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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BUDDHIST ANTIQUITIES IN BALASORE, ODISHA

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Preservation of socio-religious reforms movement in eastern Odisha and re thinking of archeological evidence of Buddhist monuments in Balasore, Odisha. I attempt to reconstruct the religious history of the district. My paper gives a historical development of different religious rather than their philosophical complexes.

ABSTRACT

Balasore district was part of the ancient Kalinga which later became a territory of Toshala or Utkal, till the death of Mukunda Dev. It was annexed by Moghuls in 1568 and remained as a part of their suzerainty up to the middle of eighteenth century, to be précised up to 1750-51. Then the Marahatta Rajas occupied this part of Odisha and it became a part of the dominion of the Marahatta Rajas of Nagpur. The East India Company ceded this part through a treaty called treaty of Deogaon in 1803 and it became a part of Bengal Presidency up to 1912. But the first English Settlement came into existence in Balasore region in 1634 while Sahajahan was the emperor at Delhi. The first of English factories was established in this region in 1640. During this period Dutch and Danish settlements were also founded in this region. Balasore as a separate district was created in October, 1828 while it was in the Bengal Presidency. With the creation of Bihar province, Odisha was diverted along with Balasore district from Bengal to Bihar But with the creation of Odisha as a separate State on 1st April, 1936 Balasore became an integral part of Odisha State. The national movement of independence surged ahead with the visit of Mahatma Gandhi in 1921. Similarly *Praja Andolan* was initiated against the ruler of Nilagiri State. The state of Nilagiri merged with state of Odisha in January, 1948 and became a part of Balasore district. In 3rd April, 1993 Bhadrak Sub-division became a separate district and from this day Balasore remains a district of Odisha with two Sub-divisions namely Balasore and Nilagiri having 7 Tahasils namely Balasore, Soro, Simulia, Nilagiri, Jaleswar, Basta & Baliapal and 12 Blocks namely Bhogra, Jaleswar, Baliapal, Basta, Balasore, Remuna, Nilagiri, Oupada, Khaira, Soro & Bahanaga. The name of the district is being derived from the name of the town, which is old and important. The name Balasore is recognised from the Persian word *BALA-E-SHORE* which means "TOWN IN THE SEA". The historical legend ascribes that the district has been named as per the LORD BANESHWAR (LORD SHIVA) of the town, which subsequently changed to Balasore during Mughal Rules. The History of Balasore District is the amalgamation of several cultures and civilizations colonized the region for a couple of years. The history of Balasore witnessed a quick succession of several dynasties in its bosom. As far as the history of Balasore District is concerned; there was a constant strife among the different rulers over the entire tract of the District. When the power of the indigenous Hindu kings falls short to retain their kingdom with a strong foundation, the Mughals and the realm of Balasore District was passed in the hands of Marhatta Rajas of Nagpur. Finally during the British expedition in India, the absolute political power came in the hands of the British Raj. The East India Company ceded Balasore District in 1803, through a treaty called as The Treaty of Deogaon and then it became a part of Bengal Presidency up to the year 1912. However, the first English settlement came into existence in Balasore region in 1634, while Sahajahan was the emperor at Delhi and the first of the English factories was established in this region in 1640. During this period, Dutch and Danish settlements were also founded in this region. Balasore, as a separate District was created in October 1828, while it was under Bengal Presidency. With the creation of Odisha as a separate state on 1st April 1936, Balasore became an integral part of Odisha State. The state of Nilagiri merged with the state of Odisha in January 1948 and then it became a part of Balasore District. On 3 April 1993, Bhadrak sub-division became a separate District and from this day onwards, Balasore remains a district of Odisha with two sub-divisions namely Balasore and Nilagiri. There are many historical monuments in the Balasore District. Some of the major monuments in Balasore District include the rich sculptural remains found in Ayodhya. The ruin of the old Buddhist monastery and temple is there in Kupali in Balasore District. Some of the ruined forts at the Jayachandi forests in Raibania are also there in the District. The major religious monument found in the District is the Lord Chandaneswar Shrine.

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INTRODUCTION

The Dravidian and Aryan cultures got situational opportunities to assimilate, integrate into what we term as 'Odishan Culture'.

That the Odishan culture was diffused to the South-East Asian counties through the prosperous ports of *Tamralipi* (now in west Bengal), Pipli, Balasore and Dhamra by the way of maritime adventure and finally commingled with the indigenous cultures there is clearly evidenced from their traditions, literature, art and architecture and folk culture.

The mainstream of Indian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Sakta- Tantrism, Vaisnavism and finally the Muhammadanism crept successively into this region, flourished under the patronage of the royal dynasties leaving behind indelible mark of their efflorescence in the shape of monuments, sculptures, epigraphs, literature and folk-tradition. The contribution of this district to the religious history of the state is as immense as its role played in military conquests and extension of the Kalingan Empire to the Ganges in the north. The militant people of the area were not merely satisfied with the military conquests but were greatly interested in bringing home the traits of different alien cultures, nourished them in their indigenous ways and finally exposed them as part and parcel of their own culture.

Buddhist antiquities: Buddhism, a district religious movement of civilization in the past had profoundly affected the moral ideas of the time and acted as catalytic factors in transforming the social order. This religion evidently based on cardinal principles of kindness, humanity and equality greatly influenced the cultural life and was deeply imprinted in literature, philosophies and folk culture. The great personality of Buddha, a unique combination of dignity and affability, wisdom and kindness threw the doors open to the people, irrespective of castes and creed finally drawing a large following from all parts of India. His unshakable serenity and unflinching self-confidence pushed him to stride ahead in his mission against opposition and hostility and even personal danger. With the passage of time the supernatural powers of the Buddha grounded on actual occurrences were recorded with legendary accreditations, and apart from His teachings communicated by oral means, through discourses to and discussion with his disciples and the Enlightened Himself were defined and worshipped. The Buddhist thought stimulated intellectual, religious and artistic renaissance grounded in the blend of Hindu and Buddhist cultural element.

It is historically not known whether the Buddha entered into the mainland of Kalinga but the tradition relates the spread of his deliverance in Kalinga during his life-time. According to Pali literature Tapassu and Bhallika, two merchant brothers of Utkala while proceeding to madhyadesa with five hundred carts full of merchandise, paid reverence to the Buddha just after his enlightenment and offered him cakes and honey. They are stated to be the first lay disciples of the enlightened Buddha. The Buddha out of compassion offered them handful of his hairs and nails which they enshrined in their homeland. Here it may be mentioned that in ancient times Rajagriha and Pataliputra and cities of Kalinga were well-connected by roads (Rajapatha), the prosperous harbor of Tamralipti being the converging point of different routes. Tapassu and Bhallika must have passed through the road with their merchandise and come back with the deliverance of the lord and his corporal remains. The Mauryan emperor, Ashoka must have the Rajapatha during his war expedition against Kalinga which ultimately converted him from 'Chandaashoka' to 'Dharmaashoka'.

The disastrous result of the Kalingan war was the immediate inclusion of Kalinga in the Magadhan Empire with its headquarters at Tosali. Early Buddhism prevalent in Kalinga got a new impulse and spirit from the time of Ashoka, and embarked upon a new phase of development. Until recently the earliest Buddhist remains of course barring those of Ashokan period, were not earlier than the 8th century A.D.

But the discovery of the cooper plate and a vast Buddhist remains at Jayrampur in the district of Balasore published back the history of Buddhism in Odisha by another 200 years filling up the 'gap' that existed from the time of Ashoka till rise of Bhaumkaras. A cooper plate grants to of Mahasamanta Achuta under Maharajadhiraja Gopachandra reveals that *svetabalika* village in Dhandabhukti was granted for the Arya- Samgha of bhudhist group whose presiding deity was bhagavat Arya-Avalokiteswara. The cooper plate was collected by me from Shri Shyamsundar Jena of Jayrampur village who got the plate while collecting bricks from the vast *maund* lying in the village. The *maund* which has yielded myriads of large sized old bricks and still contains much is locally known as *Ahutikunda* (a sacrificial pit) of Virat Raja of Mahabharata character where the king had performed horse sacrifice. The magnitude of the *maund*, a chlorite image of the Tara (with an inscription 'Sri Rani Mulauchha' now worshipped in the Village, a bronze statue of Buddha (now preserved in the Odisha State Museum) recovered from the site and a bronze image of Tara from another extremity of the village clearly indicate that there was a vast Buddhist establishment during the time of Gopachandra whose territory extended from Faridpur in the east to the present Balasore town. However, the excavation of the site will hint about a flowering of Buddhist art and religion in 5th/6th century A.D. Thus, it is well-neigh a fact that the Buddhist site of Jayrampur fills up the hiatus in the history of Buddhism in Odisha. The Buddhist sculptures of this area bear the acme of post-Gupta art movement.

Since this time till the rise of Bhaumkaras, the history of Buddhism in the district as well as in Odisha is shrouded in mystery. Possibly many of the Buddhist remains either lie under the ground or damaged by the non-Buddhists and the Muslims. Whatever remains other than that of Jayaramapura, are available may all be assignable to Bhaumkaras period, and only a few to later period. There were many Buddhist sites in the district, the notable of which are Khadipada, Solampur, Ayodhya, Kupari, Balasore, Dakeswari that still preserve magnificent statues of Buddha, Boddhisattwa, Tara etc. and many other Vajrajanideities along with ruins of stupas and shrines. Ayodhya was a flourishing center of Buddhism with Marichi and *Tara* as the presiding deities. The vast area of Ayodhya washed by the river of *Sone* in the north and circumscribed by the hills in the east and south-east, has yielded numerous Buddhist images and worked-stones possibly of Buddhist structures. The Goddess Marichithree-faced, eight-armed standing in *alidha* pose on the chariot drawn by seven pigs is one of the best specimens of Buddhist art in Odisha. The Original temple of the goddess was at the place about a kilometer to the present site and even now in this place are seen pieces of worked stones, pillars and *Amalakasila*. The huge remains strewn in the entire area including a number of beautifully chiseled images and a chain of irregular caves in the nearby hills indicate that there was a vast Buddhist monastic establishment much before the rise of Bhaumkaras. The caves here may be contemporary of those found in the hill ranges stretching from the time of Asoka till 8th century A.D. But in the basis of the cave architecture and the available sculptural remains the date of the site can be pushed back to two centuries earlier when many of the caves were dug not in the Asia hill ranges but Buddhism spread here up to 11th century A.D. if not later. Other notable images of the place are Manjusri, Avalokiteswar, attendants of Marichi (enshrined in the Marichii temple) Vartali, Vadali, Varali, and Varahamukhi which mark the spread of Buddhist thought and

Buddhist art. 'The Tara image of Ayodhya seated gracefully in elevated lotus throne in Lalita pose displays superb modeling of limbs with oval face, round breasts, slim waist and rhythmic hands and feet. Her calm and meditative face, lit with a smile of compassion, reveals the divine beauty within and discloses her concern both for the inner and outer world. Some ancient sites at Ayodhya in the district are surrounded by rivers Gharghara to the east, the Sona to the north and the Singhu to the west of it. It was the richest of Buddhist antiquities in Balasore. The site has yielded some antiquities of the past like Tara, headless Buddha. The Marichi temple also contains inscription of the Buddhist Dharani. The image of Monstrous found on the left side of Marichi. Very close to the temple of Marichi, is a ruined temple which extends up to the *bedha* portion made of laterite blocks. Besides, there is a Siva temple known as the Dakshinesvara where near the Sivalinga small broken miniature Buddhist sculptures are lying. Inside the compound of the Ayodhya High School minor loose sculptures of Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheons are lying.



Figure 1. Headless Buddha, Ayodhya Museum

Not far from the river Vaitarani, but within environ of Jajapur was a flourishing site of tantric Buddhism datable to the Bhaumakara period. The place was famous for her monastic institution established by Mahamandalacharya Paramaguru Rahula Ruchi during the time of Subhakar Deva of Bhauma dynasty. Several images of this site preserved in the Odisha state, Museum, Bhubaneswar, the vast mound at Khadipada and the old bricks found in the villages-shrines indicate that there was a vast monastery in Khadipada. The specialty of artistic grandeur lies here in the carving of the images in pieces. The colossal image of Buddha (now in the state Museum in *Bhumisparsa* mudra carved in pieces) is the best example of artistic endeavor. Solampur, on the bank of the river Vaitarani, a famous Center of Tantric Buddhism, is referred to in the Neulpur cooper plate of Subhakar Deva. Many images are in broken stage lying scattered in the area but a few of them now preserved in the Raghunathaji Temple, suggest the artistic glory of the site. The image of Buddha in *Bhumisparsa* mudra with the depiction of eight great miracles such as, the birth of Buddha from Maya Devi, his Dharmachakraprabartana mudra at deer park, his descent at Sankisu with the heavenly bodies, receiving a bowl of honey from the monkey at Vaisali, his serum at sravasti after the performance of the great miracle, subduing the mad elephant Nilagiri and his Mahapariarvana in the Sat forest at Kusinagar, flank led by the manusi Buddhas in *ardhaparjanka* pose, is one of the best specimens of Buddhist art in Odisha. The other noteworthy specimens of the place are a two-armed Avalokiteswar, a two-armed Tara standing in *Tribhanga* pose, a figure of two-armed Avalokiteswar associated by two small figures of Tara (belonging to 12th century A.D.), and A Chlorite image of Vajrasattva which indicate the spread of Tantric Buddhism in the area. The site may be assignable to the Bhauma epoch.



Figure 2. Stupa temple, Ayodhya Museum

Kupari in Bhadrak sub-division exhibits Buddhist remains datable to 8th/9th century A.D. Sir John Beams indicates that there was a Buddhist monastery and a great Buddhist Temple wherein one colossal image of Buddha was enshrined. Kupari or Komparakagrama in Uttar Tosali finds mention in the Neulpur copper plate of Subhakaradeva-I. The hill near to the site contains caves used for the residence of the ascetics. Charles Fabri on the ground of pillared hall at Sisupalgarh assigned the date of the pillared structures of Kupari to first century B.C.

But in the absence of the sculptural remains it is difficult to assign the date of the site. However, the two elevated pillared structures, one inside the village, and the other at the outskirt indicate remains of the Buddhist monasteries. However, Kupari was a potential center of Buddhism till the Bhauma epoch. Later and it was super-imposed by Brahmanical religion the remains of which are still seen. The beautiful image of Parvati and Visnu and a dilapidated Saivite temple substantiate the statement. Gandibedha, a few miles to the north-east of Kupari is identified with a famous Buddhist treatise Ganda Vyuha sent through Prajna during the time of Subhakar Deva to the Chinese Emperor. The remains of Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheon are seen in this place and Dubri hill close by. Basta or Bansada, was in the past a center of Tantric- Buddhism. An image of Buddha and another of Avalokiteswar associated with Tara now kept in the residence of Laxmananath Ray Mahasaya are stated to have been shifted

from this place. The present Ray Mahasaya at laxmananath's father recovered Buddhist and Brahmanical images from Basta. But some of them have been damaged or stolen in last few years. Sri N.N. Vasu has referred to an image of Buddha at Kaspā in Balasore town. A colossal image of Avalokiteswar kept in the compound of Phakirmohan College, an image of Tara and Buddha collected from the palace of Raja Manmatha Nath Deva and now preserved in the Balasore Museum, reveal that Balasore was in the medieval time a center of Buddhist culture.

At Dakeswari *pitha* of Orasahi village near Chandabali images of Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheons. The important figures of Buddhist pantheon is a life size four armed Avalokiteswar seated in Lalitasana on the full blown lotus pedestal. Avana, a village on the seashore has recently exposed hundreds of inscribed terracotta seals which containing the Buddhist Dharanis, two Avalokiteswar sculptures, two Jain Trithankaras, Mahisamardini and Ganesha. Most probably there was a Buddhist monastery. Baseli of Badagaon near Bahanaga, a famous shrine is an image of Vajra Varahi of Tantric Buddhism. The image conforms to the Dhyana. The ancient site of Avana is located near the sea-shore, 40 kms from Balasore. It is a site which was the center of religious activities in a chronological order starting from Jainism, Buddhism, Saktism and ended in Saivism. The gradual development of various religious cults in a competitive spirit finds from the area. The Brahmani temple on the basis of epigraphically evidences engraved on the door frame can be assigned to C. 9th A.D.

Conclusion

The worshipper should conceive himself as goddess Vajravarahi whose complexion is red like the pomegranate flower; who is two-armed, one-faced and three-eyed, has disheveled hair, is endowed with the six auspicious symbol, and is nude, whose essence is the five spiritual knowledge, who is of the nature of the Sahaja pleasure, who shows in the right hand the Vajra together the Tarjani, and bears the Kapala and the Khatvanga in the left, who stands in the pratyahidha attitude, tramples upon the fierce Kalaratri, is decked in garlands of wet heads, and who drinks the blood trickling there from. The survey of sites and the study of the images lead to conclude that tantric form of Buddhism flourished in this part of land from 6th century A.D. to 12th century A. D. along with Jainism, Saivism and Vaisnavism. During the Bhauma rule Buddhism was the chief religion in this area. In the present state of affairs the district is still a mine of ancient remains ranging from sculptural pieces to magnificent temples, monasteries and forts, much of which still lie in the mounds or bricks-debris.

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