

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND EVIDENCE OF MARITIME BUDDHISM IN SOUTH INDIA

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Trade routes, both maritime and overland, were the primary means by which Buddhist thought and imagery were conveyed from India, the birth place of Buddhism, to other Asian countries and also within India. These ancient connecting routes provided an avenue for the religious, cultural, and artistic influences of Buddhism to reach the distant corners of the continent and beyond.

India has a long maritime trade history right from 3rd millennium BC. There was an extensive maritime trade network operating between the Harappan and Mesopotamian civilisations as early as 3rd millennium BC. Since the dawn of historical epoch, trade network of India had expanded widely and thorough the trade activity Buddhist thoughts also travelled to various parts of world. It is noteworthy to mention that almost all the important Buddhist centres of pre and post Christian era are located on the trade routes. Furthermore the Buddhist establishments were mainly patronized by the trade communities and guilds. Interestingly some of the Buddhist institutions in India were either established or patronized by the foreign traders or rulers who came in contact with these Buddhist centres through trade. There is a monastery at Nagarjunakonda, the famous Buddhist site in Andhra Pradesh hallowed by its association with Acharya Nagarjuna, known as Simhala vihara. This monastery is said to be patronized or established by the devotees from Sri Lanka who frequently visited to this site. The Sailendras, the rulers of Srivijaya kingdom which comprised of Sumatra, Java and Malaysia peninsula founded Buddhist establishments not only in their kingdom, but also in many other nations particularly India. An inscription at Nalanda in Bihar records that a Sailendra king Balaputradeva built a monastery there in the 9th century AD and at his request king Devapala of Bengal endowed five villages for its upkeep.

Similarly the Larger Leyden copper plates of Rajaraja Cola I (985-1014 CE) records that a Buddhist *palli* (temple) in the Culamanivarma Vihara was erected by

the Kitara king at Nakapattinam, perhaps for his subjects who settled at Nakapattinam for trade purpose. The record states that Rajaraja granted the revenues of the village of Anaimankalam to this vihara. It had been built in the name of his father by Maravijayottunkavarman who was born in the Sailendra family, who was the Lord of the Sri-Vishaya, who was conducting the rule of Kataha. The Smaller Leyden copper plates of Kulottunga Chola I (1070-1122) dated to 1090 CE records the exemption of certain taxes to the *palliccandam* villages of two Buddhist *pallis* at Nakappattinam at the request of the ambassadors of the king of Kataram. The Sailendra Chutamanivarma vihara alias Rajarajapperumpalli was built by the king of Katara during the time of Rajaraja. Rajendracolap Perumpalli was probably constructed during the time of Rajendra Chola I (1012-1044) or Kulottunga Chola I (Rajendra is one of the titles of Kulottunga Chola) before 1090 CE.

Few decades before, practically not much is known about the Buddhist remains in Tamil Nadu. On the basis of the clue from the inscriptions, the place names, details provided by the local and foreign texts and exploration and excavations, large number of sites yielding Buddhist relics are spotted all over the state. The author has prepared the distribution map of these sites by using GPS and also created a data base using GIS tool. The data includes the location, nature, description, date and status of the relic, photographs, published references, drawing, etc. The list includes 127 Buddhist sites in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. Interestingly the mapping of the Buddhist sites not only revealed the distribution of the Buddhist sites in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry but also the focal centres and their trade links, both maritime and overland.

Tamil Nadu had an intensive maritime trade link with western countries, inese and south-east Asian countries for a long time. Large number of Roman coins, pottery and other materials attested these facts. There is also large number of Chinese coins and other materials from China and South-east Asia are found in Tamil Nadu. The noteworthy feature is that majority of the places where the Buddha remains reported are flourished as trade centre and also yielded Chinese and South-East Asian potteries datable to 9th -14th century AD. The present paper deals in detail about this.