

Buddhist Stupa at Ghantasala

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Abstract- *Ghantasala is one of the Ancient Buddhist and trade center in Andhra Pradesh now also we can find the Buddhist remains like stupachaitiya and vihara. We find the ancient coins. Which were evident for foreign trade. The route was costal as well as inland we find mahanavikas mentioned in the inscriptions of Ghantasala. In this paper an attempt is made ensile the Buddhist constructions in Ghantasala.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ghantasala a large flourishing village in Divi Taluk, was once a renowned Buddhist Centre teeming with monuments of great beauty. Ghantasala town and mandal head quarters are existent in Krishna District in South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. It is based at a distance of nearly 21 Km from the western part on of Machilipatnam and about 40 km from the eastern of Krishna river located about 60 km away from Gahantasala in Vijayawada, which is the largest city of Krishna District. This region is historically significant since it possesses some focus Buddhist sculpture, and it was proclaimed as a historical site during the period 1870 to 1871 by the British East India company, stupa of Ghantasala measuring about 23 feet in height and 112 feet in circumference was unearthed by Alexandar Rea. Ancient Buddhist slabs and relics have been found in 1919 to 1920.

Its prosperity was mostly due to the sea-born trade. Ptolemy specific mention of the emporium of Kantakossyla in the region of Malsolia (Machilipatnam) which is my 13 miles from Ghantasala was the crow flies. A number of Roman gold coins and hundred of copper and lead coins of the Satavahanas with the ship motif found here are now the only remnants left by the flood- tide of the Indo-Roman-Trade indeed one of the inscriptions, in character of the 2nd century A.D J found here, relics the gift of an ayaka-pillar by the wife of a Mahanavika once a prosperous town of Indo Roman commarce, Ghantasala was also known to be a well – known religious spot. There have been instances of carved limestone one columns which area associated with Buddhist monastic settlements belonging to 2nd and 3rd century BC at Ghantasala. Besides, a stupa “Mahachaitiya” displaying a uniq. pattern, composed of bricks at the center is another structure which is praiseworthy. The cube, of solid bricks situated at the central part of chaitiyain embedded with 12 constellations inspired by the Zodiac. These chaitiya’s served as residences of the Buddhist monks and were popular during the Era of the satavahana dynasty. Lime mortars and marvelous pasters made up the

walls of the stupa. Yet another interesting structure is a beautifully carved structure adorned with the figures of two garland bearers on the dome, a miniature stupa based on a throne at the centre and a “Dhamma Chakra”. ‘A purnakalasa’ carved with lotus flower’ suggesting the birth of Lord Buddha, which measured four by three concentric inner wheels are also a part of the stupa.¹

Like most of the Buddhist centres in the lower Krishna valley, it, too, was subjected to large scale pillage, so that the remains surviving now are only a small fraction of what once existed. Several limestone pillars of various sizes, bearing the characteristic village including the pastures ghotakam surrounding it. The existence of chases at their top suggests that they formed part of a number of monasteries. One pasture, locally called Dharma – Ghotakam, yielded life-sized image of Buddha in the early Amaravathi style, an inscribed lion (belonging to the mandapa of Buddisiri) which most probably crowned the gate and a number of pillars, of which tow are inscribed in ornamental Ikshvaku characters. The record the gift of a stone mandapa with a gandha – kutti, a railing (vedika) and a torana at Ukashasirivadhana by the house holder Buddisiri, a resident of kantakosala². Evidently, at this spot three existed a mandapa and a shine of Buddha. Similar pillars, but inscribed, are now laying in a field, locally called yennamyadu, associated with low mounds. Other localities Ghotakam- Malapalli and mounds like kota- dibba yielded similar fragments, the latter having an inscribed on in per-Ikshvaku Charaters³.

In and around the village.i.e several mounds locally fragment of mandapa pillars, inscribed slabs, ayakapillers, brick bats, early historic pottery, image of Buddha, Raman and sathavahana coins etc⁴. Recently a heard at kshtrapa coins was also reported from this place, now kept in the state museum, Hyderabad.

The mound containing the ruins of the mahachaitiya was excavated by A.Rea. Like the stupa of Nagarjunakonda, the internal Construction of the dome is in the form of a wheel with two concentric circular walls, connected with each other sixteen redial walls. The inner ring contains within it a network or cross walls around a central cube so that sixteen irregular cells are formed. These cells, together with the ones between the two rings, are packed with back mud. Around the dome, which is stated to be 111 ft. in diameter⁵.

The site is being in close proximity to see the sea on the east – coast of Andhradesa towards south attracted many people from further regions. It enjoyed close cultural contacts with many neighbors Buddhist centres. The people of this place made munificent donations to the stupa at Amaravathi⁶ Upasika Budhasiri of Nagarjunakonda, built a stone at Kantakosala⁷. It is interesting to note the wife of Mahanavika⁸. (master mariner) donated an ayakastamba to the Mahachaitya at Ghantasala.

The mound called Lanja Dibba was first excavated by A. Rea⁹, which brought to light the structural remnants of Mahachaitya. The plan of the stupa is very interesting as it resembles in plan those of Bhattiprolu and Nagarjunakonda. The dome of the stupa was constructed on wheel pattern encompassing the central square hub. These two structural components of the stupa were constructed by spokes and the gaps in between so formed were filled with black earth. There is a terrace around the dome with wide space ($5^1 7^{11} \times 3^1 6^{11}$) height which probably served as inner pradakshinapatha. The terrace or drum had four ayaka projections ($17^1 6^{11} \times 5^1$). There is an outer Pradakshinapadhatoo the occurrence of fragments of limestone panels. Such as coping stones and railing pillars decorated with motifs such as garland – bearing dwarfs, around the stupa suggests that it was well-fenced with railing and embellished, like the stupa at Amaravathi.

II. CONCLUSION

The carved slabs belonging to the stupas are today exhibited in various museums scattered across London and Paris, presently there exists a museum at Ghantasala which consists of some Buddhist slabs and relics which have been discovered recently, the town of Ghantasala has been declared as one of the tourist locates of the state by the government of Andhra Pradesh.

REFERENCES

- [1] EP.Ind., XXVII (1947-48), P.4.
- [2] Ep.Ind., XXVII, P.3
- [3] Ibid., P.4
- [4] Debalmitra, Buddhist monuments, 1971, P.215
- [5] A.Rea, South Indian Buddhist Antiquities (Madras, 1894), P.2 from the details given on p.32 the diameter comes 115 ft.6”.
- [6] J.Burgess, The Buddhist stupas of Amaravathi and Jaggayyapeta 1887, P.106.
- [7] E.I., XXVII. P.3
- [8] E.I., XXVII, (1947-48). P.4.
- [9] A.Rea. op.(it.) 1894, PP.32-34