



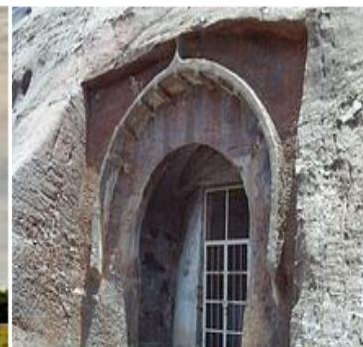
Lecture Series on World Heritage and Culture

86th Lecture on **“SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF Andhra Pradesh Part 2 (Buddhist Circuit)”**

By

Dr.G.Sethuraman, Art Historian and Dr.V.Vedachalam Archaeologist

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SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF ANDHRA PRADESH- Part 2

Andhra Pradesh is well known for its Buddhist monuments. The present lecture concentrates on the development of Buddhist art and culture in Andhra Pradesh. The Buddhist *stupa* at Amaravati is one among the three famous Indian Sculptural schools of art; the others being Gandhara and Mathura. The Satavahanas ruled Andhra region for about four centuries. Though they followed Vedic or Brahmanical religion, they patronized Buddhism as well. It helped Buddhist to reach its height in Andhra. A group of people from Deccan seem to have visited the court of Bimbisara, father of Asoka, and enacted the life story of the Buddha, from the birth to the *Maha parinirvana* as drama, in front of the king. This is referred to in a Buddhist literature, *Avadana Sadaka*, which belongs to the third century BCE. It testifies the trade activities, which flourished between the North and South India and the spread of Buddhism in the South even during the Mauryan period. The area in between the rivers Krishna and Godavari, located near the coastline, provides a number of Buddhist *stupas* belonging to the period from 200 BCE to 300CE. Some of them were hewn out of stone and others were of brick structures. Sankaran Konda and Kundupalli were cut out from rocks. At Kundupalli, a circular shaped cave was cut out with a *stupa* at the centre. This seems to have served as prelude to the formation of the *chaitya mandapa*. Its roof, measuring 18 feet diameter is also circular in shape. Its inner portion looks like an inverted basket. Its height is 14 feet and 9 inches. This is dated to 200 BCE. The Sankaran Konda *stupa* is somewhat later than that of Gundupalli. Here, a large *stupa* is carved within a *vihara* with a diameter of 65 feet. The basement of the *stupa* is circular in shape. Though these two *stupas* are not artistically significant, their antiquity could not be ignored. The other Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh, which have *stupas*, are Amaravati, Jaggayapetta, Nagarjunakonda, Battiprolu, Goli, Ghantasala, Gudivada, Petthakanja, Nagulapadu, Athuru, Dhupakunda, Sandhavaram, Harhapadu, Chinnakanja, Ramatirtham, Kanupatthi, Arugolanu, Petthimatthur, Kodavalli, Puttham, and Salikundam.

The *stupas* of Andhra Pradesh consisted of brick built hemispherical domes on a low base which had projections at the four cardinal points. Five and beautifully chiseled pillars (*ayaka stambhas*) in a row were erected on each of these projections (*ayaka vedikas*), a characteristic, unique to the *stupas* of Andhra Pradesh. Further, the manner of construction of the interiors of these *stupas* is also of interest. While the *stupas* of Battiprolu and Gudivada were of solid brick work, those at Amaravati and Ghantasala had "in the interior radiating brick wall with a hub and spokes, the spaces between the walls being filled with earth –packing, before the outer brick casing was constructed". P.R.Srinivasan is of the opinion that a number of *stupas* of this type have been found at Nagarjunakonda too. Obviously this method was adopted for reasons of economy. But if it is viewed from a different angle, it may show that the radiating ribs with the hub in the centre may give the idea of an outline of an immense umbrella and may be taken to be symbolic of the Buddha being the universal monarch in regard to the *dharma*. This might have been employed to strengthen the *stupa* structure. The *stupas* of this region were decorated with marble stone. But, however, excepting the basement all other upper structures have been destroyed. It probably served as a prelude to the modern system of pile foundation.

Though this system was mostly employed by the builders of the *stupas* at Ghantasala and Battiprolu, there were many modifications made subsequently. The central part of the *stupa* at Battiprolu is square in shape. It is connected to a circular wall by spokes of a wheel. This type of *stupa* construction might have been initiated first at Battiprolu. According to P.R. Srinivasan, the erection of *ayaka sthambhas* over the *ayaka vedikas* was a unique characteristic of the *stupas* of Andhra. But H. Sarkar feels that these features are not unique to Andhra for there are no pillars of such type in the *stupas* at Ramtirtham and Salikundam. He further says that the *cakra* type is found in a few *stupas* only at Nagarjunakonda. The five *ayaka sthambhas* represent symbolically the five important episodes of Buddha's life, viz., Birth, Great Renunciation, Enlightenment, First Sermon, and Extinction. With this introduction, it is necessary to discuss some of the Buddhist monuments of Andhra elaborately.

Amaravati Stupa

Amaravati, located to the north of river Krishna, is one of the well known and significant centres of Buddhism in India. It is known locally as *Dipaladinne* (Hill of the Lamps). This place is situated 35 kilometers north of Guntur. Its present neighbouring village Daranikota was the capital of the Later Satavahanas in the name of Danyakataka. The history of Amaravati *stupa* (*Maha Chaitya*) extends over a period of about a millennium and a half. "It is, therefore, certain that the *stupa* –complex there must have undergone several major renovations and additions from time to time. This time –span, broadly speaking, may be divided into five major divisions- Asoka, Post-Asoka, Satavahana, Ikshvahu and Early Pallava to Medieval period". It is unfortunate that the artistically excellent *stupa* of Amaravati became oblivion. It was visited by the famous Chinese traveler Huen Tsang in 639 CE. He had recorded that this monument was so beautiful in its structural art more than those of many historical monuments of India. However, some of the portions of the *stupa* have already been ruined even before hundred years of his visit. From then onwards it began to lose its structures gradually and only fragments of the *stupa* were found. All the available pieces of the *stupa* were arranged to a shape by Ferguson. Amaravati once formed part of Sindhalapudi zamindari. One of its zamindars, by name Vasreddy Venkadatri Naidu, had shifted his residence from Chintalapudi (Chintapalli) to Amaravati, and laid the foundation of the modern township around the Amaresvara temple. "Many people, at his invitation, settled in the area, and the building activity that ensued thereafter led to the spoliation of several mounds yielding large-sized bricks and lime stone slabs. The *Dipaladinne* did not escape the landlord's eyes: it was ransacked for suspected treasures and also perhaps for building material.

At the time of the digging of the mound, some sculptured slabs came to light and the news reached Mackenzie, who already visited this place in 1797. He correctly assessed at that time the potentiality of the mound of some 90 feet (27.43m) in diameter and a height of about 20 feet (6.09m). Mackenzie revisited the place, in 1818, with a band of assistants for preparing detailed drawings of the site and the monument. A few sculptured pieces were also recovered by him". After the discovery by Mackenzie, many scholars including Europeans and officials took keen interest in the collection of sculptures at this site. Some attempts were also made to excavate the *Maha Chaitya*.

Sir Walter Smit dug the south-west portion of the mound in 1845, and recovered a few sculptural panels. Other scholars like Robert Sewell (1877), James Burgess (1881) and Alexander Rea (1888-89) made systematic survey and recoded the sculptural panels precisely. Alexander Rea conducted two more excavations – one in 1905-6 and the other in 1908-9. He found remains of megaliths ascribable to a period prior to the construction of the *Maha Chaitya*. However, the recent excavation, during the year 1958-59, under the stewardship of R.Subrahmanyam and K .Krishnamurthy of the Archaeological Survey of India, brought to light a large number of inscribed architectural pieces, fragmentary sculptured panels, reliquaries and other minor antiquities including sculptures and reliefs ascribable to the medieval times. “Some more inscribed and sculptured slabs were exposed in an excavation carried out by I.K. Sharma in 1973-74 at a site close to the *Maha Chaitya*. The lowest stratum yielded both Black- and- Red Ware and the Northern Black Polished Ware”.

The remains of Amaravati *stupa*, discovered between 1818 and 1974 were shifted to many museums for display. Major share of the sculptures were taken to Madras Government Museum while the others were preserved in the British Museum at London and Government Museum at Calcutta. The Amaravati sculptures are displayed in a separate gallery. The gallery specified for this collection has a remarkable votive slab which gives a clue to what the *stupa* may have looked like in its original condition. The *stupa*, 160 feet in diameter, was originally erected and renovated between 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE. “Originally, the collection, in the Amaravati Museum, comprised those left at the site by Burgess and Rea in a temporary sculpture- shed. It was now been augmented by the finds brought to light in the excavation carried out in 1958-59. In addition, there are a few antiquities from Alluru, Gummadiurru and Lingarajapalli”.

An inscription of the period of Pulumavi Vasittiputra, found on the *stupa* of Amaravati, mentions this monument as “*Maha Chaitya*”. Amaravati *stupa* is neither a memorial monument, as in the case of Saranath or Nagaraharo, nor contains the material remains as in the case of Sanchi, Sonari and Manikyalado. Instead, it is a solid structure erected on a stone box. The total height of it is 192 feet; the *anda* (dome) portion has a diameter of 162 feet and 7 inches and the height of the basement (drum) is 20 feet. There are two circumambulatory passages and one of them is on the upper portion of the basement while the other goes round the entire structure of the *stupa*. Originally, mounted on a circular drum, was the dome or the hemispherical superstructure, crowned by a railed *harmika* and a *chatra*. The dome, now missing, appears to have been built solidly of large sized bricks. There are projections on the four sides of the drum measuring six feet length each. This is known as *ayaka vedika*. There are five pillars above this *vedika*. The drum adorns the carvings of *cakra* (disc), *bhodhi* tree, *stupa* (*Tagopa*), etc. The *vedika* pillars are rectangular in shape having square portion at the top. These pillars are called in epigraphs as “*Ayaka Khambhe*”. These types of structures seem to be common in the Kalinga region as there are many such examples at Battiprolu, Ghantasala, etc. Some of the slabs of Amaravati *stupa* show the figures of two *bhutaganas* (goblins) standing on either side.

They carry a plate or vessel to receive the *pooja* materials brought by the devotees. Among the five pillars standing on the *ayaka vedika*, the one at the centre is taller than the others and it carries a circular shaped *stupa*. There is a *vedika* (railing) located between the drum and dome with a height of 9 feet. It is in the inner portion of this *vedika*, the models of the Amaravati *stupa* are carved. There are a number of circular post-holes, 0.50m in diameter, along the *pradakshina patha* (circumambulatory passage). There is another railing, made of marble, surrounding the entire *stupa* structure with a passage of 15 feet circumambulation. There are a number of post-holes in this part of the structure also. These are all decorated with sculptural panels. "In contrast to the pattern seen at Sanchi *stupa* I, the entrances in the *vedika* did not have *toranas*, nor did they form a *svastika* plan. Instead, each opening projected outward from the railing and provided an uninterrupted view of a niche on the side of the *stupa* containing an image of a Buddha or some other Buddhist subject. Atop the four entranceway railings were large sculpted representations of lions." The pillars of the *stupa* adorn lotus medallions either fully evolved or half. The upper and lower portions of the pillars show half lotus medallions while the central part has fully evolved medallions. Each medallion distinguishes from pillar to pillar. In the words of A .L. Basham, the relief medallions are certainly among the greatest works of Indian art. Beautifully balanced in composition to fit the circular frames, they convey an intense vitality and sense of rapid movement, quite unexpected in the context of the grave and calm religion they illustrate. The slabs over the standing pillars are known as *ushnism*. Relief panels showing a simple *stupa* with plain hemispherical *anda* on a circular *medhi* (drum) seem contemporary with the representations of the *Maha Chaitya* in various phases of the elaboration and may show, or even derive from, associated votive works.

The sculptural art of Amaravati began after one or more phases of purely architectural development of the *Maha Chaitya*. The earliest sculptural phase (first phase) of Amaravati is a manifestation of the central Indian art-tradition represented by Bharhut and the early phase of Sanchi. These are relief sculptures with emphasis on landscape and animal motifs. There are a few *yaksha* and *yakshi* figures also but they reflect certain advancement over Bharhut. A.L.Basham feels that Amaravati School of art had great influence. Its products were carried to Ceylon and South- East Asia and had a marked effect on local styles, while its influence on latter South Indian sculpture is also very evident. "If the schools of Bharhut, Sanchi and Mathura are marked by a sensual earthiness, that of Amaravati marked by vital, excited movement. The slender, long-legged figures are portrayed in vigorous action, often rising almost to frenzy, as in the famous medallion showing a host of ecstatic demigods carrying the Buddha's begging bowl to heaven." The second phase must have been occurred around 100CE while the third and fourth phase mostly resembling the Kushana sculptures (CE150-250) of Mathura. As in the case of other regions, the Amaravati sculptures are also noted for their national importance. In the initial stage of the sculptural art of this place, Buddha was shown through symbols, not in human form.

Only during the latter stages Buddha was depicted in human form as a prince wearing the garment of an ascetic. Aesthetically, the sculptures of the first phase are poor. The sculptural representation of the conversion of the Jatilas or Kasyapas, displayed in the Madras Government Museum is the best example of the first phase of Amaravati. The second phase probably began around CE100. The sculptures of this *stupa* represent both Hinayana and Mahayana sects. Mostly made of white marble and lime stone, those sculptures depict the stories from *jataka* tales and early Buddhist symbols- an empty throne, foot prints, the *Bodhi* tree, etc. Dream of queen Maya, the mother of the Buddha, women worshipping at the foot of the Buddha, taming of the elephant Nalagiri, renunciation and final departure of the Buddha, his meditation, and delivering the first sermon, demigods carrying the begging bowl of the Buddha, etc. The earliest representations of the Buddha are symbolical, the symbol employed always including a pair of feet and often consisting merely of the feet. This is common in sculpture at Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodhgaya and Amaravati and was the way Buddha was worshipped before the representation of his person came into vogue. During the second phase sculptures relating to his life story and others seem to have been depicted. The images of the Buddha show serenity, simplicity, graciousness, etc. Among the sculptures of this period mention may be made of a scene in which Mayadevi and her attendants taking bath in the Anothatha tank. In this figure, Mayadevi stands at the centre and combing her hair. The four attendants carry water pots on their hips. Another panel depicts the preaching of the Buddha. In this, Buddha's garment goes on the left shoulder as at Mathura. His right hand gestures *abhaya hasta* while the left hand is placed on the thigh. There are four disciples, standing two on either side of the teacher in worshipping manner. In another scene, found in the same slab, Buddha teaches to his disciples. His sandals are seen at the bottom and *cakra* is placed on a high pedestal. "There is a large slab broken at the top showing the lower panel and part of the upper one. In the lower panel, two nobles, one on either side of *Bodhi* tree with empty throne below, hold up one a banner and the other a double umbrella. Beside each stands a woman obviously his wife, with her hands joined in adoration. Between the panels is a border of running animals (lion, bull, and horse) and the border to the right is decorated with rail pillar ornamentation."

The scene of Siddhartha's (Buddha) departure from home is found in many slabs. Some of them belong to the first and second phases and others the third phase. For example, in a panel of 1st century BCE, a horse is drawn by its rider. Buddha is not seated on the horse. But the artist tries to show symbolically that Buddha is seated on the horse back through the umbrella and flywhisks shown above the horse. In another specimen of the same period, the artists elaborated on this iconography of the rider less horse and added a pair of two men dancing in strange postures, who are leading the horse instead of the regular groom. This has the version which has trotting horse and the whole movement is in a rightward direction, in contrast to an earlier simpler version with leftward movement. In this relief, the man holding the parasol is also pulling the horse's tail, which is an indication that he is Chhandaka. As per *Nithanakatha*, Siddhartha instructs Chhandaka to lead the horse by holding his tail.

“It may be assumed that the next three versions of the Abhinishkramana from Amaravati are later in the sequence because they are more elaborate figure compositions and they also introduce the incident of the dwarfs supporting the hoofs of the horse, and forming a sort of row the lower part of the relief. The first of these three consists of a rider less horse, which would be the earliest of the three; the other two introduce Prince Siddhartha personified as a young man riding on the horse. In the former the gliding horse still retains the forward movement, but the horse becomes comparatively static in the other two reliefs. However, in all the three reliefs the compositional focus is on the centrally placed horse, the grouping of figures on either side, serving as a frame around the horse.”

In a panel of sleeping women in Siddhartha's harem, he is represented on a seat as a young prince calmly watching the disgusting sight. The seat is plain, similar to the seats on which other female attendants are seated and not like a royal throne. The composition is arranged in two tiers, the upper tier consisting of seats on which some women and Siddhartha are seated and the lower tier indicating the sleeping women on the floor. The stone slab situated above the dome of the *stupa*, there are figures of *triratna* which indicate the Buddha, *dharma* and brotherhood of the monastery. Below the *triratnas* are a row of the figures of lions. Here, in the Parinirvana scene, Buddha is not shown in reclining posture. Instead, a *stupa* is carved on a slab and devotees worship it. The dream of Mayadevi and its interpretation scenes are beautifully carved on a slab. The birth scene of Siddhartha here, unlike Bharhut, Sanchi and Gandhara, is peculiar in which Mayadevi is shown with three bends in her body keeping the branches of the tree like *salabanchika*. The foot print of the child Siddhartha is seen on a cloth held by men. The scene of enlightenment and first ceremony are depicted in many slabs. Some of them are found in the British Museum, London. A strange sculptural panel of Amaravati is the worship of river and tree. There is a belief that Buddha got enlightenment on the banks of river Palgu in North-Eastern India. In this panel a river, foot prints of Buddha, birds, etc. are depicted. The scene of subjugation of Nalagiri is preserved both in the British Museum and Madras Museum. In the Madras Museum panel, the artist represents the massive elephant leaving the town gate with fury as he flings by his trunk a man in upside down position, witnessed by a group of terror-stricken women. Next follows the same elephant meekly kneeling down in front of the Buddha at the other end, as if 'taking up dust from off the feet of the Blessed One'. The Buddha is present in person, accompanied by two monks with folded hands. In the British Museum panel two moments are portrayed, one when the angry elephant emerges from the town gate and the second moment as he sobers down and kneels in the presence of the Buddha. In addition to the religious panels, as in the case of Sanchi reliefs, Amaravati *stupa* also portray contemporary social structure through the depiction of materials used in day to day life during the Satavahana period. They include, royal emblems, attendants, umbrellas, flywhisks, fans, headdress, sword, sandals, throne, banners, cup bearers, sword bearers, hunchbacks, hunters, dwarfs, doorkeepers, ornaments, dress, turban, *krita*, monkey cap, coiffure, ear ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, girdles, anklets, stomach band, finger ring, belt, toilet, arms, chariot, elephants, cavalry, infantry, *toranas*, long seats, pillows, cushions, vehicles, vessels, musical instruments, dance poses, etc.

Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, the father of Indian Art History, has rightly pointed out that “it would hardly be possible to exaggerate the luxurious beauty or the technical proficiency of the Amaravati reliefs; this is the most voluptuous and the most delicate flower of Indian sculpture.”

Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayapetta and Other Buddhist spots in Andhra Pradesh will be covered under “87th Lecture on “**SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF Andhra Pradesh Part 3 (Buddhist Circuit)**”

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