

*Esoteric Odisha?: Paraphrasing Xuanzang and Tārānāh, Augmenting Sectarian
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Xuanzang's contribution towards the horizontal spread of Buddhism and vertical understanding of Buddhist philosophy and texts has been incomparable. As an ancillary outcome of his firm resolves to procure genuine Buddhist text from the land of the Buddha, he presents a vivid sketch of the sacred landscape of India of his time in his travelogue. The evolution of Buddhist archaeology in India has been deeply inspired by his records of the western world and it acted as a guidebook for the archaeologists of the 19th century led by the legendary Sir Alexander Cunningham. The information derived from his narrative is an important source for recreating the Buddhist world of his times, locating Buddhist establishments in early India, and for envisioning their socio-cultural environment. In some cases, he emerges as the most important and probably the only authentic literary source of knowledge, as is the case of the Buddhist heritage of Odisha. In his accounts of travels of Eastern India, in Fascicle X, he mentions Buddhist vestiges of U-cha, Kalinga, and Kosala (South) which roughly correspond to the modern state of Odisha on the eastern seaboard of India. Although brief yet intense, this experiential description remains unparalleled for tracing the circumstances and true nature of the history of Buddhism in this region.

Xuanzang studies have been a lively field of research in the west but strangely, Indian scholarship has shown lesser enthusiasm towards this. Although no one should be more indebted to this scholar-monk than Indians, as most of the lost Buddhist Sanskrit texts are being retrieved by way of retranslation of their Chinese version extant and preserved due to diligent efforts of Xuanzang. The Great T'ang Records of the western world, henceforth Si-Yu-Ki is a unique piece of writing and may be termed as 'Chance-writing' because Xuanzang has no intent or will to write his travel account while he was traveling, the task was only undertaken at the instance of the T'ang emperor Taizong, yet he seems to deploy all the modern tools of social science research such as personal visits, interviews with relevant people, interaction with the common folks and enquires about the history and culture of the places. This way he presents an objective wholesome picture of the topic he writes about. Often the issue of Sino-centrism in his writing is raised and it is reminded that his primary targeted readership group was not Indian but Chinese. Carter remarks that Xuanzang's

perception of Indian realities is conveyed through a Chinese conceptual grid (1988: 56). This is understandable, because, intelligent as he was, he would have wanted to impress the Tang emperor with the might of his faith and with his reputation by detailing his reception at the royal courts of Indian countries. But this does not diminish the quality and objectivity of the work because there are internal shreds of evidence in *Si-Yu-Ki* to cross-check facts about India.

Odisha was not a part of Xuanzang's original itinerary, he probably wished to embark on his homeward journey from the port of Tamralipti via Ceylon. A south Indian priest whom he met at Tamralipti, encouraged him to go to the south and visit Orissa and other countries and observe the sacred traces" (Rongxi, 1995:131-133). Xuanzang entered the country of Odisha or Odra U-cha from North-West and presents an elaborate account of stupas, two of which are said to exhibit spiritual wonders and of a monastery called Pushpagiri (Pu-se-po-k'i-li) (Beal, 1911: 203). This part of Odisha was found to be overwhelmingly influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism by Xuanzang. His biographers add that there were 100 monasteries and 10,000 Priests who all study Mahāyān (Rongxi, 1995:134). Then he moved towards the South-East and mentions a part city of Charitra (Che-Li-ta-Lo). From there to South-West to reach the country of Kong-u-To (Rongxi, 1995: 206) which was a country of non-believers in the Buddha dharma and was inhibited by heretics of different sects. Moving further southwest he reaches Kalinga (Kalinga-Kin) which is said to have 10 monasteries and 500 priests who all study Mahāyān (Rongxi, 1995: 208). Near to the capital of Kalinga Xuanzang records to have seen a 100 feet high Stupa which was built by Emperor Asoka. From here he entered the country of South Kosala (Map No.2). The proper identification of these place names with modern locations is back into the melting point. The Buddhist landscape of Odisha has drastically changed since Cunningham, Fergusson, Sewel, etc. attempted their identification based on the then-available material, as the great wealth of Buddhist archaeology of Odisha was yet to be unravelled at that time. These early corroborations of place names heavily relied on philological comparisons. Advantageously now we have means and measures to scientifically substantiate suggested revised identifications.

The part of Odisha first entered by Xuanzang is identified with Jajpur district where he visited a prominent monastery of his times named Pushpagiri. Locating this place in Buddhist landscape on linguistic ground has been challenging because no place with this name has been known in Odisha. Although a site in adjoining state of Andhra Pradesh is

noticed with this name, but accepting this identification would have disrupted the entire mapping and understanding of Xuanzang's route. The Pushpagiri monastery is now identified with the remains of a monastery at the site of Langudi (Prusty and Mohanty, 1993). This site has yielded several stone inscriptions with one of them having an epigraph as "*Sri Puspasabharagiriya*" (Mountain laden with flowers) and another with *Pispasirivihare* further confirms the existence of monastery. The stupa area at Langudi also yielded two inscribed male and with female images with writing of "*ranja Asoken*" and "*ranja Asoka*", Asoka has been identified with Mauryan Emperor Asoka (Plate No. 5). These are definitive pieces of evidence that stamp a seal of authenticity over Xuanzang's observations. He also mentions two prominent stupas located on the hills, close to this place. Earlier Cunningham has identified these two hills with Udayagiri and Khandagiri (Beal, 1911: 205 n. 54). This view is no more relevant as Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves were excavated by King Kharvela for Jain ascetics (Panchmukhi, 1929-30:71-84) and they are also situated at a distance from Puspagiri. Now, these two stupas are convincingly identified with Ratnagiri (Jajpur) and Lalitagiri (Cuttack), at a distance of 12.5kms. from each other. Ratnagiri is probably the richest site with remains of two impressive monasteries, a small monastery, a massive stupa, more than seven hundred miniature stupas, and an ever-rising number of sculptures and relieves of Buddhist deities (Mitra, 1981-83, I& II). A large number of terracotta sealings inscribed with '*Sri Ratnagiri Mahaviharasya arya bhikshu sanghasya*' legend have been found (Mitra, 1981-83, 1,388-392) from the monastery site (Plate No.1).

At the site of Lalitgiri, remains of four monasteries, a stupa, an apsidal Chaitya, a good number of miniature stupas have been unearthed (Chauley, 1999:411-455). The most startling discovery at Lalitagiri has been a relic casket that is supposed to be containing Buddha's bone relic, but this is still in a speculative stage. Terracotta sealings bearing the legend of '*Sri Chandraditya Vihara Samagra arya bhikshusamghasya*' have also been found at the site (Plate No. 2). Udayagiri (Plate No. 3) is another prominent site located at a distance of 12 km. from Ratnagiri and 7.5 km. from Lalitagiri (Mukherjee, 1957). Located at the foothills of Asia hills, excavations at this site resulted in the discovery of remains of two Buddhist settlements, and from the monastic seals found at the sites, they have been identified as *Madhavpur Mahavihar* () and *Simhprastha Mahavihar* (Bandyopadhyaya, 2007). The statement made by Xuanzang's companion Huilithat Uda (Odisha) had 1,00 Sangharams and 10,000 priests studying Mahāyāna, may not be doubted in the light of these remains of massive and magnificent Buddhist structures and sculptures of excellent

craftsmanship. Langudi (Plate No. 4) site flourished from 1-2nd c. A.D. to 7th c. A.D. ('Buddhist Heritage of Odisha', 142-48), Ratnagiri (Mitra, 1981,1:16-22) from 5th c. A.D. to 13th c. A.D. and Lalitagiri is the rare site as it has probably the largest continuous stratigraphy of Buddhism extending from the pre-Christian era to the 12th century A.D. (Chauley, 1999:411-422,). In all, around 200 Buddhist sites are scattered all over the state and 12 out of 30 districts are known to have a dense concentration of Buddhist art and architectural remains (Mishra, 2013: 68).

The enormity of material, a wide variety of palaeography, an even wider range of time brackets render Buddhism of Odisha as unique. These comparatively younger sites and their yields are still open for fresh interpretations and formulation of hypotheses. One hypothesis, gaining ground in the present times is that Odisha has been a cradle of Buddhism, being postulated overlooking the antecedence of some prominent sites. This view is structured over the evaluation of the present archaeological resources of Odisha within the conceptual framework provided by the medieval Tibetan sources, all based on secondary information. The two most prominent works are 'The Blue Annals' written by Go Lotsawa Zonnu Pal (Tr. In English by G.N. Roerich) completed in mid-15th century and the History of Buddhism in India by Lama Tāranāth (Tr. In English by Lama Chimpa & Alka Bhattacharya). With regards to the character of Odisha-Buddhism, Xuanzang and Lama Tāranāth stand at binary opposition. By application of the method of intertextuality to their writings, it is attempted to affirm, confirm or negate each other's views on the subject. Since what Xuanzang has written about Odisha amounts to only a few stanzas, his statement that Mahāyān Buddhism was predominant in Odisha, is taken as the premise for deductive reasoning of the character and identity of Buddhism of Odisha.

Before discussing his observations about Buddhism in Odisha, it is important to justify how much credibility can be assigned to his view. Xuanzang was already a celebrity scholar in his lifetime, who was felicitated and patronized by the mighty Tang ruler and in eastern hagiographic tradition, two of his pupils and companions in his travels wrote his biographies. Later, his depictions found a place in Dun Huang caves and other sites of Central Asia (Wong, 2002: 44) elevating him to the status of a cultic figure. Even then for applying his information for Indian circumstances, it becomes important to fathom out his depth of knowledge of Buddhism in the Indian context and Indian Buddhism as practiced and prevalent in local conditions at the time of his visit. His first prominent appearance at the

religio-political scene was at the court of the king Harsha of Kannauj, who was a devotee of Mahāyāna. The specific reason for this invitation was to make him debate with Hinyanists, Mahāyānists, Jainas, Brahmins, and heretics. Xuanzang's religious expositions and wisdom made such an impact that he was able to impress both Mahāyānaists and Hinyanist, who respectively conferred the titles of '*Mahāyānadeva*' and '*Moksha-deva*' on him (Rongxi, 1995: 158). Certainly, there must be some amount of exaggeration in this account and the description of lofty praises heaped on Xuanzang by the king of Kamrup (Assam), as his accounts and his biography by Huili were meant primarily for the Chinese readers yet all this might not be without a kernel of truth.

Xuanzang spent his two years in rigorous training and learning at Nalanda monastery. He has had the fortune of being accepted as his disciple by Śīlabhadra, the chief Abbot of Nalanda monastery, 'the omniscient master, the incomparable metaphysician (Grousset, 1971:161). Besides Xuanzang and Huili, the other two eminent Chinese pupils of the monastery Faxian and Yijing approve that Nalanda, as a seat of higher learning followed an inclusive curriculum that enabled the learners to make a comparative study of religions. They were taught texts belonging to Mahāyān, the other eighteen sects of Buddhism, and Vedas and Hindu texts on medicine and other sciences (Beal, 1958:112). Xijing spent ten years at Nalanda as a student of Hinayana. The system of education at Nalanda was distinct as its ideal was freedom, freedom of thought, opinions and belief, toleration that would not constrain conscience, the first principle of a sound and scientific education (Mukherjee, 1986:572). Having been nurtured in this atmosphere, Xuanzang must have developed the ability to distinguish between the trends, tendencies, and ritualism of different sects of Indian Buddhism. He has been extremely methodical in preparing a database of Buddhist monks present at the places and monasteries he visited along with the name of the school of thought of Buddhism to which they adhered. Hence there might be no reason to doubt his sectarian characterization of Buddhist places he visited.

Xuanzang proved to be a skilful learner as he was counted as one among the distinguished class of priests of Nalanda who mastered fifty collections (Rongxi, 1995:95).

An additional point of debate is that how to treat the records of Xuanzang's travel of the western countries. Should it be considered as a 'sacred piece' of writing by a monk pilgrim or as secular historical information and in that capacity be subjected to criticism, deconstruction, and comparison? Max Deeg has criticized 'romanticized historicism' followed

in the usage of Xuanzang's account (2012:94). This is a valid criticism, as the most difficulty is encountered in interpreting geographical information and identification of place names. Generally, rather than questioning his sense of geography, scholars have tried to squeeze in information to fit into his descriptions. As a result, many places remain unidentified. The problem arises from the fact that these texts were translated in the late 19th or early 20th century and have been standardized. Since then there have been rarely any attempts to translate them afresh.

Moreover, the history of Buddhists in India has been flawed with an over-emphasis on reliance on textual sources. Gregory Schopen (1982) has made a powerful, though, debatable statement in his work on the material life of Buddhist monks by giving primacy to archaeological evidence over textual description. Archaeological advancements have not been applied to interpret Xuanzang's writing whereas it could be of great help in authenticating information provided by him and in enhancing the value of his work. Buddhist archaeology has made rapid progress in recent times in India, particularly in the state of Odisha. This has not only enriched the Buddhist landscape of Odisha but the discoveries also urge scholars to investigate archaeological remains with a new perspective which may give a new meaning and credibility to the literary works such as those of Xuanzang. It has been aptly remarked by Bash that the archaeological study of Buddhism in Odisha has 'lost its innocence' (2013:43) and the complex dimensions of the history of Buddhism are being dealt with in archaeology.

Xuanzang and Tāranāth produced their respective works with different objectives and neither of the two could claim to be historical writing in a stricter sense. Xuanzang wrote *Si-Yu-Ki* to influence Tang emperor Taizong. When he requested the emperor to write the preface for his translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese, his request was declined, instead, he was asked to write about what he saw and experienced in the foreign lands (Rongxi, 1995:170). Tāranāth himself belonged to the Tibetan Buddhist sect of Vajrayana and he took upon himself the arduous task of presenting a factual history of lineage tradition. He asserts that lineage tradition is very strong in Tibet, no text be expounded without permission from a teacher, member of the spiritual lineage to which the text belonged (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 1970/90:356). As Xuanzang derived his motivation to travel to the land of the Buddha from the incorrect and incomplete translations and unavailability of texts in China, so was Tāranāth inspired by his zeal to weed out interpolations and fakeness in Siddha-lineage. Xuanzang himself visited those places which he writes about and presents his

experiential account about location, people, customs, and state of Buddhism at those places. Tāranāth claims that because of his many previous births in India he had a vivid recollection of the geography and topography of India. Even he is said to have received his name Tāranāth in his dream. By his own admission, when he was writing his work, Buddhism has already vanished from India (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 1970/90 352). A clearer picture emerges if Tāranāth's information on Buddhism and his work on the lineage of Siddhas are separated from each other. His account is replete with references to Mahāyān and Acaryas of Mahāyāna throughout his writing. The first appearance of Mahāyān in the human world is placed in Odisha in about the first century A.D. (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 90). He writes that at the time when Candrarakṣita was ruling as king in Odivisha, Arya-Manjusri came to his house in the guise of a monk, preached some Mahāyāna doctrines and left a book there. According to Mahāyāna followers of the sutra, it was the *Prāñña-pārmīta-aṣṭasahasṭika*.

He further writes that Arya Nagarjuna built many temples in the eastern countries like Odivisha (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1970/90: 109). Nagarjuna has been the most distinguished philosopher monk of Mahāyāna tradition. This is apparent from Tāranāth's work that Mahāyāna never relegated but continuously maintained a respectable position in the religious milieu of Odisha from early centuries up till 12-13th c. A.D. as is also supported by the archaeological finds. The chronological and temporal descriptions of the position of Mahāyān in Tāranāth seem to be strongly reinforcing Xuanzang's report that Odisha was a strong bastion of Mahāyāna. Paradoxically, the doubt and debate about the Buddhist identity of Odisha emanate from the other aspect of his history of Buddhism in India and his writings on Siddhas or Tantric masters. He enlists many Siddhas coming from different parts of Odivisha, although their names and place names are still plagued with controversies. The identification of Tāranāth's Odivisha and Xuanzang's Odra (Wei-Cha) with Odisha is not only compelling but has also been affirmed by other circumstantial pieces of evidence. One of the arguments in favor of Vajrayāna identity for Odisha rests on the identification of certain place names. The most enigmatic question is related to the location of Sambhala. Tāranāth counts a King Indrabhūti who ruled over Sambhala in Urgayana country among the Siddhas who was an exponent of Cakrasamvartantra (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 1970/90 245n.90). N.K. Sahu identifies this with Sambhalpur in Odisha (1958: 148) which has been widely followed by other scholars (Padhi, 2013: 93).. This assumption is probably derived from the concurrent appearance of Sambhala with Ratnagiri. Ratnagiri's identification has been established beyond doubt as sealings with the inscription of '*Sri-Ratnagiri-Maha-Vihariya-Aarya-*

bhikshu-sanghasya, have been collected from the excavation of monastery site in Ratnagiri (Mitra, ii, 1983: 380-394). Sambhala, on the other hand, is mentioned in the context of Tantras and in the association of Ratnagiri, which might have tempted scholars to believe that Sambhala might be Sambhalpur which is based on selective reading of the narration.

This confusion issues out of the identification of Odiyana and this has deeply influenced the characterization of the Buddhist identity of Odisha. Firstly, there can be a doubt that when Tāranāth has been consistently using 'Odivisha' for Odisha then why would he use another term, that too just in one reference. Even before Tāranāth the Blue Annals specify the location of 'Oddiyan' as being in 'north-west, two-thirty yojanas west of Magadha' (Roerich, 1949:367). The Indian Vajrayāna text Hevajra Tantra mentions four important Tantra Pithas (seats) namely Oddiyana, Jalandhara, Purnagiri, and Kamrup (Snellgrove, 1959: 20). Even more, in the account of 84 Siddhas, Tāranāth names the country as 'Uddiyana' which according to him was divided into two parts Sambhala and Lankapuri. Those identifying Sambhalawith modern Sambhalpur (Odisha) have not at all dealt with the location of Lankapuri. One strong evidence in favor of Sambhala not being Sambhalpur and Indrabhuti not ruling in Odisha is that none of the 200 documented major Buddhist sites is located in Sambhalpur district. Therefore, this identification does not seem tenable.

This particular position on Vajrayanic Buddhism of Odisha is built on hitherto uncritically examined material on 84 Maha-Siddhas of tantric tradition provided by Tibetan sources, many of these Siddhas are shown to have an association with Odisha. Again, this material is also very inconsistent and lacks uniformity across the sources. This must be borne in mind that the emphasis was on preservation and popularisation of the process of attainment of siddhis by the saints, their lineage, and the miracles performed by them. It seems that biographical details were only added to reveal the social background of the Siddhas. Although Abhyakark Gupta, the writer of tantric text *Nishpannayogavali* and Ratnakargupta had also prepared a list of Siddhas but their original texts are lost, their excerpts used in Tibetan sources are only available. Central to this thesis are often quoted names of some Siddhas who are believed to have consolidated and made Vajrayana form of Buddhism widespread in Odisha, prominent of them are Indrabhuti, Cheluka or Pito, Sarah or Rahulbhadra, etc. In a closer investigation, it becomes clear that some of these attributions are wrongly interpreted, and in most of the cases the saints may have belonged to Odisha but their practice and preaching of Vajrayāna were centered at Nalanda, Vikramśīla, even in Kashmir. It is convincingly reasoned that Indrabhuti was not a king of Odisha but he ruled in

the western kingdom of Oddiyana. Sarah or Rahulbhadra who is supposed to be the same as mentioned in Khadipada inscription (Ghosh, 1941-42:247-48), according to Tāranāth, Rahulbhadra attained siddhi at the banks of river Sindhu (Chimpa and Chattopadhy, 1970/90: 281). He stayed for some time in Nalanda and Vikramasila Universities but spent most of his life as a wandering ascetic. Cheluka or Pito is credited with introducing Kalacakra Tantra into Sambhala which he studied at Ratnagiri (Roerich, 1949: 753). This again indicates a short sojourn of Cheluka in Odisha. There seem to be no firmer grounds to implant the theory that Vajrayana was flourishing in Odisha during the early medieval period of the history of India.

Why, at this stage, is it important to discern dissimilarities between Mahāyān and Vajrayana? Because it is vital to understand this dimension for validation of Xuanzang's views on the state of Buddhism in Odisha in contrast to the modern scholarship's sectarian attributions. Mahāyān is the liberal form of Buddhism which propagates the idea of the liberation of all sentient beings and in this sense, it is an all-inclusive sect. Its doctrine of Bodhisattvahood of altruistic nature emphasizes the accessibility of the soteriological goals to the adherents other than monastics also. Mahāyān is based on the principle that all sentient beings possess '*Budhankur*' (Buddha seedlings) and thus have the potential to attain Buddhahood. At the ideological level, Mahāyān philosophy is based on the twin principles of Karuna (Compassion) and Prajñā (wisdom). Later on, the concept of Śūnyata was introduced by Madhyamikas as the ultimate reality. In the simplest terms, 'Upaya' (skillful means) are employed for the perfection of Prajñā and Karuna which leads to their union to produce the state of realization of Śūnyata or the ultimate truth. While upholding altruistic values, Mahāyān did not involve complex ritualism and austere methods.

In addition to its simplicity as compared to the other sects, Mahāyān reaped the advantage of representing Buddha in the anthropomorphic form which was subsequently adopted by other schools also. Since then, there was an unprecedented efflorescence of religious art that produced easily comprehensible symbols of faith which attracted masses towards Buddhism. The ancient sites of Gandhara, Mathura, Sarnath, Sanchi, Amaravati, etc. stand as testimony not only to the expanding pantheon but also to the widening social bases of Buddhism. Monuments of Odisha, despite belonging to a later day can be counted as a continuum of this art epoch and idiom.

Vajrayana is considered as an offshoot of Mahāyān and a direct descendent of Yogacara School of philosophy and that Mahāyān contains many Tantric elements

(Bhattacharya, 1982: 217). However, in practice and praxis both the sects bear decisive differences. The prominent specifications with Vajrayana worship were that it was not open for all but meant for adept few, it was to be practiced individually and not among the gatherings. It was to be undertaken in isolation and secrecy. *Guhyasamajtantra*, the foundational text of Vajrayana means 'secret society'. Tāranāth says that before the tantra was openly practiced, most probably he is speaking about Tibet, people had the capacity of tenaciously keeping the secret, therefore, nobody could know them as practicing the *guhyatantra* so long as they did not attain Vidyadhar siddhi (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya, 1970/90:155). Tsongkhapa, the 14th c. Tibetan master calls tantra practice of Vajrayana as 'Secret Path' (Kilty, 2013:22). Buddhist tantric texts prescribe qualifications for the preceptor and disciples (Bhattacharya, 1968: 24). Even in Tibetan tradition, it was the practice of the Siddhas to preach according to the capacity of the disciple. A very simple and obvious reason for maintaining secrecy might be that gaining social approval for some objects and practices in tantric rituals would have been difficult. It may be assumed that it may have been a subject of exegesis, exhortation, and intellectual enrichment at the select centres of Buddhist learning at Nalanda, Vikramśīla, Ratnagiri, and the region of Kashmir but it could perhaps never gain popularity in the public arena. This is true that *dohas* and *Caryas*, a form of the couplet, composed by Sahajyanists, a branch of Vajrayāna have been popular in eastern India but their essence is Bhakti (devotion) not Tantra. Maybe, even a doubt could be cast over the identity of 'Sarah' whether he was the same as the tantric Sarah or Rahulbhadra counted among the Mahasiddhas.

Further insight into sectarian affiliations of Odisha could be gained by putting Xuanzang's observation through 'archaeology test'. Although he only took notices of stupas and monasteries in this region and writes in detail, about legends related to these places, nothing about sculptures, stone carvings, or epigraphical material. Even then, in the present state of knowledge, there is ample archaeological evidence to prove that some of the important sites like Langudi, Lalitgiri, and Ratnagiri were already flourishing and objects of veneration were already being created. Probably antiquity and history of monuments, Buddhist preachers, and centres of learning attracted him, more than anything. He even seems to have ignored the art of Gandhar and Mathura. Although he never fails to document Asokan stupas, which he also does in the case of Odisha.

From the aniconic to anthropomorphic phase, the Buddhist pantheon and iconography traversed a long path. What started as a simple representation of Śākyamuni Buddha in a

monkish garb reached up to a pantheon brimming with almost 300 divinities, with highly adorned and ornamental, even sometimes, sensuous female Goddesses. The three sites of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitagiri, alone have produced a startling array of form, variety, and styles in sculptures of deities, it is most alluring to name this region as 'Gandhara of East'. A fresh explanation of these sculptures is attempted to assess the metaphysical rooting of the icons, their functional aspect, and the class of devotees who solicited their blessings. Given the limitations of this study only the most popular forms of deities based on their figural count would be considered with a presumption that rare and stray finds do not reflect the general religious sentiment of the people.

Almost invariably at all the major sites of Odisha, sculptures and relieves of Buddha exhibiting different handpostures are commonly found. They adorn the sanctum of monasteries at Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri, and Udayagiri. They are identified as 'Dhyani Buddhas' (Plate No.6 & 7) and their first reference is believed to have been found in tantric text *Guhyasamajtantra* (Nyaupane, 2012:15- 31). But this may not be taken as definitive evidence because in much earlier Mahāyān texts such as Vajrachhedika prajñāpāmitra sutra probably belonging to the 1-2nd c. A.D. (Schopen, 'Diamond Sutra', 227-28), mentions the names of these Buddhas as deities of different directions. The internal evidence of *Guhyasamaj* in the context of Tathagat mandal indicates that it was only incorporating and developing already existing Buddha icons into mandal deities. The hand gestures of preaching, boon giving, and imparting fearlessness are found at Gandhar, Mathura, and Sarnath, all predating Odisha Buddhas and also predating evolution of Vajrayan pantheon. Another point worth noticing is that the sculptures of Buddha are massive in size, even some separate Buddha heads at Ratnagiri rise above the height of five feet (Personal observation of author). The colossal images have been a prominent feature of Mahāyān Buddhism as have been exemplified in erstwhile Bamiyan Buddhas, Yun-Kang Buddha, and many others.

Avalokiteśvara is the most represented Bodhisattva in Odisha and Mishra (2013: 57) claims to have documented about 150 images and 14 forms of this Bodhisattva. From Mahāyān sutras such as Saddharmapundarik dated 1st c. A.D. (Vaidya, 1960: 252-57). Avalokiteśvara emerges as the personification of the concept of Bodhisattvahood and the embodiment of its sentiment of compassion. Indeed, the idea of Avalokiteśvara originated and matured in the Mahāyāna folds and its depictions are numerous in early art schools of India. However, some evolved forms of Avalokitesvar, i.e., Padmapani and Vajrapāni (Plate

No. 8) Sadakshari-Lokesvara are found in Odisha. Tara manifests as the most powerful imagery of a female Buddhist deity who is compassionate as a mother and valorous as a protectress. In Mahāyān tradition, she first appears in the company of Avalokiteśvara (Vaidya, 1964: 45), and later she is represented as his emissary and his consort (Getty, 1978:118), though her representation as 'consort' is no more agreeable. She had her most ardent followers among the Vajrayāna saints like Atisa and Sarvanjanmitra. The most impressive form of Tara is manifest as Ashtamahabhaya Tara in Odisha at Ratnagiri, where standing Tara is surrounded by eight great perils (Plate No. 9) and this probably has no equivalent in Vajrayāna pantheon. Jambhala (God of wealth) and Hariti (Protectress of children) have already been reported in Gandhara art, suffice to say that they are originally Mahāyān deities. Vasudhara figures in Pantheon of Mahāyān as the consort of Jambhala and Goddess of fertility (Bhattacharya, 1968: 202). The large size of their prominent position within the shrine suggests that these icons were meant for public worship.

A peculiar yet copious feature of archaeological finds in Odisha is the occurrence of miniature stupas. More than seven hundred, mostly monolithic stupas have been found from Ratnagiri. These are commonly termed as votive stupas. Elsewhere the author has raised doubts about the nature of miniature stupas (Trivedi, 2014:12) that had there been a tradition of donating stupas with impressions of different deities, then at least at these three prominent sites which are located at a close distance from each other, there would have been some uniformity in distribution, which is not to be found. The highest concentration is found at Ratnagiri where these stupas are adorned with intricate carvings of such deities as Māricī. Arapācana, Majuvāra, Manjughosha, Vajrasattva, Parnsābari, Ushnishvijaya, Cunda (Mitra, 1981, I, 110-132). These gods and goddesses belong to the domain of Vajrayana and as already stated, Tibetan sources mention Ratnagiri as a sect of tantric education. It is proposed that these miniature stupas were instrumental stupas erected for sādhanā to be used by the individual practitioners, who, in all probability used to be the members of monastic community. A large number of small monolithic and other stupas have been discovered near the site of Stupa 1 at Ratnagiri. These are strewn all around the area in haphazard manner, being in different stages of workmanship. Mitra (1981) believes that this place might have been the dumping ground for already dedicated votive stupas. But this suggestion is inadequate to explain the presence of large number of semi-finished and damaged stupas. It seems more convincing that this was the location of workshop for production of miniature

stupas. Such place within the sacred space affirms that primary consumers of the products would have been the inmates of the monasteries of the complex.

Vajrayāna tantric practices are based on the principles of macrocosm and microcosm, the individual and the divine. The medium of these practices are mandalas, the mystic diagrams involving an elaborate arrangement of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, female deities, minor wrathful guardian Gods, etc.. Donaldson sees a possibility of sculptural mandalas in Odisha (1995:173-204). At Ratnagiri and Udayagiri panels with a central Buddha or Bodhisattva surrounded by other icons have been found. Similarly, it is also speculated that miniature stupas with Vajrayāna deities were aligned to form mandalas (Plate No. 10). Although examination of tantric texts like *Guhyasamajtantra*, *Nishpannayogavals*, *Advayavajrasamgrah* make it evident that consecration of mandala is a sacred ritual performed by the practitioner in the presence of and under the guidance of his preceptor. No examples of permanent modeling of mandalas are found in Vajrayāna literature (*Sriguhyasamajmandalvidhi*, 1-15). On the other hand, representation of a group of deities in a single panel is found at earlier panels at Mathura and Sarnath.

To strengthen the argument in favor of the Vajrayāna character of Buddhism in Odisha, the occurrence of dhāraṇī inscriptions is often cited. At Ratnagiri the largest number of clay seals and sealings and also inscribed images with dhāraṇī have been found (Mitra, 'Ratnagiri', 1, 30-31; 2, 409-22). Dhāraṇīs too are as much a part of Mahāyāna as they are of Vajrayāna, but they seem to have a different meaning for different sects. There is a very interesting ongoing debate about the disposition of dhāraṇī. Two groups have emerged, one led by Lamotte who believe that dhāraṇīs are mnemonic devices or codes for storing or maintaining information, and the other group led by Waddle and Tucci takes a teleological position that dhāraṇīs represented the kernel from which the finest tantra developed (McbrideII, Dhāraṇī, and Spells, p. 86). Schopen also cautions that some dhāraṇīs should not be classified as Tantric because there is nothing Tantric about them (1982: 105). Dhāraṇī inscriptions found from Ratnagiri and other sites, except for a few, belong to this category (Plate No.11). This is known as Gatha of the chain of causation (*Pratityasamutpada* sutra) which is as follows:

***"Ye dharma hetu-prabhava hetuh teahams Tathagato hyavadat tesham cha
yo nirodha evam vadi Mahasramanah."***

There has been a long tradition of entering this dhāraṇī into the votive stupas or engraving it on sacred vessels to earn manifold merit. It was noticed by Faxian in 3rd c. A.D. (Takakusu, 1886/2005: 150-51) and is also found in an inscription from Odisha housed in State Museum at Bhubaneswar (Ghosh, 1941-42: 171-74). At Sarnath, Sanchi, and Kanheri also such dhāraṇī inscriptions on votive stupas have been found (Sykes, 1856: 37-53). It can be reasonably concluded that appearance of dhāraṇī at Buddhist sites of Odisha does not lend much credence to the view of Vajrayāna association of these sites.

To conclude this may be surmised from the above discussion that Odisha all along history maintained a tradition of the predominance of Mahāyāna as observed by Xuanzang. Thorough scrutiny of Tibetan sources, particularly Tāranāth's history of Buddhism in India, makes it evident that it only delves into the theoretical role of Odisha in Vajrayāna and not about its praxis. Other than Ratnagiri, the majority of the Buddhist site bear no explicit signs of affiliation with Vajrayāna. The icons which are treated as markers of tantra practice are by no means exclusivity of Vajrayana. There seems to have been a common iconographic tradition that was evolved and implicated by different sects for different purposes.

The expansive size of places of worship and stupendous images suggest public participation, not being compatible with the occult Vajrayana method of worship. It is also noticed that the Gupta idiom of art transferred from Sarnath is more pronounced than the influence from the Bengal school of tantric art suggesting that it has independent origin and a unique character. Buddhism in Odisha may be located in between Late Mahayana and Mature Vajrayana.

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