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BUDDHISM AS REFERRED IN THE HISTORICAL RECORDS

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ABSTRACT:

After the establishment of Buddhism in the 6th century BCE by Gautama Buddha, it began to spread throughout the world. It is almost an accepted as well as proved that Buddhism had spread in Tamil Nadu during the 3rd century BCE during the period of Asoka, a great Mauryan emperor. These are all not only proved by the physical sources but also attested by the different types of sources such as archaeological sources and contemporary literary works. These pieces of evidence proved that Buddhism had its foothold in Tamil Nadu during 3rd century BCE and continued to hold its influence till the 9th and the 10th centuries CE.



KEYWORDS: establishment of Buddhism , foothold , evidence proved.

INTRODUCTION:-

Buddhism came to Tamil Nadu during the 3rd Century BCE during the time of Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor, while he sent his son Mahendra and daughter, Sangamitra to Tamil Nadu, in order to propagate the doctrines of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. It flourished in Tamil Nadu from the 3rd Century BCE to the 14th Century CE in places like Kaveripoompattinam, Uraiyur (Uragapura), Buddhamangalm, Sangamangai, Nagapattinam, Madurai,

Thanjavur, and Kanchipuram. This fact is proved by the Rock Edicts of Ashoka (Edict ii & Edict iii) and Sangam literature like Manimekalai, Silappadikaram, Maduraikanchi.¹

Ceylon chronicles like Mahavamsa and Deepavamsa refer to the arrival of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and then spread to Sri Lanka. Hieun Tsang, a Chinese traveler, who visited Kanchi, indicated an existing vihara of Buddha of Ashoka period in the Chola Country and a Stupa of Buddha in Kanchipuram.²

Asoka's Rock Edicts

Asoka left behind a large number of edicts, inscribed on rocks and pillars all over the empire, reflecting on his Buddhist beliefs.

a) Girnar Rock Edicts (Gujarat)

Girnar Rock Edicts were issued after 12 years of Asoka's coronation. It says that the Yukas (subordinate officers) and Pradesikas (district heads) along with Rajukas (rural officers) shall go to all areas of the kingdom every five years and spread the Dhamma policy of Asoka. It also mentioned that Asoka

¹ S. Umarajan, *Sangaththamilum Samayangalum*, First ed., Karthick Pathippagam, Chennai, December 1997, pp. 74-79.

² Arivozhi, *Kanchi Kamatchi*, 1st ed., Manivasakar Pathippagam, Chidambaram, 1983, pp.130-133.

established a lot of hospitals for the welfare of the people under his territoriality, especially in Tamil Nadu.³

b) Peshawar Rock Edict III

Peshawar Rock Edict III proved that Asoka preached his Dhamma policy in the region of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka (Ceylon). In this Rock Edict, he said that his Dharmavijaya prevailed in the border kingdoms of the Cholas, Pandyas and at Tambapanni (Thamiraparani). But it was his son Mahinda (Mahendra) who was responsible for the introduction of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

CEYLON CHRONICLES

Mahavamsa and Deepavamsa of the Ceylon chronicle mentioned that the spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and the royal patronage of the rulers for its growth. In this task, he was helped by Maha Aritta, a nephew of the Sri Lankan king Devanampiyatissa. Mahinda is said to have erected seven viharas at Kaveripattinam while he was on his way to Sri Lanka. After the 3rd Buddhist council in Pataliputra, the Buddhist Sangha sent missionaries to preach the doctrine of Buddhism in the world, Mahinda and his disciples such as Ettiayar, Uththiyar, Sampalar, Patthasalar who were sent to spread of Buddhism in Ceylon. Buddhism might have gone to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu by sea route, a route by which one can reach Sri Lanka easily. Since these existed very close cultural affinities between Sri Lanka and the Tamil Country from time immemorial, the Buddhist activities in India could have easily influenced in some way or other the Buddhism of Sri Lanka.⁴

FOREIGN TRAVELLERS' VISIT

a) Hieun-Tsang visit (Chinese Traveller)

He visited India between from 629 to 645 CE and studied the essential features and growth of Buddhism. In his travel account, he mentioned relations between India and Sri Lanka especially South India. He visited Kanchipuram in 640 CE who said that there was a Buddha stupa which was built by Asoka. In the account, he indicated that there was a Buddha vihara in the Chola country. He found a Buddha vihara (Sangaramam) of Mahinda (Mahendran) in Madura (Madurai) or the Pandya country and said that these viharas were in damaged condition.⁵

b) Burma country Records

It indicated that Dhammapala, a famous Buddhist monk who resided in the viharas which were built by King Asoka in Kanchipuram. He lived in the 5th or the 6th century CE and belonged to the Thanjavur which had Pandya rule.⁶ He wrote a commentary in the name Netti or Nettipakarana. In this commentary, the above vihara is mentioned. He also translated Tripitaka (Holy book of Buddhism) in Pali language.

BUDDHISM IN THE TAMIL LITERATURE

In the Sangam literature, there was no evidence in relation to Buddhism, but the literature of the Kalabhra period witnessed the growth of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.

(a) Manimegalai

It is one among the twin epics. It is written by Sittalai Sathanar. Sathanar is the name also indicated Buddha. It is written on the basis of the doctrine and lifestyle of Buddhism. Manimegalai was

³ Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, *Bauththamum Thamizhum*, Pavai Publications, Chennai, 2007, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 25-26.

⁵ K. Bothibala, Jeyabalan, K. Anban, *Thamizhp Panpattil Boutham*, Kaavya Publication, Chennai, 1st ed., 2013, p. 207.

⁶ Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, *op. cit*, pp. 27-28.

the daughter of Madhavi, who followed and practiced Buddhism. She clearly attested that Buddhism was one of the best religions among others.⁷

(b) Nattrinai

Nattrinai was written by Ilam Bothiyar who was a Buddhist. It is one of the works among the Eight Anthologies or Ettuthogai.

(c) Purananuru

It is written by Pakkudukai Nankaniyar who was a contemporary of Buddha. It gives a detailed description of the doctrine of Buddhism.⁷

(d) Kundalakesi

Kundalakesi is written by Nathakunthannar. She was a famous Buddhist Bikku of North India contemporary of Buddha. It was against the dominance of Saivite and Vaishnavites.

(e) Pattinappalai

Pattinappalai is written by Uthirakannanar. It was one of the literary works of Pattupattu. It indicated the spread of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.⁸

(f) Maduraikanchi

Maduraikanchi was a famous literary work of Pattupattu. It is written by Mankudi Maruthanar which had proved that Buddhism spread in the region of Madurai. It is mentioned the popularity and worship of Buddha in the name of Mahayana.⁹

(g) Veerasoliyam

Veerasoliyam was a Tamil grammatical work. It is written by Buddhamitra who patronized by Veerarajendran (Veeracholan). Buddhamitra stated the condition of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu.¹⁰

ROLE OF TAMIL BUDDHIST MONKS

According to the historical sources, monks were from Tamil speaking regions of Kanchipuram, Woraiyur (Chola country) and of the Pandya country contributed towards voluminous commentaries which enlighten the reader the exact teachings of Buddha. The writing of commentary spells a long period from the 2nd to 4th century almost covering 1200 years which obviously discern the truth that Buddhism was the popular religion of the Tamil region.

(a) Buddhadatta

He was a contemporary of Buddhaghosa and Buddhamitra but the senior monk who had gone to Sri Lanka to study the Dhamma of the Buddha. According to the writings of Buddhaghosa, the elder Buddhadatta a native of Uragapura (The capital city of Cholas called in Tamil ancient Uraiyur). After his studies in Sri Lanka, he returned to Uraiyur and lived in a vihara built by a devotee named Venudasa on the banks of river Kaveri. While staying in this Vihara till his death he wrote commentaries on Buddha's teachings in Pali language.¹¹

He wrote a commentary on original Pali canonical text falling in the Suttapitaka called Buddhavamsa in the name of Madhurattha Vilasini. He wrote another commentary on the writings of

⁷ G. Sethuraman, *Bowtha Samaya Kalai Varalaru*, New Century Book House Pvt Ltd, Chennai, 2011, p. 227.

⁸ K. Bothibala, *op. cit*, pp. 208-209.

⁹ S. Umarajan, *Sangath Thamizhum Samayangalum* (Tamil), Karthick Publications, Chennai, 2008, pp. 74-79.

¹⁰ K. Bothibala, *op. cit*, pp. 83-84.

¹¹ Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy, *Kalabhirar Attchiyil Tamilagam* (Tamil), Vidiyal Publication, Chennai, 2008, pp. 61-62.

Buddhaghosa in the name Abidhammavatra. He wrote a summary on this commentary of Buddhaghosa in the name Vinayavinichaya.

(b) Buddhaghosa

The greatest Pali scholar and commentator was Buddhaghosa who flourished in the 5th Century CE. He was born in Kanchiwaram (Kanchipuram). His literary works were carried out only in Tamil Nadu. He stayed Kanchi and compiled some commentaries and later he lived in Mayavaram near Thanjavur. In the colophon to the commentary on Anguttara Nikaya called Mmanorathapurani Buddhaghosa says that at the time compiling the work he lived at Kanchipuram. He wrote the commentary on the Majjihima Nikaya called Papancasudani. For visiting Sri Lanka he went to Nagapattinam, a port city of Chola empire for embarking.¹²

(c) Dhammapala

He lived in the 6th century CE. Some scholars opine that he belonged to the Chola Kingdom and a native Thanjavur the capital city of the empire. But the great modern Tamil Scholar Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy claims that Dhammapala belonged to the city of Thanjavur which is in the Pandya Kingdom. But according to the travelogue of Hiuen Tsang, he was a native of Kanchipuram. From the writings of Dhammapala, it is understood that he has lived in Nagapattinam, in the vihara built by Asoka. In his commentary work Nettpakarana he says that while residing at the monastery built by King Asoka at Nagapattinam.¹³

(d) Anuruddha

This scholarly monk flourished during the early part of the 12th century CE. He was born in Kaveripattinam and it may be the Pali form of Poompuhar or may be the capital of Chola kingdom. He associated with the Mulasomavihara of Kanchi for which sometimes he acted as abbot of the monastery. During his religious works, he visited the southern parts of Tamil Nadu. He wrote famous treatises named Abhidhammattha - Sangha a manual of Buddhist psychology and ethics.¹⁴

(e) Kasspa Thera

He was a native of Chola kingdom he spent some time in Sri Lanka for widening his knowledge in Buddha Dhamma. For his part, he also mastered over the Abhidhamma called Moha Vicchedani.

(f) Dipankar Buddhapiya Thera

He lived during the 12th century CE. In the concluding part of his grammatical work, Buddhapiya lets his biographical notes that he lived in the Chola kingdom.

(g) Sariputta Thera

He also hailed from Chola kingdom and belonged to the 12th century CE. He wrote a Pali grammar book in the name of Pathavatara.

(h) Dighnaga (480-540 CE)

His name in Tamil accent is called as Dinnaga. He was born in a small village nearby ancient Buddhist city Kanchipuram.

(i) Bodhi Dharma (486 -536 CE)

He was born in the ancient Buddhist city and the capital of the Pallava kingdom. He was written many books but very famous for his meditation called Zen and later days it was called Zen Buddhism.

¹² K. Bothibala, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-345.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 346-347.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 347-348.

Besides Dharmagupta, Dharmapala, Dharmakirti and other Buddhist monks lived in Tamil Nadu did for the development of Buddhism.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism is one of the popular religions of the world. It was propagated during the rule of Asoka and other early kings of India. It was preached and introduced by the missionaries in Tamil Nadu from its beginning. It left many imprints in history. One such imprint is its literature. Buddhism and its teachings were made popular in the Tamil literary works as well as by the foreigners' records. Due to the emergence of the Bhakti movement revivalism of Saivism and Vaishnavism happened in the Tamil region caused the decline of Buddhism and its centres. The loss of royal patronage was also the reason for its decline. The literature of Buddhism is of high value in understanding the political, social, cultural and religious situation of yesteryears. Hence, there is a need for protecting these sources without any religious or social abhorrence.