



Lecture Series on World Heritage and Culture

87th Lecture on “SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF Andhra Pradesh Part 3 (Buddhist Circuit)”

By

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SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF ANDHRA PRADESH- Part 3

Nagarjunakonda

During the Ikshvahu period (3rd century CE) the site of Nagarjunakonda rose to prominence. The Ikshvakus came to power when their first king, Vasisthiputra Santamula, seized control from the weakened Satavahanas in the second quarter of the third century and established a new capital at Vijayapuri in the Nagarjunakonda Valley. “Although Nagarjunakonda (Hill of Nagarjuna) was not the original name for this region, the great *acarya* Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism and a proponent of the Mahayana doctrine, is believed to have lived there in the first or second century CE, thus accounting for the popular name. Certainly, the site of Nagarjunakonda, which housed more than thirty Buddhist monasteries from the second to fourth centuries CE, was the seat of much innovation in Buddhist practices, beliefs, and art forms. From a historical and archaeological viewpoint, it is a tragedy that this remarkable site had to be submerged recently during the construction of the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam, though the government of India must be commended for its efforts to excavate the site and erect reconstructions of the monuments for later study.” The monuments of Nagarjunakonda are simplest often consisting of a *stupa* and a *vihara* varying in size, but some do indicating an apsidal *chaityagriha* containing a *stupa*. The more elaborate ones include image chambers. The main *stupas* were of brick or rubble, stone-encased or plastered; often with inner bracing walls varying in number according to size and radiating like the spokes of a *cakra*, as at late Buddhist sites elsewhere or forming a *svastika*. Most of them have pillar projections as at Amaravati. The *viharas* were usually regular quadrangles with cells on three sides and the fourth open to the shrines.

“The artistic productions of the Ikshvakus at Nagarjunakonda concur with the later period of Amaravati. Stylistically the works may be divided into two periods. The earlier ones, belonging to the reign of Santamula, include memorial pillars and drum slabs. On the memorial column of Santamula, showing scenes of his life, the figures still look somewhat rigid. The art has not yet attained the vigour and confidence of Amaravati, due perhaps to the instability after the decline of the Satavahanas until the Ikshvakus gained full control.” In the *Mandhata jataka* at Nagarjunakonda the figures have become more delicate and show subtle expressions. Attended by the seven gems, the king crushes the *nagas* who oppose him and conquers the Trayatrimsa heaven where he shares the throne with Indra. But he desires everything for himself. This evil thought causes his downfall. A comet in the sky at the top right corner signifies the fall of the king from heaven. The birth scene of Siddhartha depicted at Nagarjunakonda is somewhat different from other sites. Here, Maya Devi stands on the left hand side of the composition in the reverse *tribanga* projecting her hip. The child is received by four *devas*, on a piece of cloth. On which are seven tiny foot marks indicating the seven steps of the Bodhisattva. “The female attendant with folded hands is a new element in the Nagarjunakonda relief, together with the water pot at the bottom, which suggests the bathing of the child”. One of the sculptural panels portrays a *yaksha* bowing out of his own shrine in *anjali hasta*, instead of emerging out of his tree, the moment the infant Siddhartha is brought near him by his mother. She is attended by three maids, two of them waving the *chamara* (flywhisk), and a third crouches at the feet of the *yaksha*. In the second section of the relief, the sage, Asita, wearing a head gear of twisted knots of hair, has carried the infant Siddhartha on his lap, in the same manner as Maya Drvi carried him, again represented by a horizontal roll of cloth on which are carved the *‘Buddha pada’*. The sculptures of the later period date from about the eighth year of Virapurushadatta’s reign. Examples of these include the great renunciation, and the breaking of the news of Siddhartha’s departure. In the great renunciation scene Siddhartha sits on a horse with Indra holding the royal umbrella. The four *devas* carry the legs of the horse Kanthaka. In the breaking of the news of Siddhartha’s departure, Siddhartha raises his hand to his head and Yasodhara begins to swoon. Thus the artists skillfully depicted mingled astonishments and grief.” A panel in the site Museum of Nagarjunakonda depicts a rider on a rearing horse pursued by a ferocious animal – each figure dramatic in its actions. On the left side of the panel, men with weapons raised high repel an attack by horse and elephant riders. Another panel in the same museum depicts the scene of lamentation in the palace of Suddhodhana. Here, “Chandaka bows on his knees, in front of the king. Both these men use the Indian gesture of *vilap* (lamentation), raised right arm, and bent at the elbow and the hand touching the right side of the face which is held sideways. Chandaka and the collapsing horse are placed in the middle. The grieving king on the left is paralleled by the lamenting women on the right. Two of them appear prominent as they are supported by

by female attendants. The one conspicuously positioned may be Yashodhara, dramatically flinging up her left arm. And other may be Gotami, Siddhartha's foster mother. This relief is one of the most compact and expressive compositions of its kind". A headless image of the Buddha from Nagarjunakonda is now preserved in the National Museum, New Delhi. A sculptural panel of this site depicts the scene of distribution of the Buddha's relics. An inscription of the Ikshvahu ruler Virapurussadatta (250-275CE) speaks about his marital relations with Indo-Sythian Western Satrapa king Rudrasena II. The epigraphs of Nagarjunakonda tends to stress the cosmopolitan nature of Buddhist activities there, explained that a variety of Buddhist monks came from various lands. This place had trade contacts with Sythians and Greco-Romans. A relief representing Dionysus was also found in the Nagarjunakonda palace site. Roman coins were also found here. There were also Hindu monuments at this site.

Jaggayapetta

Jaggayapetta town was founded by the local chief Venkadadri Nayudu by renaming Betabolu. "What appears to have been a more important early *stupa* existed at Jaggayapetta, some thirty miles from Amaravati, and from this site a number of early reliefs of high interest have been recovered; amongst these may be especially mentioned a number of pilasters with bell capitals and adorned winged animals in Bharhut style, one representing an elegant *punya-sala* with worshippers, and another representing a king surrounded by emblems of royalty (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy)". The king surrounded by emblems of royalty is popularly called as *cakravartin* or universal monarch. According to Susan L. Huntington, this is stylistically related to Sunga period sculptures from Sanchi, Bharhut and other sites. The white marble slab bears shallow carvings of a standing male figure, the *cakravartin*, and his seven precious possessions: a horse, elephant, wife, minister, general, the dharma (wheel), and riches (gems). The main figure probably represents the *cakravartin* Mandhata, the main character in the *Mandhata jataka*, who was endowed with the Seven Precious Possessions and the Four Supernatural Powers, and who could create a shower of seven kinds of gems simply by clenching his left hand and touching it with his right.

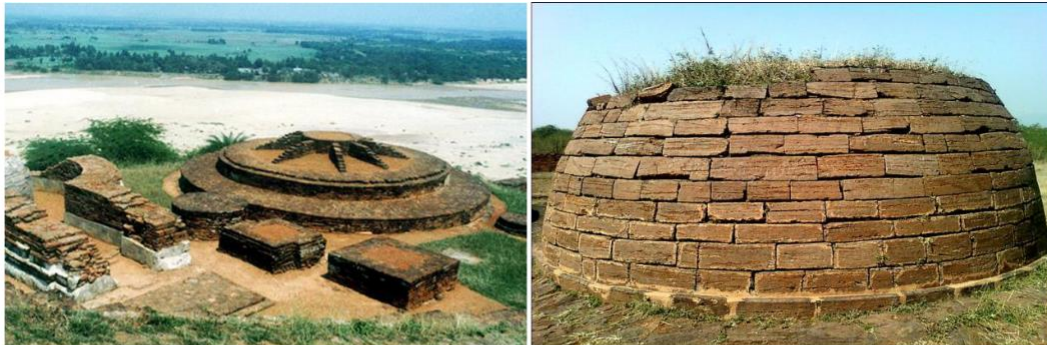
Other Sites

Near Guntupalli there is a group of Buddhist caves, including *viharas* and monolithic *stupas*, and a small *chaitya* –hall similar to the curious early types at Junnar and Kondivte in the west, but with a façade recalling that of the Lomas Rsi in the Barabar Hills. Here also are remains of the largest known structural *chaitya* hall, and there is another at Vidyadurrapuram near Bezwada. A large Buddhist monastery existed in the Sankaram hills, Vishakapatnam district, the monolithic *stupa*, some of the cells, and perhaps the three structural apsidal *chaitya* halls, dating from the first or second century BCE, though the site continued in occupation up to the Pallava period. There was another large monastery at Ramatirtham, with the brick foundations of no less than six structural *chaitya* halls, some of which at least must be of quite early date (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy). At Goli, in Palnad taluk of Guntur district, there was a small *stupa* ornamented with sculptures. The *stupa* probably belongs to about 250 CE. The sculptures found here are the seated Buddha, empty throne and deer, *Vessantara jataka*, the king, father of Vessantara, enjoying the company of his children, *yakshi*, Buddha's visit to Yasothara, *nagas*, worship of *stupa*, etc. The Buddhist centre at Ghantasala provides the sculptures of mutilated image of Buddha and the story of the return of Kanthaka, the horse of Siddhartha, to Kapilavastu. There was a *stupa* made of solid brick at Battiprolu in Guntur district. It was one of the earliest *stupas* where the slabs encasing the projections at the four cardinal points alone were sculptured. Three inscribed votive caskets each containing a stone and a crystal reliquary with relics and jewels were found here. Thotlakonda Buddhist complex is situated on a hill near Bheemunipatnam about 15 kms from Vishakapatnam. The Telugu name Totlakonda was derived from the presence of a number of rock cut cistern hewn into the bedrock of the hillock. It provides an insight into the process of transoceanic diffusion of Indic culture, especially Buddhism. The Archaeology Department of Andhra Pradesh excavated this site from 1988 to 1993. The excavations revealed the existence of a Hinayana Buddhist complex which flourished 2000 years ago. To the south of the complex there is a tank which served as a water source to the inhabitants of the monastery. The excavation also provided some Satavahana period lead and Roman silver coins indicating foreign trade, sculptures, miniature *stupa* models in stone, footprints of Buddha, etc. Bavikonda Buddhist site lies about 16 kms away from Vishakapatnam. Bavikonda means hill of wells. It has a number of Monastic ruins dating back to the third century BCE. Puvarullakonda is the local name of a hill, popularly known as Narasimhasamy konda, near

Bheemunipatnam, in Vishakapatnam district. It is one of the largest Buddhist Monasteries of Northern Coastal Andhra region. *Stupas*, ruined monastic structures, *chaityas*, votive *stupas* were found here. Nearly sixteen rock-cut cisterns were carved on the hill for the storage of rain water. Erravanam caves are situated on the left bank of Yeleru river, at a distance of 45 kms from Rajahmundry. The caves are located on *Dhanla-dibba* hillock. The excavations revealed historical remains dated back to 100 CE. Adurru, in the East Godavari district, was excavated first in 1925. The ruins of Maha *Stupa* besides other artifacts have been discovered at the site. It is believed that this Buddhist centre was created by Sangamitra, the daughter of Asoka, on her way to Sri Lanka. Buddhama is a village in Guntur district. The very name of the village indicates its religious significance. A large hoard of bronze Buddhist images dating from 8th century was found here.

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