



EARLY JAINA CAVES IN ANDHRADESA – A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Jainism is one of the oldest religions of ancient India. This religion enjoyed the equal prevalence and popularity like Buddhism. Rishabhanadha was the first Tirthankara of Jainism followed by twenty four Tirthankaras. According to Jaina text *Haribhadriya vritti*¹ that Mahavira himself preached his faith in the region of Kalinga. *Avasyakasutra* of Haribhadra says that the king of Kalinga at that time was a friend of Mahavira's father, Siddhartha. Hence Mahavira thought that this doctrine would be well received in Kalinga and hence decided to preach it there. It is identified that the Kalinga territory comprised the districts of Srikakulam Vijayanagaram and Visakha districts². According to Jaina tradition the first Tirthankara had two sons Bharata and Bahubali, it was from Bharata the country came to be known as Bharathavarsha. It further states that Bahubali established his kingdom with Podan as his capital. Podan has been identified with Bodhan in the Nizamabad district of present Telangana region. This fact is known from one of the Sravanabelgola inscriptions that Bodhan contained a huge idol of Gomath³. In this paper express to present the spread of Jainism in Andhra and the historical importance of early Jain caves in Andhra.

On the basis of archaeological evidence the famous Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela gives details the king Kharavela was a staunch Jain and he belonged to the Mahameghavahana family. The Brahmi inscription of Guntupalli caves, considered the Sada records that the Guntupalli caves were originally of the Jains⁴. It must be stated that Jainism enjoyed the privilege of being a popular faith even before Sada rule in Andhra. This fact clearly states that the Jainism flourished in Andhra before Christ. The spread of Jainism in South India is known by Bhadrabahu-Chandragupta tradition. In the later part of Chandragupta Maurya, a Mauryan ruler of ancient India converted to Jainism by a Jain monk named Bhadrabahu. Chandragupta Maurya, Bhadrabahu and thousands of Jain monks came to Karnataka and stayed at Shravanabelgola. They campaigned in many places and welcomed many people to join Jainism. Bhadrabahu

moved South under the leadership of Vajraswami and later on that of Vajrasena, another information states that Samprathi the grandson and successor of Asoka was a patron of Jainism and he established Jaina monasteries even in the countries like Andhra and Tamil⁵.

The excavations conducted at Vaddamanu yielded remains of Jaina stupa and a number of label inscriptions mentioning names of Jaina teachers and lay disciples. Hence the site revealed the Jaina establishment from Mauryan to Visnukundin times from 4 th century B.C. to 5 th century A.D. The record donations or gifts made to Ganas, Gandharas, Sanghs and Viharas. The recent discovery of three copper plate grants belonging to king prithvi-sri-mularaja of 5 th century sheds fresh light on the existence of an Jaina vihara at Vaddamanu⁶.

The above literary and archaeological evidences suggest that early Andhradesa was one of the recipients of Jainism. The early jaina monks were mostly preferred natural caves, for their stay on the tops of the hills, which were inaccessible. These caves represent architectural developments in the history of Jainism in Andhra. Here the general character of the Jain architecture in Andhradesa is very similar to that of Buddhists and Hindus⁷. In early centuries the Jains stayed in natural rock-cut chambers, afterwards these are replaced by more grandeur ones. These Jaina monuments divided into two types namely rock-shelters or natural caves and caverns and structural shrines, the former choose mostly wandering ascetics, these settlements were mostly modest, unattractive and inaccessible⁸.

The main purpose for used natural caves by Jaina ascetics to practice *Sallekhana-diksha* during their last days for attaining salvation. For Sallekhana practice they used rock-beds for their shelters. These early Jaina caves were free from any architectural or sculptural carving. They were simple natural formations.

Malakonda

In Andhradesa the Jaina monuments are both natural and artificial; the former category comes from the cave scooped on a hillock at Malakonda near Kandukur in Prakasam district. This Malakonda hill contains a natural cave it is now called "*parvatiguha*". On the basis of Brahmi Characters here registers a gift made by a certain *siriviri-sethi*, son of *nanda sethi* of *Aruvahula kula* to the cavern. According to Dr, G. Jawaharlal sir, this type of early caves belonging to the early period found in Madurai, Ramnad, Tirunelvely, districts of Tamilnadu. Another cave comes from '*Munulagutta*' in Kapparaopeta village, Karimanagr district, containg the cave with four beds with low pillows meant for the monks. Here Dr. P.V. Parabrahma Sastry sir collected some Satavahana coins from the vicinity of this cave. On the basis of numismatic evidence that the cave definitely goes back to the early Satavahan period. Also this cave resembles to the earliest jaina settlement in Telengana.

Guntupalli

The Guntupalli cave actually found on the hill at Jilakarragudem, near Kamavarapukota in West Godavari district. Generally scholars like Alexander Rea and Longhurst says these caves flourished in 2nd century B.C. belonged to the early Buddhist establishments. But the conservation works at Jilakarragudem, these caves supposed that originally occupied by the Jains⁹. Although it was originally a Jaina tirtha, later on it was appropriated by the Buddhists at present it was being considered as Hindu-kshetra.

Konakondla

Konakondla in Anantapur district is the domicile of the famous saint, Kundakundacharya, who was the earliest exponent of the Jaina faith in Andhra. He lived in the first century A.D. Here there is a natural cave situated in front of the Z.P. High school. This site is the earliest Jaina centre in the Rayalaseema area.

Penikalapadu

This natural rock shelter is 8 km away from Muddanur town in Kadapa, one rock cut shelter named *Sanyasi gundu* bears an inscription of early 7th century A.D. This cave dwelling can easily accommodated ten devotees in it¹⁰.

Mylavaram

On the bank of the river Pinakini, the midst of Mylavaram dam, this is very near to Dommana Nandyal a hill contain rock shelters. The shelters bearing mural paintings. On the basis of Paintings, the identification of Tirthankara image, these rock shelters were inhabited by Jains. This is also mentioned in Kaifiats¹¹.

Belum Caves.

These caves are located near Belum village in Kolimigundla of Kurnool district. These caves, which are important by the occupation of Jains and Buddhists. These caves were used by Jaina monks for meditation. The caves are well lit and there are directions for you to explore the cave.

Rmatirtham

This site is situated in Vijayanagarm district; here two hills called *Gurubhatkakonda* and *Durgamkonda* are most important. In *Gurubhakta* hill we find only natural caves capable of sheltering single monk¹². The Ramatirtham site has a potential Jain centre from early times to 12th century A.D.

Kollivalasa

This site is 8 km away from Amudalavalasa town in Srikakulam district. Here the hill contains a cave-shrine. The most important feature of this cave is the entrance of the cave has a *mukhamandapa* surmounterd by *sikhara* over it¹³.

Saidapuram

Siddhaullayya konda is known as Saidapuram. Here a jaina rock shelter located 3 kms west on Podalakur-Saidapuram road. Here the rock-shelter is enclosed by the hill. There are six Jaina sculptures are found¹⁴.

To conclude the early Jaina caves found in Andhra Pradesh were not suitable for settled life. These shelters mainly over hanging boulders. The main purpose for used natural caves by Jaina ascetics to practice *Sallekhana-diksha* during their last days for attaining salvation. For this practice *sallekhana* they used rock beds, these were simple natural formations. These early Jaina caves were free from any architectural or sculptural carving. They were simple natural formations no architectural and sculptural carvings. The above mentioned points indicate Jainism is one of the oldest religions in ancient India, the natural caves used by Jaina ascetics to practice *Sallekhana-diksha* for attaining salvation.

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