The outstanding contributions of Orissa towards the Buddhist culture is uncountable. In past Buddhism occupied a great position in religious history of Orissa. Lord Buddha is rightly said the light of Asia. The great Vaishnav poet Jayadev of Orissa of twelfth century A.D. described Buddha as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Buddhism had influenced the social, cultural and political life of Kalinga. The relation of Orissa with Buddhism is very ancient. The early Buddhist text Nikaya and Jatak mention the names of two merchants of Utkal: Tapassu and Bhallika who become the first devotees of Lord Buddha. They had also received the sacred hairs of Buddha and enshrined the "Kushadhatu" at Kalinga. In this way the Buddhism entered in Orissa. During that period "Akiria bad" was established in Orissa and the followers of this ideology were strongly protesting the Buddhism in Orissa. When Buddha defeated the religious faiths of Akariabzad, through Buddha became very popular in the soil of Orissa. After Kaling war emperor Ashok had extended his heartily support for the spread of Buddhism in Kalinga. Ashokan rock edicts at Dhauli and Jaugada have helped increase the Buddhist culture in Orissa very rapidly. During the time of great emperor Ashok, Buddhism became very popular in Orissa. Buddhism was divided into nineteen groups at the time of Ashok. Among them Jheravada, Mahasanghika, and Sarvastivada were vary popular among common people. During the time of Ashok, Buddhist monks of above groups had come to Kalinga and stayed there. Ashok built a monastery for the Theravadin monk Tissa, who was his younger brother living in Bhojakagiri near Delanga in Kalinga. Acharya Mahadeva a great scholar of Mahasanghika had visited Kalinga and established his association here. Bhikku Dhiti Kumar and his disciple Kalanka had spread the culture of sarvastivada in Kalinga. Acharya Posadha had played vital role for growth of sarvastivada Buddhist culture in
Kalinga. The section saravastivada of Buddhism became very popular during that period. Some Buddhist remains are still found in Bhubaneswar. According to well-known historian K.C. Panigrahi the Sivalinga of Bhaskareswar temple is originally an Ashokan Pillar but another famous scholar N.K. Sahu rejects the opinion of K.C. Panigrahi with strong argument.

After the decline of Maurya empire the downfall of Buddhism started in Kalinga. Kharavel in 1st century B.C. offered royal patronage for growth of Jainism in Kalinga. Buddhism was divided into two groups named Hinayan and Mahayan. From early 1st century A.D to seventh century A.D both Hinayana and Mahayan schools were prevalent in Orissa. Hiuen-T Sang, the Chinese traveler stated about the controversy of Hinayan and Mahayan in odro in his account. Mahayan which took its origin in 1st/2nd century A.D. in Kalinga by Acharya Nagarjuna and king Kaniska. Many eminent Buddhist Acharyas, teachers, scholars and saints visited Orissa during this period and they made Mahayan Buddhist culture popular in Orissa.

By sixth century A.D. a number of Buddhist centres and academies were developed. Among them Puspagiri, Suravagiri, and Parimalagiri were famous at national level. In the Birupa-Chitrotpala valley archaeological remains of great Buddhist monasteries are found at Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri and Udayagiri.

The great Buddhist Vihar Puspagiri which Hiuen-T Sang mentioned in his account has not yet been identified properly. Lalitagiri the oldest of the three monasteries was known as Chandraditya vihar. Ratanagiri and Udayagiri monasteries were known as Ratnagiri Mahavihar and Madhavapur Mahavihar respectively. It is known from the Buddhist text "GandBruha" that there was a Buddha Vihar at Tosali in Suravagiri in third century A.D. now known as Dhauligiri. There, Acharya Sarvagami was the renowned monk who popularized Buddhist culture in Orissa. Another important Buddhist centre was Parimalagiri, identified as the present Gandhamardana hills of Balangiri district. Famous Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna was the Acharya of this holy centre. Aryadev, the disciple of Nagarjuna was the citizen of Singhpur, the capital of Kalinga. He became the principal of Parimalgiri vihar after the death of his teacher. Buddhism started to decline in the last part of third century A.D in Orissa. In Gupta period Brahmanical culture enjoyed royal patronage. Buddhism did not able to contest with them. Dr N.K. Sahu states that Muchalindha Buddha vihar in Ganiapalli of western Orissa was another Buddhist centre in third century A.D.

In fourth century A.D Acharya Dignaga was the teacher of Bhorasaila Buddha vihar of Delanga in Puri district. He was a famous logician and author of "Pramana Samuchaya". According to N.K. Sahoo 'Delanga' derived from the name of 'Acharya Dignaga'. Acharya Dignaga was the contemporary of Mahakabi Kalidas. There was a great difference in between them. But their contribution to the Indian culture is remarkable. Vadar Palita the secretary of Kalinga king was the disciple of Dignaga and by the order of his teacher he had constructed sixteen Buddhist Vihar in Kalinga. By early seventeenth century according to Hiuen-T-sang's account, Buddhism was predominate in the Odra country. According to him there were one hundred Buddhist monasteries and ten thousand Mahayan monks.

Bhaumakar rulers have given royal patronage to Tantrik Buddhism. Sivakaradeva-I of this dynasty sent a Buddhist Manuscript named 'Gandavyuha' to the Chinese emperor To-tsong by the hand of Prangha, a well known Buddhist
Acharya who had learned about meditation at Ratnagiri Mahavihar. The Tibetan historian Taranatha and Tibetan text mentions a place called Oddiyaan (Orissa) as a great centre of Mahayan Buddhism and also the birth place of Tantrik Buddhism. Bodhis, a tantrik monk practiced Yoga at Ratnagiri. According to Taranatha, Rahulatana tantrik monk belonged to Orissa became the Chancellor of Nalanda University early in the 9th century A.D. Tantrika Buddhism gradually trifurcated to Bajrayana, Kalachakrayana, and Sahajayana. Indrabhuti, the king of Sambal (Sambalpur) is said to be the founder of Bajrayana. His foster son and disciple Padmasambhava carried this culture to Tibet. Acharya Pitopado of Ratnagiri is said to have introduced the culture of Kalachakrayana.

Another renowned Saddhika Laxminkara the sister of king Indrabhuti is known as the founder of Sahajayana. Majorities of Siddhas among eighty-four saints in Buddhism were from Orissa. Some of the well known siddhas of these schools were born in Orissa. They are Naropa, Sarahapada, Sabaripada, Luipada, Kambalapada, Anangavatra, Birupada, and Kannhupada.

No doubt Orissa had valuable contribution towards Buddhist culture. Buddhist past of Orissa was colourful and glorious. The contribution in the field of art and architecture of Buddhism is far-reaching. Buddhism also provided valuable contribution for the growth of Oriya language. Many scholars opined that doctrine of Sunyata of Vaishnavism, Nathaism, and Mahima culture of Orissa had come from tantrik Buddhism. It is proved Gorekanatha the Siddha of Nathaism was at first a Buddhist Siddharth. Basic principles of Mahima dharma has come from Buddhism that Biswanath baba a prominent siddha of Mahima culture has admitted. Temple city Bhubaneswar is an ancient Buddhist centre. Bhubaneswar was the another name of Lord Buddha. An Ashokan pillar which was collected from Ashok Jhara, is now in the State museum. The name of the place of Bhubaneswar like Mancheswar, Bubheswar colony, Pandara and nearby Chandaka has similarity with Buddhist God and Goddess. A great controversy for the birth place of Buddha continues till now. Some scholars are saying the village Kapilaswar near Lingaraj temple is the birth place of Lord Buddha. Tri-ratna of Buddhism-Buddha as Dharma and Sangha are compared, Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Scholars like Professor Wilson, James- Fergusson, and general Cunningham have referred to the Buddhist origin of Jagannath. Some scholars believe annual bathing ceremony (snana yatra) and the car festival (Rathayatra) are Buddhist practice. The term Jagannath was applied to Adi Buddha by Raja Indrabhuti of Sambal in his work "Gyanasiddhi". The people of Orissa show there devotional high respect to Lord Buddha and Buddhist culture.

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