stretches along the Kaligandaki River, namely the Lumbini-Lo Manthang Corridor, is a very important one. So, this study focuses on how this road was connected with the Silk Road. The study focuses on the history and culture of different nodes/nodal towns established and developed along the routes and its probable connection to the Silk Road of main stream.

## **1.2 Objective of the Study**

The major objective of the research is to have a detailed study of different nodal towns along the Lumbini - Lo Manthang Kaligandaki corridor to know its probable link to the Silk Road. Therefore the work aims to study the trans-border relation of Nepal with India and China in the political, religious and cultural context. Further, it is to explore the history of religion, culture and trade of numerous ancient settlements along the corridor of the Kaligandaki River from Southern Terai to Northern Mountain regions and Himalayas and beyond the Himalayas, focus on how this Kaligandaki Road as a corridor played the role in establishing and flourishing of multidimensional culture in the long history form 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC to 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Finally, through the analytical study of history and culture of Lumbini-Lo Manthang Corridor, it has targeted to find out the position of Nepal, especially of Kaligandaki corridor in connection with ancient Silk Road. Following are the objective set for the study

1. Identify and map the connecting major nodes/nodal town/s and the component sites/monuments within the Lo Manthang – Lumbini corridor along its segment from Lumbini to the south up to Indian border and compile information on the connectedness of the

component sites/monuments and nodes/nodal towns with each other and with the Silk Roads as possible;

2. Study about the current situation of entire Lo Manthang – Lumbini corridor at present in relation to the physical evidence, continuation of activities including any other significant observations, such as threats, or ongoing measures relevant to the protection of the component sites/monuments and nodes/nodal towns;

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study completely deals with different nodal towns along the Lumbini – Lo manthang corridor on the basis of political, cultural and religious and trade history found as evidence in these places. Therefore, the study will shed light on the entire historical significance of Silk Road in Nepal.

### **1.4 Rational of the research**

Since the origin of this route was based on the trade of Chinese Silk, at some point during the 1st century BCE, silk was introduced to the Roman Empire, where it was became extremely popular. This luxury item was thus one of the early motivations for the development of trading routes from Far East to Europe.

In the later period, especially from around the year of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, experts have expanded their study of exploring Silk Road also in East and South East of Asia. In this context Nepal also has been a place of focus. It is obvious that Nepal doesn't have the direct link with the main stream of Silk Road; however, because of the historical relation of this land with China, Tibet and India from far historical period, there is probability of some kind of connection of branch routes to the Silk Road. Not only one but at least three routes assumed as branch of Silk Route in Nepal; and among them, the route which stretches along the Kaligandaki River, namely the Lumbini-Lo Manthang Corridor, is also a very important one. Hence the rational of this research is to study to discover the real historical context whether the route was really connected to the Silk Road or not.

## **1.5 Previous Study of the of Lo Manthang-Lumbini Corridor**

Lumbini – Lo Manthang Corridor is a road of multi fold importance. This Road has geographically included Terai, Mountain, Himalaya and the plateau of Tran Himalaya region. Historically also, various dimensions of this road have come into surface. The places connected by this road also have diversity in religious or cultural aspects. So various studies have been carried out about these aspects. Mustang area is the place of highest importance of Lumbini – Lo Manthang Corridor. Scholars have done a good deal of study about Mustang area. There is no doubt that the history and culture of this area and those of the Tibet are interdependent. Hence, the studies carried out on the Tibetan areas such as Guge, Purang, Gungthang, Shakyamath etc automatically are related to the Mustang area. This has resulted into the extensive studies of Mustang also. Focusing on the Mustang Area, various national and international Tibetologists have done remarkable studies. However, very few studies were carried out about the region before 1950 AD since the area was restricted for the foreigners to visit and was geographically almost inaccessible for the Nepali scholars also (Dhulgel, 2002, p.22)

Giuseppe Tucci was the first foreigner to study about the Himalayan Region of Nepal. The contribution of G. Tucci, who was well versed on Sanskrit and Tibetan languages, is very important. He visited the Himalayan areas of Nepal such as Dolpa, Mustang etc in 1950 AD. ‘Journey to Mustang’ (1953) of Tucci is the result of this field visit. Tucci has intensified his study on physical cultural monuments and material and also have tried to give his opinion on the historicity of those built structure on the basis of his knowledge but not evidence based. Rather he has tried to explore in ethnological aspects, he is almost silent about the history of political affairs and trade in the Kaligandaki Corridor.

After Tucci, the study of David Snellgrove about Mustang and in some extent about the pilgrimage sites of Kaligandaki corridor is another mentionable work. Snellgrove also had traveled following the footsteps of Tucci. Snelgrove also is a Tibetologist and was another European next to Tucci to visit Mustang. His interest was in studying the Buddhist traditions of Dolpo, LoIMustang, and around. David Snelgrove published his first book on Nepalese Buddhism in the name of Buddhist Himalaya in 1957 as an outcome of his visit just after the

visit of Tucci. Snelgrove, in this work, focused on Tibetan Buddhism and its diffusion and spread in the Nepalese Himalayan regions.

Himalayan Pilgrimage (1961) is the next contribution of Snelgrove. This book deals on various pilgrimage sites along the Kaligandaki Corridor and the sites of Dolpo as well. His study shows that he followed the steps of Tucci up to Tsarang but did not climb down more 20 kilometers to reach to Lo Manthang. Snelgrove has dealt in detail about the Buddhist sites and monuments also.

Michel Peissel is another well-known writer to write on Kaligandaki route from Pokhara to entire Mustang. Peissel's book *Lo Manthang, The Lost Tibetan Kingdom* (1964), though it is a travelogue, has depicted the then picture of entire route. Peissel was the first historian to discover the foundation and the lineage of the King of Mustang. He was the first person also to discover 'Molla' as historical document.

Contribution of David P. Jackson, another prominent Tibetologist, can be placed in higher position. Jackson's *Mollas of Mustang* (1977, 78, 79 and 84) published in series in *Kailash*, a journal on Himalayas Study is very much remarkable work on the history of Mustang. Jackson's work is very rich original source on history of Kingship of Mustang, political history of the region including many Tibetan kingdoms and history of monasteries and Buddhist religion

Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf's 'Himalayan Traders' (1975) also comes as an important mention in this context. This book is a good contribution on the ethnological study of Nepalese Himalaya including Mustang. He had travelled the Kaligandaki route being accompanied by Dor Bahadur Bista, a prominent ethnologist of Nepal.

Among the contribution for the study of the Mustang Area of Nepali Scholars, the research paper on history of Lomanthang in 1986 by Jagaman Gurung, research article on Muktinath Area in 1988 by Ramesh Dhungel, 'Mustang Digdarshan, 2044' by Narayan Prasad Kshetri, *The Cultural Heritage of Blo (Mustang)*, 2056 by Jagaman Gurung and Prayag Raj Sharma and 'Kingdom of Lo (Mustang)', 2002 by Ramesh Dhungel are the major ones. Dhungel's book (2002) is the first complete book on the political history of Mustang.

*The Ancient Salt Route of Western Nepal* (1994) by Ratan Kumar Rai and the *Nepalko Bhansarko Itihas* (Dahal and Bhattarai, 2075) are also worth mentioning. The book has



concluded that the route of Kaligandaki was a historical Salt route of Nepal. Rai's book, however, deals more on the history and culture of Thakali ethnic group of Mustang area.

Babukrishna Rijal, Tarananda Mishra, Basanta Bidari, Cheri Alen are significant names on the study of Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road corridors, especially for the study of Lumbini-Kailvastu and the places related to Buddha around the Lumbini.

However, the above mentioned all research papers or books are written in different context. So, they have not primarily dealt with the nodal town along the Corridor in detail. Neither any of the books have focused on Silk Road.

Since the study of Silk Road is in very preliminary phase in Nepal, the identification of connecting point at least with two bordering countries, India and China and identification of different nodal towns of historical importance in connection to Silk Road is necessary to start this study. Among the various Silk Routes identified in India, the number 40, 41 and 42 routes are important and keeps the possibilities to be connected with the corridors goes through different places of Nepal. The Number 41 route of Indian Silk Road have more possibility to be linked with Lo Manthang – Lumbini Silk Road corridor.

## **Chapter: Two**

### **Study of Nodal Towns**

#### **2. Nodal Towns in the Silk Road**

Concept, scope and significance of node or nodal town in Silk Road is definite. 'A major urban centre and usually a place where a number of routes intersect' is nodal point of Silk Road. These centres are likely to have played an important role in administration, re-supplying, redistribution/marketing, and production; and in reflecting the outcomes of the Silk Roads in terms of architecture, arts, society and beliefs (Tim Williams, 2014:27).

The study focuses on the history and culture of different nodes/nodal towns established and developed along the Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor and its probable connection to the Silk Road of main stream.

## **2.1 Lubmini - Kapilvastu: a Southern Connection Point**

Since Lumbini is birthplace of Buddha, this place became the place of frequent visit destination from the very historical period. Therefore, Lumbini and the area around was linked by the Uttarapath, also known as Great Trunk Road. The Uttarapath is also known as Silk Road of India. The ancient Uttarapath, the Silk Road of India starts from Taxila and covering various parts of Indian subcontinent also connects Lumbini.

As proved historically, this road was first linked to Lumbini in the period of Emperor Ashok. Ashok had been to this region at least two times. Both of the times he had proceeded from Chunar of Mirzapur, since it is known the Chunar of Mirzapur was the production center of almost stone pillars produced by Ashok (Bidari, 2007). All the places Ashok erected pillars with inscription, Bodhgaya, Rajgriha, Baishali, Lauriya Araraj, Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurva, Lumbini, Niglihawa, Gotihawa and Sravasti are seems in the same linking road. All those places are linked with Uttarapath, ancient Silk Road of India. One of the nearest Buddhist site of India linking to Lumbini of Nepal seems to be Sravasti. The distance between Sravasti and Lumbini is less than 350 Kilometres.

Sravasti was the departure point for both Chinese travellers, Fa-hsien and Yuan Chwang (Hiouen T'hsang) to arrive to Lumbini. Both of the Chinese pilgrims arrives at first in the place of Krakuchhanda Buddha in Kapilvastu. While coming from Sravasti to Kapilvastu, most probably, they followed the same route in practice in present days. Khunuwa is the present border of Kapilvastu of Nepal and Siddharthanagar of India. The link road from Kapilvastu district head quarter via Kudan and Khunuwa, the bordering settlement, reach to Shoharatgarh to meet the main road from Sravasti. Balarampur, Tulsipur, Badhani etc. are the major settlements in between Sravasti and Shoharatgarh. Therefore the Chinese travellers most had followed the same route to arrive Kapilvastu. From Sravasti the Chinese pilgrims travelled through the main highway up to Shoharatgarh and from Shoharatgarh they most have taken the link route to Kapilvastu. Fa-hsien and Yuan Chwang had arrived to the place where

Suddodhan had met his son as Buddha first time. This place, as PC Mukharjee has identified as Nyagrodharam, is the present Lori Ka Kudan, few kilometres south from the fort of Tilaurakot, which is identified as the palace of Shakya Kingdom. Hence, the most probable connection point of Lo Manthang – Lumbini Silk Road corridor could be the linking road from Taulihawa to Shoharatgarh road.

## **2.2 Lumbini Nodal Town**

### **2.2.1 Situation**

Lumbini, the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha lies in Rupandehi District of Lumbini Province. Lumbini is situated around 300 kms southwest from Kathmandu. Siddharthanagar, the nearest Indian border town, is 27 kms from Lumbini. Lumbini lies 28 kms east from the ancient capital Kapilbastu of Shakyas and 27 kms west from the ancient capital Devdaha of Koliyas. In ancient time, Lumbini was called 'Lumbini Kannan', 'Lumbini Batika', 'Lumbini Upawan', 'Lumbini Pratimokshaban', 'Lumbini Chittalatawan' etc. Lumbini area was a protected and managed as a common place by ancient Kapilbastu and Koliyagram kingdom (Bidari, 2009).

### **2.2.2 History of Lumbini**

The history of Lumbini, known as a birthplace of Gautam Buddha since 6th century BC, is associated to the history of ancient Shakyas of Kapilbastu and Koliyas of Ramgram. Kapilvastu being also the birthplace of Krakuchhanda Buddha and Kanakmuni Buddha, its history obviously goes back to 9<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Ancient Kapilbastu and Ramgram states have been mentioned in Buddhist literatures such as Didhanikaya, Sumangal, Mahabastu, Lalitbistar etc. The capital of ancient Ramgram was Devdaha. There was long established family relation between the Shakyas of Kapilbastu and Koliyas of Ramgram. There used to be marital exchanges between these two states. Lumbini Area was situated almost at the center of these two kingdoms. In comparison to Ramgram Kapilbastu was larger, more prosperous and powerful. Lumbini, in many Buddhist literatures, has been explained as a beautiful garden of Kapilbastu. Lumbini being a beautiful garden situated in the center of the two states, was also a common visiting and relaxing point of the both royalties (Rai, 2010).

Siddhartha Gautam was born in 623 BC right here in the garden of Lumbini. After Siddhartha was enlightened and was called Buddha at the age of 35, the importance and fame of this place was spread widely. Before his death (Mahaparinirwana), Buddha had suggested his disciples including Ananda to go for pilgrimage in four different places related to the life and events of the Tathagata. This way, the birthplace of Buddha after his Mahaparinirwana became even more famous.

The followers of Buddha, right after his Mahaparinirwana, seemed to have started the pilgrimage of Lumbini as his birthplace. The evidences found from the archaeological excavation of this region prove this fact. The "Marker stone" discovered in the excavation seems to be the first monument established after the Mahaparinirwana of Gautam Buddha according to the archaeological evidences. After the rise of Mauryas in India, especially the Emperor Ashoka, the fame of Lumbini was heightened. Emperor Ashoka visited Lumbini and not only protected the "Marker Stone" of Buddha's birthplace but also erected a column with inscription specifying the birthplace of Buddha.

Dibyabadhan had mentioned that Emperor Ashoka, in the process of building 84 thousand relic stupas, also built one in Lumbini. (Giri, 2010). The excavation of 1977-78 AD had found a relic stupa, which is supposed to be related to Maurya period, at the northern side of Mayadevi Temple. However, it is yet to be proved whether this stupa was built with the relics of Buddha in it. (Rijal, 1978). Many structures of Maurya period including pedestals of Mark stone have been found around Mayadevi Temple. While studying the bricks of Mayadevi Temple, one can conclude that the use of bricks was started in this area during Maurya age. The structures built in Maurya period have been renovated and expanded later in different periods (Giri, 2010). The Grand Trunk Route was the main route to come to Kapilbastu-Lumbini from Pataliputra of ancient Magadha. (Bidari, 2009). The Grand Trunk Route coming from the south and the Silk Road coming from the north seemed to have crossed somewhere near Lumbini.

Even in Sunga and Kushan age, many people seem to have visited Lumbini area and renovated many stupas or biharas and even built some new structures according to historical evidences. The big stupas and sixteen stupas at the east and north of Mayadevi Temple were constructed during 2nd century BC (Bidari, 2002). The Stupa, situated right at the east of Mayadevi Temple, was built in 3rd century BC. and its renovation continued until 4th century AD. This

proves that the monks and Buddhism followers used to come to Lumbini during Sunga, Kushan and Gupta period. (Mishra, 1990)

The Chinese travellers seem to have continuously visited Lumbini since the beginning of Gupta period. According to historical evidences, the most Chinese visits were made using the Silk Road during the Gupta period. The Gupta period influences can be traced in most of the art and architectures found in Lumbini. The focused study of Lumbini shows that the Silk Road Corridor expanded in Nepal was related to the movements of people for religious purposes. The Buddhism was the main reason for that. The centres of these religious movements were Lumbini and other places related to the life of Gautam Buddha.

Three major routes have been found developed between China, Tibet, Nepal and India because of religious, cultural and trade activities. Among them, the route that intersects Lumbini is the most important. This route starts from Bodhgaya of India and expands through Lumbini, Ridi, Mustang and Purang of Tibet upto Gunge. Lumbini-Mustang route was one of most used corridor among three Silk Road Corridors which connect Nepal. This route is the one among the three in which the highest number of evidences of ancient movements have been found. However, no written records or evidences so far have been found which explain about the movement starting from Gunge via Purang, Mustang and through Lumbini to Bodhgaya. However, the serious study of the various religious and cultural activities shows the influence of one place in the others.

## **2.2.2 The activities in Lumbini-Kapilbastu and its relation to Silk Road**

### **2.2.3.1 Emperor Ashoka in Lumbini**

The royal tour of Emperor Ashoka from Pataliputra of India to Lumbini-Kapilbastu does not have direct link to the Silk Road. However, his visit in later period became one of the reasons for the expansion and development of the Silk Road. After the Mahaparinirwana of Gautam Buddha, the first visit with evidences was of Emperor Ashoka.

### **2.2.3.2 Lumbini and Chinese Travellers**

**Seng-Tsai:** Seng-Tsai was the first who travelled from northern China targeting Lumbini of Nepal. He made this travel between 350 to 375 AD (Mishra, 4:1996). His travelogue reveals

that he had come via Kapilbastu to Lumbini. However, no evidences show that he had used the Kaligandaki Corridor to reach Lumbini. Rather, he had come to Nepal via Inda. Seng-Tsai was the first person with evidence to reach Lumbini after Emperor Ashoka. Seng-Tsai has mentioned that he had seen Nativity sculpture in his visit to this place. Seng-Tsai was informed that this sculpture was made by Ashoka and he accordingly recorded in his travelogue. However, the scholars have concluded that this sculpture was from 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This fact suggests that a special team had visited Lumbini area in early 4<sup>th</sup> century and had established a nativity sculpture related to the birth of Gautam Buddha amidst a grand ceremony.

Anyway, the Great-China and Kapilbastu-Lumbini were well connected by the mid of 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is yet to study the link between the route he took and the Lomanthang-Lumbini corridor. However, it has been well established that Lumbini area by the time of his visit was well developed as a famous Nodal Town.

**Fa-hsien/Fa-Hian:** Fa-hsien was another person with evidence to visit Lumbini from China. Fa-hsien was also called as Fa-Hian in writings. He was a Buddhist pilgrim. The main purpose of his visit India was to gather Buddhist scriptures and to collect "Binaya Pitak" which was scarce in China. But Fa-Hian had given priority to Buddhist pilgrimage also. He had come to Nepal during the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Fa-Hian's visit to Nepal had been a bridge to develop Lumbini as a special Nodal Town. However, even Fa-Hian had not visited Lumbini using Tibet-Lo Manthang route. The Lumbini, birth place of Buddha, Kapilbastu, where he spent his childhood and other places around had been famous pilgrimage destinations by that time. Fa-Hian knew this fact which had inspired him to visit all these places. Fa-Hian had entered Nepal via Shravast of India. Among the pilgrims to visit Nepal, he was the first to visit present day Kudan-Gotihawa. Even today, this is the easiest route to enter Kapilbastu from India. He has mentioned Gotihawa as the hometown of Krakuchhanda Buddha and as the place where Gautam Buddha after enlightenment had stayed for some time while coming back to his hometown. Fa-Hian first reached to the place of Krakuchhanda Buddha and later visited the town of Kanakmuni Buddha. (Bidari, 2004) He has mentioned in his writings that he had seen the stone pillar erected by Ashoka, the stupa of Kanakmuni Buddha and the town of Kanakmuni Buddha. He had reached from the town of Kanakmuni Buddha, the present day Niglihawa, to Kapilbastu, the present day

Tilaurakot. Fa-Hian and his friend Tao-Tsing had reached Lumbini in about 403 AD using landroute. Yet, some historians have said that these two travellers had visited Lumbini around 409 AD. (Bidari, 2002)

The historians have estimated that Fa-Hian, to come from Shravasti to Kapilbastu and to Lumbini, had used the Uttarapath (Grand Trunk Route) which had long been used as a north south trade route (Tarananda Mishra). The team of Fa-Hian had reached Ramgram from Lumbini. This reveals that by the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, Lumbini, Kapilbastu and the places around had been centers of Buddhist religion.

**Che-mong:** No clear evidence have been found to establish that Che-mong had visited Lumbini. But Che-mong being the traveller to reach India after Fa-Hian, the probability of his coming to Lumbini has been discussed. The team of Che-mong had entered India from western Tibet via Kashmir. Che-mong had visited different places of Northern India to collect Buddhist religious scriptures. The travelogue of Che-mong got lost and so detail of his travel could not be found (Bagchi, 1944).

**Yuan-Chwang:** Yuan-Chwang was another Chinese traveler to visit Lumbini – Kapilbastu area and to contribute to provide historical information about the place by writing about travel detail. Yuan-Chwang is also known as Yuan-Chwang/HiouenThsang/Huan Chwang/Hiuen Tsiang. He was a Buddhist monk. He had visited as a pilgrim to Lumbini, Kapilbastu and the places around. Yuan-Chwang had started his long journey from Great-China in 629 AD. He stayed in India till 643 AD and returned to China in 645 AD through Sea route. In the middle of his travel period, in 636 AD, Yuan-Chwang had visited Lumbini Kapilbastu. But at the same time, the date of his travel to Kapilbastu has also been fixed to be December 25 of 636 AD. (Bidari, 2004)

Yuan-Chwang had written that he followed the footsteps of Fa-Hian to reach to Shravasti and from Shravasti travelling 500 lee towards north east, he reached the birthplace of Krakuchhanda Buddha. He had seen the stupa of Krakuchhanda Buddha. He has mentioned that he saw a stupa near Krakuchhanda Stupa which was a place Buddha was met by his father. Likewise, he has mentioned that nearby this place was a pillar related to Krakuchhanda Buddha which was erected by Emperor Ashoka. (Bidari, 2004). The place he had pointed out has been thought to be present day Gotihawa and Kudan area of Kapilbastu District where

there are stupas and Ashok Pillar as mentioned in the travel detail. However, the part of the inscription written about the Nirawana of Krakuchhanda Buddha as mentioned in his travelogue has not been found yet, only the lower part of the pillar has been found in erected form.

Yuan-Chwang also had reached from the town of Krakuchhanda Buddha to the town of Kanakmuni Buddha and to the place of stupa built in his memory, 30 lee north east. Near this stupa, Yuan-Chwang has mentioned that he saw an Ashokan Pillar with a lion's image in its top. It has been established that the Ashokan Pillar seen today in Niglihawa of Kapilbastu District was the pillar he saw (Bidari, 2004). But Vincent Smith and some other explorers have maintained that the Niglihawa Ashokan Pillar was originally somewhere else and was brought later on to the place of where it is today. Smith has mentioned that this pillar was probably brought from Dohani of Kapilbastu to Niglihawa (Allen: 2012). As mentioned in this Ashokan Pillar, the stupa renovated by Ashoka has not been found yet.

Yuan-Chwang has mentioned in his travel detail that he had reached to Tilaurakot of Kapilbastu. He had seen ruins of 10 towns of Kapilbastu and the capital itself was in the ruined form. He has mentioned, by this time there were no rullers, the land was fertile, the people were engaged in farming, there were a small number of monks who followed Thera line of Buddhism (Bidari, 2004). Yuan-Chwang also had reached to Lumbini. Yuan-Chwang also seemed to have followed the same route taken by Fa-Hian to reach Lumbini from Kapilbastu. Yuan-Chwang has written that he saw a pond, an 'Ashok' tree under which Buddha was born, hot and cold water well and many stupas related to various events of Buddha's life. He has mentioned that with these stupas, he also saw a pillar which was erected by Emperor Ashoka. He has mentioned that the pillar was broken and the top portion of the pillar with an image of a horse was on the ground. Nearby that pillar, he has mentioned, he saw a small river which was then called 'Oil River' by which he seems to have pointed to the "Telar River" seen today. From Lumbini, Yuan-Chwang went to Ramgram where he had seen one among first eight stupas of Buddha.

**I-Tsing:** After Yuan-Chwang, I-Tsing had visited Lumbini area according to the historical evidences. He had started his tour to India in 671 AD. The description of his visit to 30 different



countries have been found but detail description of his Lumbini visit has not been found yet. (Bidari, 2002)

**Hiuen-chiu:** Hiuen-Chiu had come to India in 646 AD according to historical evidences. He had been to Rajgriha, Gridhakut, Mahabodhi and had returned to China via Nalanda through Nepal (Bidari, 2002). While going via Nepal to Tibet, it has been estimated that he also went to Lumbini but there are no historical evidences to establish this fact. The three major routes from Kathmandu to Tibet were Kathmandu-Kodari-Lhasa, Kathmandu-Nuwakot-Kyornu and Kathmandu- Kaligandaki Corridor –Mustang-Purung. If he had reached Lumbini, the shortest route for him to go to Tibet was the Kaligandaki Corridor through Palpa, Ridi and Mustang.

**Wang-hiuen-tse:** Wang-hiuen-tse was a Chinese traveller to come to India the most frequently. The details have been found about his 4 times visit to India and in his 3rd visit, he also had come to Lumbini where he also offered some worshipings (Bidari, 2002). After the end of his forth visit to India, he went to Tibet via Nepal but this time no evidences point that he also reached Lumbini. However, it is probable that he followed the Kaligandaki route to go to Tibet. The earlier Chinese travellers were of religious nature but Wang-hiuen-tse had come to Nepal for different purpose. Wang-hiuen-tse was a government official and had come to Nepal as a government representative. It can be well established by his coming to Nepal and visiting Lumbini that the relation between China and Nepal had developed in a special dimension.

**Wu-Kung and Fang-Chih:** Wu-Kung and Fang-Chih were the latest Chinese travellers to visit Lumbini according historical records. They had visited Lumbini in 764 AD. Wu-Kung also has mentioned that he had seen the Buddha stupa seen by Yuan-Chwang. Fang-Chih has written in detail about Ashokan Pillar. He has mentioned that he saw an inscription about Buddha's birth on the pillar.

The Chinese travellers mentioned above were some important ones among hundreds of others who visited Lumbini and wrote travelogue about their visit which are still available. Between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, at least 169 Chinese travellers had visited India according to historical evidences (Bidari, 2002). There are no evidences which tell these all travellers came to Lumbini. However, what can be possible that all of these travellers were Buddhism followers and if so they must have been eager to visit Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha.

The visit of Chinese travellers Wu-Kung and Fang-Chih around the middle of 8<sup>th</sup> century was the last historically proved visit for about 600 years. After these two travellers, the visit of Khas Malla King Ripu Malla had visited Lumbini in 14<sup>th</sup> century AD according to historical evidences. In fact, after Padma Sambhava from India visited Tibet through Nepal in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, Nepal had become famous as a center of the Buddhism study. There are some evidences which establish that Padmasambhav had come to Mustang from Tibe. During that time and after that Kaligandaki Corridor seemed to have been popular already. The discovery of Kaligandaki Corridor must have made the travels to Lumbini easier but there are not enough evidences to establish this fact.

### **2.2.3.3 Ripu Malla's pilgrimage to Lumbini**

At the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Buddhism seems to have received a royal recognition in western Nepal's Khas kingdom. In fact, Buddhism had considerably influenced these states since 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. It has been evident that people had knowledge till 14<sup>th</sup> century that Buddha was born in Lumbini and where this Lumbini lies. People seem to have forgotten about Lumbini only after that.

King Ripu Malla was a Buddhism Follower and had been to Lumbini as a pilgrim of Buddha's birthplace. According to historical records, he has been the first person after the Chinese travellers to reach to Lumbini and to introduce himself by his own name. Ripu Malla also had constructed two stupas in Lumbini (Tarananda Mishra). Ripu Malla also inscribed 'Om Manipadme hum' 'Sadakshari Mahayana Baudha Mantra' along with his name on Ashokan Pillar. During 14<sup>th</sup> century, Kapilbastu and Lumbini have been estimated to fall under western Khas state. (L.B.Pradhan, 1979) Ripu Malla reached not only to Lumbini but also to Kapilbastu. He also has inscribed his name on the Ashokan Pillar of Niglihawa. This proves that Ripu Malla was the last historical person to visit Lumbini - Kapilbastu area. There are also no architectural evidences to prove that some others also had reached there and built or renovated any structures. The Stupa constructed here by Ripu Malla was the last construction.

Though all of these visits and travels can not be linked with the Kaligandaki Corridor, it is highly possible that all the pilgrims, after Padmasambhav had visited Tibet via Nepal, used the route from Tibet to Mustang and the Kaligandaki Corridor.



Figure 1: Gotihawa (Birth place of Buddha)



Figure 2: Pillar in Gotihawa



Figure 3: Side view of Gotihawa pillar



Figure 4: Tilaurakot Kapilvastu



Figure 5: Tilaurokot Kapilvastu Temple



Figure 6: Niglihawa pillar



Figure 7: Nepal India Border Khunuwa



Figure 8: Phulbari Sendurbar Rupture



Figure 9: Front view of Sendurbar Rupture

## **2.3 Palpa-Tansen Nodal Town**

### **2.3.1 Situation**

Palpa district is lies in the Lumbini province. It is bounded by Nawalparasi and Tanahu districts from east, Gulmi and Arghakhanchi from West; Rupandehi and Nawalparasi from South Gulmi, Syangja, and Tanhun district from North. Tansen, the district head quarter of Palpa is located in northeastern part of the district. More precisely the Tansen, an old settlement of Palpa is situated in  $27^{\circ} 52' 0''$  North,  $83^{\circ} 33' 0''$  East in the world map.

Tansen of Palpa is located along the Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road corridor. Very often the corridor follows the Kaligandaki River from its northern most part, Lo Manthang and the route leaves the Kaligandaki River in Ridi-Rishikesh. From Ridi-Rishikesh it goes towards

southeast to reach Tansen. Along the old route of Ridi-Tansen there are several other small old settlements. From Tansen the route climbs down towards southern plain.

### **2.3.2 Early History of Palpa and Tansen**

Tansen is an old settlement of Lumbini- Lo Manthang Silk Road. Ancient history of the Tansen is almost obscure, however, this place is well highlighted from the period of Sen. Whereas the history of entire Palpa is important even from prehistoric period. Evidences of the pre-historic human settlements have been found around Palpa Region. Dilliraj Sharma had found Neolithic tools in the Madi meadow, Palpa. (sharma, 2046:87) There must have been ancient human settlements around fertile plains of Kaligandaki, the northern part of Tansen. The archaeological and historical evidences have already established that southern belt of Palpa was inhabited by human since early age.

Palpa has been mentioned in *Pouranic* and religious literatures also. So, these literatures can be taken as reference for the historical study of Palpa Region. Rampur, Keladighat are the places of religious importance. The fourth chapter of Gandaki Mahatmya mentions Rampur as a meditation venue of God Ram, the king of Ayodhya. (Gurung 2061:137)

While exploring the antiquity of Palpa, one needs to see the origin of the word 'Palpa'. In an ancient text called *Swapna Pariksha*, a text about Sen of the region, found in National Archive, the Sanskritized version of Palpali is expressed as '*Parpariya*'. It has been estimated that the word *Parpariya* was in course of time distorted to be Palpali (Panthi, 2042:21). Likewise, according to Yogi Narahari Nath the Mahabharata explains that a principality called Pallab was ruled by Paal Dynasty and so the Pallab ruled by Paal in course of time became Palpa. This explanation gives a hint that the relation of Palpa can be linked to Pallab, a dynasty of ancient India. Pallabs were a branch of Yuchi clan from China who later entered into India and were called Pallab in Sanskrit literatures. One needs to explore the archaeological evidences to establish that these Shakapallabs had contributed in the development of Silk Road. However, it has been doubted that Pallabs and Palpa had any links. (Panthi, 2042:22)

Some studies have been conducted to explore the origin of the name Tansen. Basically the early name of Tansen was Tansing. The old people still call Tansen as Tansing. Besides, a report issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2025 mentions that Tamrasen, a king of Sen



Dynasty made Shrinagar his capital, and the same Tamrasen in course of time distorted to be Tansen. Madhav Prasad Devkota, the famous Poet of Palpa, also endorses the mention of the Ministry (the distortion of Tamrasen as Tansen) in his writings. However, Devkota in his later writings corrected his earlier version and wrote that the word Tansing was derived from Magar dialect in which "*Tan*" means a big place and "*Sing*" means settlement. He corrects that Magars called this place "Tansing" because it was a big human settlement.

Palpa basically being a habitation of Magars, the influence of Magar language in the name of places are evident. Places habited by Magars in Syangja such as Changsing, Darsing, Bhursing, Dishingkot etc are named in Magar language. In the same way, the names of the places ending in "*Sing*" such as Foksing are found in Palpa. This indicates the domination of Magars in the region. So, Tansen was not named because it was ruled by Sen Dynasty but because the place was dominated by Magars. There are historical evidences which establish that even Sens used the word Tansing not Tansen. (Panthi, 2042:24-25)

### **2.3.3 The Activities in Palpa and Its Links with Silk Road**

#### **2.3.3.1 Palpa as a historical settlement**

There are no evidences which can explain directly about the position of Palpa in Lichchhabī period. However, the Changunarayan scription mentions that King Mandev got victory over the Mallas from across the Gandaki River. Dhanabajra Bajracharya has mentioned about the possibility of Mallapuri explained in the Mandev scription being the Palpa region situated across the Kaligandaki River (Bajracharya, 2030:10-13). As assumed by Bajracharya, if the Palpa region is same historical place of Mallapuri, the Tansen must be an ancient settlement established along the Lumbini-Lo Manthang Silk Road corridors.

#### **2.3.3.2 Palpa and its connection to Kashmir**

It has been mentioned in *Rajatrangini* written in 1207 that the Jayapīd, the king of Kashmir had invaded the Nepali state ruled by the King Aramuddi. The state ruled by the king Aramuddi has been estimated to be Palpa situated across the Kaligandaki River (Ghimire, 45:24). The Kaligandaki route being the main route to reach Palpa from Kashmir, this historical fact is very important in relation to the Silk Road. Professor Peshal Dahal and Ghanahsyam Bhattarai (2075) also has mentioned this fact to relate the historical connection between Kashmir and

Nepal through the route along the Kaligandaki. It is worth mentioning here the fact that Laddakh of Kashmir and Lo Manthang of Mustang had links from very historical period.

### **2.3.3.3 Magars of Palpa and its relation with Silk Road**

Palpa was famous as Magarat State during pre-Malla period. In the manuscript colophon of a manuscript written during the Pre-Malla King Narendradev mentions of 'Shree Gandigulmabisaye'. An 'Astasahashrika Pragyaparamita' written during the period of King Harshadev also has mentioned the same. This Gandigulma mentioned in both texts have been estimated to be the region under present Palpa (Nepal, 2062:31). A bronze record of NS 221 has mentioned a word 'Mangwarbisaye'. It is probable that this Mangwarbisaye was Palpa region (Bajracharya, 2066:19). One study argues that the Magars of Nepal are from Kham, a place east of Lhasa and west of China. The nomadic Magars came down towards south through the pass of Mustang in search of better pasture (Budhamagar, 2070:231-233, DoA, 2071). However the date they left their place of origin was quite earlier then the date of Silk Road, it gives the hits about the use of corridor through Kaligandaki.

### **2.3.3.4 Tansen as a head quarter of Dana Bhansar**

Dana is an ancient settlement along the Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor in Myagdi district. There was a Custom office in Dana in historical period and was famous as 'Dana Bhansar'. Historical records says that the Dana Bhansar was operated from Palpa (*Palpa Gauda*) (Gurung, 2007:160). Therefore, if these historical facts are seriously studied, one can establish the link of the Silk Road to Palpa, a place situated at the Kaligandaki Corridor.



Figure 10: On the way Ridi-Tansen

### 2.3.3.5 Irrigation System in Argeli

While talking about Palpa–Tansen as a node of Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road corridor, "Argeli" comes to be a worth mentioning place. Argeli is an old settlement in the connection road from Kaligandaki (Ridi-Rishikesh) to Tansen. It is about 28 Kilometre northwest towards Ridi and about 5 Kilometre southeast from Ridi-Rishikesh. The Ridi-Rishikesh itself is one of the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative Sites of Nepal. More precisely the old settlement of Argeli lies on  $27.9251^{\circ}$  N,  $83.4617^{\circ}$  E in the world map.

The place has two major importance, it is an old settlement along the old business road dominantly resided by Magar ethnic group and the next is there is a traditional irrigation channel managed by local resident. The source of the channel is *Jorte Khola* (Jorte River). The channels are made damping in four places of the river. Locally the irrigation channels branched from four places of the Jortekhola are called "*Jethi Kulo*", "*Maili Kulo*", "*Saili Kulo*" and "*Kanchhi Kulo*". The channel system equally divides the water as per the land area. This kind of traditional irrigation system is an exactly similar system still in practice in Mongolia (DoA, 2071). Local people believe this irrigation system in Argeli is about 6 to 7 hundred years old. However, there has not found any written document about the establishment of this irrigation

channel, most probably, it was built in early Sen Period. Hence, the Argeli is very important in the sense of Silk Road study.

### 2.3.3.6 Nuwakot fort and custom office

Fort of Nuwakot in Palpa is another significant site of historical importance. Palpa-Nuwakot lies in the southeast of Tansen and in the north of Butwal. The fort also used as auxiliary fort of the historic Jitgadhi fort in Nepal-British war is considered older than Jitgadhi. Nuwakot was also a custom point of Sen kingdom of Palpa. This place has a religious importance also, since it is known as an *Ashram* of Rishi Kaldeval, the guru of Gautam Buddha's father Shuddhodhan. Historically the Nuwakot was a very busy custom centre, since this was the most used route to go towards southern plan and further to India. With the decline of Sen Kingdom the custom office was closed. A tradition of leaving a stick hold by the traveller there in the custom as tax is still in practice. It is a linking route to the Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor.



Figure 11: Current Argeli Irrigation Canal



Figure 12: Current Argeli Irrigation Canal



Figure 13: Current Argeli Irrigation Canal

## **2.4 Dana nodal town**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

The Dana of Myagdi is a significant historical place of Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor. Dana is located on the 28.5354° N, 83.6242° E in world map. Geographically, Dana is the northernmost area of the Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor for paddy cultivation. Generally, it is the northernmost climatic zone in this route suitable for buffalo farming.

Dana is an old settlement located on the bank of Kaligandaki in the northern part of Myagdi district. Although Dana is a small settlement in term of human habitation, it has been famous for its importance in trade control and regulation since time immemorial. At present no such historical trade activities are continued in Dana. There is only a small settlement and some old government office buildings existed.

### **2.4.2 Dana Custom Office a Site Directly Linked to Silk Road Activities**

Dana is known as a historical center of trade, since there was a trade regulating custom office for a long time in history. There is no clear written evidence of when the Dana custom was established. Nepal-Tibet trade, which dates back to the Lichhavi Period, as evidenced by historical sources, was well-flourished in the Malla period. Therefore, to regulate the trade through Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor Dana might have been established as custom point in earlier historical period. Historical sources clearly says that there was custom office in Dana in Rana Period; and the Dana custom had played a significant role in trade through this route (Gurung, 2007:160). From Tibet salt, wool, sheep, horse, medicinal herbs etc. were the major goods to import Nepal and India through this Kaligandaki trade route; and grains, spices and ornaments used to be exported from Nepal and India to Tibet (Dhungel, 2042). Dana customs was operated from "Palpa Gounda" (Gurung, 2007:160). It shows the directly link of Dana to Palpa.

An archival document of 1867 mentions the establishment of a revenue office in Dana. This is an earlier written source ever found to mention about Dana custom and it manifests the continuation of trade in this route and significance of Dana Bhansar. A historical letter dated 1905.12.12 also has been found. This is the letter written to the then custom officer (*Nikharidar*). The historical letter is significant to understand the then custom system. There was a system of presenting the revenue transparently to the local people. The letter address to tax officer (*Nikharidar*) of Dana

custom office has asked to demonstrate the outline of revenue to the public (Chhetri, 2044:273). Later the Custom system of Dana governed by Government was changed and given to consultancy in contract basis. The new system seems started from 1882 BS. It was expected to maximize the revenue through that contract system. According to available records Dana custom was continued till 1943 BS (Chhetri, 2044:273).

From the above references it is understood that there was good trade between Nepal and Tibet and Lumbini-Lo Manthang route was one of various trade routes. Gold, wool, salt, *Churpi*, horse, silk, *Radipakhi* etc. were major import from Tibet and Nepal used to export food items including spices and rice from India through Kaligandaki route. Since several tributary routes come to link this corridor, the trade through the route was well-developed.

In Lumbini-Lo Manthang route, in the upper part, *Sherib*'s two places, Kagbeni of "Baragaun", and Tukuche of "Panchgaun", and in the lower part, Dana always seems as center of trade. As historical documents associated to Dana Bhansar and other custom centers of Kaligandadi routes evident, Nepal has benefited from Nepal-Tibet trade since the Malla period and this was continued till the Rana period. Some remaining glimpses of old trade route and pictures of caravan nearby Dana manifests the trade regulation of this corridor and importance of Dana custom (Haimendorf, 1975). After the Anglo-Tibet Treaty of 1904, not only did the British interference increase in Nepal but also the trade hold by British-India over Tibet became stronger. That interference of British-India resulted gradual decline in Nepal-Tibet trade including trade through Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor. After 2007, the trade activities in corridor seems to have been almost terminated. There is a lack of written evidence in the history of Dana customs before the Rana period. However, the custom already established in this area may have been expanded and managed more during the Rana period. Therefore, the position and importance of Dana custom and overall Dana area in Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road corridor can be considered important.

## **2.5 Marpha nodal town**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

Marpha region has historical, archaeological and cultural importance for the study of Lumbini-Lo Manthang Silk Road corridor. Marpha lies at the lower belt of Mustang. This region as a whole is

called 'Thak.' In this very Thak Valley surrounded by Himalayas is situated ancient town Marpha. Marpha region is world famous for anthropological, archaeological and sociological studies. Marpha region being a conducive place for farming has been the choice of people since ancient time. The evidences have been found to prove that people in ancient times used to live in the caves and forts of the hills surrounding this valley and used to do farming in the plain and fertile land in between. This fact is further proved by the presence of ruins of architectural structures in Gharapjong Fort and other caves found here in surrounding hills.

Marpha and other five villages (Panchgaun) of its proximity in total are also called Thakkhola. Some consider Thasang and others Marpha as a center of Thakkhola. The 'Panchgaun' of Thak area, 'Baragaun' situated at the northern side of Thak and 13 villages of southern side towards Myagdi (which is also called 'Thak Sat Saya') are said to be Thak influenced areas. Marpha lies at the center of all this places. The area covered by places called Thini (Gharapjong), Chiwang, Syang, Chhairo and Marpha in total is known as Marpha.

Marpha had given special contribution to develop the trade and cultural relation of Nepal with India and Tibet during ancient and middle age. Marpha–Thak region continued to contribute for the trade exchanges between Nepal and Tibet until the rule of Shah and Rana dynasty in Nepal. Michel Peissel has labelled Thak Valley as a 'Gateway of Southern and Eastern Asia' (Peissel:2009).

## **2.5.2 The activities in Marpha and its relation to Silk Road**

### **2.5.2.1 Thak Civilization and its Relation to North and South**

Marpha Valley (Thak civilization) along with the age old homesteads of its surrounding, cave civilization and some pre-historic references found in Pauranic religious scriptures seems to be an ancient human settlement. Ample references of Marpha are found in different religious scriptures. On the basis of archaeological evidences, the human civilization seems to have started even earlier than Pauranic age. According to the archaeological explorations and studies conducted in Chokhopani, Tukuche, Khingar, Jharkot, Fujling and Jhongkyure, the cave civilization in this region has been claimed to have developed even earlier than 3rd century BC. (Regmi and Pandey, 2062:77). The bronze items found in Chokhopani caves can be compared with the bronze culture



developed in Ganges Valley. It gives the clear picture of the relation between Gange Valley and Thak. Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor is the only means of this relation.

### **2.5.2.2 Thak Civilization and its Link to Silk Road**

One cannot get the entire historical information about Marpha by focusing the study merely on Marpha. So, it becomes necessary to discuss the entire Thak civilization to study the cultural and historical background of Marpha center. It is interesting in this context to know how the name 'Thakkhola' was coined. The old name of Tukuche, the lower belt of Sherib, was 'Thakkhopchen'. Some studies have indicated that 'Thakkhola' is the distortion of same 'Thakkhopchen'. Some opine that the name 'Thakkhola' was derived from the name of the local river called 'Thakkhola' which flows through western north of Tukuche and ends in the Kaligandaki River. Some others find the origin of the name in Thapa Chronicles in which it is mentioned that 'Thakkhola' is the distorted version of 'Thapakhola'. According to a local legend, Hansaraj had once been a powerful king of this area and he had an influential councilor of 'Thapa' caste, this Thapa somehow was killed in a river of this area and this river in course of time was called 'Thapakhola'. It is interesting to note that the Thapas of Myagdi don't drink the water from Thapakhola where their ancestor was killed. In course of time, it is believed that the same 'Thapakhola' gradually distorted to be 'Thakkhola'. Later, those who lived in this Thakkhola were called 'Thakali. The religion and culture followed by these Thakalis is called Thak civilization of Thakali culture. (Bista, 2010:34). These all historical background of the mixing culture of Thak region can be studied in Silk Road concept.

There is still a debate which among the five villages is the center of Thak Valley. Some consider present day Kowang to be the Major Thakali settlement. Others say that the center is Tukuche. The second opinion seems to be more plausible because according to the chronicles, the King Hansaraj from Jumla had established his kingdom in Thakkhopchen (Tukuche). Some others think Marpha was the first human settlement of this region. In fact, Paanchgaun (Thini, Chiwang, Marpha, Chhairo and Tukuche) in total are called Thakkhola. Some even say that the area between Kagbeni and Kowang is called Thakkhola. Paanchgaun, Thak and Thakali Subbas had a remarkable contribution for the development of external trade to India and Tibet. The places of this region including Daana, Ghansa, Kobang, Tukuche, Marpha, Kagbeni were the custom and trade centers. During Rana Regime, the Thakali Subbas of Thak were entitled with some trade rights, specially for the trade of salt.

Thak Valley also has played an important role for the development of Silk Road. Many historians have regarded Thak civilization as a Cultural Gateway of eastern and middle Asia. This place also has been considered to be the mixing point of Bon, Buddhist, Hindu, Khas Arya and indigenous tribes. The places including Marpha, Tukuche and Daana were centers of trade and local administration. There are historical facts available to establish that Thak Valley (Marpha), being a convenient place for 10 out of 12 months of the year to conduct the Kaligandaki Corridor and Trans-Himalayan trade, was the special trade center.

### **2.5.2.3 Bon Religion in Marpha**

The detailed study of historical records indicates that Thak region encompasses the entire area occupied by Panthechu (Panthekeyu), the southern border of 'Kag-Barha-Gaun', Lubrak and its southern belt Lete (Kyimlang) and Ghasa (ngya). Gharapjong (Thini) was the center of Thak region and the entire Sherib (Lower Mustang). The ruins of historical human settlement of Gharapjong can still be seen.

The religious history of the region shows that 'Barhagaun', 'Panchgaun' and 'Saatgaun' of Lower Mustang were influenced by Bon religion. The center of Bon religion in Mustang was Tha-Sherib. 'Tha-Sherib' means 'a border of Sherib'. The capital of this state was Gharapjong (Thini). The name Thini was derived from the ruler called 'Thing'. This capital was traditionally also called 'Thing Gharapjong' or 'Sumpo Gharapjong'. When 'Thak-Dana' custom office got developed into an administrative unit with some local rights, the importance of Gharapjong got diminished gradually. Hence, the Bon religion played important role for the regular contact between Marpha and Tibet.

### **2.5.2.4 Marpha and its Relation with Guru Marpa**

It is interesting to note how the name Marpha was originated. According to the local tradition it was named after the name of Guru Marpa. According to scholars opine the present name of Marpha is the distorted version of Marpa. In Tibetan Lama Buddhism the place of Guru Marpa is a significant personality. Guru Marpa is belonged Shakya School of Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, there was direct relation to Shakya Math of Tibet. Guru Marpa played significant role to spread Nāropa's school of thought from India to Tibet. It is believed Tibetan Lama Marpa had come and

meditated in this place in 11<sup>th</sup> century. It shows the then directly link between Shakya Math, Marpha of Mustang and India.

#### **2.5.2.5 Marpha a Centre of Multi Religious Culture**

Marpha valley is important also in terms of religious and cultural viewpoint. There are references of Muktinath and Damodar Kunda in Pauranic literatures. In Buddhist tradition, the Loghekar Gumba of Upper Mustang is regarded as the most ancient Gumba. Sherib was the centre of Bon religion once upon a time. On the basis of all these facts, this entire region can be considered as a common playground of Northern Mangols and Southern Aryas. Likewise, this place also is a common place of Hindu, Buddhist and Bon followers. Marpha, being the origin of all these activities, can be evaluated as an important Nodal Town of the Lumbini – Lo Manthang Corridor.

The Buddhist tradition entered into Mustang region during 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. By that time, there was already a local state called Sherib in Lower Mustang. The centre of Sherib was Gharapjong. Sherib state was under 'Shang-Shung' and 'Shang-Shung' was a center Bon tradition. So, there was the influence of Bon religion in Sherib too. The Bon religion which was influential in Sherib is a main bridge to link the Lumbini – Lo Manthang Corridor with the Silk Road.

There was a dispute for a long time between the ancient Bon and Lama Buddhism established by Padmasambhav. Sometimes Bon became the dominant one and other times Lama Buddhism. But gradually the Buddhism dominated the region and became a permanent influential religion for later years. From the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Lamas of Buddhist tradition including Milarepa, Lama Snage, Lama Rinchhensangpo, Lama Ronggom, great priest of Kashmir Shribhadra ran a kind of campaign to spread the Buddhism. This is a crucial reference which contributes to indicate that Sherib and Silk Road were connected.

The social and cultural study of Thak region can also be an important source of facts for the study of the state of Silk Road in this region. There is similar influence of Buddhist Lamaism, Bonism, Ancient paganism and Hinduism in this region. Some characteristics of all these religions can be traced in the lifestyle of the people living here. The influence of Khas in this region is noteworthy. It is estimated that Khas had entered into the Thak Valley through two main routes. First route is considered to be the route through Himalaya series and the other route is thought to be Mahabharat mountain series from where these Khas people seem to have come to this valley.

Hence all the above mentioned multidimensional socio-religious, cultural and trade activities occurred in Sherib had established the Marpha as an important nodal town of Silk Road corridor.



Figure 14: Kobang Mhekilakhang Gumba



Figure 15: Inner part of Kobang Mhekilakhang Gumba



Figure 16: Marpha Village

## **2.6 Kagbeni nodal town**

### **2.6.1 Situation**

Kagbeni is an ancient human settlement situated almost in the center of Mustang region. This ancient settlement has been developed in the bank of Kaligandaki River. The geographical coordinates of Kagbeni are  $28^{\circ} 50' 0''$  North,  $83^{\circ} 47' 0''$  East. This old settlement of Kagbeni lies under Baragung Muktikshetra Rural Municipality of Mustang District according to present day political division. The main settlement of Kagbeni is about 11 Kilometers from Jomsom, the district head quarter of Mustang. Muktinath, a supreme pilgrimage site of Hindu and Buddhist is about 12 Kilometers east from Kagbeni.

### **2.6.2 Kagbeni in Early Days**

The historical, archaeological, religious and cultural importance of Kagbeni has remained intact since ancient time. The historical significance in trade sector of this area is equally important. It is Beni. Beni means the meeting point of two or more rivers. The Hindus regard such Benis or the meeting points of rivers as sacred places. This is why, Kagbeni of Mustang has been specially

important. According to old political division, Kagbeni lies under 'Sherib' of Mustang. Among many old human settlements around Mustang, Kagbeni is one of the most important. The ancient settlement of Kagbeni lies along the route to Lomanthang from Jomsom, the headquarters of Mustang. Kagbeni is situated at a small valley created by the Kaligandaki River. Kagbeni is equally important for the Hindus and Buddhists. The influence of ancient Bon Religion can still be traced in this region. Mustang traditionally has been divided into two regions namely 'Sherib' and 'Lo'. Sherib is further divided into two parts as "Baragaun" (twelve-villages) and "Panchgaun" (five-villages). Kagbeni falls under 12 villages. Historical evidences have revealed that Kagbeni was the center of "Baragaun" since early age. In old documents, this region is addressed as 'Kagbeni Bargaun' 'Kag Baragaun' 'Baragaun' etc. (Kshetri, 2044, p. 347).

Kagbeni region was inhabited by the Khas since early age. People calling themselves as Bist, Thakuri and Gurung are found here. The Gurungs of this region are unlike Gurungs of other places of Nepal are resembling to the Tibetans and their language also is similar to that of the Tibetans. On the other hand, the minority 'Bistas' of this region are not the Bistas of Lomanthang but are the Khas Kshetris. The tribal variation seen in the Kagbeni region are important for the study of Silk Road. There are not enough written evidences as to trace the beginning of the Kagbeni settlement. There are seen ruins of two small old settlements at the left hand side of the Muktinath River which is situated at the left side of the route that stretches from Kagbeni to Muktinath. These ruins are situated at the lap of a cliff with many caves. These ruins are possibly the settlements of the same cave dwellers who in course of time came down to the river bank and established settlements. According to a popular legend in the region, the present day Kagbeni town was established by the same people who resided in the settlements of the river bank.

Likewise, there is a ruin of an old human settlement near 'Eklebhatti' a new hamlet at the bank of Gandaki River along the road from Jomsom to Kagbeni. This settlement of which almost all parts are eroded by the Kaligandaki River is called "Kakningba". Kagbeni town is said to have been established by the same people of Kakningba after the river eroded the settlement. Among the ruins of debris of the Kakningba settlement, different items including earthen utensils (potsherd) used by the settlement dwellers are still seen at the surface or at the bank of the river. Seeing the conditions of the animals bones found at the place, one can also guess that the settlement was swept away by the river suddenly. The excavation of the ruins would tell when this settlement was converted into ruins and when it shifted to Kagbeni. There are many ruins of cave colonies still

seen around Kagbeni. Since the other villages around the area are proved to have been established by these cave dwellers, one can conclude that Kagbeni town also was established by the same cave dwellers. So, if we are to make a serious study to find out the time when these cave dwellers shifted to the ground and started to build mud houses, we can also find the history of Kagbeni town. However, the indications have been found that there were very few households in Kagbeni during that time. Tibetologist David Snellgrove had seen only 50 households in 1957 AD during his visit to this place. Snellgrove, explaining about this town, has written “*Kagbeni with its fifty or so houses is perhaps best described as a citadel. It is built on the river’s edge and effectively blocks the valley. The local Tibetan name is in fact just Kak (bKag) which is a word meaning ‘block’. There was once a king but his palace is falling down and his dethroned descendants are too poor to repair it.*”s

### **2.6.3 The historical activities in Kagbeni and its relation to Silk Road**

#### **2.6.3.1 Relation between Ladakh and Kagbeni**

There were many tiny states around Mustang region in the past. There are some hints which indicate that even Kagbeni was a separate state. In a 'Molla' with a description of 'Gharapjong' state situated around present day Thini, we can see the mention of Kagbeni. The old name of Kagbeni in local dialect was 'Khar'. It has been mentioned in the Molla that the ancient Gharapjong state was established by the King who came from Laddakh. In the same Molla, Kagbeni has been mentioned as Khar. There is a description in the Molla that the King of Laddakh came to this place in search of a state to rule but this place was already occupied by other kings (Kshetri, 2044, p. 182). Gharapjong is regarded as an old state of Lower Mustang. It is understood that Kagbeni settlement was established earlier than this and even the king was already elected. This fact is very important for the study of Silk Road.

#### **2.6.3.2 Dunghun, Kagbeni and Karnali**

The kings of 'Lo' in their royal chronicle have indicated that their state expanded up to Pathekhola in the south, this hints that Kagbeni region was under Lo state. The old palaces of Jharkot and Kagbeni have been mentioned as the palaces of lower region. Being at the lower end of the state, Kagbeni was also occupied by others. During the period of 8<sup>th</sup> King of Lo Mustang Aahmetenjing

Wangyal, lower region of the state was occupied by the king of Jumla who stayed there for three years. The royal chronicle has mentioned that after three years the king of Mustang regained the lower belt from the king of Jumla. It is remarkable to note the movement from Jumla to Mustang in the context of Silk Road. According to some other chronicles, the towns of lower belt Mustang were under Gharapjong state. While combing through the ancient history of this region, most of the parts of Lower Mustang around the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD almost for a hundred years were under Tibetan Empire (Dhungel, 2002: 43). Ater the death of Tibetan Emperor Dus-Srung in 705 AD, Mustang seemed to have made effort to separate from the Tibetan Empire. During this time, the Lower Mustang for around 5 years had been independent (Dhungel, 2002, p 43).

Around the end of 11<sup>th</sup> century, the whole Sherib region including Kagbeni was occupied by the Sens of Karnali (Dhungel, 2002,p. 44). So, the historical evidences prove that the entire Sherib including Kagbeni fell sometimes under Karnali State and sometimes under Tibetan Empire. It is remarkable to note that Dunghun of Tibet was a centre of the Silk Road.

The authentic inscription to speak about Kagbeni are scarce. However, Mustang state is mentioned in various places in the historical records of Khas state. The hints are available of the domination of Khas over Mustang since the time of Nagaraj, the founding father of Khas state. After Nagaraj, during the period of Krachalla, Mustang had already come under Khas state (Dhungel, 2002:56). The government documents mentioning Kagbeni written at the latter age, specially around 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, have amply been found. When the prince of Lomanthang was exiled from the country in 1652 AD, he had resided in Kagbeni (Kristen Zipperer: Kagbeni: The Gateway to Upper Mustang). The Kagbeni Palace built around 16<sup>th</sup> century AD is archaeological source for the historical study of this region. Kagbeni was the summer capital of Lower Mustang Kingdom. The ruins of a massive palace constructed by erecting the mud wall is still visible in Kagbeni. All the mentioned historical events show the link of Kagbeni to Dunghun of Tibet, Lo Mustang and Khasa Kingdom of Karnali and manifests the link of Dunghun, a centre of Silk Road to Khasa Kingdom making the Kagbeni a bridging point.

### **2.6.3.3 Bon Religion in Kagbeni**

The entire Sherib or Lower Mustang has been an important center of Bon religion and tradition since the ancient time. When Buddhism entered in Mustang in 8<sup>th</sup> century, there was an old local



religion in Sherib. The studies have shown that the local religion of that time was Bon. Sherib was the center of the state, so the entire Gharapjog area had been like a center of Bon religion. In the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century, the vast empire of Tibet was in the process of separation. Right at this time, the Bon religion of the main stream in Tibet was revived and its influence gradually started to spread to the south. During the period of King Langdarma, the Bon religion was considerably spread around Purang, Jhang and Lower Mustang (Sherib). Many Bon religious scholars had visited Sherib, among them Shangye, the Bon Guru, is significant (Dhungel, 2002, 53). By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Sherib had been the hub of Bon religion. The influence of Bon religion was constant in Sherib and around the middle of 12<sup>th</sup> century, specially Lubrang ('Ludhak') became one of the major pilgrimage destinations for the Bon followers (Dhungel, 2002:53). Before the entry of Buddhism in Sherib, the traditional Bon practice based on witchcraft/enchantment was prevalent. This traditional practice is known as ancient Bon religion. After the 11<sup>th</sup> century however, Bon religion, instead of following the traditional practices, started to develop formal education in the presence of Bon scholars by opening various Bon centres. The reference of Bon religion in Sherib can be taken as an important point to establish the relation of this region to the Silk Road.

Tucchi who reached in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century to Mustang has mentioned that the influence of the Bon religion is still seen in the jewellerys worn by the women of Kagbeni. Moreover, he has seen the equal influence of Hindu, Buddhist and Bon religion in their jewellerys (Tucci, 1952:54). Tucci's illustration of this characteristic of the jewellerys has brought Kagbeni even nearer to the Silk Road. The growing influence of Bon religion was still there till the beginning of 14<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, famous scholar Duchhen Chhulthim Gyachen had stayed in Bon Gumba of Lubrak for 9 years and had contributed to spread the Bon religion in Sherib. His disciple Lobpon Gyalchen was the permanent Guru of Lubrak Bon Gumba. The Scholar Chhulthim Gyachen had come to Sherib in his invitation (Dhungel, 2002, 53).

There are less practice of keeping inscription in this region. But abundantly available the stone slabs engraved Mantras. Studying those religious scripts used in the mantras related to Bon or Buddhist religion inscribed and kept at Gumbas, Chhyortens and Manewall, one can estimate their time. In a literature related Bon religion found in Gunge region, Lomanthang, Dolpo and Chhairo near Tukuche of Lower Mustang also are mentioned as the southern border regions of Gunge (Dhungel 2022:44). 'Kaligandaki route' is regarded as a route that is in straight connection to Gungem (Shukrasagar Shrestha).

#### **2.6.3.4 Kagbeni a Settlement of Multi Tribes Assimilation**

The contribution of Kagbeni centre like the other ancient settlements situated along the Kaligandaki Corridor for the development of Silk Road is remarkable. If we study population diversity of the of Kagbeni region, this region clearly seems to be the melting pot of various people from different regions from north and south. The trade of this region was specially important. That is the reason, the rulers from the North also wanted to maintain their domination over this place. Likewise, other states including Jumla also wanted to bring this region under their domination. This region has been the mixing point of Bons, Buddhists, Hindu Khas Aarya and indigenous tribes since early age to this period.

#### **2.6.3.5 Kagbeni Region as a Hindu Pilgrimage**

The entire Mustang, either it be "Sherib" or "Lo", is a Buddhism majority region. However, the Lower Mustang or Sherib has since ancient time been the area where Hindu, Buddhist and Bon religions have received equal importance. The Hindus have been attracted to this region specially because of the religious importance of the Kaligandaki river and the Shaligrams. Likewise, those who go for pilgrimage to Damodar Kunda use the Kaligandaki Corridor as a main route which goes through Kagbeni. Such things have made this place important since early age. Likewise, the sacred place of both the Buddhists and Hindus, the Muktinath, lies right in this region. For Hindus, the relation of Kagbeni and Muktinath is indispensable. It has been proved that Muktinath has been the important pilgrimage destination for Hindus since 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dhungel). Due to all these reasons, Kagbeni has been developed as a cultural hub of the Kaligandaki Corridor.

#### **2.6.3.6 Buddhism in Kagbeni a Link from Tibet to Kathmandu**

While studying the religious history of this region, one must take into account the many references made about the Gumba of Kagbeni. The study of Mollas prove that the "Kagbeni Gumba" had relations with the Namgyal Gumba of Lomanthang. Mollas are the important sources of the historical studies not only of Mustang but also of Tibet. The Mollas which are recited in religious ceremonies have been available many in number. Among them, one of the Mollas recited in Namgyal Gumba has the same author's name which is seen in a manuscript found in Kagbeni

Gumba. David P. Jacson has mentioned that this document is from 18<sup>th</sup> century. (David P Jacson, 1984:28). Namgyal Gumba is one of the ancient Gumbas of Upper Mustang and it has direct relation with Shakya Math of Tibet.

Kagbeni Gumba is one of the major physical sources for providing information about the religious history of Kagbeni. The wall paintings and images found in this Gumba are of historical importance. Giuseppe Tucci has claimed that the wall paintings of this Gumba are from 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century. He has claimed that the images found in this Gumba are the crafts of Kathmandu. Tocchi has said that the image of Bajrashatwa might be the product of golden age of metal craft in Kathmandu (Tucci, 1952:54). The Kagbeni Gumba is the Gumba of Shakya tradition. The influence of Shakya sect was remarkable in Mustang since 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, all mentioned religious activities throughout the Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor making Kagbeni the center for a long period of history made the settlement a nodal town of Kaligandaki Silk Road corridor.



Figure 17: Kagbeni



Figure 18: Gumba near to Kagbeni



Figure 19: Kagbeni Monastery



Figure 20: Kagbeni Village

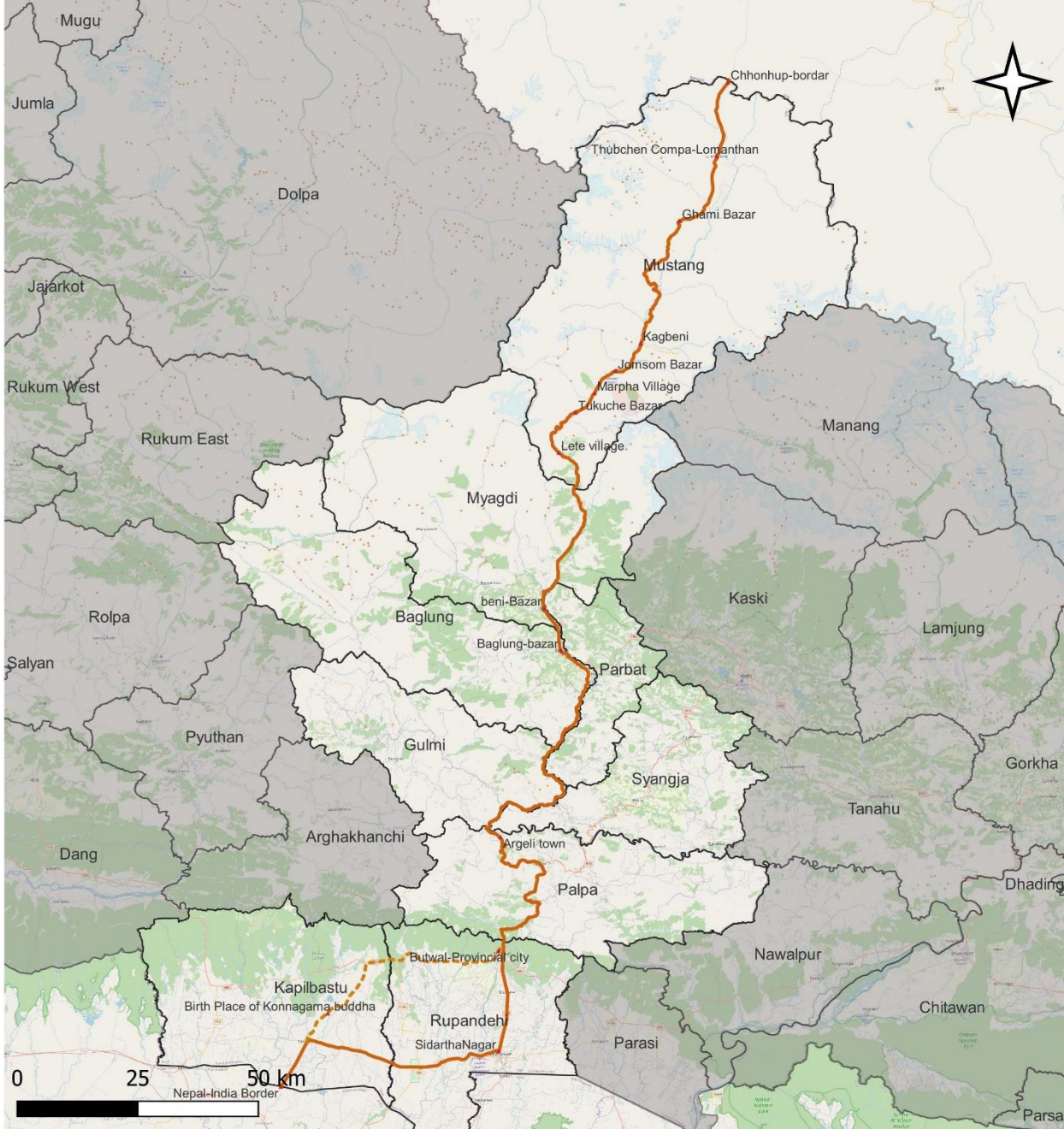


Figure 21: Lumbini Lomanthang Silk road corridor

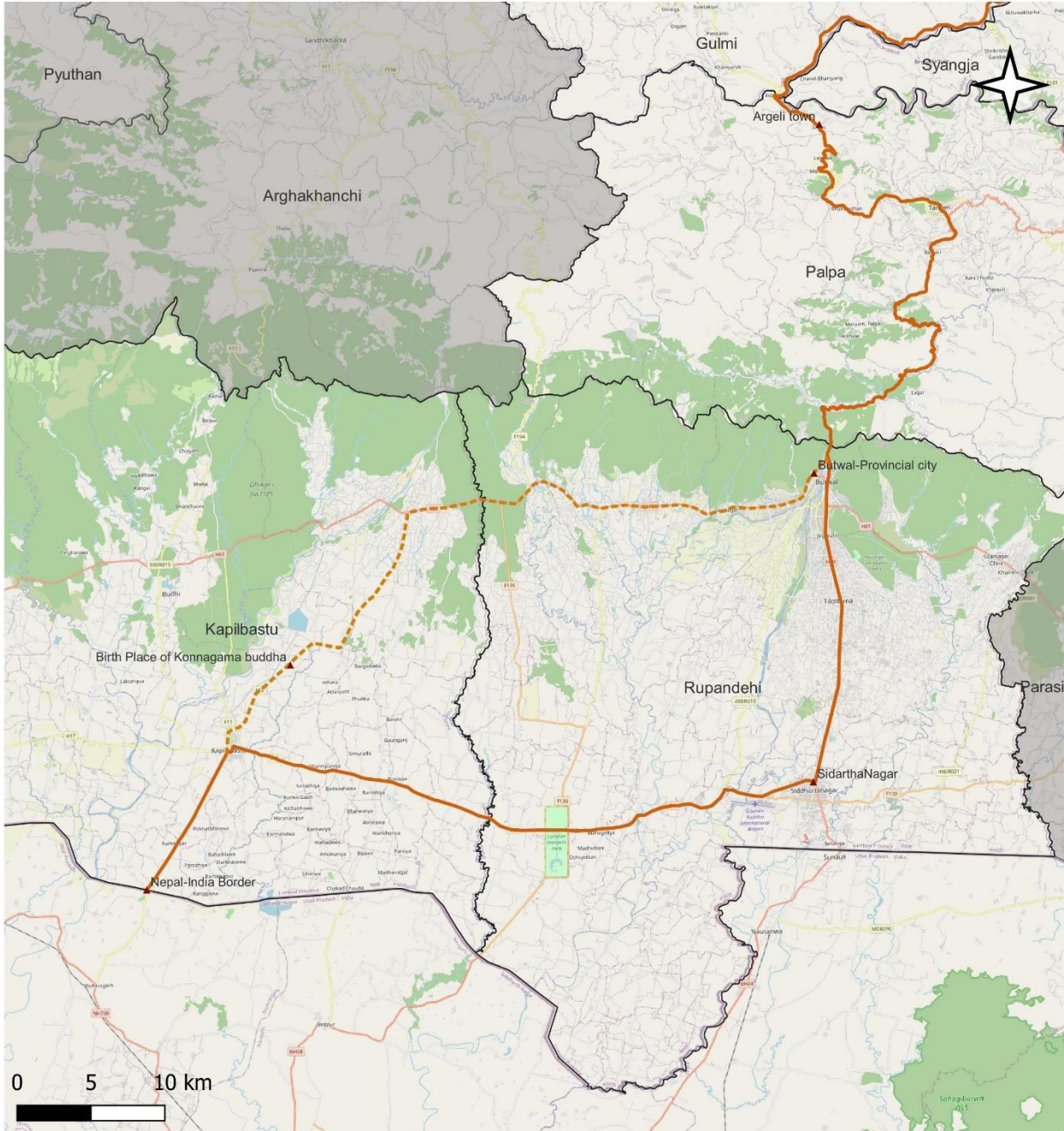


Figure 22: Lumbini Lomanthang corridor (Lumbini palpa section)



Figure 23: Probable silk road corridor India

### **Petroglyph of Kakningba**

Petroglyph is a kind of rock art made by incising, carving and abrading stones. Petroglyph is also called stone carving or stone engraving. Petroglyphs have been found in almost all places including Europe, Asia and Africa and they are mostly related to ancient man. These are symbols of birds, animals, human beings etc. carved on big or small rocks.

In Nepal, the petroglyph sites are mostly found in Mustang region. The petroglyphs are found in Kak Nigba ( Eklebhatti), Chhuksang ( near Riri cave) and Samar of Mustang. If one compare the petroglyph from Ladakh and entire Western Tibet and also further more to the petroglyph of Middle East with that of Mustang, several resemblance can be found on it. However, as L. Bruneau and J.V. Bellezza (2013:13) suggests, it is difficult to identify the exact origin of Western Tibetan Plateau motifs of petroglyph.

Regarding the ancient creator of Mustang Petroglyph, here, we can remember opine of late senior archaeologist Tarananda Mishra that the ancient people in mustang may have come from Kashmir

region. These petroglyphs also prove the fact that, among the people who came in this region to live, some were near to Mid- Asia culture and some were near to Indus civilization.

Apart from prehistoric importance, in regard of the historical events, there are high possibilities that the petroglyphs specially found in Mustang region can be studied from the Silk Road perspective. The petroglyphs found here can be instrumental to study the Kaligandaki Silk Road corridor. Specially the similarity of the petroglyphs found here with ones found in Mid-Asia and Indus Valley can be the solid evidence for Silk Road Nomination through comparative study.

## **Conclusion**

The present study of Lumbini – Lo Manthang corridor, so far it was already assumed as one of the Silk Road corridors of Nepal, is focused on probable nodes or nodal towns developed in historical periods along the corridors. Since the study has limited from southern end of the corridors to Lower Mustang, more precisely, up to the territory of Kagbeni of Kaligandaki valley, at least 6 historical places are identified as nodal towns and studied in detailed to show its connection to the Silk Road. Even the Muktinath, a pilgrimage site of Hindu and Buddhist has not been covered within this study. There are hundreds of ancient cave settlements in Muktinath valley and only few of them have been explored. Some of the cave settlements are identified as very ancient one. A thorough research seems necessary for the segregation of the particular evidences that would be related to Silk Road. Muktinath temple itself has very old history. The Jwalamai temple in the territory of Muktinath seems older than Muktinath. Since both of the places are visited and worshiped by both Hindu and Buddhist, if the route cause is identified through research, it must be very significant in Silk Road point of view.

Upper Mustang has its wider territory. There are several historical places of historical and cultural importance in this wider territory. Lo Manthang, the capital of Mustang lies in the same upper part of Mustang and Lo Manthang itself have very long history of direct connection to different places of western and Northern Tibet which has connection to Silk Road. Logyakar Gumba, believed to be established by Guru Padmasambhav himself, Nmgyal Gumba, Niphung Gumba and all three Gumbas inside the fortification of Lo Manthang could be very significant for Silk Road point of



view. A very detailed study is necessary to explore its probable connection to Silk Road. Dozens of cave settlements have been explored also in Upper Mustang and hundreds are yet to be explored and excavated. History of Upper Mustang has gone up to 11<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Some cave excavations have significant findings. Some of those findings are important evidence to establish various places of Upper Mustang as significant nodal towns of Lumbini – Lo Manthang Silk Road Corridors.

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