

BUDDHISM IN ANDHRADESA

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Abstract:

Religion is one of the earliest social institution created by mankind. Buddhism was a popular living faith in 6th. C. B.C. The role played by royalty, laity, artisanal and mercantile sections. Patronizing the Buddhist Sangha along with monasteries, and its role facilitating a new social order and state formation. Buddhism has answered the several changes that occurred.

During his life time itself Buddha established Buddhist *Sangha* in which membership was made open to all persons, male or female above 15 years of age without caste restrictions. The *Sangha* or the Church played a significant role in preserving and propagating the doctrines of Buddha. In due course of time Buddhist *Sangha* set up many monasteries in different regions which grew up not merely as organisations for training missionaries but also great centres of culture and teachers, students and scholars flocked from far and near. Royal patronage under Asoka, Kanishka and Harsha also helped the cause of Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhisim, Buddhist Sanga, Andhradesa, Buddhist chaityas, Socio-religious

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Introduction:

The sixth century B.C. may be regarded as an important land mark in the history of India. It was an age when people in India were disgusted with old philosophical dogmas and were striving for simple methods of worship and easier means of escape from the ills of this mundane existence. It was also an era of protest and revolt against old order and the standardization of social patterns, the ritualistic form of religion, the absolute power of the priest-craft and dead weight of a dead culture.¹ In a way, the old sacrificial religion of the Vedas had lost its appeal and the Vedic gods had long ceased to satisfy the spiritual needs of the people and did not suit the day's dynamics of social and economic transformation. It created a ferment of new ideas and philosophic principles leading to the rise of 61 different schools of religious speculations in the 6th century B.C.² and the lion share was that of Jainism and Buddhism which have greatly influenced the society and culture of India. Significantly, the leaders of these movements Mahavira and Buddha hailed from the Kshatriya community and that too they belonged to the republican areas. They rejected the authority of the Vedas, the need for sacrifices and the superiority of Brahmins. But accepted the doctrines of *Karma* or past actions, soul and rebirth. They emphasise the need of doing good deeds in this life to save oneself from rebirth and stress the importance of the moral character of persons. For proper understanding of the present topic it would be useful to have glance on the brief history of Buddhism.

In a way both Jainism and Buddhism take their stand on certain aspects of the pre-existing system. Both are organized as ascetic orders and brotherhoods. Asceticism in fact, has its origin in the Vedic thought and has been directly encouraged by the Upanishads. The *Aranyakas* are the products of hermitages of the forests while the Upanishads recommended retirement to forests as essential to those who seek the highest knowledge. Pertaining to Buddhism, the fundamental teaching of Buddha were represented by ‘‘Four Noble Truths’’ (*Arya Satyas*) concerning suffering (*Dukkha*), the cause of suffering (*Dukkha samuddaya*), the destruction suffering (*Dukkha nirodha*) and the way that leads to the destruction of sorrow (*Dukkha niridhagamini-pratipada*). Buddha held that death was no escape from desire as it leads to rebirth and further suffering. The ultimate aim of life is to attain *Nirvana*, which means freedom from birth and rebirth and one could achieve final salvation (*Nirvana*) by following the right way of ‘‘Noble Eightfold-path’’ (*Astanga Marga*), that is to say, Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech,

Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Contemplation. In his last exhortation to his disciples just on the eve of his death, the Buddha said, "Decay is inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence (*apramada*)."³ Buddhism stood between the two extremes: unrestrained individualistic self-indulgence and equally individualistic but preposterous ascetic punishment of the body. Hence its steady rise, its name "The Middle Way".⁴ After enlightenment Buddha preached his message to the people for 45 years and passed away at Kusinagar at the age of 80. When the news of the Lord's passing away spread, all people among whom he had wandered and preached sent their representatives and claimed a share of the relics. Ajatasatru put in a claim, the proud Lichchavis, the Sakyas among whom the Lord was born and all others. The Mallas stoutly refused but yielded to the persuasions of a Brahmin and divided the relics into eight parts. The relics of Buddha over which *stupas* were built by Asoka and Kaniska are said to be from among those which were distributed in this manner.⁵

During his life time itself Buddha established Buddhist *Sangha* in which membership was made open to all persons, male or female above 15 years of age without caste restrictions. The *Sangha* or the Church played a significant role in preserving and propagating the doctrines of Buddha. In due course of time Buddhist *Sangha* set up many monasteries in different regions which grew up not merely as organisations for training missionaries but also great centres of culture and teachers, students and scholars flocked from far and near. Royal patronage under Asoka, Kanishka and Harsha also helped the cause of Buddhism.

After the death of Buddha the first Buddhist Council was held at Rajagriha in which the teachings Buddha were compiled into two parts called *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Dhamma Pitaka*. The second Buddhist council was held at Vaisali in which the Buddhist monks were divided themselves into two groups namely Sthaviras and *Mahasamghikas*. The third Buddhist council was held at Pataliputra during the rule of Asoka. The council made a new classification of the Buddhist canonical texts by the addition of a third *Pitaka* called *Abhidamma*. In the fourth Buddhist council held at Jullundhar during the reign of Kaniska, the Buddhism split into two main branches namely Hinayana and Mahayana.

In course of time somewhere in fourteenth century, Buddhism disappeared from the North India. Though it lingered on for a few years in some others places but without back-bone it was not able to stand and consequently the disappearance of Buddhism from the land of its birth was complete.⁶

Buddhism in Andhradeasa:

Though Buddhism originated in Gaya (Bihar), it was south India, particularly Andhradesa which nurtured it to the maximum. Ample evidence of this can be found in Buddhist inscriptions relating to 47 sites In Andhra Pradesh. Both from foreign and native literary accounts, it is learnt that Bhuddhism made its way into Andhradesa even during the life time of the Buddha. Yuan Chwang, a Chinese traveller recorded that Buddha visited a monastery in An-To-Lo (Andhra) at where he preached, displayed miracles and received into his religion a countless multitude.⁸ The Buddhist literature contains references to Asaka and Mulaka as Janapadas Andharatta and Andhranagari on the river *Telivaha*. The river *Telivaha* is identified with Krishna as it flows black and Andhranagari therefore may be identified Dhanyakataka on the banks of Krishna. Andhranagari or Dhanyakataka finds such a prominent place in Buddhist literature as it was already a centre of Buddhim.⁹ The Buddhist chronicles *Suttanipata*, *Vimanavattu*, *Kathavattu* indicate that Bhuddhism entered into Andhradesa even before the convention of the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra during reign of Asoka.¹⁰ *Suttanipata* states that the Kosalan brahmin Bavari settled with a few young disciples at the junction of the Mula and Godavari rivers in the territory of the Assakas. (which was a part of Andhradesa in those days) He sent sixteen of his disciples to meet Buddha at Rajgriha.¹¹ According to *Vimanavattu*, the king of Assaka was ordained by Mahakatyayana, one of the foremost disciples of Buddha.¹² The XIII Rock edict of Asoka clearly states that the Andhras were living with in Raja-Vishaya and were already following the *Dhamma*. The Third Buddhist council was convened by Asoka at Pataliputra. It seems that Asoka invited the different sects among the Andhra Buddhists-the *Chaityakas*, *Purvasailas*, *Aparasailas* and others.¹³ The above description makes it clear that Buddhism entered into Andhradesa while the Buddha was alive.

Buddhism prevailed in Andhradesa covering a vast area comprising Saripalle in the north to Nandalur in the south-west, Ghantasala and Kanuparti in the east, Kotilingala and Kondapur on

the north-west and Satanikota in the Kurnool district in the south ranging from Pre-Asokan times to the reign of Vishnukundins (5th to 6th century.). A welcoming feature of the Buddhism in Andhradesa was that both schools of Buddhism, namely, Hinayana and Mahayana, flourished in this land. Of the Buddhist sites in Andhradesa the Stupas at Bhattiprolu, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Goli in Guntur district Jaggayyapet and Ghatasala in Krishna district Chandavaram and Dupadu in Prakasam district deserve special mention for their celebrity in the history of Buddhist Art and Achitecure. Guntupalle in West Godavari district, Sankaram and Bavikonda in Visakhapatnam district, Kapavaram in East Godavari distrit, Salihundam and Kalingapatnam in Srikakulam district Dhulikatta in Karimnagar district, Kondapur in Medak district are some of the important Buddhist sites of worth mention in Andhra Pradesh. It is unfortunate that most of the above mentioned Buddhist sites are in dilapidated condition.

In the field of sculpture and architecture, Buddhism produced valuable pieces of art. It is believed that the image worship was introduced in India by Buddhists. The images of Buddha and *Bhodhisatvas* are found at different parts of the country. The sculptures of Nagarjunkonda, Amaravati, Saranath, Barhut and Sanchi are perennial source of inspiration to a student of Buddhist art. In the beginning as there were no contemporary portraits, and, in fact, the Buddha is represented for centuries after his passing away only by a tree, his footprints, or the Wheel of the Law in sculptures such as at Barhut.¹⁴ It was during the Kushans, started the tradition of carving the images of Buddha in stones and such images for first time were found in Gandhara. *Viharas* were constructed in large number to preserve such images.

Conclusion :

It is said that Asoka opened the *stupas* of Kusinagara, collected the dhatus of Buddha, originally deposited in them and distributed all over his empire. According to *Mahavamsa*, he built 84000 *stupas* over the relics. At least two *stupas* – those of Amaravati and Bhattiprolu are definitely known to have contained the genuine relics of Buddha. One of the earliest *stupas* in Andhra Pradesh is probably represented by the one at Bhattiprolu at where Alexander Rea excavated the *stupa* site and the vicinities in 1892 A.D. The *stupa* at Amaravati has invariably been mentioned in inscriptions as *maha-chaitya*. In the Thirteenth Rock-edict of Asoka, the Andhras are mentioned along with the Pulindas and other southern people. Amaravati itself has yielded a fragment of inscribed Asokan pillar made out of local quartzite. The valley of Nagarjunakonda

which is named after a *Mahayana* Buddhist monk marks a significant land mark in the history of Buddhist architecture and sculpture in India. More than thirty Buddhist establishments mainly *stupas*, *viharas*, *Chaitya-grihas* were noticed in the valley. The Buddhist remains at Chandavaram consists of a *maha-stupa*, *viharas* and an apsidal *chaitya-griha* and likewise a number of Buddhist sites are spread across the length and birth of Andhra Pradesh which demand our attention for a substantial study and research.

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