

## A study of Buddhist sites in Karnataka

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### Abstract

Buddhism is one of the great religion of ancient India. In the history of Indian religions, it occupies a unique place. It was founded in Northern India and based on the teachings of Siddhartha, who is known as Buddha after he got enlightenment in 518 B.C. For the next 45 years, Buddha wandered the country side teaching what he had learned. He organized a community of monks known as the 'Sangha' to continue his teachings after his death. They preached the world, known as the Dharma.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, meditation, Aihole, Badami, Banavasi, Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Dambal, Haigunda, Hampi, Kanaginahally, Rajaghatta, Sannati, Karnataka

### Introduction

Buddhism is one of the great religion of ancient India. In the history of Indian religions, it occupies a unique place. It was founded in Northern India and based on the teachings of Siddhartha, who is known as Buddha after he got enlightenment in 518 B.C. For the next 45 years, Buddha wandered the country side teaching what he had learned. He organized a community of monks known as the 'Sangha' to continue his teachings after his death. They preached the world, known as the Dharma. According to Buddha, life is a long suffering. The suffering is caused because of the passions people desire to accomplish. The more one desires and the less he accomplishes the more he suffers. People who do not accomplish their desirable passions in their lives will be born again to this life circle which is full of suffering and so will distant themselves from the world of no suffering - Nirvana. To get Nirvana, one has to follow the eight-fold path which are to believe right, desire right, think right, live right, do the right efforts, think the right thoughts, behave right and to do the right meditation.



Fig 1

### Dharma chakra, a symbol of Buddhism

Buddhism existed in Karnataka before 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. It was thrived in Karnataka during the period of Maurya, Satavahana and Kadamba dynasties. Many of archaeological and literary evidences are corroborate in this regarding. During the reign

of Ashoka, Mauryan emperor (273 to 232 B.C.) it gained royal support and began to spread more widely reaching Karnataka and most of the Indian subcontinent also. Ashokan edicts which are discovered in Karnataka delineating the basic tenets of Buddhism constitute the first written evidence about the presence of the Buddhism in Karnataka. Aihole, Badami, Banavasi, Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Dambal, Haigunda, Hampi, Kanaginahally, Rajaghatta, Sannati and other places are attributed to Buddhism in Karnataka.

### Badami

Badami is one of the most important historical place in the history of South India. Earlier it was called as Vatapi which is the capital of the Chalukyas of Badami. It is one of the Buddhist center at the time of olden age. It has many type of temples of Saiva, Vaishnava, Jaina, Buddha and Shakta. Out of them, four cave temples are most important. These cave temples are built between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

There is a natural cavern between the cave II and III, on the boulder below the rock shelter, the figures of unfinished Padmapani Avalokitesvara and defaced Buddha are carved. By the side of cave No. IV there is a small cave with a major niche. It has a figure of a certain Buddhist Jatakas. They are Nalagiri and Sundarananda episodes etc. A. Sundara says the sculptures of Bodhisattva Maitreya, Padmapani and a Buddha at the place are located but appearance of these figures at the place, when compared with the temples of Hindu, it was not famous at Badami during the reign of early Chalukyas. The occurrence of these figures at the place indicate that Mahayana was existed there but the account of Huen Tsang speaks the existence of both Hinayana and Mahayana at Badami. He had noted the points during his visit to the place therefore, there is a possibility of noticing the relics of the Hinayana cult of the period at the place.

### Banavasi

Banavasi is one of the important ancient site in Karnataka. It is also called as Vijayanti in ancient times. It was the capital

of the Kadambas, which is situated on the bank of the river varada, a tributary of river Tungabhadra in Uttarakannada District. This place was considered as an important Buddhist centre right from the period of Ashoka of the Mouryan dynasty.

The second Buddhist council was conducted under the leadership of Moggaliputta tissa during the reign of Ashokain 241 B.C. At the conclusion of the council, Moggaliputta had decided to establish the Buddhist religion in various parts of the country. This information is furnished in the account of Mahavamsha (4th Century A.D.) Therefore Thera Moggaliputta sent several Buddhist missionaries to different parts of the countries. These places are Kashmira, Gandhara, Mahishamandala, Vanavasi, Aparanta, Yana, Himavanta, Suvamabhumi and Tamrapanni. Maharakkhita to another country. According to Mahavamsha Moggaliputta sent five the ras to Tamrapanni, one Mahadevathera to Mahishamandala, one Rakhita to Vanavasi, one Rakhita to Aparanta and MahaRakhita to another country. Missionaries had gone to different countries to propogate the religion one of the countries was Vanavasa, which is also mentioned in the records of the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus and is identified with the present Banavasi.

The explorations carried out at Banavasi had revealed certain quantity of Buddhist remains. They are the sculptures of Yaksha, a female head, a mother and child, two types of Naga. Besides on the south-east of Banawasi on due pedestal part of a sculpture probably. Buddha's foot and terracotta, stupa motifs lids with the floral and elephant decoration were found the pedestal beam inscription, which mentions a sculpture, named Ravi and his sculpture teaches Gosala Damoraka. The former was a Shilavardhaki. Shilavardhaki means stone artisan, and Yaksha sculpture was found in a local maruti temple at the place on the basis of its iconographic features. It is identified as maitreya in the Buddhist tradition. Maitreya is next to Buddha. According to the Buddhist tradition, Buddha is still in the Bodhisatva stage in Tushita heaven and he would descend to this world in human form, 4000 yrs after the disappearance of Gautama Buddha and is considered to be a redeem all sentient being from sorrows.

### **Chandravalli**

Chandravalli is one of the important archaeological site in South India. The valley of Chandravalli is situated immediately to the South-West of the fortified hill of Chitradurga. It is also one of the Buddhist Centre at the time of Satavahana Period. M.H. Krishna systematically conducted an excavation in 1928-29 and found some coins engraving of a chaitya and a Bodhi tree, sculptures of Buddha and Yaksha here. Some paintings and other relics are also noticed at cave of Chandravalli.

### **Dambal**

Dambal, a small town situated in Gadag district, 13 miles awaysouth-east of Gadag.

It is also one of the prominent Buddhist centre in ancient times. An inscription of 1095-96 A.D. found near Jaina temple, in the fort was edited in 1881 by J.S. Fleet. He reported that the location of the inscription, belongs to a Jaina Basadi and it was a Jaina inscription. Latterly, James Burges,

revised the inscription and he said it was a Buddhist inscription. Right from the period onwards, the inscription has been referred as Buddhist by many scholars, which studying the Buddhism in Karnataka etc. In the recent decades T. Vasant Kumar has published his thesis "Karatakadalli Buddha Samskriti" (Kannada). He has given detailed information about the inscription in his work. He has also stated that, the location of the inscription is near a Jaina Basadi and he has mentioned that, there was another Buddhist inscription located by the side of the doorframes of the Jaina Basadi. M.M. Kalaburgi, edited in his volume "Dharwad Jilla Shasanagalu" has also written in the same way. Later in the recent years, H.R. Raghunath Bhat and his research students carried out further exploration in Dambal area, to investigate the remains of the Jaina Basadi. The published inscription and location of the viharas of Tara Bhagavati and Bauddha, Luckily, he could notice the door frame and the figure of Bauddha and Tara bhagavati, and also an inscribed doorframe with the figure of Bodhisatvayaksha, who has tucked yogapatta. After studying these material, he has justified that the location of the sculptures and the inscription on the ruined mound was the place of Bauddha. Tarabhadravivihara. Knowing the construction of Bauddhavihara by sixteen settis, when senior queen Laxmidevi of the chalukya king Vikramaditya VI over 18 Agraharas was ruling from Dharma Pura in 1095-96 A.D. The Tarabhadravivihara in a larger proportion by Vaddavyavaharasangamsetti of Lakkundi engraved Tarabhadravatigure on the inscription. He has asserted that it was the place of Tara Bhagavati. In this record, totally three inscriptions were unearthed on the ruined mound of the Jaina Basadi, identified as Tarabhadravivihara. The first inscription edited by Fleet already stated the construction of two viharas at the place. They are Bauddha viharas by sixteen settiset. and Bhagavati Aiya Taradevivihara by Vaddhavya-Vaharisangamavay asettivyavahari in 1095-96, A.D. Another inscription of 1098 A.D. belongs to the reign of Chalukya Vikramaditya VI, refers to the gifts of oil for the perpetual lamps in the Bauddha Vihara built by Sangam Setti. The inscription of 1098 A.D. further informs a deity Buddha and the words in the inscription are Namu Buddhaya, Tarabhadravati, Buddhasya, Bodhi Swaroopo, Tathagathasya, pujaris, Bhikshus, Buddha Shasana, Buddha dakshina etc. An inscription of 1283 A.D. referred by T. Vasantkumar does not traced as per his reference.

The over all information clearly shows that, there were two Buddhist monasteries at the place. Therefore it is hardly possible to accept the opinion of H.R. Raghunath Bhat, that the location of the inscription and his notices of sculptures in the ruined mound in the fort area, was only the monastery of Tarabhadravati. There must be two separate localities of these two monasteries in the area. Besides, the Buddha image as mentioned in the inscription could be installed in one of the monasteries. It is therefore necessary to carryout excavation for identifying the localities of the two viharas and the Buddha image atthe place.

### **Hampi**

Hampi isone of the significant archaeological site in Karnataka, which is situated on the banks of the river Tunga-Bhadra in Bellary district. It was the capital of the

Vijayanagara empire. Two minor rock edicts of Ashoka are found near by this place (Udegolam and Nittur), It is suggest that, this region was part of the Mauryan empire. During the excavation at Hampi area several Buddhist relics were noticed in different places in different periods by the staff of A.S.I was found first in palace complex are an ear Mahanavami dibba. Some inscriptions, three stucco heads of Buddha and five inscribed panels of cornice beams and Jataka stories of Buddha are found here. A lime stone inscription of 2nd century refers to "tarasaputasadanam." It refers to the register of a donation by the son of Tarasa. It was presumed to be a donation to Buddhist sangha. The lime-stone members found in the Mahanavami dibba and mint area as well as a stucco head of Buddha are placed in the sitemuseum near Kamal Mahal at Hampi. Two stucco images of Buddha collected at Kamalapur by Sri Venkatesh Aital of Chitradurga and are displayed in the museum at Dharmasthala. They are studied by A. Sundara and are comparable to Gandhara images. In the trial excavation at an area of west of kings audience hall were found five large lime-stone panels. They are of cornice beams and the relief figures of life of Buddha and Jataka stories. These structures were belonged to Vijayanagara period.

### **Haigunda**

Haigunda is also a small village, located on a small hilly land in the midst of the river Sharavati and about 20 km east of Honnavara of Uttarakannada District. There is an ancient habitation site, with the cultural remains of pottery, brick bats and the elevated land. The brick structure appear within the premises of these sculptures is therefore suspected to be a stupa remains. All these sculptures are in round relief. In different parts of the sites and within the village area, the sculptures of Buddha in two numbers had been brought to light.

In the midst of cultivated paddy fields, a colossal sculpture of yaksha (locally called Badri) was brought to light on the slope of the village. between the two hillocks in the place, a dwarf yaksha close to modern Laxmi temple was brought to light. There is a brick structural remains in the site is located between the sculptures of Buddha and Yaksha. The Buddha sculptures are similar to each other. The legs and hands of the Buddha icons are broken likewise the hands of other Buddha icon are broken. One measures 1.12 metres, height 5 cm broad and the other 1.0 mt height. The colossal yaksha 1.65 meter, excluding the pedestal part 0.56 meter broad at the chest level. The pedestal measures 1.5 meters high. The kubjayaksha measures 65 \* 28 cm excluding the pedestal or peetha. It may be noted that, there are also sculptures of Surya, Janardhana, Shivalinga in the place, among these, the sculptures of two Buddha, a colossal yaksha or a dwarf yaksha is locally known as Babaria or Babru and it is one of the Bhutas of Coastal people is in the place worshipped are belonging to Buddhist religion. The ancient site is dated to circa 1st BC to 3rd century AD. The Buddha sculptures are dated to circa 4th and 5th century A.D.

The colossal yaksha is dated to circa 1st and 2nd century A.D. The discoveries of this site and the sculptures of this place, justifies that the prevalence of yaksha worship in the region in 1st century A.D and expressed his doubt, the structural remains could be the place of stupa of the place as well as rare

type of sculpture of yaksha and Buddha icons are earliest of its kind. The sculptures are made on schist stone.

### **Kanaginahalli**

Kanaginahally is famous for Buddhist Mahastupa of Karnataka. It is also situated on the left bank of river Bhima in Chittapur Taluk of Gulbarga district, just besides 3 kilometers from Sannati. There are three big mounds at Kanaginahalli. The excavation was conducted during the year 1994-98. Various forms of Stupas, Yaksha sculptures, idols of lord Buddha and other antiques were found. The sculptures of Ashoka are also found here. The remains of Mahastupawas found on its lower ground plan. This was constructed out of the slabs of the sedimentary lime-stone which is in circular ground plan. Some inscriptions of the place, inform about certain details of the Mahastupa, architecture of the place. The stupa is in semi-circular form. Sundara A noticed some memorial stones of wealthy donors or devout merchants and patronizing Buddhist religion. He has shown for the first time that the human habitation starts in the area from middle Paleolithic period. The stupa of Kanaginahally was constructed during the Satavahana period.

### **Rajaghatta**

Rajaghatta is a small village, which is situated in the Doddaballapur Taluk of Bengaluru rural district. There is an ancient habitation site, located on the Northern side of the village. The site has several mounds of grayish soil. Therefore, the site is locally called as Boodidibba, This site was found first during the archaeological exploration in 1975 by the staff of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Mysore, Mysore. Latterly, In 1997 Nagaraja Sharma, a photographer of same university had carried out exploration at the site and noticed some more cultural relics. In the site were found brick structure of Chaityalaya, Vihara, large number of about 300 of votive stupas with inscribed tablets and a stucco head of pertaining to Buddhism during the exploration and excavation. During the excavation carried out in 1998-99 by M.S. Krishnamurthy, who was the chairman of the Department of ancient History and Archeology, and the staff at the site, an apsidal brick structure of Chaityalaya and a Vihara were noticed. Besides, about 300 terracotta of them have inscribed tablets. They read commonly as Ye Dhamma Hetuppa Bhavathesa, hetuthathagatha AA. He the sa cha yo Nirodha Evavaadi Mahasamano. A stucco head of Buddha made of lime stone is also noticed.

### **Sannati**

Sannati is a small village which is situated on the right bank of the river Bhima in Chitapur Taluk of Gulbarga district. Large number of Buddhist archeological remains like sculpture of Buddha, Stupa and others are found here. The Buddhist Sculptures are, nine images of Buddha, large number of Relief sculptures of Buddha and various Jataka stories of Buddha, Yaksha figurines, memorials stones, votive stupas were found. There are major inscriptions of Ashoka and the inscriptions, belonging to the Satavahana period were also found here. For the first time, this ancient site was noticed by Kapatral Krishna Rao of Gulbarga In 1954, with the numerous

sculptures, some with symbolically main episodes of Buddha's life such, as Vajrasana with Buddha pada under the Bodhivriksha, memorial panels and numerous Brahmi Inscriptions of 1st and 2nd C.A.D. Laterly, S. Nagaraj carried out the survey in Sannati area and brought out some more Buddhist remains. He noticed sculpture of Buddha, decorated pattike, inscriptions, fort bricks and ancient antiquaries. Laterly, M. Sheshadri was conducting elaborate exploration in sannati area and brought to light some more details of Buddhist remains. The remains are a Stupa mound, a large number of broken sculptures, two inscribed Ayakapillars, a slab with throne, the foot prints and the Bodhi tree, some inscriptions, potteiy, beads, shell, bangle pieces, and a habitation site. He is dated them to circa 1st C to 3rd C. A.D. He has stated that the stupa mound was eroded by the river nearby and the villagers also completely rifted its building and retained only the circular basement. Therefore main, the super structure was entirely gone, many of the remains are therefore scattered from the village to the site all along the riverbank. The inscribed two Ayaka pillars found in a field, near the site were also compared with the Buddhist monuments of Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati. He has pointed out that the Ayaka pillars were usually erecting on four cordinal points of the stupa. They are five great events of Buddha's life. They are Janana, (Nativity) Mahabhinishkramana (Renunciation) Samyaksanhodhi (enlightenment) Dharmachakrapravartana (death). The inscribed relief figures and the inscriptions paleographically dated to the period of the Satavahana that is 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. He further suggested that many more details could be brought out after conducting the excavation at the site. Sheshadri collected some fragments including a broken yaksha sculpture and carried to Mysore and now it is displayed in the museum of the university of Mysore. P. B. Desai conducted the exploration in sannati after the discovery of the site by Kaptral Krishnarao in 1954 and the further exploration study of the site by She shadri in 1968 along with his staff members. The team has noticed some more facts and collected some new materials. Sannati to kanaginahalli to the extent of two miles in circumference, Buddhist remains are spread. They are destroyed stupa remains, inscribed slab on the upper side, Ayaka pillars, these pillars are inserted in five directions which are considered as the symbols of five great incidents like his birth, renunciation, enlightenment, first sermon, Nirvana, on these pillars figures of Buddhist followers and articles were sketched. He compared the Ayaka pillars to Nagaijundakonda, Yaksha figure to pitalhkhora and some decorative bands to Bharahut and other sites to Amaravati and other places. In front of Devi temple, on the slab of the neem tree is sketched Vajrasanapada symbol, Bodhi tree, chaitya relief, lotus and his followers, headless yaksha, ox owner along with the servants, tiles, mud potteries, stones, sulphur glass, and ornaments. In the year 1985 one of the biggest mound was excavated therein some rusticated coins and a circular burnt brick structure around it has been brought to light. There was one more stupa, near the river but the significant remains of the Buddhist were hardly found in the site.

### Conclusion

The article focus upon the Buddhist sites which are noticed in

Karnataka. Besides these sites, there are number of other places with even more recent Buddhist inscriptions and relics. Balligave (Chikkamagalur), Kadri (South canera), Kapu (Udupi), Koliwada (Dharwad), etc. A trace Buddhist culture must have existed even during Western Chalukya period as we see inscriptions indicating Tara, Baudhayana, etc were worshipped. Interestingly, the caves around Kadari of Mangalore also have Buddhist- Vajrayana connections. These caves are locally called as Pandava caves. They have discovered Bodhisattva idol in the Jogi Mutti of the same region. Some of the Inscriptions found at Kolar, Uttarkannada and other districts of Karnataka are also make references to Buddhism.

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