



A STUDY OF BUDDHIST ART OF THE LOWER KRISHNA VALLEY

ADIL FIRDOUS

RESEARCH SCHOLAR OPJS UNIVERSITY CHURU RAJASTHAN
SUPERVISOR NAME-DR.JAYVEER SINGH
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OPJS UNIVERSIY CHURU RAJASTHAN

ABSTRACT

The land form, topography, river systems, rock and mineral resources along with the flora and fauna have been supporting human settlements in the lower Krishna valley since the prehistoric times. The find spots of the prehistoric sites are proximal to water courses and the rock resources, supported by conducive ecological niches. The demand for food by the early hunter-gathers, pastoralists and cultivators was always within the carrying capacity of the various aspects of the local ecology. There had always been a dynamic equilibrium between the demand and supply of calories to the folk. The extant tribal and aboriginal folk along with their habitats and food gathering and food producing economies largely reflect the life and culture of prehistoric times in the valley. The status of prehistoric societies upto the advent of pastoralism and early farming may be considered as egalitarian. The advent of Neolithic way of life and successive advances brought in ranked and stratified societies. The advent of metal, copper and iron led to a gradual urbanization. It must be noted here that all the component factors leading to the urbanization as enunciated are perceivable in the case of the lower Krishna valley. However, the courses towards urbanization were slow and limited in nature. The components of urbanization in the lower Krishna valley are characterized by small settlements populated with early iron using communities. Edifices like Megalithic structures demanded joint operations by larger sections of people around. Identification, extraction, smelting and forging of iron equipment demanded specialized skills and labour. The Black and-red ware and associated potteries of Iron Age also demanded a high level of skill by the potters. Domestication of

animals and cultivation of plants brought in permanence in the settlements. Bead making, bangle making, basketry also demanded handing down of the skills through generations. Contact with the neighbouring settlements and access to required mineral resources richly enhanced the interaction spheres. This led to a type of a trade and exchange networks. This in itself along with primitive belief patterns comprised the urban status of some of the settlements of times anterior to 4th century B.C. in the lower Krishna valley.

KEYWORDS:Buddhist Art, Lower Krishna Valley, human settlements

INTRODUCTION

The AitareyaBrahmana mentions that Andhras constituted a mixture ofvarious tribes. The people who were cursed by Visvamitra included Andhras, / — Pulindas, Sabaras and Mutibas. This indicates that Andhras were originally degenerated Aryans. The Buddhist literature mentions that the monks of Andhra region are Andhakas. However, as Andhakas were mentioned along with the Vrishnis' and the 'Bhojas' it is possible that the Andhakas were not non Aryans.Puranas also sometimes mention that the Andhras wereMlechhas. However, the Mahabharata gives equalstatusfortheAndhras, the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras. Andhras lived in the association of many other tribes. They included Naga, Yaksha, Mahisaka and Asmaka. These tribes maintained a Serpent, an Elephant, a Buffalo and a Horse as the totemic symbols respectively. The Mahabharata mentions about Khandavadahana and the Sarpayaga. The Mahabagavata mentions about the KalTyamardam. These references indicate that the Naga population of Kuru, Panchala and SurasenaJanapadas were driven out of their homelands. The Nagas have migrated to different regions south oftheVindhya. One such settlement of the Nagas has come up in the lower Krishna valley (HanumanthRao, B.S.L.,1973: p.8). One of the inscriptions of the Guntupalle caves mentions that the cave was scooped in the Mahanagaparvata (Sarma, I.K., 1998). Also tradition has it that AcharyaNagarjuna of 2nd Century A.D., obtained his Paramitas from the Nagaloka. The SamkhapalaJataka mentions the mouths of the river Krishna as located in the Nagaloka (Cowel, E.B., 2005: Jataka no. 524).

The literary work Gandavyuha, which is Buddihist in nature, mentions thatmany people ofthe Naga tribe have accepted Buddhism atDhanyakataka on the instance of Manjusrf. The Gandavyuha is dated to 3rd Century A.D. The 'Mahavamsa' and the Pali literature mention that a Naga king by name 'Kata' was living in the area of Majarika. The Majarika is the present daylower Krishna valley referred to as Maisolia by the ancient travellers. The sacred literature of Siam and Simhala also mentions the lower Krishna valley as the abode of Nagajati (HanumanthRao, B.S.L., 2003: p. 21). In a number of sculptures from AmaravatC persons of the Naga tribe are decorated with the hoods of a serpent above their heads. In some of the Hindu temples also as atBiccavolu, belonging to the Eastern Chalukyan time, figures of male and female Nagas are to be seen. They have human bodiesupto the waist. Their heads are crowned by

snake hoods (Sivaramamurti, C.,1957: p. 50). Similar motifs are to be seen in many other temples of Medieval times in Andhra.

Ancient Tribes of the Lower Krishna Valley

In the Buddhist literature, the part played by Naga Muchilinda during the penance of the Buddha is well known. Evidently the Naga tribe played / an active role in the spread of Buddhism from Dhanyakataka and Sriparvata regions. In the present day, Prakasam district, at Malakonda a tradesman gave a donative records, dated to 2nd Century B.C. The inscription mentions him (HanumanthRao, B.S.L.,et al,1998: p. 94) as belonging to 'Aruualakula'. In Tamil Aruva means a snake therefore it is apparent that the Naga tribe had a distribution along coastal Andhra south of the river Krishna also. The Yakshas are also an important tribe that lived across the lower Krishna valley. They are represented in sculptures of Amaravatwith slightly rounded faces and heavy body makeup. There are fond of music and associated with the spread of Buddhism in this area. The chief ofthe Yaksha'sis Kubera, and he is represented in the panels of Buddhist art. With the passage of time these Yakshas have degenerated themselves into Jakkula's. Their settlements like Jakkulanekkalam can be seen even today close to Vijayawada in the lower Krishna valley. They developed an art form known as Yakshagana. It is a musical composition and even today Yakshagana is a popular music type. Terracotta images of Yakshas and Yakshis are recovered at Dhanyakataka, Vijayapurf-Ndgarjunakonda and Chebroulu of the Guntur district.

In addition to the above tribes we have population whose totemic symbols are a Horse and a Buffalo. They are known asAsvakas and Mahisakas. The Sangam literature mentions about Erumainadu. Its Sanskrit equalent is Mahishamandala. 'Erumu' is the teluguequalant of Mahisha. We have such places like Yenamadala near Guntur reminiscent of their lineage from Erumainadu and the Mahfshaka countries. The Satavahana is a combination of two words Sata and Vahana. In the Mundari language Sata means a Horse. Han or Vahan means a son. This means that the Satavahanas were a tribe whose totemic symbol is a Horse. Among the many Andhras mentioned Assakas and Asmakas are known. Possibly they had a horse as their totemic symbol. It is possible that the Satavahanas started their political career from AssakaJanapada and at a later date Bodhan of AssakaJanapada became their early capital.

Taking the Numismatic evidence which includes the coins of Chimuka (Simuka), the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh is taken to be the original home land of the Satavahana (Shastri, A.M., 1998: p.11). The Mulakas are related with the Asmakas of the Deccan and constitute a small tribe probably their original home land was located in Maharashtra across the banks of the Godavari. From the Suttanipata, it is apparent that the Mulakas had their capital at Prathisthana. This was referred to as Baithan by Ptolemy. It is held by the Vishnudharmottaram, that the Assakas and the Mulakas were living across the banks of the Godavari. The Nasik inscription of GautamfBalasri mentions that GautamiputraSatakarni conquered the regions of Asika, Asaka and Mulaka. These factors indicate that the Mulakas were geographically located close to Asmakas (Law, B.C., 1973: pp. 184-185). Bhojas were an ancient tribe, who spread over parts of central and southern India since very early times. According to MatsyaPurana, the Bhojas and Satvats belonged to the Yaduvamsa. They had their capital at Mathura and they habited the SurasenaJanapada on the Yamuna. The Vishnu Purana considers that the Satvats and the Bhojas were closely related people. By the time of the Epic period itself, the distinction between the Bhojas and Satvats vanished. According to the Mafiabharata, the Bhojas are associated with the Vrishnis, Andhakas and the Yadavas and formed a confederacy.

The Vanaparva of the Mahabharata mentions warriors of these tribes together. The Verataparva and the Udyogaparva of the Mahabharata state that a large number of the people from Vrishni, Andhaka and Bhoja tribes accompanied Lord Krishna to Dwaraka. There are instances to conclude from the Mahabharata that the Bhojas and the people of Vidarbha were closely connected. It is interesting that Kalidasa (Raghuvamsa-V), mentions the king of Vidarbha as a Bhoja. According to the Vishnu Purana-IV, the Satvatas were born in the family of Yadu and the descendants of Satvatas are known as Bhojas. The Bhojas were mentioned as the subordinate tribe in the Asokan Rock Edicts-V and XIII. They are mentioned along with the Andhras, Pulindas and the Rasthrikas. In the Hatlgumpha inscription it is mentioned that Kharaveia defeated in his fourth regnal year the Rathikas and the Bhojakas (Rasthrikas and Bhojakas). It is interesting that the Bhojakas and the Yadu clan extended all the way upto Kerala. This is evident from the Arulaperumal inscription and the Ranghariatha inscription of Ravivarma. Thus the Bhojakas and the Yadu clan have mixed up with the population of south India including the Andhra country (Law, B.C., 1973: p. 373), It is already stated the BhojakaYadu families were closely linked up with the Andhakas. t ^ The Sabaras are a non aryan tribe mentioned in the

great Epics. We find a reference to the Sabaras in the AitareyaBrahmana (VII). They are cursed by Visvamisra along with Andhras, Pundras, Pulindas and Mutibas.

The MatsyaPurana mentions the Sabaras as the residents of Dakshinapatha. / Ptolemy in his Geography mentions about a country called Sabarai. This / could be the region occupied by the Sabaras. The RamSytana mentions that the Sahara women were attached and dedicated to Sn Rama and the Sabaras themselves were a wild tribe living in the forests of the south (Law, B.C., 1973: p.172). Mutibas are also a non-aryan tribe mentioned alongwith the Andhras, Pulindas etc. The 'Saan/chyayanaSrauta Sutra' refers to the Mutibas as Muchipas. They are definitely a Southern tribe. If the reading is correct then Modubae of Pliny may be identified as Mutibas. Asokan Rock Edict-XIII, refers to Paitryanikas along with Bhojas and others (Sircar, D.C., 1998: p.44). B.C Law (1973: p.381) is of the opinion that the Petenikas of the Asokan records could be identified with the residents of Paithan (Prathisthana). There is also another opinion that Paitryanikas are those who enjoyed the property of their fathers (Bhandarkar, D.R.,1919: as referred to by Law B.C.,1973: p.382). We have Pitrubhaktas, who ruled parts of southern Kalinga, extendinguptoPisthapura during 4th-5th centuries A.D. (Sarma, I.K., 2008: p.78). However, the relation of Pitrubhaktas with the Petenikas (Paitryanikas) of Asokan records is yet to be established. The AnguttaraNikaya gives the same opinion as held by Bhandarkar, D.R. At the present status we may accept that the Paitryanikas are the residents of the Paithan region. The Periplus and Ptolemy mentioned about Paithan but they did not speak of the name of the people as Petenikas.

The Pulindas have been mentioned in the Asokan Rock Edict-XIII along with Andhras and Bhojapaitryanikas. The AitareyaBrahmana speaks — i of the association of Andhras with Sabaras, Pulindas and Mutibas. The Mahabharata and the Vishnupurana also place Pulindas along with Andhras / and Sabaras in the Dakshinapatha. The Bhagavata mentions that the Andhras, Abhiras, Pulindas and a few other tribes accepted SrfKrishna as their supreme Lord. By the time of Ptolemy the Pulindas were distributed across the banks of the Narmada, areas near Ujjain and other regions (Law, B.C., 1973: p.175). At present it is difficult to assess the extent to which the Pulindas mixed with the population of ancient Andhra. Though Rock Edict-XIII of Asoka mentions about Nabhakas and Nabhapahktis along with the Andhras, their association and mixingwith ancient Andhra people is yet to be investigated. Thus, during the

ancient times the land of Andhra was variously occupied by people, either local or immigrants. The tribes, who lived in this area or migrated to this region, included the Andhakas, Asmakas, Mulakas, t Pulindas, Sabaras, Bhojas etc., besides the Nagas and Yakshas, Thus the ancient population of Andhra represents a mosaic of various tribes. It is not surprising that the Yaksha and Naga population dominated the scene in the / spread of Buddhism at Dhanyakataka, Sriparvata-Vijayapuram and other areas.

Characteristics of the Amaravat Style of Art

1. Amaravat

The art of Amaravat had its beginnings during the Mauryan period. In due course of time, the art flourished under the patronage of Vandanamagoshthi and Dhanakadanigama, besides the contributions made by the various sections of the society. The carvings at Amaravat reached a climax and excelled the art of Barhut, Sanchi and western Indian Rock-cut caves etc. The style of Buddhist art reached its climax in the various carvings at Amaravat and there by justified in being called the Amaravat school of art. During the period under consideration, it became a normal trend to adorn the stupas with beautifully carved panels on pale green or white limestone. Only a few stupas have retained a few panels while at Amaravat, the panels are not only large in number, but also varied in nature. The school of Amaravat art later on spread across Nagarjunakonda, Kesanapalli, Chandavaram, Jaggayyapeta etc. The earliest art of Amaravat can be seen across the granite rail, particularly on the uprights. The registers included the Triratna symbol, a Vriksha-chaitya and a Stupa on outline. These are dated to 3rd century B.C. on the basis of the associated cross-bar, which is inscribed. Particularly in the carvings of the stupa, in outline, one can see characters of graphic art (Ghosh, A and H. Sarkar, 1967: pp.168-177). It is from these initial beginnings, the Amaravat art records strides of development as seen in the sculptures of the limestone stele and the Yaksh figures, which are presently displayed in the Archaeological Site Museum, at Amaravat (PLATE - XI). The stele is all the more important because it records in six scenes, the events connected with the life of Buddha from his birth to his final Mahaparinirvana at Kusmagara. Most of these scenes are appended with label inscriptions, which is a practice very common at Barhut. On the second / face of the stele, the buildings at Sravasthi are depicted along with the story related to Anadhapindika. The story goes to say that Anadhapindika purchases Jetavana from prince Jeta for the construction of the Gandhakuta,

Kausambakut, and Karerikutfetc., for the residence of Lord Buddha. On the third face of the stele, the river Krishna is represented as flowing water flanked by multistoreyed structure provided with stair case. Also, a vaulted structure with massive pillars and otherstructures having chaifya- arches and a pavilion are all carved inside a railing. In general, the art on the stele bears close resemblance to the art of Suhgas as seen across the panels of Barhut. In some aspects particularly while showing structures isometrically the Amaravatartisans exhibited a lead. The other sculptureslike the Elephant, the Yakshand the Stupafigures indicate flatness in form and angularities recalling examples from Barhut.

2. Nagarjunakonda

The art of Nagarjunakonda has been studied by many scholars after its initial discovery followed by retrieval of many more pieces through the excavations. A critical analysis of the art of Nagarjunakonda indicated that 'the general atmosphere of allegiance and sophistication, of passionate gaiety and animation, of conscious grace and dolorous dalliance, and some timeseven of exuberant abandon and trembling unrest - all unmistakable evident in the Andhra reliefs of this period - have also been noticed again and again' (Ray, Amita, 1965: p. 11). When compared to the joyful and animated reliefs of Bodhgaya, Barhut and Sanchi the art exhibited at AmaravatTand more particularly at Nagarjunakonda is sensuous and mundane and exhibit the innocent joy in life. This is in contrast to the physical charm perceivable in the Yakshfs of Mathura and to some extent Barhut and Didarganj. When compared to Sanchi and Mathura, the art ofAmaravatfandNagarjunakonda is passionate and sensuous representing a Mature phase. This also shows a change in the aesthetic vision technical exuberance and changing ideals of beauty. It has been stated that the transformation in the art is from the stable and permanent to the transient and mobile. The change is in tune with the artistic development, 'from Barhut to AmaravatTthere is, along the arrow line of time, a story of evolution along a straight high way laid down by the art itself' (Ray, Amita, 1965: p. 11). From the epigraphical record ofNagarjunakonda, we understand that the art was patronized by members of the sangha, the ladies ofthe royal and noble families who were attached to the Buddhist order. Also a monastic establishment atAmaravatTandNagarjunakonda represent a transitional phase in Buddhist ideology and thereby the art is a reflection of that.

The reliefs of AmaravatfandNagarjunakonda along with those at Golirepresent a physiognomical composition of men and women comparable to the description given for the progressive type of the Chenchus (Fiirrer, Haimendorf, C.Von, 1943). This aspect is evident in the representations of the human beings of AmaravatfandNagarjunakonda across the well-built frame and slim and springy physiognomical forms of men and women. Particularly, the busts of women are slighter and softer and the lips thinner # and narrower, much as we find amongst Chenchu women. Also, slender and tall with elongated legs tapering downwards particularly standing in an abhangapose with the entire weight of her body resting on her right leg, as such the female form is mastered by the craftsman. In some casethe physical form was able to express the psychological state of men and women. In a general way, we may say that linearism dominated the human sculptures with all grace and charm. Each sculpture, human or animal, throbs with life. The human figures are present in each scene, in all possible poses and attitude.

CONCLUSION

The components of urbanization in the lower Krishna valley are characterized by small settlements populated with early iron using communities. Edifices like Megalithic structures demanded joint operations by larger sections of people around. Identification, extraction, smelting and forging of iron equipment demanded specialized skills and labour. The Black and-red ware and associated potteries of Iron Age also demanded a high level of skill by the potters. Domestication of animals and cultivation of plants brought in permanence in the settlements. Bead making, bangle making, basketry also demanded handing down of the skills through generations. Contact with the neighbouring settlements and access to required mineral resources richly enhanced the interaction spheres. This led to a type of a trade and exchange networks. This in itself along with primitive belief patterns comprised the urban status ofsome of the settlements of times anterior to 4th century B.C. in the lower Krishna valley. In the present context, the Janapada of Magadha rose pre-eminently and could influence areasfarsouth of the Vindhyanmountains. Successive dynasties that ruled from Rajagriha or Pataliputra paved the way for an empire building activity. It is notsurprising that the emergent Mauryan Empire was able to influence across places far south of the rivers the Godavari and the Krishna.

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