Contributions of Odisha Towards Buddhist Culture

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Contributions of Odisha towards the Buddhist culture is beyond measurable. In past, Buddhism occupied a prominent place in religious history of Odisha. 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 texts Nikaya and Jatak mention the names of two merchants of Utkal; Tapassu and Bhallika who were the first devotees of Lord Buddha. They had also received the sacred hairs of Buddha and enshrined the “Kusha dhatu” 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, Buddhism became very popular in the Soil of Orissa. According to Buddhist “Mahaparinirvana sutra”, Kalinga was one of the kingdoms to obtain the tooth-relic of Buddha after his Creamation at Kusinara. Bhikshu Khemathera had brought the sacred tooth relic of Buddha to Kalinga. This tooth relic was enshrined and worshipped at Dantapure, the then capital of Kalinga. The text ‘Dathvamsa’ of Ceylon states that Danta Kumar, the Prince of Ujjain had married Hemamala, the daughter of Guha Siva, the King of Kalinga who ruled in the third century A.D. Princess Hemamala carried the tooth relic in her well laid hair-to Ceylon accompanied by prince Danta Kumar.

The Historic Kalinga war of 261 B.C which was fought on the bank of the river Daya near Bhubaneswar is one of the memorable events in Buddhism. After Kalinga war, emperor Ashok had provided his heartily support for the spread of Buddhism in Kalinga. Ashokan rock edicts at Dhauli and Jaugada stand testimony to it. During the time of great emperor Ashok, Buddhism became very popular in Orissa. To spread Buddhism nineteen groups were formed during the reign Ashok, the great. Among them Jheravada, Mahasanghika, and Sarvastivada were very popular. During the time of Ashok Buddhist monks of above groups had come to Kalinga and stayed here. 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: Bhikshu Dhitik Kumar and his disciple Kalanka had spread the culture of savastivada 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 gave 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 Hinayan and Mahayan schools were prevalent in Orissa. Huien-Tsang, the Chinese traveller stated about the controversy of Hinayan and Mahayan in his account. Mahayan 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 are famous world wide. In the Birupa-Chitrotpala valley archaeological remains of great Buddhist monasteries are found at Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri and Udayagiri.

The great Buddhist Vihar Puspagiri which Huien–Tsang mentioned in his account has not yet been identified properly. Lalitagiri the oldest of the three monasteries was known as Chandraditya Vihar. Ratnagiri and Udayagiri monasteries were know as Ratnagiri Mahavihar and Madhavapur Mahavihar respectively. It is known from the Buddhist text “Ganda Bruha” 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 poularised Buddhist culture in Orissa. Another important Buddhist centre was Parimalagiri, identified as the present Gandhamardana hills of Bolangir district. Famous Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna was the Acharya of this holy centre. Aryadev, the disciple of Nagarjuna was the citizen of Singhupur, the capital of Kalinga. He became the principal of Parimalagiri 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, Brahmnnical culture enjoyed royal patronage. 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, the word ‘Delanga’ is 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 contributions to the Indian culture is remarkable. Vadra 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 Huien-Tsang’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-tsang 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 Oddiyan (Orissa) as a great centre of Mahayan Buddhism and also the birth place of Tantrik Buddhism. Bodhisi, a tantrik monk practised Yoga at Ratnagiri. According to Taranatha, Rahulatantra tantrik monk, belonged to Orissa. He 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 belong to Orissa. Some of the well known Siddhas of these schools were born in Orissa. They are Naropa, Sarahapada, Sabaripada, Luipadakambalapada, 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 to the growth of Odia language. Many scholars state that doctrine of Sunyata, of Vaishnavism, Nathaism, and Mahima culture of Orissa had come from tantrik Buddhism. It is proved, Gorekhanatha, the Siddha of Nathaism was at first a Buddhist Siddharth. Basic principles of Mahima dharma has came 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, now preserved in State Museum. The name of the places in Bhubaneswar like Mancheswar, Buddheshwari colony, Pandara and nearby Chandaka have similarity with Buddhist god and goddess. A great controversy till now continuing for the birthplace of Buddha. Some scholars are saying that the village Kapileswar near Lingaraj temple is the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Tri-ratna of Buddhism-Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are compared with 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 (Ratha yatra) are of Buddhist practice. The term Jagannath was applied to Adi Buddha by Raja Indrabhuti of Sambal in his work “gyanasiddhi”. The influence of Buddhism are found in the social, cultural, and religious life of Odias. The people of Orissa pay their devotional high respect to Lord Buddha and Buddhist culture.

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