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EVOLUTION OF CHAITYAS AND SHRINES EXCAVATED AT UDAYAGIRI— A STRATIGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This paper presents a few studies in the development of Buddhist shrine in India from the 6th century B.C. to about the 11th century A.D. . Firstly, a humble attempt is made to show the Buddhists adopted different types of Building plans like elliptical, circular, apsidal and quadrilateral in different periods. In the present context of archaeological research, it is hardly possible to reconstruct any clear picture of ideological background of chaitya-grihas or Buddhist shrines. Yet the archaeological remains supported by epigraphical evidences successive phases of construction do not give any clear picture of the original establishments belonging to a particular period. As no earlier attempt was made in any of previous excavations to correlate the structural remains with the stratigraphic data; all important evidences relating to the development of Buddhist shrines in the many sites are now lost. Elliptical structures of ancient India are not widely known but these structures corresponding to a linear plan with semi-circular end¹ did exist, appears to be older than the circular and apsidal ones.

Key words: *Buddhist, Shrine, Evolution, chaitya-grihas, Odisha, Excavation*

Introduction:

Majority of the sites like Rajgir, Gopika cave, Sravasti and Kausambi are confined to the Gangetic basin which is the cradle of elliptical (shrine) type of architectural plan. Except the Gopika cave in the Nagarjuni Hill all of them are attributed to the Buddhists. But the elliptical shrines of Besnagar and Nagari, both being in central India, belonged to the Vaishnava sect. The earliest elliptical structure of Jivakamravana monastery at Rajgir, may be dated to *circa* 6th-5th century B.C. ². It is interesting to record here that neither any stupa nor any shrine seems to have existed at Rajgir. Next, the Gopika or Nagarjuni

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cave (fig-1) in the Nagarjuni hill, District- Gaya, Bihar, ascribable to the 3rd century B.C., consists mainly of a single hall and entered by a passage in the middle.³

During Asokan regime several architectural forms like stupas, monasteries, rock-out caves, free standing pillars minor or major rock-edicts, stepped well etc owed much of their popularity throughout the length and breadth of his empire. The *chaitya-grihas* or Buddhist shrines possibly made their first appearance during Asoka's time. Such type of circular and apsidal forms represent a further stage in the development not only in architecture but also in the sphere of ideology related *chaitya-griha* or the memorial aspects of the *chaitya*, the concept of shrine, being inseparably connected with the subsequently emerged ideas of *Bhakti* and worship. So far as the archaeological remains are concerned these Buddhist shrines conform mainly to three different shapes, viz. (1) circular, (2) apsidal, (3) quadrilateral. It is, however, not certain whether elliptical form was ever connected with the stupa-shrines or not.

The present study involves of the large scale excavation at Udayagiri,(1985-1989 and 1997-2003) District- Jajpur, Odisha, conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India, which explicitly shows the doctrinal changes in the largest monastic establishment. Udayagiri brought to light two simultaneous sectarian development of monastic establishments of “*Sri-Madhavapur mahavihara-aryabhikshu-sanghasya*”⁴ and “*Sri-Simhaprastha-mahavihara-aryabhiksu-sanghasya*”⁵.

It is to mention here that within an enclosure wall three types of *chaitya-griha* i.e. circular, apsidal and rectangular dimensions unearthed stratigraphically in succession at Udayagiri-2. Perhaps this is the only Buddhist site where we can date and study the evolution of *chaitya-grihas* stratigraphically. This type of evidence has proved that Udayagiri was a most important center of Buddhism. It appears that whenever any changes takes place in Buddhist philosophy and religion it has been reflected in art and architecture of Udayagiri. For example the original central stone stupa of circular *chaitya-griha* on stone plat form has been transplanted in stone apsidal and later on also used in rectangular *chaitya-griha* Besides, *chaitya-grihas* are encountered in other sites like Lalitagiri, Sisupalgarh and Khandagiri-Udayagiri in Odisha. The architectural development and dating of apsidal *chaitya* Udayagiri is possible until and unless the comparative study and conclusions are derived from other sites.

Further, it is not certain that how the innovative ideas and concepts introduced in the construction of apsidal shrine i.e. ritualistic place of worship related to Buddhism. This entails a deep study indeed.

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Udayagiri (Lat. 20° 39' N. ; Long. 86° 16' E.) (fig. 2) lies in tehsil Darapana of district- Jajpur in Odisha. Situated on the right bank of river Birupa, a branch of Mahanadi, it is 88km away from Bhubaneswar via Chandikhol on the way to Ratnagiri, in the picturesque valley surrounded by Assia hill on the west, south and north and opened in the east to the bank of river Birupa. The horseshoe shaped valley is vertically divided in to two halves by a ridge. The northern half of the valley named as Udayagiri-1 and Southern half of the valley is known as Udayagiri-2.

Excavation of Udayagiri-2 (1997-2003) revealed one impressive brick-built double storied monastery having its sanctum provided with an ambulatory passage, shrine complex, tank, a large stone platform with a circular *chaitya* facing north in centre, a brick-built rectangular *chaitya-griha* raised over an earlier apsidal stone *chaitya-griha* and other brick and stone stupas within an enclosure wall, stone path way, drain etc were brought to light. Its stratigraphical level could not be properly established due to iconoclastic and vandalism activities which took place during 11th century A.D. at the site. On the basis of findings of the apsidal *chaitya-griha* and an inscribed relic container belonging to circa 1st century A.D., a number of sealings and imageries bearing the Buddhist creed assignable to the 7th to 9th century A.D., a rock-cut stepped well inscribed with a record ascribed to circa 9th – 10th century and typical pottery assemblage, the site was under occupation right from the beginning of the 1st century A.D. to the 13th century A.D.⁶ However the date of the site could also be pushed back to the 3rd century B.C. on the basis of stratified material remains of the *chaitya-griha* area.

(a) Circular *chaitya-griha* on masonry platform facing north (phase- I):

(3rd/2nd century B.C. to 1st century B.C.)

The roughly square 14.05m (N-S) and 13.35m (E-W) stone platform (Pl. I) made of seven courses ashlar masonry was approached through a flight of stone steps devised with a *chandrasila* to the north. On the centre of this platform was raised a stone stupa (dia. 3m) traceable only on plan and provided with a circumambulatory path (width 1.22m) demarcated by a low height brick wall from the paved stone platform path (Pl. II). Stratigraphically, this is the earliest structural activity of the site below the apsidal masonry *chaitya-griha*. When compared to circular *chaitya* of Bairat⁷ in Rajasthan or Junar⁸ rock-cut circular *chaitya* in Maharashtra this structure could be pushed back to as early as Sunga ascendancy datable to circa 3rd/2nd century B.C.. This so called structure could be used as circular *chaitya-griha* during Hinayana period.

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The same contemporaneous evidence are also encountered at Lalitagiri below the apsidal *chaitya* and at Sisupalgarh below the recently partially exposed *chaitya* at *Solokhamba* area by the Deccan collage Pune and Cotsen Institute of Archaeology and Department of Anthropology, university of California, Los Angeles. The ten donatory inscriptions in shell characters engraved on the platform as well as on its threshold had been the handiwork of later period (7th / 8th century A.D.). Some of the stone slabs used for the pathway of this structure were also inscribed in the same shell script character. The date of this phase may be tentatively fixed between 3rd century B.C. to 1st century B.C. .

(b) Masonry apsidal *chaitya-griha* facing east (phase-II) :

(1st C. B.C. to 3rd/4th C. A.D.)

The apsidal *chaitya-griha* (23.60m X 15.85m) made of stones enshrining the same stupa (3m) was standing on the earlier stone paved platform. The masonry platform made of finely dressed stones is originally plastered with lime. Presently, the stupa has preserved its *medhi* portion only (Pl. III). Now the facing of the *chaitya* was towards east approached through seven steps of ashlar stone masonry (Pl. IV). On the basis of comparative study of the apsidal *rock-cut chaityas* of Bhaja, Karle, Ajanta and Ellora etc.⁹ in Maharashtra, apsidal structural *chaityas* of Sanchi¹⁰, Sirkap¹¹ and Saranath¹² from 3rd century B.C. (structural temple, Sanchi-40) to 5th century A.D. (Ajanta cave - 19) then, the present example could be dated between *circa* 1st century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. .

Besides, the apsidal *stupa-shrine* at Udayagiri¹³, District-Khurda, Odisha, appears to be the earliest datable to *circa* 1st century B.C.. However it is identified as a Jaina temple. But on personal examination it was observed that some elliptical impression on plan (Pl. V) of this structure could also be inferred.

Though during this time, emergence of Mahayanism coincided with introduction of the images of Buddha in the Buddhist art. The new school which sprang up in Gandhara and Mathura at the same time in the 1st century A.D. defied the Hinayana school and gradually the image of the Buddha began to adorn all subsequent Buddhist sites in India and outside. But due to lack of Buddha image of Mahayana periods from the sites indicate that at Udayagiri-2, Hinayana phase might have continued for a longer period, from 1st century B.C. to 3rd/4th century A.D.. But at Lalitagiri in Cuttack district, Langudi in Jajpur district and Ganiapalli in Baragarh district are noticed few sculptures of Buddha belongs to Mahayana phase.

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Earlier it was thought that, this type of *griha-stupa* did not spread to the east coast and also to the entire Ganga- Yamuna doab. Further, this form however, had its later extension at Bagh¹⁶, Dhamnar¹⁷, both being in central India. But its occurrence at Udaygiri-2, Odisha on the apsidal *chaitya-griha* is the important discovery in the archaeological field. Again, the constricted inner side of the rear western projection (*ratha*) was perhaps meant for accommodating a cult image. But no image is recovered from here which is possibly due to mindless vandalism and rubbing activities at sites. The mouldings akin to the typical contemporary Odishan shrines viz., *khura*, plain recess, *kumbha* and *pata* save for its northern side which was subsequently renovated, the southern and western projections (*rathas*) were decorated with *tulapithas* showing six squares cut with lotus petals, a feature found in early type of temples of 7th-8th century A.D.¹⁸. It is also differ from the western Indian series in having quadrangular stupa shrine with in the monastic enclosures. So from where this conception was derived that has to be finalised with dates.

(c) Rectangular brick *chaitya-griha* facing east (phase-III):

(4th C. A.D. to 7th C. A.D.)

With the doctrinal changes, the earlier constructed apsidal *chaitya-griha* might have come in to disuse. Later on, a brick-built rectangular *chaitya-griha* with its *triratha* shrine was erected over this already existing apsidal platform, retaining the same stupa but with east orientation (Pl. VI). The date of this phase may be tentatively fixed between 4th century A.D. to 7th century A.D.. At the same time, the early distribution of such type of *chaitya* in the western coast Buddhist *rock-cut* sites like Kuda, Mahad, Karad¹⁴, Sailerwadi, Junnar, Kanheri etc.¹⁵ and in the Taxila region have made their appearance during the 1st century A.D. to 4th century A.D. .

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(d) Rectangular brick *chaitya-griha* with an entrance orienting north (phase - IV):

(7th C. A.D. to 9th C. A.D.)

The rectangular brick *chaitya-griha* was entered through an ornate doorway from north which has now been completely destroyed. Only stone foundation of that doorway was un-earthed *in situ* position. The southern arm of *chaitya-griha* was utilised to act as a low stone platform consisting of eight lions (originally they were ten as evidenced by space and their pieces) which served as *Simhasana* (Pl. VII) for installing five colossal images of *Dhyani*-Buddhas displaying with usual postures as suggested by large fragmentary sculptural members recovered from the adjacent area. Besides, Fragmentary images of Buddhist deity, *naga-dwarapalas* and pieces carved with scenes of day to day life were also recovered. During this time possibly so called “*Simhaprastha Mahavihara*” was transformed from *Mahayana* to *Vajrayana* sectarian affiliation.

On the cardinal directions the *chaitya* shrine was provided with *gavakshas* of decorated stone *jails* worked with three-hooded snake motif.

The brick apsidal platform was also in use as evidenced by projection towards north. During this period the donatory inscription in shell characters on the stone platform as well as its threshold were possibly engraved. This phase can be placed from *circa* 7th century A.D. to 9th century A.D. tentatively. After that “*Madhavapura Mahavihara*” was probably established separately by queens of Bhaumakaras for nuns to practise *Kalachakra tantra*.

(e) Rectangular shrine complex facing east: (phase-V)

(9th C. A.D. to 11th C. A.D.)

In Udayagiri-2, at north-west outer corner area of the monastery, the shrine complex (Pl. VIII) within an enclosure has its entrance (3.04m wide) towards the east exposed away from the *chaitya-griha* area. A massive image of Avalokitesvara lying on its back dominated over the surrounding, attesting the importance of the area.

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To enshrine the presiding deities, some shrine chambers were constructed on the northern and southern wings of the structure. Remains of two externally projected chambers on the southern side measuring, the south western one 1.56m in width while the length is obscured and the southeastern one being 1x 1.30m. respectively. Traces of two externally projected shrine-chambers were found on the northern side measuring the northwestern 1.50sq.m. while the eastern one 1.50 x 2.05m is better retained with its door-sill and stone pedestal for enshrining the deity. On the northwestern corner is preserved an externally projected shrine-chamber 1.84x1.32m.. This cell along with the up raised base for holding an image fits well with the size of the Avalokitesvara image and might have enshrined the deity.

In the Buddhist pantheon, Avalokitesvara is the most popular of the Buddhist Bodhisattvas. The Tibetan work *Mani Kambum* relates the story of his birth. Once upon a time, Amitabha, after giving himself up to earnest meditation caused a white ray of light to issue from his right eye, which brought Padmapani (Avalokitesvara) Bodhisattva in to existence. Amitabha blessed him, where upon the Bodhisattva brought forth the prayer; Om Mani Padme Hum, Oh! the jewel (of creation) is in the lotus!

Avalokitesvara is thus the spiritual son of the *Dhyani* Buddha Amitabha and his Saktipandara. Along with them he presides over the present kalpa which is the *Bhadrakalpa*. He is to rule over the universe during the period between the *Mahaparinirvana* of the *Manushi* Buddha Gautama and the appearance of the future Buddha, Maitreya. Five thousand years after the Gautam Buddha, Maitreya will appear as a *Manushi* Buddha in the fifth world, which will be created by Visvapani (fifth *DhyaniBuddhisattva*). That is one reason for his popularity. The *Gunakarandavyuha* (a fourth century text) relates how he refuses Nirvana, until all human beings are in possession of the Buddhi knowledge. He assumes protean manifestations of divinity. The text mentions him as the fast god to issue out of the primordial Buddha (Adi-Buddha) who creates the universe. The conception of Avalokitesvara is datable to the Asokan period. In the work *Mahavastu, Avadana*, the Mahasanghika describe him as the Bhagvan who takes the form of a Bodhisattva, whose duty is to look around (Avalokita) for the sake of instructing the people and for their constant welfare and happiness. This conception of the Bodhisattva Avalokita took concrete form in the *Amitayus Sutra* or the *Sukhavati Vyuha*, a work datable to A.D. 100. The *Guna Karanda vyuha* narrates the story of the creation of the fourth world by Padmapani (a form of Avalokitesvara). 'From between his (Padmapani's) shoulder sprang Brahma; from his two eyes, the Sun and the Moon; from his mouth the air; from his teeth, Sarasvati; from his naval, water; from the roofs of his hair, the Indras and

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the devatas.' Avalokitesvara, being the compassionate Bodhisattva, takes numerous forms to lead people to Nirvana. A Buddhist legend refers to his 333 incarnations. He manifests himself repeatedly for the purpose of saving mankind. His worship became popular in Northern India in the 3rd century A.D. and by the 7th century A.D. . He became the most popular of the Bodhisattvas. Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang speak of him with great reverence. The *Sadhanamala* describes fifteen different varieties of Avalokitesvara, in thirty-eight *sadhanas* (descriptive hymns). But these by no means exhaust all his forms. In the Macchandar Vahal of Kathamandu (Nepal), 108 different forms of him are painted.

The white Tara is regarded as the consort of Avalokitesvara. Tara holds a position of considerable eminence in the Buddhist pantheon. She is a savior Goddess, a deliveress. She is the sakti of Avalokitesvara as Uma is that of Mahesvara. In the Tantrayana, Sakti assumed great importance. The male god was to be approached through his Sakti.¹⁹ The walls of the complex exhibit beautiful mouldings and traces of 44 carved niches are also visible on the southern and western walls at regular intervals for holding images. The courtyard of the shrine has yielded some vestiges of the flag-stones with which it was paved. The votive stupas were found mostly dislodged from their original position but an assemblage of them over the pavement in the north-west corner of the courtyard is significant. A good number of mutilated images of Bodhisattvas have also been retrieved. The verandah is in a slightly raised level from the courtyard, veneered by slanting bricks. Evidently stone pillars held the roof between the corridor and sanctum cells as well as carved niches were also unearthed. Five such square stone bases are noticed on the verandah. Stones in the drain running almost parallel to the eastern outer wall of shrine complex represent mostly re-used architectural members. Therefore, this appears to be a later accretion. On the basis of a study of the antiquities of the shrine area which includes inscribed images, stones and other objects, it appears that the shrine complex was constructed after rectangular *chaitya* i.e. between c. 9th to 11th century A.D.²⁰.

(f) Post- Buddhist scenario (phase-VI):

(12th C. A.D. to 13th C. A.D.)

Probably during 12th century A.D. the iconoclastic vandalism activities in a massive scale destroyed the whole complex. Prior to that, earlier the vaulted windows (Pl. IX) those were provided for free air and light to monastery, closed from both the sides, probably to thwart external threats.

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The ornate doorway of rectangular *chaitya* orienting north had been destroyed completely. Fragmentary images of Buddhist deity, naga-dvarapalas, pieces of facade of gateway and pieces of five *Dhyani* Buddhas (Pl. X) were collected from the debris of rectangular *chaitya-griha* complex. All the important stupas were also destroyed with other different forms of Avalokitesvara and images of Bodhisattvas.

The area on the eastern side of the monastery, where the deposits have formed a sudden slope on the edge was thoroughly probed. From the lower level was found the haphazardly laid architectural detached members of a Buddhist temple in stone nearby. Some of these architectural members are akin to temple mouldings and some of them are ornamental in nature containing sculptural representations of semi-divine and divine beings. In the same area was found remains of a masonry structure measuring 7.25x5.90 m. with a 1.05m. thick partition wall (Pl. XI).

The stratigraphical sequence is not possible here due to dump and pits of old materials. This seems to be some Buddhist temple which might have been thoroughly devastated later on. Though an effort was made later on during close of 12th century A.D. to construct some shrine but could not survive.²¹

Excavations of Udayagiri-1 (1985-89) yielded a magnificent monastery and an impressive brick stupa with four *Dhyani* Buddhas viz. Akshobhya (E), Rthasambhava (S), Amitabha (W) and Amoghasidhi (N) in niches at the middle of four cardinal directions. The important finds included terracotta seals and sealings with the inscription “Sri *Madhavapur mahavihara-arya-bhikshu-sanghasha*”. Proving that monastery at Udayagiri-1 widely known as *Madhavapur Mahavihara* then. On the basis of findings the site may be dated to 8th to 13th century A.D.. Due to the evidence of an enclosure wall in front of the monastery in all the four phases and fragments of faience bangles unearthed, the excavator B.K.Shina opines that this monastery could be resided by nuns.

During the time of its inception, this site became more popular and the population of monastic establishment almost doubled which followed by a period of turmoil which witnessed the destruction of monastery twice during phases-III and IV. The destruction of the monastery of earlier phase may have been caused both by nature and by religious animosity. Being surrounded by the hill on the three sides the rainwater washed the structures. Attacks from outside may not be ruled out as the recovery of iron arrowheads and spearheads at the site, which must have been used to counter the onslaught. Gradually the

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monastery got damaged and abandoned and could not sustain further long and met its decline during 13th century A.D..

<p>Phase - III (200 years tentatively)</p>	<p>Rectangular brick <i>chaitya-griha</i> facing East (4th C. A.D. to 7th C. A.D.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship of Stupa (stone) with rectangular <i>brick-chaitya</i> facing east. • Probably Mahayana started image of Buddha kept in on alcove at brick-wall of rectangular brick <i>chaitya</i>.
<p>Phase – II (400 years tentatively)</p>	<p>Masonry apsidal <i>chaitya-griha</i> facing East- (1st C. B.C. to 3rd /4th C. A.D.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brick Monastery with brick coryard & oriation its drain towards East. • Worship of Stupa with apsidal <i>chaitya</i> • Water Reservoir
<p>Phase – I (200 years tentatively)</p>	<p>Circular <i>chaitya</i> on stone platform facing North (3rd /2nd C. B.C. to 1st C. B.C.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship of Stupa with circular <i>chaitya</i> and other brick Stupas.
<p>tentatively)</p>	<p>A.D.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brick monastery with stone courtyard entrance towards – East (Udi-1). • Monastic seal (Udi – 1) <i>Madhavapura Mahavihara samagra Arya Bhikshu Sanghasya</i> was probably established separately by queens of Bhauma karas for nun to Practice. <i>Kalachakra Tantrans.</i> • Brick monastery double storied with stone courtyard entrance towards north (Udi-2). • <i>Dharani mantras</i> (god & goddess, temples, rituals, <i>stotras</i> (litanies) etc. • Worship of Akshyobha (Buddha in Bhumisparsha mudra) facing north in Monastery (Buddha in sanctum). • Worship of stone Stupa & <i>Pancha-dhyani</i> Buddha on lion pedestal in <i>chaitya-griha</i> facing North. • Seal Monastic (Udi-2)- <i>Simhaprastha Mahavihara Samagra Arya Bhikshu Sanghasya</i> (proto-devnagari) transformed from <i>Mahayana</i> to <i>Vajrayana</i> sectarian affiliation. • Shell scripts or <i>Sankha-lipi</i> sealing the circular <i>chaitya</i> by the stone pavements of this period.

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