



Viharas in early Andhra: A cultural study

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Abstract

The Buddhist Viharas as centres of learning. It's literary, philosophical and artistic activity and attracted not only pilgrims but also students from distant places. These centres exhibited their beliefs and practices of Buddhist traditions in different schools. These centres were sophisticated centres of learning, training for monks in philosophy and religion, medicine, astronomy and grammar. This centres of viharas study shows that to classify into different periods for purpose of its activity on cultural background in early Andhra.

Keywords: Buddhist viharas, monks, literary activity, training

1. Introduction

The origin of Buddhism in North India from 6th C.B.C is generally considered as a socio, religious revolution against the Vedic Brahmanism for its social order based on varnasrama dharma. Expansion of Buddhism under the Mauryas in Northern India into Andhra region. During this time, a numerous changes occurred in socio, economic, cultural fields are one of the important events in the history of Andhra. Several earliest rock edicts of Ashoka in Kurnool ^[1] and Guntur ^[2] districts attested to the functioning of provincial administrative machinery of the Mauryas in these areas. Thus, the mutual cultural relations between North and South were prosperous in subsequent periods. This time, many Buddhist monks of different sects migrated from Northern India into Andhra. This phenomenon continued and rapid changes in art and architecture fields of Andhra. Monks were constructed Stupas, Chaityas and Viharas of Buddhist tradition in different areas such as river belts and hill areas of Andhra during succeeding centuries from time to time. These Buddhist Viharas as centres of literary, philosophical and artistic activity and attracted not only pilgrims but also students from distant places. These centres exhibited their beliefs and practices of Buddhist traditions in different schools. These sites were sophisticated centres of learning training for monks in philosophy and religion, medicine, astronomy and grammar. In this context, an attempt made in this paper 'Buddhist Viharas in Early Andhra'- A Cultural study' shows that Viharas examine in micro level study to classify into different periods for the purpose of its activity on cultural background.

Buddhism began to spread outside and encouraged its missionary efforts by the wide reach of the Mauryan regime. By the emperor of Ashoka became a lay Buddhist and promulgated Buddhist principles in public edicts while prohibiting the sacrificial cults as contrary to Buddhist benevolence ^[3]. Thus, proliferation of Buddhist religion in South from across central India during 2nd C.B.C onwards. From many of the Viharas especially in Andhra like Dhanyakataka, Nagarjunakonda, Bhattiprolu and Gantasala with a large number of inscriptions have been found in Brahmi script and Pali language. In this time also saw the beginning of state support in outlying kingdoms and their patronise

continued from time to time. The rulers and wealthy laity gave lavish material support of these centres. This time several centres of Viharas have received income from various villages donated by kings and aristocratic families designated for everything from building and victuals to incense and books, one senses rivalry over the prestige of having great centres to developed.

The Buddhist culture cannot be disposed of more historical phenomena in our cultural history it has been born along by stream of its continuity and is part of its continuum. The history of this culture is bound up with the history of the Sangha. The Mahaparinibbanasuttanta are listed the four holiest places of pilgrimage for a Buddhist sites respectively of the lord's nationality, his enlightenment, his first ceremony and his great passing away ^[4] and gradually pattern of vihara construction had emerged and growth in subsequently periods due to various factors played their respective roles in emerging and development of these centres in early Andhra. All this being equal importance made them work of constructing Viharas here easy and convenient but, utilization of these early structures gradually change from time to time due to their objectives in religious systems and beliefs of Buddhist religion. A Vihara built was compact building design to single Sangha of just one congregational unit. But, with in this pattern the open quadrangle developed afterwards into a roofed and pillared hall (Mandapa) and the cult object (Buddha image or stupa) originally installed in quadrangle itself was afterwards shifted to sanctuary with facility for circumambulation pradaksina. Viharas is the name given generally to a Buddhist monastic establishment. The words arama, Vihara and Sangharama are used almost as synonyms. Thus these viharas were built all over early centuries of Buddhism by lay devotees for the accommodation monk communities (Sangha's). These viharas in the early age of Buddhist history were the nerve centres of Buddhism.

Earliest Buddhism its philosophy of life for the improvement of individual morals but, not an organised of this religion. A number of passages in the Buddhist chronicle literature indicates that the free life of early Buddhist bhikkus in Mahavagga ^[5] the lord is represented as declare to his followers let not two of you go same way no bhikkus should

spend two nights at one place. Thus, a life of Buddhist bhikkus was an ideal. A few of some chronicles like Nissayas^[6] which formed an important part of discipline of bhikkus also suggest a life of isolation. According to Gandavyuha, Dhanyakataka was most important centre of Bhodhisattva doctrine^[7] and Yuan-chwang records that at Tena-Ka-che-ka many Sangharamas were existed. All these are study the law of the great vehicle^[8]. He himself as studied the Abhidhamma at Dhanyakataka^[9] to attract several students from distant places. These Buddhist Viharas which become the permanent abodes of monks gradually developed into places of intellectual activity and centres of higher learning. It is said that, immediately after the Mahaparinirvana, disciples of the Buddha met in the first council, where the Vinaya and Dharma Pitakas were recited^[10]. But several students of Buddhist sects doubt whether the entire Pali texts, the pitakas were recited out in the council. It may reasonably be assumed that they took their shape much later in course of long discussions and deliberations. Especially the night time in the Buddhist viharas was spent by the monks in discussion about the Dhamma or Sutta. The Vinayadharas were those who discussed and shaped the Vinaya. Thus, gradually the Buddhist Dhamma was developed and systematised in these centres due to specialists of teachers and instructors. It was not a sudden development, but was naturally a slow process, spreading over decades or even centuries. This is scope for philosophical speculation in the teachings of the Buddhist culture which was embodied in the Pitakas.

In this texts and inscriptions we came across terms like Vinayadharas, Suttanutas, Dharmakathuka, Mahadharmakathika, Agatagama, Dhammadhara, Matikadhara and Bhanakas. They may be understood as specialists and gave instructions in the respective texts. All these many sided literary activities helped a few of the monasteries to develop into the universities in subsequent centuries in the several areas. These educational centres attracted for many students from distant places. Hien Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim of 7th century A.D states that Buddhist centres were monastic life of Monks^[11]. According to him the Buddhist viharas functioned as cultural centres gathering into themselves the rich and varied intellectual life of the period. Taxila, Nalanda, Dantapuri, Vikramasila and Jagadala centres become important learning centres. Dhanyakataka and Sriparvata, Dhantapura, Thotlakonda, Sankaram, Bavikonda, Ramatirdham Vihara centres gradually developed into great centres of learning in Andhra. At these places were developed a number of different schools and literatures to which students flocked from far and near. Several secular subjects such as grammar, medicine, logic and fine arts were studied and taught.

The sutra literature which formed the basis Mahayana was produced in the viharas of Krishna Valley^[12]. The Ceylonese tradition ascribes the Ratnakutasutras to the Andhras^[13]. Inscriptions of Andhra mentions that various sects lived in Buddhist Viharas. They are Purvasailas, Aparasailas, Uttarasailas, Rajagirikas^[14], Siddharthikas^[15], Bahusrutiyas^[16] Mahisasakas^[17], Mahaviharavasins^[18] etc... In these Purvasailas, Aparasailas, Uttarasailas, Rajagirikas, Siddharthikas were Mahasanghika sects. The Purvasailas are identified with the monks that lived in the viharas of Amaravathi, where as the Aparasailas were of the viharas of Nagarjunakonda. Uttarasaila may be identified with the Jaggayyapeta which was Known has Velogiri^[19]. Though

Andhra is known to be a stronghold of Mahasangika Mahayana School several Theravada sects also had their viharas even by the side of the Mahasangikas viharas and both lived in peace.

As noted above these were more than half a dozen. Theravada viharas including Sihalavihara, Mahasangikavihara and Mahaviharavasivihara in the Nagarjunakonda Valley. The Inscription of Salankayana king Nandivarman-II^[20] (5th C.A.D), the Guntupalli Mahavihara might have belonged to Siddharthikas.

The doctrinal differences between these various sects reflect in the layout of the viharas. The Buddhapada inscription^[21] found in the Mahaviharavasivihara at Nagarjunakonda tells us that the Monks and Nuns were highly learned. They were experts in determining the four-fold teaching of Buddha and they knew by heart the traditions of the four classes of the Buddhist Monks. The four-fold teachings are Sutta, Geyya, Abhutadhamma and Vedalla^[22]. The four classes of Monks are

1. Those who are contended with the robes presented to them
2. With food given to them
3. With the bedding presented
4. Who delight in meditation^[23]

The Buddhist vihara centres became the seats of individual philosophers who composed not only commentaries on the sutras but also original works basing upon them. Inscriptions from Amaravathi mention the name Vinadhara^[24], Mahavinadhara^[25] and Dharmakathika^[26] they were the professional instructors in different branches of Dharma. Besides several scholars and philosophers like. Acharya Nagarjuna was eminent in Madhyamika philosophy and his works are the Madhyamikakarika, Dasabhumivibhasasastra, Vighrahavyavartini, Ratnavali and suhrullekha^[27]. Aryadeva, who was another Scholar Catuhasataka^[28] and another like Buddhapalitha was the founder of Prasangika School. He was native of Dhantapura in Srikakulam district^[29]. Another eminent philosopher like Bhavaviveka was the leader of Svatantrika sect of Madhyamika school^[30]. Dinnaga is father indian logic^[31]. His great logical work Tramanasamuccaya was composed on a solitary hill with a stone Stupa near Vengi which may be identified with Guntupalli. Dharmakirti is a great Buddhist logician and Philosopher. He was a native of Chitoor district^[32]. His most important work is Pramanavartika. Buddhagosha was native very near Nagarjunakonda^[33] he restored the forgotten Pali canon to India translating it from Ceylone^[34].

The Buddhist philosophers of Andhra were interested in many branches of secular learning such as logic, polity and grammar. In an inscription from Nagarjunakonda that can be dated round above A.D 450 a Darmakatika is described^[35]. He is well-behaved of strong flawless, clean and spotless conduct and character had toiled hand in the subject of logic, polity, grammar his creed is one which took in traditional doctrine, scripture, initiation, treatises or explanation and everything enjoined to be acted in a customary manner, who possessed very desirable qualities as skill in speech, eloquence in devotees, in oral tradition and virtuous conduct, who was a highly skilled exponent or speaker of Dharma who was best among those profounder well-versed in fixing or settling a horoscope and where the yellow flag of order furnished amply. A Buddhist centre of Vijayapuri, as centre of advanced learning. A good number of students came from different parts

of India existed in Vijayapuri and obtain knowledge of Buddhist tradition and there was provision for free boarding and lodging and prospers of Darśanas like Yoga, Nyaya and Vaishēśika and so on. In this Buddhist centres including secular subjects and fine arts like paintings, music, dance and dramatics important one and also above centres much popular in vyākarna, jyōthisya and medicine. Siddha Nagarjuna the author of several Tantric works like Mahakalatantra and Kurukullatantra. He too is associated with Dhanyakataka and Sriparvata^[36].

Later on a few of Buddhist sects (Vajrayana) prominent with the impact of Hindu tradition in several vihara centres and subsequently declined due to lost its individuality of Buddhist religion^[37]. In addition a few of causes there were certain politico, socio, economic factors as further disappearance of Buddhist viharas in early medieval Andhra. During this time, Kings of various dynasties and their people in various sects did not much interested to patronise in this religion. In the same time the society of Andhra were also interested of new religious faiths like Saiva and Vaisnava traditions and made grants to these centres. Thus, the pilgrims and devotees to visit these Buddhist monasteries and gradually declined. Simultaneously prominent learning centres their teachings and thoughts of Buddhist faith also disappeared in subsequent centuries.

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