



Buddhist Remains in Western Orissa

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I

Orissa, the sacred land of Jagannath has the distinction of being the cradle land of all the major religions of India from a very early time of its history and culture. Among the geo-political units of ancient Orissa, Dakshina Kosala occupied a prominent place. During the early historic period, the territory of Dakshina Kosala, roughly comprising the upper Mahanadi valley i.e, western parts of Orissa, namely the erstwhile undivided districts of Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir and Kalahandi and the neighbouring areas of Chhatisgarh namely Raipur, Bilaspur and its adjoining region played a vital role in shaping the history and culture of Orissa and Central India, which is evident from its vast archaeological remains. The land has always provided a hospitable climate for the peaceful co-existence of various religions and sects. One can see with satisfaction the growth and popularity of Saivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism, Tantricism, Buddhism and Jainism in this area in one time or another which could be possible only because of the high eclectic attitude of the various ruling dynasties of Dakshina Kosala in ancient and medieval period.

II

Buddhism, the religion propounded by Buddha, is a significant aspect in the history and culture of Dakshina Kosala. There is no dearth of literary and archeological data, corroborating

the popularity of Buddha who seems to have acquainted the people with his teachings. The Buddhist text *Asokavadana* further informs that the youngest brother of Asoka, named Tishya, who happened to be a *Buddha Bhikshu*, went from Kalinga to the neighbouring region of Dakshina Kosala and popularized Buddhism there. The text categorically refers to the flourishing of Buddhism in Dakshina Kosala by stating that it had as many as 10,000 *Stupas*, 5,000 *Sangharama*, and innumerable *Buddha viharas*. About c 7th century AD, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang said to have visited the country of South Kosala and spoken highly of the popularity of Buddhism in this region. Hieun-Tsang has recorded that the king of South Kosala, who was of Kshetriya race, generally honoured the Law of Buddha. There were about 100 *Sangharamas* and somewhat less than 10,000 priests, who all alike studied the teachings of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana). He further informed that Nagarjuna, the celebrated Mahayana philosopher lived in a cave monastery of South Kosala, at a place called po-lo-mo-lo-ki-li, which is identified by scholars as Parimalgiri in Gandhamandhana hill, on the border of Bargarh and Balangir districts of Orissa, and also spoke of a Buddhist *Stupa* of the time of Asoka near this place. This statement reveals the fact that Buddhism had its stronghold in Dakshina Kosala during 7th century AD. Late Professor N.K.

Sahu, in his magnum opus work '*Buddhism in Orissa*' on the basis of few Tibetan texts, have tried to identify Uddiyana, one of the greatest centers of Tantricism with Orissa. The scholar has tried to identify the famous Tantric places like Sambhala and Lanka as modern Sambalpur and Sonepur in western Orissa and holds the view that king Indrabhuti who was ruling at Sambhala in Uddiyana and his sister Laksmikara, who married the son of king Jalendra of Lankapuri were famous luminaries of Tantric Buddhism. It is told that in 8th century AD, one Buddhist *Acharya* Pitopada, who happened to be Guru of *Sambala Raja* Indrabhuti and originally from Ratnagiri *Vihara*, came to Sonepur area and introduced '*Kalachakrayana*' in the area. After the death of his Guru, Indrabhuti introduced the so-called Vajrayana cult and popularized it in the area. Prof. Sahu informs us that during 700 to 1100 AD, a number of Buddhist saints (84 *Siddhas*) lived and worked for development of Buddhism in the area. Prof. Sahu also believes that Indrabhuti was instrumental in organizing the Mahayana Buddhism into what is called Vajrayana while his sister is believed to be connected with initial development of Sahajayana. Be that as it may, these literary evidences amply provide an idea of the prevalence of Buddhism in Dakshina Kosala in early historical period.

A few references to Buddha and Buddhism can be noticed in the epigraphs of Dakshina Kosala. A stone inscription of the Panduvamsi king Nannaraja of c 5th century AD, states that one Suryaghosa originally built the temple of Sugata (Buddha) at Arang. A Malhar plate of the time of the Panduvamsi king Mahasivagupta Balarjuna (595-655 AD) refers that Kailasaparama of the Taradamsaka-bhoga was granted to the community of venerable (Buddhist) monks from the four quarters residing in a small monastery and established a *Sattra* (feeding house) for the monks residing in the monastery for the upkeep of which a wide rice field was

given. The Koni stone inscription of Prithvideva, the king of Kalachuri dynasty of Ratanpur also refers the three *ratnas* of Buddhism viz., the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Kasala, the composer of the Prasasti is said to be well known in expounding the multitudes of *Agamas* of Srighana i.e. the Buddha, while the Buddhist doctrines of *Ksana*, *Samanya* and *Pramana* are referred to in the Akaltara stone inscription of Kalachuri king Ratnadeva II and the Raipur museum stone inscription of Prithvideva II. Like that study of works of Dignaga, the celebrated Buddhist logician, can be noticed in the Ratanpur stone inscription of Jajalladeva, the Kalachuri monarch. The Maranjamura copper plate grant of the somavamsi ruler vayati II was issued, while the ruler was residing in a *Vihara* (Buddhist *Vihara*), situated on the confluence of the river Mahanadi and Tel indicating to the fact that there existed a flourishing Buddhist *Vihara* in Sonepur during the period.

III

Buddhist remains are noticed throughout the length and breadth of Dakshina Kosala. The area is replete with Buddhist monasteries, *chaityagrihas*, and sculptures of Mahayana and Tantrayana phase, votive *stupas* and other Buddhist antiquities from c 5th century AD to c 11th century AD. The Buddhist remains have been reported from the sites like Boudh, Ganiapali, Nagraj, Sonepur, Ranipur Jharial, Amatgarh, Harishankar in western Orissa and at Sirpur, Malhar and other places of modern Chhatisgarh State.

Boudh and its adjoining regions have wielded valuable Buddhist antiquities of early medieval period, in the form of votive *stupa*, monasteries and Mahayana-Tantrayana sculptures. In the present town of Boudh, one can notice colossal images of Buddha and few exquisitely carved bronze images of Maitreya, Lokeshvara, Tara and Heruka. The Ramesvara

temple of Boudh premises contain a number of Mahattari Tara. A bronze image of Maitreya seated gracefully in *Lalitasana* holding a bunch of Nageswara flowers in the left hand and the nectar vase in the right hand is an excellent specimen of art. Another image belongs to a variety of Lokeswara. The four-armed deity is shown seated in *Lalitasana* on a lotus throne. The image is highly ornamented. The upper right hand is in *varadamudra* and the lower left is shown placed on the throne. This rare image has been identified as Sankhanatha Lokesvara by Prof. N.K.Sahu. Besides, one colossal image of Buddha, near the palace of Baudh sitting on a stone pillar in a *Vajrayanka* pose in earth touching posture of c 8th century, gives an idea of vajrayana Buddhist icons of this part of the country. It may be worth mentioned here that in adjoining Boudh area, like Syamsundarpur, Pargalpur near Puranakatak, Buddhist antiquities have come to light in form of votive *Stupas* and broken Buddha images in various poses. The colossal icon of Buddha from Syamsunderpur, of 5 feet height in *bhumisparsa mudra* is a fine specimen of Buddhist art. The image of Buddha alongwith an image of Tara at Pargalpur with debris of medieval period, do indicate the fact that during early medieval period, Buddhist establishments flourished in the area. A broken icon found in the premises of Rameswar temple, Baudh appears to be a Muchalindra Buddha.

Sonepur was another center of Mahayana Buddhism as revealed from the stray ruins. Though there was a Vihara in Sonepur, as reflected in the epigraph of Yayati II, there is no trace of it at present. However, a number of Mahayana sculptures are noticed in the premises of late Chauhan monuments of the area and those might have been carried off from the adjoining Buddhist establishment. It is believed that in early period the Buddhist goddess Tara was worshipped as the presiding deity in the Suresvari *pitha* of Sonepur and later on the Chauhans considered

Suresvari as *Rashtradevi* and started worshipping her in a temple. Till today Tara is considered as *Adirupa* of Suresvari and Chhinamasta image of Avalokitesvara is also noticed in the vicinity of the temple. Interestingly, in the *vedha* of Subarnameru temple, a Buddha icon of natural grace and charm in *Bhumisparsa mudra* is noticed as *Parsvadevata*. In the *vedha* of Manikesvar temple, and eight-armed icon of Buddhist god Marichi (Surya) with a chariot run by seven pigs can be identified, besides an icon of goddess Manjusri. The Marichi image has three faces, three eyes and eight arms. A few Buddhist symbols drawn in base-relief are noticed on the Lankesvari Rock near Sonepur and at Paikapali Pabli (situated 6 km. from Sonepur). The name of the neighbouring villages Buddhavar is interesting in this aspect. Besides, villages under the names of Tarapura and Marichipur indirectly speak of its link with Buddhist deities. These antiquities indicate that the place was a popular center of tantric Buddhism in the medieval period and the present name Baudh is most probably reminiscent of the Buddhist heritage of the past.

One of the most important centers of Buddhism in Dakshina Kosala was unearthed at Ganiapali, District Bargarh. The site was excavated under the auspices of P.G.Department of History, Sambalpur University, Orissa in 1978. The excavation has yielded a monastery known as Muchalinda Buddha monastery of Gupta period. The ruins of the said monastery, covering an area of one and half acres are located near the confluence of Ang and Magar rivers at Ganiapali. The excavator Dr. N.K. Sahu believes that the structure of the Buddhist monastery was originally a multi-storied one, made of well-burnt brick. However the foundation plinth in some places have been destroyed due to brick robbing. A *chaitya* hall, traces of the walls of the cells and chambers of the *Bhikshus* and mendicants of the monasteries are also noticed. The excavation has clearly revealed some dormitory like buildings on

the northern side and small chambers and cells clustered together on the southern side. Besides the monasteries, two life-size Buddha images, one the Muchalinda Buddha and the other depicting Buddha in the pose of delivering the first sermon at Sarnath, are found on a small stone *mandapa*. Both the images are magnificent and superb with classical simplicity. Infact, the scene of Naga (Muchalinda) sheltering Buddha is an excellent piece of Buddhist art. However, both the images are now in a dilapidated state. This Muchalinda Buddha is one of the earliest Buddha images in Orissa and a rare of its kind in the region of Eastern India. The other image of the Buddha in the pose of the first sermon at Sarnath has been badly moulded and smothered with cement. Stylistically, these images can be dated to the Gupta Period of c 4th - 5th century AD. Besides, a small stone plaque of reddish chlorite depicting Buddhist images of Hariti and Panchika, of early medieval period is also recovered from this site.

About 15 kms. From Ganiapali, there is another site at Nagraj, where trial trenches were undertaken by Sambalpur University. The remains of a headless Buddha carved on a coarse sandstone along with a few pieces of broken pillars are found lying on a mound covering an area of one acre at Nagraj. Some alignments of burnt brick walls were also noticed during the exploration of the site.

Another Buddhist site, as referred by Hiuen-Tsang is Parimalagiri in Gandhamardan hill. The Chinese traveller is said to have seen the doublestoreyed monasteries of Nagarjuna in this place, which was decorated with some golden Buddhist images. However, unfortunately, this place has not yielded any Buddhist antiquities so far. Some scholars have tried to identify this site with that of Ganiapali, as discussed above, which is located at a distance of only 45 kms. From Parimalagiri.

Some Buddhist remains are also noticed in different parts of western Orissa. In the region of Titlagarh (District Bolangir) Buddha images are found lying scattered in rice fields in Ghudar, Sihini, Udaypur and Kumda. These images are of two types - one showing *bhumisparsa* and other in *Dhyanamudra* pose. In Ranipur Jharial, the famous tantric *pitha* of Orissa, another beautiful image of Buddha in *Bhumisparsa mudra* is placed under a tree. It seems that this images of c 10th century A.D, belonged to the last façade of Buddhist art in western Orissa. A fine image of Muchalinda Buddha is also noticed under a tree near the entrance of Harishankar temple in Bolangir district. Besides, Buddhist remains are said to have been noticed from Amagorha, Paikapali Talpadar, Kansil, Naraghanta hills, Sonapur area, Manikband and other places in western Orissa. The Sambalpur University Museum has also preserved a beautiful icon of dhyani Buddha of 10th century AD, recovered from Bhajalpur.

Another important center of Buddhism in Dakshina Kosala flourished at Sirpur, on the right bank of the Mahanadi at a distance of 60 kms from Raipur in Chhatisgarh. The excavation conducted in 1953-54 at Sirpur revealed the existence of a large number of antiquities in the shape of coins, brick structures, Buddhist monasteries, *chaitya* etc. The site yielded Buddhist remains of the Panduvamsi as well as Kalachuri Periods. As many as five Buddhist monasteries and a number of Buddhist images in stone, bronze and terracota have come to limelight. Among the five Buddhist monasteries, two of them belongs to the Panduvamsi Period of 6th - 7th century AD, and notable for their architecture. These two Buddhist *Vihara* excavated at Sirpur, lie less than a mile south of the Laksmana temple. Largely brick-built with pillars, doorframes, and floor slabs made of stone, these *Viharas* are laid out on the rectangular plan

of a residential house with a central court open to the sky. The courtyard is fringed by pillars meant to support the roof of an enclosing gallery that provided access to cells for the residence of monks. Each *Vihara* is entered through a *mukhamandapa* that faces the main shrine chamber in the back row of cells. This enshrines a colossal image of Buddha seated in *bhumisparsa mudra* and flanked by life size figures of Padmapani and perhaps Vajrapani. A staircases close to the entrance porch suggests that each *Vihara* was a double storied structure to which was added an annex with smaller paved courts, pillared galleries and residential cells.

The main *Vihara* (Anandaprabha Vihara) is 89 x 62 with an annex of 65.5 x 53.5 ft. The excavation in the area has unearthed one Buddhist inscription of Mahasivagupta Balarjuna recording the donation a friar given by Anandaprabha for the Buddhist cause. This *Vihara* was a large Buddhist temple-cum-monastery, with a monastic annex and an enshrined colossal seated image of Buddha, attended by Bodhisattvas. The entrance to the shrine chamber is flanked by a large image of Ganga on the left; the corresponding figure of Yamuna on the right is missing. The figures of Yaksas, and the decorative designs of the *Vihara* strikingly agree with figures on the Lakshmana temple, which was built during c 7th century AD. Another monastery is noticed very close to the Gandheswara temple at Sirpur, where a large size Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* and an image of Padmapani are placed gracefully.

A number of Buddhist images are unearthed during the Sirpur excavation and many are kept in the site museum. Among them mention can be made of Buddha in *Bhumisparsa mudra*, Padmapani Avalokiteswara, Buddha in *Simhasana*, Manjusri and others. Besides, Sirpur has also yielded a large hoard of Buddhist bronzes of the eighth-century including exquisite figures of Tara, Padmapani, Vajrapani and

Manjusri, besides those of Buddha. These bronze icons are now preserved in Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay and in the Mahanta Ghasidas Museum, (M.G.Museum) Raipur. Besides, dozens of Buddhist stone images from Sirpur are also preserved in the site museum.

Buddhist images of Panduvamsi Period (6th-9th century) are found at Raipur Museum. In stone, Buddha is represented in various postures. In one example, on Dhyani Buddha is seated below an Asokan tree in *Padmasana* with an inscription attached to it. Paleographically, the image is dated to c 9th century AD. As many as ten Buddha images of stone are noticed. Buddha is depicted in *Bhumisparsa*, *dhyana* as well as *Dharmachakra Pravartana Mudras*. The Dhyani Buddha contains the letter 'Ye Dharma'. Two beautifully artistic Buddha in *Dharmachakra Pravartana Mudra* are found, one flanked by Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani and the other by Avalokitesvara and Tara respectively. As many as three stone images of Avalokitesvara are also found. Invariably the deity holds Kamala in right hand, while the left hand is in *varada*. Two beautiful icons of Manjusri are also noticed. The first image is mutilated, shown seated on Kamala, keeping right hand in *Varada* and holding *Kamandalu* in the left hand, above which a *Pothi* is placed. The other one, seated on Lalitāsana, displays *vyakhyana mudra* in one hand and *kamandalu* in the other. These images are well decorated with various ornaments like the pearl strings, *Patra Kundalas*, *Kiritamukuta*, *bhujabandha*, *katisutra* and oval *Prabhamandala*. An image of Jambhala with a small inscription on *Prabhamandala* is also noticed. An image of seated Chunda Devi, recovered from the Pancham *Vihara*, Sirpur, is shown having an *akshamala* in upper right hand and the lower one kept in *Varada Mudra* and in the lower left hand, there is a pot, while the fourth hand is not visible. Just below the pedestal of the image, a devotee can be noticed.

A few bronze images from Sirpur are also preserved in M.G.Museum, Raipur. Among the Buddhist metal images, mention can be made of three images of Buddha, four images of Avalokitesvara, one image of Vajrapani and two images of Manjusri. Among the three bronze images of Buddha, two are in *Bhumisparsa* and the other in *varada mudra*. An inscription reading "*Ye Dharma Hetu Prabhaba*" is found inscribed in one *Bhumisparsa* Buddha image dateable to c 8th - 9th century AD. Even on its pedestal, the name of the sculptor Dronaditya is engraved. The image of Avalokitesvara are all shown in *Lalitasana*, having invariably a *Kamandalu* in one hand, on the top of which can be noticed a bud or a lotus flower. The images reveal some tantric influences. The sculptor of Vajrapani is shown seated on *Lalitasana* on a lotus throne, keeping the right hand in *Varada* resting on the right lap; while the left one holds a *Kamandalu*. In this image, a *Buddha Bijamantra* as well as the name of the sculptor Dronaditya have been engraved. Two images of Manjusri are well carved and artistically designed. Manjusri is shown holding a lotus stalk above which is placed a *Pothi* in both the examples. Besides, a fine bronze image of Tara is also preserved in the museum.

Some clay seals of Sirpur contain the representation of Buddha and Bodhisattva, to c 6th - 7th century AD. In some seals, the Buddhist *mantra* like '*Ye Dharma*' is engraved.

A few Buddhist images of stone of Kalachuri Period (c 9th - 12th century) are also preserved in Raipur Museum. These images are unearthed from Sirpur. These Buddha images are small in dimensions but sometimes contain an epigraph. In one sculpture. Buddha is shown in *varada mudra*, while in another example, the seated Buddha is flanked by Avalokitesvara and Tara.

M.G. Dikshit believes that Sirpur was a strong centre of Mahayana Buddhism and the

architecture with some Buddhist relics bears a striking resemblance to those from Nalanda. Prof. D.R.Das however, thinks that these centers must have relation with those of Buddhist centers of coastal Orissa like Lalitagiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri through well-travelled route. The existence of link can be found from Vajrayana deity. As the evidence stand, Ratnagiri comes to view a few decades after Buddhism first appeared at Sirpur. The identity in visual representation of images shows that the Gupta plastic tradition travelled from Magadh to Orissa via Dakshina Kosala. The flowing grace, sensitive modelling liveliness of linear freedom of Lalitgiri and Ratnagiri sculptures can be seen in Sirpur sculptures. In this aspect, the Buddhist center of Sirpur would have played an important role in flourishing of Gupta sculptural art in coastal Orissa.

Excavation at Sirpur have unearthed a Chinese coin which belongs to the period of Kai-Yun (713-714 AD) of Tang dynasty.

Malhar, the ancient city of Mallala Pattana is situated at a distance of 14 kms from Masturi in Bilaspur district of Chhatisgarh. Excavations were conducted by the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, University of Sagar, which throws light on the history of Mallala Pattana from the Chalcolithic period to the Kalachuri rule. The excavation has unearthed the remains of Buddhist establishment like *Chaitya*, *Vihara* and *Stupas* along with a number of Buddhist sculptures which are at present preserved in Hari Singh Gour Museum, Sagar and also in the site museum of Archaeological Survey of India. In the site museum, images of Buddha, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Hevajra can be identified. The discovery of the icon of Hevajra shows that the shrines belonged to Vajrayana sect. Images of Buddha in *Bhumisparsa mudra* and of the Bodhisattvas nimbate and seated in *Padmasana* found from Jaitpur are two prized pieces of

Buddhist School of Art at Malhar. Stylistically both the images may be given a time period of c 8th - 9th century AD. The two-seated images of Avalokiteswara holding lotuses suggest a later date of c 10th -11th century AD. Recently an Archaeological Museum is established at Bilaspur, which also contains few Buddhist images of the area.

Images of Buddha are also preserved in various pre-Kalachuri and Kalachuri temples of the area. One broken image of Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* is preserved near the Derani Jethani temple near village Tala, Bilaspur district, datable to post-Gupta Period. Another image of Buddha in *bhumisparsa mudra* is noticed near the Gandai temple at Gandhevara, on the bank of the Mahanadi at Sirpur, with an inscription on the pedestal. Two images of mutilated Buddha are found set against Kirwai-Dhobini temple in Raipur district, datable to c 7th-8th century AD. Besides, two beautiful *dhyana-mudra* Buddha images of Kalachuri period are found on the walls of Siva temple, Deo Balod, Raipur and on the *Jangha* portion of the Narayana temple at Narayanapura, Bilaspur. The occurrence of independent Buddha images on the walls of *Saiva* and *Vaisnava* temples amply testifies to the popularity of Buddhism and the religious tolerance that was prevailing in Dakshina Kosala in early medieval period. In the Dasavatara panel found in the upper Mahanadi valley, Buddha is also depicted as the ninth incarnation of Lord Visnu.

In retrospect, a study of Buddhist remains in Dakshina Kosala reveals that Buddhist establishments flourished in this area, from Gupta period onwards. The Buddhist art activities continued up to circa 11th century AD. This area was famous for Mahayana-Varayana cult, as testified from the Buddhist images found at Boudh, Sirpur, Malhar and other sites. The bronze images

of South Kosala i.e. Western Orissa betray the classical art tradition.

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