

BUDDHISM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The Buddha taught dhamma to end suffering which is caused because of Greed, Hatred and Delusion. This dhamma He explained in terms of Morality, Concentration and Wisdom with its secular flavor, non-sectarian ingredients and Universal appeal. Therefore throughout history many statues of Buddha were made to express gratitude to the world teacher-Buddha. Keeping in line with this tradition a huge Buddha statue has been installed in the capital city of Andhra Pradesh. This is world's largest monolithic Buddha statue weighing 350tons, 17meters in height, standing on a lotus pedestal, installed on the rock of Gibraltar, in the middle of lake Hussain Sagar, Hyderabad in India.

Referring to images, the great philosopher Count Kaiserling writes: "I know nothing more grand in this world than the figure of the Buddha. It is the perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain". Verily true is this case too.

In the history of Buddhism, Andhra then a maritime power took leading role in the spread of Buddhism to Far East. Sri lanka and Andhradesa had close links with each other from ancient times as Dantavamsa and Attakathas testify. In the 14th century, Dharmakeerti, a leading sinhalese thera, affected repairs at the vihara in Nagarjunakonda. About the same time the sinhalese general Senalankadhikara was carrying out renovations to a vihara in kanchipura. These are last records of active

Buddhism not only in Andhra but also in the entire south of India. Andhra culture had its influence on Ceylon Buddhism. Chiefly in arts, sculpture and architecture.

The third council which was held during the reign of Ashoka under guidance of Mogalliputta Tissa, delegates of as many as six sects from Andhra i.e. chaityaka, purvasaila, aparasila, uttarsila, rajagirika, siddarthika all described as Andhakas participated. From now on Andhra played a pivotal role in the history of this religion. After the decline of Magdha Empire, two powerful empires have emerged, Andhra satavahanas in the Deccan and Kushanas in the Northwest. Andhra was home of Mahayana. From here it spread to other parts of Asia. A rare genius in the history of philosophy and profounder of Madhyamika or Sunyavada philosophy, Nagarjuna is credited with laying firm foundations for Mahayana. A galaxy of brilliant intellects, Aryadeva, elucidator of Madyamika philosophy, Buddhapalita, exponent of Prasangika school of Madhyamikavada, Bhavaviveka, head of the Svatantrika school, Dinnaga, father of Buddhist logic, Dharmakeerti, logician and epistemologist of distinction, have appeared in the subsequent three centuries in Andhra enriching Buddhist religion, philosophy, logic and related subjects. Buddhdhagosa, a revered name in Theravada tradition, was born in 4th century A.D. in planad area of Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. He wrote a treatise on tripitaka called "VISSUDHIMAGGA", which is his masterpiece on Theravada tradition.

Andhra Pradesh has 140 listed Buddhist sites, which provide a panoramic view of the history of Buddhism from 3rd century B.C. to 14th century A.D. The list of inscriptions engraved on various media, lithic, copper plates, crystals, pots, conches are 501(360 lithic records, 7 sets of copper plates, 134 inscribed pots and conches etc.) in number. Some of the famous Buddhist sites in Andhra are Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati and Bavikonda. It is Buddhism that encouraged people to transform the prevailing ideas and ideals into a definite and concretized shape, especially the form of art and architecture, philosophy and literature. Historical role of Buddhism in Andhra was to incline local people given to animistic beliefs into an organized religion and launch them on the road of civilization. The cosmopolitan spirit of Buddhism helped to remove the tribal barriers, integrated the people and gave them a cultural identity paving way for the rise of Andhras as an imperial power under the satavahana rule. It also gave a stimulus to the creative genius of the people resulting in the sculptural exuberance of the stupas at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda and scores of other Buddhist sites in the state. Fourteen Buddha relic caskets have been so far recovered from the sites of Andhra, the largest number for any state in India.

According to sutta nipata identified as one of the older parts of Tripitakas, Buddhism came to Assaka country (modern Nizamabad district of Andhra) during the lifetime

of the Tathagata himself. An ascetic by name Bavari set up ashram on the banks of river Godavari and pursued religious life. Having come to know that a Buddha had arisen in the north, he sent his disciples to meet him and engage him in a spiritual dialogue. The dialogue of the disciples of Bavari with Buddha at Vaishali is recorded in sutta nipata, which also says that the Bavari's disciples having heard the dhamma from Tathagata himself converted to Buddhism, and took dhamma to the Telugu country, Andhradesa. Buddhism in Andhra flourished for over 2000 years as one of the important religions, right from 5th century B.C. to 14th century A.D. as confirmed by literary, epigraphical and archaeological accounts. Buddhism through Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana phases flourished for longer duration.

Though various reasons are given for the decline of Buddhism in the state, it is obvious that vajrayana form of Buddhism, which borrowed heavily from the Indian tantric tradition, substituted meaningless rituals to the religious activity that can confer mystical power on the practitioners. A body of literature called Dharanis was devised to propitiate the vajrayana goddesses. The Buddhists, by this point of time, having lost all intellectual vitality resorted to tantric worship in the hope of acquiring mystical powers. Thus narrowing down the essential difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, especially the difference between tantrism, vishnuism and Buddhism.

Note worthy is the belief in the theory of incarnation describing the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, originally created in the Vishnu Purana which was written later after Buddha around seventh century and was repeated in the other Puranas. According to this story in the Vishnu Purana, the Buddha was not the incarnation of the good qualities of Vishnu but of his unwholesome qualities such as ignorance and delusion. The only aim of this incarnation was to turn the followers of the Vedas against the Vedas and prevent them from going to heaven so that the reign of Indra and the other gods in heaven could be secure. This narrative censures not only the Buddha but also his teachings. Another belief that Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Vishnu will completely destroy all Buddhists is even more offensive and misleading. Thus these false stories created confusion and made a negative impact on the believers of Buddha.

Apart from this the secondary mythological gods that were introduced in the temple under the pretext of protecting deities later became the primary gods of the temple and the Buddha's image finally disappeared never to be found again.

There was one more false propaganda that the Buddha had nothing of his own to give to the world and that the source of his teachings is from the Vedic tradition. The truth is that Buddha was the leader of *Samana* tradition. Instead of giving

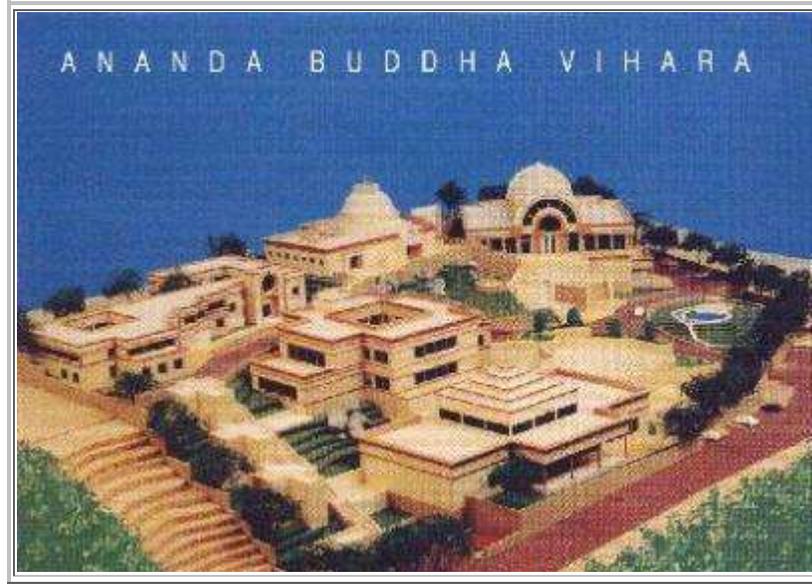
importance to prayers he gave importance to one's own strenuous efforts and exertions. He clearly said I am giver of the path of liberation. This difference between the Vedic tradition and Samana tradition gave people a easy alternative of depending on favors from some mythological gods to satisfy their greed and hatred rather than working themselves strenuously against greed, hatred and delusion which is unique to Buddha's teachings. Therefore the story in puranas proclaiming the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu and other false stories made because of mutual hostility and enmity, proved to be fatal for Buddhism in general.

Though there was no great persecution of Buddhists by the ruling families of Andhradesa, at least two pallava rulers, Simhavarma and Trilochana were zealous in destroying the monasteries at Sriparvata and Dhanyakataka. Radical Saivaite sects like Kalamukhis initially and later, Veerashaivas conducted an aggressive campaign condemning Buddhists as atheists. Occupying Buddhists places, Shiva and Vishnu temples were built over Buddhists shrines. The aggressive and often violent campaign is exemplified by the conduct of the Veera Saiva proponent, Mallikarjuna Panditaradhya, who after losing a debate to Buddhist monk in the court of chandole conspired and got them, killed and destroyed their places of worship. Panditaradhya's aggressive campaign almost wiped out Buddhism, in the Andhra country. Earlier shankara who was known as Pracchana Buddha borrowed Madhyamaka metaphysics and logic and modeled his mathas on Buddhist monasteries. Kumarila and Shankara carried on virulent crusade against Buddhism.

Of the 140 Buddhist sites identified in the state only a few have been excavated, the best known being Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. There are several equally important sites like Chandavaram and Dantavaktruni kota (Dantapur of yore), which are yet to be excavated, and which may still hold treasures of information for us.

Now in the land that once belonged to Buddha Dhamma, an effort is being made by Venerable K. Sangharakshita Mahathero and few dedicated people to revive Buddhist tradition and culture. A Buddhist Cultural Complex in the ethnic architectural style is already under construction at Secunderabad city to create the necessary facilities and ambience. Presently some of the monks from Ananda Buddha Vihara are being trained at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, Maharagama, under the able guidance of most Venerable Madihe Pannaseeha Mahanayaka Thero and Venerable Rahula Thero. The Ananda Buddha Vihara whole heartily expresses its gratitude and thanks to the Venerables and staff of Bhikkhu Training Centre for assisting in this noble deed. A public charitable trust by name Ananda Buddha Vihara Trust, had been founded with the object of reviving, preserving and

propagating Buddhist tradition and culture and making available Buddhist literature in local language Telugu.



ANANDA BUDDHA VIHARA

The beautiful Ananda Buddha Vihara
Standing on the hill Mahendra
is being built in the state of Andhra.

This is due to the effort of Bhante K. Sangharakshita
& the practitioners of the technique of Vipassana
as taught by kalyanamitra G. Satyanarayana.

Here all are to practice Sila, Samadhi & Panya
to cut the difficult snare of Mara
& finally attain the bliss of Nirvana.

The Hyderabad Vipassana International Meditation Centre, which was the first centre to organize a vipassana course in India in 1975, along with the state government of Andhra Pradesh celebrated its silver jubilee in the year 2000. Shri S.N.Goenka visited as the state guest of Andhra Pradesh on the request of the chief minister Mr. Chandrababu Naidu and a five public talk series was arranged explaining the importance of Vipassana in everyone's life. After the talk Mr. Chandrababu Naidu acknowledged the importance of moral principles in government administration and hence announced the issuing of order (G.O.Ms No

351, General Administration(AR&T.III) Department, dated 18th october, 2000) sanctioning special paid leave of 10 days to all government officials wishing to take part in Vipassana courses.

Thus the 17meter tall, 350ton monolithic statue of Buddha rising above the placid waters of Hussain Sagar is but a humble tribute of the Andhra Country to the Tathagata to whose Dhamma they owe their spiritual and cultural advancement in the formative years of their history.

In this world of fashion and passion

Buddha stands for compassion and dispassion.

In this world of industrialization and commercialization

Buddha stands for humanization and spiritualization.

In this world of diversity and complexity

Buddha stands for unity and clarity.

In this world of consumerism

Buddha stands for contentmentism.

This world with its attraction for customer oriented dhamma

Buddha stands for truth oriented dhamma.

In this world of conflict and poverty

Buddha stands for peace and prosperity

Statue of Liberty stands for freedom

Statue of Buddha stands for virtue and wisdom.

MAY ALL GET ESTABLISHED IN VIRTUE AND WISDOM.

Ven. Bhikkhu Vinayarakkhita

Dhramayatana, Maharagama.

SRI LANKA.