



## Expansion of Buddhism in Early Deccan

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**Abstract:** In "Early Historic" period South Asia witnessed the resurgence of settlements and complex governments, a significant and long-lasting transition that occurred at various points and likely in diverse ways across the Indian subcontinent. Buddhist communities were founded in Deccan between the third and second centuries B.C.E and the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Because every Buddhist organization had to provide food and financial support to its bhikkus, it was necessary for them to be located somewhat close to a town or village in order to thrive. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that a greater number of Buddhist sites can be found in proximity to rivers, major cities, and trade routes. It is obvious that these Buddhist sites need to be examined in the context of the larger socio-economic background, and such an investigation makes it necessary to determine the site's connection with the urban or rural populations in the surrounding area. And Deccan is renowned for its breathtaking rock-cut Buddhist architecture and its huge Buddhist monastic complexes. These features have contributed to the region's notoriety. The aim of this paper to revisit and explore the reasons of how and why early Deccan became the one of the chief epicenter of Buddhism in ancient India and what impact had been caused by this new centre throughout the Indian subcontinent? The logical investigation is based on the both primary and secondary sources to ensure its authenticity.

**Key Words:** Buddhism, Early Deccan, Society, Architecture.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The term "Early Historic" has been used to describe the timeline in South Asia that extent from about 500 BCE to 500 CE. This is an exceptionally long range. During this time period, South Asia witnessed the resurgence of settlements and complex governments, a significant and long-lasting transition that occurred at various points and likely in diverse ways across the Indian subcontinent. This change took shape in a variety of locations. Since the beginning of time, Deccan has witnessed to a vast proliferation of the Dhamma. Following the collapse of the Mauryan Empire, the reign of the Satavahanas and the empire's direct successors continued. The same fervor was displayed even while Ikshvakus was in control of the kingdom. Early Brahmi inscriptions found in Deccan, which have been dated to the time period between the first to fourth centuries CE, provide evidence of the existence of Buddhism in early Deccan. The population's dissatisfaction with the Brahmanical system provided the impetus for the development and proliferation of Buddhism in that region. It was the initial purpose of Buddhism to bring together into a coherent whole the numerous and varied traditions of religious thought that were widespread in the nation as well as bring together the components that were in conflict with one another in order to create an integrated social life. In Deccan, specifically on the river basins of Godavari and Krishna and its branches, the economy flourished throughout the first two centuries. This is a well-known historical truth that can't be disputed. Some of the Buddhist institutions and urban sites in Telangana, notably in the northeastern region of the state, date back to before the arrival of the Satavahanas and Pre-Satavahana-Andhras. The Brahmi script was used on labeling inscriptions and punch marks on silver coins to record a period when numerous tribes including, the Assakas, Asvakas, Sabaras, and Mahisakas, as well as the Nagas and Yakshas, inhabited the territory that is now known as Deccan. It is likely that the Assaka people were accountable for naming the region "AssakaJanapada." The land that is now the regions of Mahaboobnagar, Nalgonda, and Medak was once home to the Mahisaka people. Buddhism was responsible for breaking apart all of the obstacles that separated the many Deccan tribes and bringing them together to form a great race that ultimately ascended to a position of power beneath the direction of the Satavahanas. Following the Third Buddhist Council, which took place during the third century BC, an assortment of missionaries was sent out to spread the Dhamma throughout a variety of nations and locations. Two of the aforementioned preachers were sent to the north and west; their names were Thera Majjhantika, who went to Kashmir and Gandhara, and Thera Maharaksita, who went to Yona. Each of these areas used to be an extension of the Asokan Empire at a certain point. According to the Mahavamsa, Mahadeva traveled to Sri Lanka along



with 14,000,00 bhikkus from the Pallavabogga. The eminent bhikku Mahadeva was in charge of overseeing the overall organization of Deccan. According to the Mahavamsa, Emperor Asoka was responsible for the construction of 84,000 viharas and stupas across his dominion.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To investigate the beginning and propagation of Buddhism in early Deccan.
- To examine the support of Buddhism exhibited by both royals and commoners.
- To explore the new architectural beginnings under Buddhism in early Deccan

## 3. METHOD:

A comprehensive review of the literature had employed. This approach entails the acquisition of various types of writing, including journals, publications, and articles. Both primary and secondary sources of information have been utilized in my methodology. Since it is a work about religion and region, both primary and secondary data are essential to the investigation.

## 4. DISCUSSION:

### History of early Deccan:

Since ancient times, people have thought of the territory that lies between the Vindhya Mountains and the Tungabhadra River as the Dakshinapatha, which translates as "highway toward the south." Since the period of Aitareya Brahmana, which dates back to around 800 B.C., the residents of the north have shown a curiosity in the trans-Vindhyan area and its inhabitants. The Brahmana is familiar with the Andhras, Sabaras, Pundras, and Pulindas in addition to the Mutibas of the Deccan. Some people believe that the Puranas represent pre-Vedic heritage. In accordance with the Puranas, several of the Deccan, tribal groups, including the Andhras, Mulakas, Pahlavas, and Daradas, once resided in Central Asia surrounding the river Oxus. As with the Yueh-Chis in the distant past, these groups were driven to the Deccan region by unrest, so they left many relics of the long journey they had taken to arrive there. Andhrapatha, Mulaka (janapada), and Pallavabogga were the initial three of the mentioned tribes to establish permanent settlements. It was expected that the Daradas would have resided in the same neighborhood as the Andhras. Paishachi is a dialect spoken by the Darada people, and its influence may be seen throughout the northwestern region. According to tradition, Gunadhya wrote his Brihatkatha using the Paishachi dialect. This attests to the fact that there was indeed a sizable population of Paishachi speakers in the Deccan region during the Satavahana era. The language of the early inscription found at Amaravati 30 also provides evidence of this. The Assakas (Asvakas), who are thought to have descended from a subgroup of the Assakinoi people who were in the north-west at the time of Alexander the Great's invasion, are believed to have traveled southward alongside the Andharas and Mulakas and eventually established a settlement in the Assakajanapada.

Megalithic graves were discovered in numerous locations across nearly the whole region of Andhra. The veneration of ancestors and the idea that there is life after death are both symbolized by the construction of graves over the dead or over the remains of the dead. The iron tools and gold jewelry that were discovered within the megalithic graves are evidence of the advanced civilization that existed during that time period. In Deccan, the word "active megalithic period" refers to the time period that spans approximately 600 BCE to 100 BCE. Around this time, approximately 300 B.C.E., Buddhism came to the Deccan region. The megalithic people who celebrated grave monuments such as dolmens and menhirs had little trouble accepting this novel faith because it was really an expansion of their previously established practices. In a nutshell, the 'burials' were considerably more complex in terms of dimensions, form, construction, and splendor, although the stupa and the megalithic tomb mound shared an analogous idea and concept. The monastic establishment was primarily responsible for the spread of Buddhism, and the megalithic foundation of the masses sped up and exacerbated the process of this dissemination. The fact that megalithic society was successful and occasionally continued into the past at many of the sites in Deccan provides more support for the existence of this possibility.

### Advent and Rise of Buddhism in Early Deccan:

Throughout the time period (300 BC to AD 300), Buddhism went through a number of transitions across the nation and, more specifically, in the region of Deccan. According to I.K. Sharma (Sharma, 1988), the Mahasanghikas were able to make significant headway in Ramabrahmam and Challa Andhra because they enjoyed the support of the Mauryans. However, the Third Council was part of the Vibhajyavada (Thervada) council, and Asoka remained hostile to any innovative innovations in the initial (Purana) gospel. In regard to that, ever since the sangha was disbanded at the



second council, Andhradesa had developed into a bastion of support for the Mahasanghikas. The Caityakas split off the Mahasanghikas at the very beginning of the common eras and were prominent across the Deccan, as demonstrated by inscriptions from Ajanta, Junnar, and Nasik. Dhanyakataka was the heartland of the Caityakas at the time (Das 1993). Asoka despatched Mahadeva to Mahisa mandala and constructed edicts at Yerragudi, Rajaulamandagiri and a pillar at Dhanyakataka. The 13th Rock Edict of Asoka includes an inventory of subjects who resided in the king's dominions; the Deccanis are one of the groups that are included on that list.

Despite the fact that they are the first to recognize a named state in the region, the Satavahanas most likely formed out of a pre-existing set of insignificant polities. The Satavahana dynasty aspired to become an imperial power and finally extended their authority over a vast territory, including a portion of the eastern Deccan region. It was unavoidable that the tremendous shifts that have taken place in the present political climate, economic climate, and religious landscape should have some sort of impact on the fabric of society. By the second century B.C.E, the predominant tribal culture was one that was centered on kingship; nevertheless, this society eventually gave way to one that was founded on the Brahmanical "Varna Vyavastha." From this point forward, the four-fold Vamashramadharm was going to be the guiding principle for society. The Brahmanas occupied the highest position in the social hierarchy; following them the Kshatriyas, followed by the Vaishyas in third place, and the Sudras completed the social scale in last place. During the reign of the Satavahana-Ikshvakus, the society in Andhradesa was segmented into a number of castes and subcastes determined by the occupations of its members, in addition to the fourfold division.

Buddhism was a major force for the downfall of the established social order, at least to some extent. The majority of those who relocated to new lands converted to Buddhism and made financial contributions to Buddhist centers. By utilizing the ideas of "purity" and "pollution," an attempt was made to continue the practice of maintaining a hierarchy of social distance between the various caste groups. Buddha had come to the conclusion that in order to maintain social harmony, the caste system, in its capacity as a functional division, was required. Buddhism placed an emphasis on the importance of trade and commerce as one of its high occupations in order to attract merchants and their responsibilities. It was necessary for the Buddhist scheme of things to lend money, take interest on loans, eat food that was produced in shops, and live in cities. Buddhism acknowledged and accommodated any and all morphing conditions in current life in society and accepted them as natural. Assaka, which lies on the banks of Godavari and is mentioned in a number of ancient literary works, such as Suttanipata. Its capital was the city known as "Potali," which is now known as Bodhan. Some of the sites in North-Western Deccan (Telengana region) that date back to the pre-Satavahana and Satavahana periods have produced proof of fortified cities as well as Buddhist organizations. Recent archaeological investigations in Kotilingala in the Jagtial district, Peddabankur in the Peddapalli district, and Dhulikatta in the Peddapalli district came to light various structures revealing their urban features as well as their connection with Buddhism.

### **Royal and Native Support towards Buddhism in Early Deccan: Imperial Patronage:**

Emperor Asoka was not the founder of the Buddhism. He was not a bhikku as well, but, his involvement in the dissemination of faiths throughout the world was superior to that of others. He never attempted to use coercion or force in order to make Buddhism the official religion of any nation. Instead, he came to the conclusion that the most peaceful method to enlighten people and kingdoms was to become a missionary and teach principles and activities. Since Asoka discovered that the Andhra people embraced Buddhism (ithamrajavisaya - andhra - dharmamanusarante), he focused a lot of his attention on the Deccan region. Asoka may have held the ambition that if he succeeded in turning the Deccan into the capital of Buddhism, then he could use it as a center from which to preach the gospel throughout the region to the south, particularly in Tambapannidvipa.

Following the demise of Asoka, every dynasty that reigned over Deccan, with a couple of monarchs, adhered to the Brahmanical school of thought in terms of their religious beliefs. The Satavahanas had considered it convenient to identify themselves as adherents of the Brahmanical faith as a result of the impact of the events that took place in the north. They handed one of their sons as "Vedi Sri," the "Glory". The third king, Satakarni, and his wife Naganika were staunch defenders of the Brahmanical religion with its ceremonies and restrictions. His most famous heir, Gautamiputra, was an extremely accomplished and respected leader. Since Satakarni was such a skilled Vaidika, he received the title of Ekabrahmana. However, his successor Pulomavi gave a few donations to the Buddhists of the Nasik district, but he did so solely out of respect for politics. Yajnasri, one of his heirs, is the one who gets credit for the execution of Yajna, most likely to suggest his name. Yajna was one of his rituals. All of this merely demonstrates that the Satavahanas resurrected trust in the Vedas, reintroduced Vedic sacrifices, restored the system of castes, and defended the supremacy of the Brahmin; all of these fundamental components of Brahmanism were harshly condemned by Buddhism but the Satavahanas brought them back to life. It is a compelling narrative that Acharya Nagariuna was successful in convincing



Yajnasri to be not just sympathetic to Buddhism but also to promote it. Beginning at that point, there seems to have been a shift in the stance of the Satavahanas towards Buddhism.

At the time of the Satavahana dynasty, the Deccan became the home to an increasing number of Buddhist sanghas. On the other hand, the precise nature of these sanghas' relationships with the Satavahana state was not entirely apparent. According to a plaque found in the Pandavleni Caves that was created in the reign of Kanha, the cave was dug up by the maha-matra, who served as the head of the shramanas, who were non-Vedic sages. In light of this information, Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya draws the conclusion that Kanha was a supporter of Buddhism and that the state of Kanha maintained an administrative division devoted to the well-being of Buddhist bhikkus. The Buddhist stupa at Sanchi was significantly embellished due to the Satavahanas' contributions. During King Satakarni II's reign, extensive repairs were made to it. After the year 70 BCE, both the gates and the railings were constructed, and it is believed that the Satavahanas were the ones who ordered them. Inscriptions on the Southern Gateway attest to the fact that Satakarni II's royal architect Ananda was responsible for their construction. The artists who worked for the Satavahana Emperor Satakarni presented one of the top arches of the Southern Gateway with an inscription as a record of the donation. Several Satavahana-era inscriptions describe donations to sanghas. In the inscriptions, the seaports of Sopara, Kalyan, Bharucha, Kuda (which has not been located), and Chaul are the neighborhoods that are referred to as the contributors' primary places of abode the most often. The names Dhenukakata (unidentified), Junnar, Nashik, Paithan, and Karadh are brought up in conversation the most often among the inland towns.

Buddhism had accomplished its historical objective of tearing down the minor tribal obstacles, and it had assisted the Satavahanas in establishing their dominion over Deccan as a kingdom. They based the majority of their administrative structure on the one that had been established by their former overlords, the Mauryas, who were the first to try out an imperial government. It is important to note that every one of the surnames of the people who make up the nigama at Bhattiprolu is written in Prakrit, while the names themselves are Sanskrit. In one of the Amaravati inscriptions from the third century A.D., the name of a cobbler (charmakara) is given as Vidhika, while the name of his father is given as Naga upajjhaya, both of which are Sanskrit names. The inscription was found at Amaravati. As a result, Buddhism has made it possible for Brahmanical society and the structures of the north Indian tradition to spread throughout the Deccan.

#### **Patronage from commoners:**

Carla M. Sinopoli observes that there is evidence of gifts to the Buddhist sanghas made by the Satavahanas; the bulk contributions provided by the commoners who were not members of the royal family. The majority of these benefactors were merchants, which makes sense given that a large number of the sanghas were situated along significant trading routes. It is likely that the traders made donations to the sanghas due to the fact that these establishments aided trade by acting as rest houses and possibly by actually participating in the trade. It would appear that the monasteries had a vital role as venues for displaying philanthropic offerings, such as those made to individuals who did not practice Buddhism. Bankers, traders and merchants, caravan leaders, guilds of arts and crafts, wealthy land-owning householders' and their spouses, children, and relatives, as well as the female members of the royalty, were likely the common people, private individuals, and devout ladies who made gifts and donations to the Buddhist institutions and were liable for growing up and maintaining the Buddhist organizations.

It is significant to note that these Buddhist viharas, were situated on old trading routes that connected the significant market towns and big centers of the region. These Buddhist monasteries, which were originally designed for sheltering monks, typically provided food and lodging to travelers who were legitimately passing through the area. The resident monks were responsible for taking care of the guests and ensuring that they were comfortable, both physically and spiritually. A substantial number of these visitors were pilgrims who were either on a journey to or returning from a pilgrimage. Despite this, businesspeople who were traveling availed use of the services that were provided by these viharas. The majority of the services that were provided were done so without charging a fee. There were not many viharas that received financial assistance from the state treasury. Additionally, grateful visitors contributed generously to the preservation of the viharas through their donations. Because of the prevalence of secular amity and the rapid development of society, there was a conducive environment for the practice of religion and the arts, particularly Buddhism. It appears that the pattern of a communication system for this commerce coincided, to some extent, with the spread of Buddhism from a single region to another throughout the Deccan.

#### **Buddhist architecture in Early Deccan:**

It's notable that the Satavahana monarchs made contributions to Buddhist art and architecture during their reign. They constructed enormous stupas in the valley of the Krishna River, one of which being the 95-foot-tall stupa that can be found in Amaravati, which is located in Andhra Pradesh. Themes from the life of the Buddha were sculpted and



inlaid into the marble slabs that ornamented the stupa. These scenes were depicted in a style that was characteristically thin and graceful.

The Amaravati style of sculpture is representative of the architectural advancements made during the Satavahana eras. This style additionally had an impact on the art of Southeast Asia. They also built a vast number of stupas at Goli, Jaggiahpeta, Gantasala, Bhattiprolu and Nagarjunakonda. The original brick and wood construction of Ashokan Stupas was upgraded with stone construction as the structures were expanded. The most well-known of these structures is the stupa, with the Amravati Stupa and the Nagarjunakonda Stupa being among the most well-known examples of this type of structure.

Without the rockcut construction of the Satavahana period, the Buddhist construction would not have been comprehensive. As can be observed from the inscriptions on the various Buddhist sites of Karle, Bhaje, Junnar, and so on, the enormous rock-cut caves, also known as viharas and chaityagruhas, are the result of the backing of the monarchy. These architectures consist of chaityagruhas and viharas. The fall of the Satavahana dynasty in the late third century CE coincided with a decrease in the amount of rock-cut architectural work being done.

Junnar is the most extensive cave in the area, there are 252 caves that have been carved out of the rock. It was attempted to incorporate only places that were traced to the Satavahana period; but, due to the historical unpredictability of the construction and use of many places, this sequence can only be regarded as an estimate. Despite this, there are a few distinct groups of sites that may be identified. In the general vicinity of the Nanaghat and Bhorghat passes are separate concentrations of Buddhist shrines. There are plenty of coastal Buddhist sites that have been identified, in addition to sites that are isolated and sites that are located near large populations. It's noteworthy to note that certain significant settlements, like Prathishana (Paithan), don't appear to be closely related with any Buddhist sites. Even shallow coastal sites have a tendency to be situated on hills, and the locations of Buddhist sites seem to correlate with elevation, especially with easily accessible high-elevation locales. This is not the case with huge coastal communities like Kanheri, however, which are located on the shore.

The Ajanta cave paintings are the only specimen of Buddhist rock-cut paintings. The first phase in Ajanta took place between the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE when the Hinayana caves were discovered under the control of the Satavahana dynasty. The second phase took place in the latter half of the 5th century during their reign over the Vakatakas. The Ajanta Caves have suffered significant damage as a result of the whims of nature as well as vandalism.

## **5. CONCLUSION :**

In spite of this, it is impossible to deny the fact that Buddhism arrived in Deccan at a time and under circumstances that allowed it to successfully establish cohesion and order in an economy that was undergoing transformation. Buddhism witnessed a thriving start in Deccan from the third century B.C.E until the fifth or sixth century CE. This can be shown by a great number of inscriptions, stupas, monasteries, cave temples, and statues of Buddha. This was the primary explanation for the continued rapid expansion and flourishing of Buddhism and its organizations in the area. This was due to the larger socio-economic condition of the above groups, which included the Gahapati, Setti, and all sections of the Kamara (Artisan and Craftsmen) classes. These populations developed as a consequence of flourishing farming, manufacturing, craftsmanship, and growing internal and international trade, especially triggered by Roman trade. It was attracted by current new socioeconomic elements and grew widely between people since the ideas of Buddhism were beneficial and favorable; ultimately, Buddhism has become the preferred faith of the people. Trading of goods such as men, liquids, perfumes, cloth, leather, and food grains was outlawed and frowned upon by the Brahmanical-Hinduist ideology, and sea travel was regarded as a morally reprehensible activity. On the other hand, commerce and exchange were viewed favorably in Buddhist scriptures, and travel on the high seas was considered a noble profession.

It was widely acknowledged that Hinduism held a lower status than Buddhism in early Deccan, but the regions of Telangana and Rayalaseema did not consider Buddhism to be of minor significance. In addition to this, there was a great deal of generalization regarding the commerce route and the Buddhist center's link as well as the function of merchants. By aligning themselves with Buddhist organizations recently established professional groups were able to achieve both social respect and a sense of enlightenment. Buddhism was able to develop because of the sponsorship of the traders, and it was also disseminated by the commercial community from the Krishna River Valley to other parts of India and abroad as well.

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