

Dangers faced by Fa-hein on his journey to India in 5th century AD.

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Abstract :

This article discusses the dangers that Fa-hein, a Chinese Buddhist monk and traveller, faced during his pilgrimage to India in the 5th Century AD. Fa-hein's personality traits played a significant role in his successful pilgrimage, but he had to undertake a long and arduous journey on foot. He had to grade extreme weather conditions, cross treacherous terrain, face the danger of bandits and robbers. The most significant dangers that Fa-hein, were the risks of starvation, dehydration, illness, and disease. The article focuses on the provinces where Fa-hein faced danger, including Chang-yih, the Gobi Desert, Kara-shahr to Khotan, the Belortagh range, and the Indus banks. Fa-hien account of his journey provides insights into the dangers and difficulties faced by travellers during that time and highlight the courage and determination of the monk.

Key Words: Monk, Traveller, Pilgrimage, Arduous, Starvation, Dehydration, Determination.

Introduction:

According to the translation by Giles and Legge, Fa-hein (also known as Faxian) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and traveler who lived during the 5th century CE. He is renowned for his pilgrimage to India in search of Buddhist scriptures and his subsequent documentation of his journey in his travelogue titled "Record of Buddhist Kingdoms". He made an agreement with *Hwuy-ying*, *Tao-ching*, *Hwuy-king*, *Hwuy-wei* and few others to go to India, the land of origin of Buddhism and collect these ancient books of rules and regulations and bring them back to China for the betterment of Buddhism. This journey supposedly started in the second year of the period of *Hung-shih*, the *chi-hai* year of the cycle i.e AD 399 and ended in AD 414.

Personality of Fa-Hein.

Fa-hein's personality traits played a significant role in his successful pilgrimage to India and his enduring legacy as a renowned Buddhist monk and traveler.

Writings of Fa-hein show his curiosity for new discoveries. As he described the customs and traditions of the nations he travelled to, his writings also demonstrate his curiosity about and interest in other cultures and religions. He made extensive preparations for his journey, including gathering funds, seeking guidance from fellow monks, and studying the language

and customs of the countries he planned to visit. He also kept detailed records of his journey and observations. Thus displaying the persona of meticulousness and conscientiousness.

Dangers faced by Fa-hein.

Fa-hein had to undertake a long and arduous journey on foot, covering a distance of more than 10,000 miles. He traveled through treacherous terrain, crossed rivers and mountains, and had to brave extreme weather conditions. He also had to face the danger of bandits and robbers. One of the most significant dangers faced by Fa-hein was the risk of starvation and dehydration. Another danger that Fa-hein faced was the risk of illness and disease. During his journey, he was exposed to various diseases, and he had to rely on his own knowledge of medicine and herbal remedies to treat himself and his fellow travelers. Another disadvantage he faced was the language barrier, this made it difficult for him to deal with locals.

Besides that he especially mentions a few places where he faced danger for his and fellow travellers life, and mentions provinces where he lost few companions. To focus on the topic in the discussion which is **The dangers faced by Fa-Hein in his journey** I will be talking about the provinces which are related to the topic thus I would highly recommend to the readers to go through both translations to get the picture clear about all the provinces mentioned by *Fa Hein* in his spiritual journey.

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Chang-yih (in Kan-chow department in Kan-suh)

First incident of immediate danger faced by *Fa-Hein* and his companion was in the province of *Chang-yih*. *Chang-yih* was a market town which could be reached after crossing the ranges of *Yang-lou* was in a condition political unrest therefore king of the province was not feeling comfortable letting these monks pass by without any protection thus he declared himself as there *Danapati* (religious protector) and didn't leave their company.

Gobi Desert

Le-Hao, the governor of the province called *Tun-hwang* gave *Fa-hein* and his companions necessary equipment and food for their dangerous journey to the Gobi Desert. H.A Giles' translation of the desert goes like "In this desert there are a great many evil spirits and hot winds, those who encounter them perish to a man. There are neither birds above nor beasts below. Gazing on all sides as far as the eye can reach to mark the track, no guidance is to be obtained save from the rotting bones of dead man, which point the way". It took them around seventeen days to cross the desert and the graphic representations are giving a clear picture

of the conditions faced by the group of monks in those days, thus any specific mention of any particular danger is not mentioned in either translation.

Kara-shahr to Khotan

In *Kara-shahr*, *Fa hien* and all his companions experienced hostility from the priests of the province and did not cultivate politeness. Thus, they left the place to move towards *Khotan* and along the route they didn't encounter a single place of habitation and also had to face the great difficulties in crossing the rivers to reach *Khotan*.

Belortagh range

Fa-hein and his companions to reach the Northern part of India had to cross the snowy mountains of *Belortagh*, which according to the translations is full of venomous dragons able to spit winds, stones, fire, rain, snow and sand when provoked. These mountains are totally covered with white snow and the climate is alike in both seasons i.e winter and summer. *Fa-hein* also mentions that one in ten thousand people can actually cross the range safely and reach the other side; he also mentions the habitants on this region which he called "The men of Snow Mountains".

After crossing these dangerous mountains and crossing several rivers they finally reach the northern part of India, in the town called *Darel*.

Indus banks

After leaving the town of *Darel* the group of monks reached the bank of the river Indus after crossing a range of difficult tracks. "On nearing the edge, the eye becomes confused; and wishing to advance, the foot finds no resting-place." Giles in his translation. After reaching the edge of these mountains they ascended downwards with the help of a set of stairs which was excavated before the period of *Fa Hein*, thus using them they reached the banks of Indus and crossed the river with the help of suspension bridges made of ropes.

After crossing the river, they reached the town called *Udayana*.

Nagahara

Hwuy-ying, *Tao-ching*, and *Hui-ta*, from the town of *Udayana* left the company of *Fa-hein*, *Pao-yun*, and *Seng-ching* to travel towards "Buddha's Shadow" (as mentioned by Giles and Legge both) in the province of *Nagahara* to see the shadow, tooth and skull bone of Buddha. While *Fa-hein*, *Pao-yun*, and *Seng-ching* remained at *Udayana* for their summer retreat. In the town of *Nagahara*, *Hwuy-king* fell ill therefore *Tai-ching* stayed with him to look after him in the same town while *Hwuy-tah* came to the town of *Peshawar*.

Hwuy-king died in the monastery at *Nagahara*, *Hwuy-tah* with *Pao-yun*, and *Seng-ching* decided to go back to China thus the journey left ahead of *Fa-hein* was to be undertaken alone.

Little Snow Mountain

On their way to Punjab, they had to cross the Little Snow Mountains or *Safed Koh*, *Kohat Pass*. According to the translation by both Giles and Legge these mountains were covered in snow during all seasons, they were coming from the north and they encountered a cold storm due to which *Hwuy-king* lost his life. After *Hwuy-king*'s death *Fa-hein* had to accept his fate and continue.

Note

According to the translation by both Giles and Legge *Fa-hein* crossed these mountains with two others, Legge mentions them as *Hwuy-king* and *Tao-ching* and both mentions that after the death of *Hwuy-king* (and *Hwuy-king* in Giles case) *Fa-hein* had to continue the journey alone from *Nagarahara*.

In the translation of Legge, *Hwuy-king* died twice, from the footnote 2 of Legge page 36, "King was at this time ill in *Nagarahara* and indeed afterwards dies in crossing the Little Snowy Mountains; but all the texts make him die twice. The confounding of the two names has been pointed out by Chinese critics." While in Giles's translation it was *Hwuy-ying*, a new character which he didn't talk about earlier who died on the Little Snowy Mountains.

In "A Study of James Legge's Translation of The Travels of Fa-Hien by Jie Hong", explains that it was Fa-Hien together with *Hwuy-king*, *Tao-ching*, *Hwuy-ying*, and *Hwuy-wei* who went to India to seek for the Disciplinary Rules. However, in the end, *Hwuy-wei* and *Tao-ching* stayed in *Kao-chang* and India respectively while both *Hwuy-king* and *Hwuy-ying* died on the way, so only *Fa-Hien* returned to the land of Han. (link in the reference)

Kapilavastu

Kapilavastu, was the birthplace of Buddha himself. It was also the capital of king *Suddhodana*, the supposed father of Buddha. *Fa-hein*'s description of the town is distressed, he mentions that there were no habitants except few monks, "neither king nor people" translates Legge. From Giles' translation, we receive a warning from *Fa-hein* while travelling through the roads of this town to be cautious of wild elephants and tigers.

Deccan

"The kingdom of *Dakshina* " as described by *Fa-hein* was a tract of uncultivated lands and a number of hillocks. He even describes the local population as a bit arrogant maybe because

of their lack of belief in Buddhism which is also mentioned by *Fa-hein*. He goes on to describe that villages were located far apart and the roads were not constructed properly. Vegetation was dense. He also mentions that the king of the kingdom used to receive gifts from the people to provide a safe journey through the roads though *Fa-hein* clearly mentions that he was unable to go to Deccan because it was out his way.

The most interesting thing which *Fa-hein* mentions about the people of Deccan was that everyone used to fly with their wings and there were people who were waiting for their wings to grow so they could fly.

Sea route

Sea route for *Fa-hein* started in the famous port town of *Tamlook*, where he embarked on his journey on a big merchant vessel over the sea to reach the kingdom of *Singhala* (Sri Lanka).

From Singhala to Java.

After staying in Sri Lanka for two years *Fa-hein* decided to leave and got on a big merchant vessel with hundreds of people. *Fa-hein*'s ship encountered many storms and strong winds for the first three days of their journey and on the fourth day their ship started to leak and water started filling the vessel. There was a small ship attached to a bigger vessel "as a provision against damage" was occupied by few men and they cut the rope fearing many people would try to come onboard.

People of the bigger ship started throwing heavy objects in the sea to make the vessel lighter and *Fa-hein* also threw few objects in the water though his most important possessions were the books which he collected on this long and dangerous journey. He mentions that he prayed to *Bodhisattvas* to protect his books from the situation. The leaking of the ship continued for thirteen days then they found an island where they repaired the vessel and continued.

He mentions pirates and the dangers encountering a group of one. He describes the dangers of the sea route in a very vivid and lively manner or I would say that Legge did an amazing job while translating this part of *Fa-hein*'s journey. "The great ocean spreads out, a boundless expanse. There is no knowing east or west; only by observing the sun, moon and stars was it possible to go forward. If the weather were dark and rainy, the ship went as she was carried by the wind, without any definite course. In the darkness of the night, only the great waves were to be seen, breaking on one another, and emitting a brightness like that of fire, with huge turtles and other monsters of the deep." translates Legge. After enduring a life-threatening journey for ninety days *Fa-hein* reached Java.

From Java to China

After staying in Java for around five months *Fa-hein* boarded a ship back home to complete the final phase of his journey. About two hundred people were onboard with provisions for fifty days.

First month of the journey was steady according to *Fa-hein's* records but after that their vessel encountered a large storm of black clouds with winds and heavy rain. *Fa-hein* describes the magnitude of the storm by explaining the destruction it caused. One day while facing all these troubles caused by storm all the Brahmins blamed *Fa-hein* for their miseries as he was a follower of Buddha and he should be left on some island so they can reach their destination in peace, but due to one patron of *Fa-hein* he was not subjected to such cruelty as he said "If you land the Bhikshu, you must at the same time land me, and if you do not, then you must kill me. If you land this *Sraman (Fa-hein)*, when I get to the land of Han (China), I will go to the king and inform you. The King also reveres and believes the Law of Buddha and honours the Bikshu." translated by Legge, thus this patron saved the life of *Fa-hein*.

After sailing for seventy days Sailors realised that they were on the wrong route, provisions were almost over. Fresh water was also very scarce for everyone. Thus, after travelling for twelve more days probably in the right direction, they reached land and after seeing similar faces and similar dialects *Fa-hein* realised that he had reached his *homeland*.

A review of the Sources.

Translation by HA Giles:

Herbert A. Giles, an English diplomat and sinologist, translated Faxian's "Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms" into English in the late 19th century. However, some scholars have criticized Giles' translation for its inaccuracies and for not fully capturing the nuances and complexities of the original Chinese text.

James Legge's translation:

James Legge's translation of *Fa-hein's* travelogue is one of the most popular and widely-read versions of this text. Legge's translation provides a detailed and accurate account of *Fa-hein's* journey, including the dangers and hardships that he faced along the way. Legge's translation captures the essence of *Fa-hein's* original text, and his annotations and footnotes provide valuable insights into the cultural and historical context of *Fa-hein's* journey. Legge's translation is also notable for its elegant prose and clear and concise writing style.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, *Fa-hein's* journey to India was a remarkable feat of determination, courage, and faith. Despite facing numerous dangers along the way, including natural disasters, hostile

environments, and human threats, and even death he persevered and successfully achieved his goal of studying Buddhism and bringing Buddhist texts back to China from India.

Fa-hien's accounts of his travels provide us with a valuable insight into the challenges faced by ancient travelers and the rich cultural and religious diversity of India (though he also mentioned supernatural beings in his writings, I have tried to add few in this article). His writings also remind us of the importance of preserving historical and cultural heritage, as they offer a glimpse into a bygone era and the lives of people who lived centuries ago.

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**Boros of Assam:
An insight into ‘Bathou’ Faith & belief system in the
light of the guiding principles.**

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Abstract :

Boros constitute the major indigenous community in Assam and are the aborigines of the Brahmaputra valley those have been mentioned as *Kirats* in the ancient literature of Bharat. The Socio-Cultural foundations of this community are integrated with an independent faith and belief system and emanates in all walks of life with reverence for ‘Bathou’ as the supreme God. Lord Shiva is worshiped as Bathou who too is considered as a *Kirat* while the Proximity to Mount Kailash as the abode of Lord Shiva from this place can lead to assume this fact that the reverence to Lord Shiva in the form of ‘Bathou’ by Boros might have been due to in being the primal descendancy at a certain point of time. The Boro way of life attributes every principle of self discipline assigned to a specific deity. The spiritual elements in the ‘Bathou’ faith could also be considered as devout principles of Sanatan Hindu Dharma which can be realized within human consciousness. The study has drawn inferences upon the existing primary and secondary sources and the materials available.

Key words : Shiva, Bathou, Boro, Sanatan, Dharma

Introduction :

Bharat has a considerable no. of indigenous population in almost every state. The scheduled tribes of Bharat make between 8-9% of the total population. The colonial rule had initiated the term tribe in Bharat, by using the term in the context of the indigenous settlements the Britishers segregated the ethnic groups and thus connoting each group under a terminology. It seems the idea behind doing so was in the name of administrative convenience. Harry Verrier Holman Elwin was a British born Indian anthropologist and a Tribal activist, who began his career in India as a Christian Missionary. Elwin had been working for several years and his insistence on preserving tribal Identities and customs and he had been advising J L Nehru that this region that had many tribal communities should not be interfered with to preserve their pristine character. And due to this policy many parts of Bharat where Indigenous population have been dwelling were in segregation and for a total of almost fifty years the North-eastern part too had met the same fate. This policy was an impediment to the growth of this region into the national fold. Thus the word Tribe that came to be incorporated

in the constitution had played a major role in dividing the people and distancing the indigenous populations those had some affinity among themselves from each other and that got reflected in the policy of preservation and segregation. The Boros are a large indigenous group in this region and in this context an attempt is made to discuss the rudimentary aspect of the religion of the Boros also with some reference to the contemporary belief system.

Objectives of study:

- (1) Understanding the basic principles of the Bathou faith and acknowledging the same.
- (2) Identifying the significance of the Bathou faith and methods of worship of Boros.
- (3) Understanding the integration of the elements of nature being touched upon in conceptualizing the Bathou faith.

Methodology:

Mainly secondary sources were being consulted. Talking to the some people belonging to the community had been the source for understanding the processes and methods of worship.

Origin :

The Boros of Assam are recognized as a scheduled tribe (under plain category). They constitute the largest indigenous group among the various ethnic populations of the present-day state of Assam. The Boros (Kacharis) may be described as the aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. There was a time when the entire western valley of the Brahmaputra, Chinese areas in the east that covered Hwangho and Yang-tse kiang rivers of North western part and the Patkai region on the southern Tibet was dominated by the Indo-Mongoloid people, as according to the modern terminology and were called as *kirats*. According to the available sources in various ancient Scriptures and Historical discourses, Books on History etc. The Himalayas have been the abode of most of the hilly population of Bharat and those are the ancient inhabitants in the present society. In ancient times, the north-eastern region, especially Assam and its neighbouring regions, was known as the land of Kiratas, i.e. the habitat of the Indo Mongoloid people.

The Himalayan *kiratas* are the Boros, also known as *Kirats*, as mentioned in various Hindu scriptures and Purans, more particularly in Mahabharat. They are considered to be a group of ancient indigenous people living in the eastern Himalayas and the North-eastern regions of India. The Puran that mention the Kiratas include: Shiva Puran, *Markandeya* Puran, *vayu* puran. Boros were known as *kiratas* and had been ruling Assam before the entry of Ahoms. In the War of the Mahabharat many Mongolian Boro kings had been ruling in different parts of the HwangHo valley and Yang- tse - kiang rivers in the Northwestern part of China.

The genealogy of king *Baan* as the famous Boro king was contemporary to lord Krishn. It is mentioned in *Suta samhita* that King Ban was a great devotee of Lord Shiv.

Bathou the supreme God :

The religious faith 'Bathou' is the prime faith on which the entire socio economic and cultural life of the Boros is based upon and they worship Bathou as the Supreme God. According to the Boros before the creation of the Universe there existed a vacuum and *Oblongwari* an eternal God who was formless had desired to take the form of flesh and blood thus he came in the shape of a lively human being and was called *Jiu Bwrai*. He is believed to be the first human with a soul. It is believed that he had uttered these five spiritual words *Awng* (Earth), *Hring* (water), *Khling* (air), *fwt* (fire) and *che* (sky). It is therefore believed that the first five elements were created then and by Him. Panchtatva i.e the five elements have also been the basis of all the philosophies of Hindu Sanatan Dharma. The term Bathou consists of two meaningful words i.e. 'Ba' means 'five' or '*pancha*' and '*thou*' (or *gwthou*) stands for principle or philosophy (*tatva*). The term 'Ba' incorporates in itself five elements - '*Ha*' (earth), '*Dwi*' (water), '*Bar*' (air), '*Or/San*' (Fire / Sun / Light) and '*Okhrang*' (ether); without which there is no survival. So the term Bathou comprises five elements (pan-cha-tatva) those are; not easy to understand without spiritual realization. Panchtatva is also one of the basic principles of the Sanatan Bharatiya Hindu Dharma. In both the belief systems this spiritual conformity is the basis of the beginning of this cosmic universe accordingly.

Boros regard Bathou as the divine entity of Shiv or *Sibray*. Through Bathou Boros worship Shiv and Bathou is the main God of worship. The *Sijou* - plant a cactus (*Euphorbia splendens*) is worshiped with great reverence and is being kept in northeast direction of every household in its sacred altar. Boros believe that lord Shiv meditated under a big *sijou* plant on the mountain of the Himalay, thus it is worshiped as a symbol of lord Shiv. The plant to be placed for worship has to have five branches and is to be planted in the Eastern part of the courtyard. The place from which the plant is brought a ritual is being followed wherein a music is being played by the devotees and then very respectfully the plant is placed upon Altar. There are sixteen posts created equally split into two parts while in the creation of the sacred Altar. Each split post symbolizes male and female and specific deity that has a specific role. Each post represents a deity.

The foremost and most important God is the '*Ailing*' deity of lust and greed. By worshipping Him one can overcome the intense desires of lust and greed. It is believed that his disciples are protected from these evils. Another deity named '*Agrang*' blesses his disciples with peace and unity. '*khaji*' is a deity who provides guidance of truth and purity. '*Khwila*' is another deity, God of wind. '*Abla khungur*' is yet another God of wind. '*Raj khandra*' is the deity of truth. '*Raj phutur*' is the God of love and teaches its disciples that love begets love. '*Ali Bwrali*' is the God of cultivation and cares for the crops. '*Sanja Bwrali*' is the God

who teaches not to kill animals and birds and to be merciful. '*Sari jwmwn*' is the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom. '*Awi Mwnasu*' is another Goddess for cultivation and natural seedlings. '*Basu Mainao*' is the Goddess of earth and wealth. '*Bwrai sikh Raja*' is the deity of wild animals and teaches his disciples humility and compassion. '*Bwrai Bag Raja*' is the deity who teaches self restraint.

'*Bwrai Shoudri*' is a deity that teaches disciples to pray to Bathou during any eventuality in life. '*Basumati*' is the deity of death who carries the soul after death.

In other words Bathou is a civilization in itself that enhances all the human traits thus enabling in alleviating and also resolving the conflicts of survival. Most of the agrarian societies be it Sumerian, Mesopotamia etc. in any of polytheistic or monotheistic nature it is seen that the Socio Cultural set up in these societies had been based upon a belief system incorporating deities, Gods and Goddesses in order to develop and create a systematic functioning of the society. Similarly, Boros as an ancient society are still playing an important role of conservationists and in preserving nature as their forebears in the form of rituals, practices, customs etc. Lord Shiva being the core of the Sanatan Hindu Dharma with the philosophy almost similar that emanates from the reverence of Bathou with those principles thereof. In addition to this the Boros worship many deities and during Durga Puja and other Hindu festivals Boros offer oblation to the respective deities as well.

The principle on which Boro society is organized does encompass all the aspects upon which a perfect society must stand and evolve upon. It can be said that these foundational spiritual principle guide the Bathou religion and furnish all the philosophical requirements for a perfect Civilization of value system to flourish and grow. Surrounding the Bathou philosophy exists a system for regulating the functioning of the moral as well as economic and Socio Cultural life and principles are the guidelines to lead the society that stands quite similar to the Sanatan way of classifying deities of their attributes respectively.

Kamrupa (Assam) was being ruled by *Kirats* and the religion that was followed was '*Kiratajohmotoh*' that in other words means *Kirata* -religion. In conformity with the belief that Lord Shiva was a *Kirat* and Goddess Parvati was a *Kirati*, It can be inferred as the abode of Lord Shiva had been Kailash and this Mountain in China had a great a great affinity with the inhabitants of this very large area.

It is accepted that Lord Shiva and Goddess Maa Parvati are also the originators of the music and dance. The ragas were introduced by Lord Shiva and Ma Parvati had taught the dance to the Princess Usha the daughter of king Baan of *Thoiphur* (Tezpur). Later Usha had taken this art form to Dwarika from where the entire women had learnt the dance in various forms. The structure on which the entire Socio-Cultural and religious set up of Sanatan Hindu civilization

stands upon consists of the spiritual elements similar could be traced back to the progenitors of the people of this region.

Conclusion :

Boros being one of the most ancient societies of the world, the fundamental principles of the Bathou faith do possess the sources of civilization intangibly incorporated in the practices of worship and it is purely spiritual in character. The entire Socio-Cultural regulatory mechanism for an ideal society to evolve upon rests on the fundamental principles of Bathou. Boros and their idiosyncrasies are quite relevant to most of the indigenous societies of Bharat in relevance to the faith and practices of worship in commonality of being Spiritual and incorporating the elements of nature as well.

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