

Residue of Buddhism in Western Karnataka

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Abstract

The existence of Buddhism in Western Karnataka also called Tulunadu has proved beyond doubt. The Natha Pantha, a branch of the Vajrayana form of Buddhism, existed in Kadri in Mangalore since the 9th or 10th century A.D. Both Udupi and Mangalore Districts are in the Tulunadu of coastal Karnataka. There are two concrete pieces of evidence of the existence of Buddhism in Udupi District. One is the image of the Buddha, of roughly 10th century A.D., found in Koppalangadi near Kaup in Udupi District. But it is worshiped today as Vasudeva. The second one is the basement of the Buddhist Stupa found at Ankadakatte near Kundapur in Udupi District. The other evidence of the existence of Buddhism in the District is a place near Kundapur called Buddanjaddu. Resemblance of Hariti, a female divinity Buddhism is also found here. Buddhism was widespread in western Karnataka during ancient times. Buddhist statues are found in various places like Kadri in Mangalore, Haigunda, Babruwada and Mulur-Udupi. Kadri also had a Vajrayana Buddhist Vihara.

Keywords: Natha Pantha, Buddhist Stupa, Buddanjaddu, Ankadakatte, Hariti, Rock Edicts, Tulunadu, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Kadri, valokitesvara, Kaifhiyat.

In this paper, an attempt is made to identify the footprints of Buddhism in western Karnataka, particularly in the coastal region including the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi in Karnataka state, and Kasaragod of Kerala state in the light of new archaeological findings. It is the continuation of the work of historians like BA Saletore, M Govinda, Pai, K V Ramesh, P Gururaj Bhat, Chidananda Murthy, KG Vasantha Madhava, T. Murgeshi, and others who have identified many Buddhist residues in this region. The archaeological relics like pottery, Rock art, sculpture bricks, inscriptions, etc. found in the coastal region provide evidence of the existence of Buddhism in this part of the country. According to the South Canara Manual, the territory to the south of River Swarna in Kalyanpura of Udupi District up to River Payaswini in Chandragiri in the Kasaragod taluk of present Kerala State is called Tulunadu. Thus, Tulunadu spans across the coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka state, and Kasaragod district in Kerala state. It is bordered by the Arabian Sea to the west and the Western Ghats to the east. Tulu Culture is unique with Tulu being the primary language spoken in this region.

Rock Edicts of Ashoka found in Karnataka were the only source of information about the existence of Buddhism in Karnataka. However, archaeological pieces of evidence found in Buddhist sites in Karnataka like Banavasi Sannati, Chandravalli, Rajaghatta, and in Coastal Karnataka prove that Buddhism existed in Karnataka in the early centuries of the Christian era. Ancient Buddhist structures have been noticed by scholars in Sannati, Chandravalli in Chitradurga, and Banavasi. Archaeologists have been working in different parts of India in general Karnataka and particularly to know more about the spread of Buddhism in Karnataka. Rajaghatta in Chikkaballapur Taluk was an important center of Buddhism in the 5th to 8th century CE. It was generally believed that Buddhism in Karnataka was spread by Ashoka through his rock edicts. Now scholars have discovered the relics of Buddhism in Karnataka, from the beginning of Ashoka, Shatavahana, and other dynasties. In North India, Hinduism was revived after the establishment of the Gupta dynasty Gupta rule, in South India also like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka Hinduism was revived by the Gangas, the Chalukyas, and the Rashtrakutas. Therefore, Buddhism has started to decline.

Tulunadu or coastal Karnataka is the Southern extension of the Konkan Coast. In the North of Tulunadu, that is in the Konkan region where a large number of Buddhist relics are found. The Department of Archaeology, Deccan College Pune has conducted extensive research work in this region. The Buddhist literature Divyavadanam conforms to the visit of Buddha to the Konkan region. Buddhism existed in the North of

Tulunadu which is the Konkan region in the middle of the 5th century BCE. The Buddhist text Mahavamsa furnishes information that the Mauryan emperor Ashoka had sent Buddhist missionaries to Aparanta to propagate Buddhism. Buddhism reached its Zenith in the Konkan region during the rule of the Satavahanas. Nearly 200 Buddhist caves have been identified in the Konkan region belonging to the Satavahana period. The Buddhist caves at Nanivali, Dhondase, Chiplun, Khed, Chaul, Kanheri Mahad, etc. evidence that Buddhism was spreading rapidly in the Konkan region during the early centuries of the Christian era. The archaeological pieces of evidence confirm that Buddhism prospered in this region even after the decline of the Satavahanas. The archaeologist identified the process of changes from Hinayana Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism and then to the Vajrayana form of Buddhism in the Konkan region. From the Konkan Region Buddhism has spread to Tulunadu and mostly the Vajrayana form of Buddhism is found in this region. Ashoka sent Buddhist monk Dharmarakshita to spread Buddhism in the Deccan and South Konkan regions and also to Banavasi. A large number of images of Buddha are found in Goa which is located in the North of Tulunadu. Hiregutti copper plate inscription begins with an invocation to Buddha.

The prevalence of Buddhism in Tulunadu was a matter of historical speculation among scholars. But Kadri was considered one of the strongholds of Buddhism in Tulunadu. The existence of Buddhism in Tulunadu Karnataka is proven beyond doubt. Kadri was a stronghold of Nathapantha. An inscription of Alupa king Kundavarman is found on the pedestal of the statue of Manjunath at Kadri. The statue of Manjunatha is regarded as the statue of Avalokitesvara, and Avalokitesvara is one of the Buddhist pantheons. It is also argued that Buddhism entered Tulunadu much before the reign of Kundavarman. The Nathapantha, a branch of the Vajrayana form of Buddhism has existed in Kadri in Mangalore since the 9th or 10th century A.D. Although the Kadri caves are called Pandava caves, they can not be associated with Pandavas, for they were built by the Buddhists in the early centuries of the Christian era. In Karnataka Buddhism and Nathapantha were brought together by the Manjunatha deity. Manjunatha is a popular deity in the entire Tulunadu. In Mahayana Buddhism Manju or Manchu is the Tibetan name for the Buddha. Kadri Manjunatha shrine was a place where the Buddha was worshiped as Manjunatha and Avalokiteshvara. Alupa king Kundavrama built Kadrika Vihara in 968 A.D for the Buddhist monks. No doubt that the Alupa rulers were shaivites. But there is evidence that in Belligave in Banavasi Buddhist viharas were built by Shatakarani and Kalyani Chalukyas, who were Shivites. Therefore, there is no wonder when the Alupa Kundavarman, a Shiva, built a Buddhist Vihara at Kadri in Mangalore. Of course, Shiva has been referred to as Lokeshwara in many inscriptions of this region. The bronze statue of Manjunatha at Kadri is 150 cm high and is regarded as one of the best of its kind in the country. The elegance, grace, resilience, poise, and tranquility are reflected in the image of Lokeshwara. Lokeshwar is a very imposing figure with three faces and 6 arms showing six different mudras, with two attendances flanking Lokeshwara. Lokeshwara is sitting on a padma-pitha, a Uttariya is found on his chest. Three faces are adjoined to one another, the central one being prominent. A relief of Dhyana Buddha is found on the Prabhavali and the image of Shivalinga is also found on either side of the Prabhavali. The Avalokitesvara (Lokesvara) statue is of 4-inch height and has one head and four hands. Buddha Amitabha with dhyana mudra is visible on his crown. A small Buddha carving is also visible on a temple pillar in front of the sanctum sanctorum. According to the epigraph found on the pedestal of Lokeshwara image the Lokeshwara was installed in AD 968 by Kundavermarasa the Alupa King. Manjughosha sculpture identified by Dr. P Gururaj Bhat at Kadri Hills has been identified as Buddhist Manjughosha of the Vajrayana form of Buddhism. Kadri Hills was considered a place of Buddhist Vihara of the Vajrayana sect. However, some historians view that the iconographic features of the Manjunatha statue of Kadri cannot be taken as a piece of evidence of the prevalence of Buddhism in this region.

On the other hand, the existence of Buddhism in various parts of the north Kanara District is convincingly proved. After the third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra, Ashoka sent Thera Rakshitha to Vanavasi (Banavasi). Since then, Buddhism has been popular in and around Banavasi. In Banavasi, Hygunda, Babruvada, Thorke, Kadagoda etc. Buddhist monuments are found. Thus, Buddhism entered the North Kanara district during the time of Ashoka, became popular during the Shatavahana period, and survived during the rule of the Kadambas, the Chalukyas of the Badami, and the Rashtrakutas. Buddhism was there both in Mangalore District and in North Kanara District. The temple also hosts statues of Mahasiddhas such as Mathsyendranath, Gorakhnath and Chowranginath. Another statue of Mathsendranath obtained from the same temple is also kept in the Mangalore Archeological Museum. These three Mahasiddhas are part of the 84 Mahasiddhas of Buddhism, and also are the founders of Nath tradition. This temple is a clear case of how

Buddhist teachings flowed into the Nath tradition and established secretly within the Saivite system at a time when the survival of Buddhism became difficult in many parts of India. For many centuries, Buddhist lineages survived secretly in India within the Nath tradition. There is currently a Nath Sampradaya Matha and some laterite caves in the hillock behind the Temple.

Udupi district is located between North Kanara and Mangalore District. In most of the temples of Udupi District, there are special stones called Sastavu Kallu or Sasthaviswara or a shrine called Sasthavu gudi. In Udupi Taluk there are two places; one is Sasthav near Kokkarne and Sasthana, a village side of N.H.17 near Kota. The word Sasthavu according to Amarasimha is one of the names of the Buddha. Therefore, it is not unlikely that Sasthavukallu, Sasthavu Gudi, Sasthana village, and Sasthav place in Udupi District are all related to Buddhism. There is a Vasudeva temple in Koppalangadi near Kaup in Udupi District. This temple is also called Barya temple. The term Barya has been derived from Behari means vyapari or merchant. The place Koppalangadi is also a significant trade center. The present temple is facing towards east but the temple lake is on the western side of the temple. Therefore, it can be assumed that the temple was originally facing towards the west, as in the case of all Buddhist temples on the west coast of India. Even in Kaup, the head of Kaup village is referred to as a Buddhist in the Kaup Kaifhiyat. The Perdoor Kaifhiyat also mentions that the image of the god Ananthapadmanabha was carved by a Buddhist of Nellikaru village.

Ankadakatte near Kundapur in Udupi District is also considered as a Buddhist monument. The basement of a Buddhist stupa found in Ankadakatte was built of laterite bricks. The basement is 139 feet circular in shape and about 7 feet in height. Presently it is considered a part of Kotelingeshwara temple, Koteswara. It is considered as a basement of the Buddhist Stupa.

The existence of Buddhism in Tulunadu is now well established by the discovery of a new Buddhist site at Kundapura taluk of Udupi district by the author of this article along with Prof. Murgshi and others. This place is called Buddhanajaddu. Jeddu means an open plain land. Buddhanajaddu is located in a relatively high area. It is an important rock art site in Coastal Karnataka. It is located in the Mukambika forest in Karkunje Village of Kundapur Taluk. Prehistoric rock engravings on natural laterite stone are found here. Since this place is called Buddhanajaddu, the engravings of the human figure here are considered the figure of Buddha. Some pottery pieces are also found near this site. Critics argue that it is very difficult to accept that the rock art or engravings of the human figure on natural laterite stone are the figure of Buddha. Mulur is a small town near Kapu, in Udupi district. From the works of Dr. Gururaja Bhatt, we came to know about a Buddha statue being worshipped as Vasudeva (Krishna) in that place. The village Mulur was known as Mulapura (the root place) in ancient times as is mentioned in the epigraph of 11th century CE (similar timeframe as Kadri statues).

Many small sculptures holding children on their lap sitting in padmasana pose found at Kalyanapura and Mandarti in Udupi taluk, Jannadi in Kondapur taluk Tellaru in Karkala taluk of Udupi district have been worshipped as Hindu goddesses. But they are considered Hariti sculptures of Buddhism. Hariti is a female divinity who was a Yakshini of Rajagriha when Buddha was dwelling there. She is one of the Twenty-Four Protective Deities of Mahayana Buddhism. In her positive aspects, she is regarded for the protection of children, easy delivery, and happy child rearing, while her negative aspects include the belief of her terror towards irresponsible parents and unruly children. In both Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, she is venerated as a protector deity, but in many folk traditions is often recognized as a female demon of misery and unhappiness towards children and parents. The Hariti cult seems to have been well established by the Indo-Greek and Kushan times as indicated by the archaeology and sculptures of this period and Hariti gained popularity as time passed. A comparative study of Harithi sculptures of coastal Karnataka with other parts of the country indicated the probabilities of the existence of the Hariti cult of Coastal Karnataka. A few large size burnt bricks have been identified in Yellampally in Brahmavar Taluk of Udupi district, presently kept in Millagris College Museum in Udupi district have been identified as the bricks belonging to Satavahanas period used in building Buddhist structures. The information given in the Perdoor Kaifhiyat, Kaup Kaifhiyat, and places like Buddhanajaddu, Sasthana, Sasthavu, Yallampally, etc. need to be studied from a new perspective.

Further north along the Karnataka coast after Gokarna is the coastal town of Ankola. There, near the seashore is a temple of Babru from which that village gets the name Babruwada. Babru in the local tongue means a local guardian deity. An earlier study has a photo of the statue taken before 2007 CE. From that photo, it was clear that we can expect to see a grand Buddha statue in Ankola. That statue seemed to be from the 4th or 5th Century CE. Being very close to the seashore, there was heavy weathering of the statue and hence the facial

features were not clear. This would have made people confuse the Buddha statue to be a local guardian. So, they called him Babru. That statue was of a Buddha seated on a lion throne with hands in dhyana-mudra. Though the face was worn out, Ushnisha and Utthariya (upper robe) were visible in the photo though there was significant weathering.

Conclusion: The Residue of Buddhism is found in in western Karnataka, particularly in the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi in Karnataka state, and Kasaragod of Kerala state. The Natha Pantha, a branch of the Vajrayana form of Buddhism existed in Kadri in Mangalore. The evidence of the existence of Buddhism in the District is a place near Kundapur called Buddanjaddu. Resemblance of Hariti, a female divinity Buddhism is also found here. Rock Edicts of Ashoka found in Karnataka were the only source of information about the existence of Buddhism in Karnataka. However, the archaeological pieces of evidence found in Buddhist sites in Karnataka like Banavasi Sannati, Chandravalli, Rajaghata, and in Coastal Karnataka prove that Buddhism existed in Karnataka in the early centuries of the Christian era. The statue of Manjunatha is regarded as the statue of Avalokitesvara, and Avalokitesvara is one of the Buddhist pantheons. Alupa king Kundavrama built Kadrika Vihara in 968 A.D for the Buddhist monks. Sasthavukallu, Sasthavu Gudi, Sasthana village, and Sasthav place in Udupi District are all related to Buddhism. Ankadakatte near Kundapur in Udupi District is of Buddhist monument. A few large size burnt bricks have been identified in Yellampally is considered as Buddhist relics.

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