CHAPTER - VI
CONCLUSION

A systematic codification and analytical and scientific examination of the existing evidences of Buddhist lineage of South Kośala provide us the ground realities to assess Buddhist heritage in this region. While it is imperative to compare and contrast its existence and popularity in Indian perspective, it is desirable to summarise its content as underlying favour in shaping the life and culture of the people of South Kośala.

Buddhism, under royal patronage, occupied a prominent position in the religious history of India. The great Chinese travellers like Fa-hien, Hiuen-Tsang and I-tsing, have given the picture of the flourishing state of Buddhism in India of their time. Buddhism gave a popular religion without any complicated and elaborate rituals such as could be performed only by a priestly class. It quickly won the hearts of the people of the down-trodden classes in the graded society. The easy ethical code prescribed by Lord Buddha appealed to the masses. Buddhism also denounced caste system and advocated equality in the society irrespective of sex, age and position. It preached to the princes the principle of forebearance, peace and tolerance.

In course of time a remarkable change came over Buddhism. From its earlier form of ethical religion, Buddhism changed into the Mahāyāna doctrine which deified the Buddha.

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and the devotion to the person of the Buddha became the dominant feature of this religion. A follower of the Buddha no longer cared for his own salvation but preferred, out of compassion (Karunā) for the other beings. Neglecting his own deliverance, he was even prepared to be born again and again in this earth to help his fellowmen to achieve their deliverance. Thus the change from the selfish turning away from the world (Nivṛtti) to the beneficent activity to help and services to others (Pravṛtti) was largely responsible for gaining public support. Charity, purity, truthfulness, self-sacrifice and non-violence became the chief characteristics of this religion. In the Bhāgavat Gītā also importance has been laid on personal conduct like the Noble Eightfold Path, prescribed by Lord Buddha.

It is universally admitted that India owes, to Buddhism the beginning of her plastic art. Buddhism became a source of inspiration for architecture, sculpture and painting not only in India but also the countries where Buddhism was embraced. It has been shown that Buddhism crossed the narrow limits of the family school of Brāhmanical times and expanded into the larger monastic school which threw its door open to all Buddhists and non-Buddhists, Indians and foreigners. In the field of education India is indebted to Buddhism.

It has been marked that with the spread of Buddha's religion to the Asiatic countries like Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Cambodia, Laos, Tibet, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Sikkim,
Bhutan, Ladakh etc. Buddhist culture was introduced to their people. For them, Buddhism became a new philosophy, a new culture and an inexhaustible mine of artistic impulse.

Buddhism has been a great force for achieving peace in the world. The Buddha's policy of peace and non-violence has its great impact on the countries in the modern world. Being influenced by Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi introduced the principle of Satyagraha in his private life as well as public life. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Primeminister of independent India established his firm faith on the policy of peace of Buddhism while settling disputes at home and abroad. He kept away India from joining any power bloc during the time of the Cold War. The foreign policy of India is based on the five rules of conduct or the Pancha Sila, which is a Buddhist term. It allows the peaceful co-existence between the people of different ideologies. At the very centre of the national flag of India, the historic symbol of 'Asoka Chakra' reminds the nation not only of the sublime doctrine of the Buddha but also of the 'Dharmavijaya' or Conquest by Righteousness of Asoka. Similarly, the lion-capital of Asokan Pillar at Sarnath, the national emblem of India, represents the fearless proclamation of Dharma to the four quarters of the world. Buddhism, a religion of such a great importance has moulded the life of the people of India from the ancient period. Although this great religion has witnessed a sharp decline in this land, its spiritual value has survived till today and its sacred places exist to this day.
When Buddhism was adopted almost by the whole country from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and Hindukush to Burma and Bengal, South Kosāla being a part of this territory was not lagging behind. Rather it appears to have been more acceptable to the people since their rites and rituals were least Brāhmanic and more humane. The manifestation of this faith is found in the form of monuments and sculptures, the remains of which are lying scattered in the region of South Kosāla in several places like Narsinghnāth, Gaṇiāpāli, Baidyanāth, Mahādevpāli, Rāṇīpur-Jhariāl, Baud, Sirpur, Malhar etc.

Buddhism seems to have set its foot in this land since the early centuries of the Christian Era. The testimony of Hiuen-Tsang further pushed back the period when he wrote that King Sa-to-po-ho (Sātavāhana ruler Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi) had constructed a great monastery at Po-lo-mo-lo-ki-li (Parimalagiri or Gandhamārdanagiri) of South Kosāla, with the great sage Nāgārjuna as its principal Āchārya. Excavation at Sirpur, Malhar, Gaṇiāpāli etc. brought to light many Buddhist antiquities including some monastic establishments. Many other sites like Rāṇīpur-Jhariāl, Mahādevpāli, Baidyanāth, Baud etc. are rich in archaeological ruins of Buddhist culture. South Kosāla played a vital role in the development of Tantric Buddhism such as Vajrayāna and Sahajayāna propounded by King Indrabhūti and his sister Lakṣmīkarā respectively.

Buddhism as a protestant Hinduism moulded the life of the people of South Kosāla for a long period as this region
was the hinterland of the tribal people since the ancient period. Buddhism, unlike Jainism which paid much more attention to the affliction of self-torture to liberate self from this mundane world appealed the tribals far better than Hinduism which was ridden with caste conflict and Brāhmanic domination. On the other hand Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna school of Buddhism have enough scope to satisfy the tribal faith and belief based on natural feelings. Tribals found Buddhism preaching a simple and puritan way of life without intricacies rites and rituals of the Hindus. It appeals nearer to their way of life which was least philosophical, ethical etc. and which characterises the higher religious order of the Hindus. Further the religious conflict which characterises the religious life of the people of coastal region of Orissa in particular and some other places in general is conspicuously absent in South Kośala. It is seen in Sirpur region (one of the ancient capital of South Kośala) that Vaiśṇavism, Śaivism and Buddhism flourished side by side within a radius of five kilometres during 8th and 9th centuries. Many of the places in South Kośala such as Narsinghnāth, Gaṇiāpāli, Nāgraj etc. are remarkable for having vestiges of Vaiśṇavism and Buddhism belonging to the same period in the vicinity of the same village. Religious co-existence appears visible as a dominant factor in the psyche and ethos of the people of South-Kośala. It is so much dominant that even today there is hardly any religious conflict among the various communities that inhabit the territories and plains of South Kośala.
Buddhism in South Kośala was not only a means for spiritual attainments and salvation but also a driving force in shaping a way of life that ensures social harmony and peaceful co-existence which was possible due to its principle of liberalism and catholicism. The impact was conducive to a sustainable cultural set up for which a composite religious order came to dominate in the psyche of the people of South Kośala. Verily this ideal was not only responsible for the continuation of the tribal religious faith and belief in the acceptance of Stambheśvarī or Khambeśvarī worship by the common man but also responsible for the growth and development of cults like Mahimā and Jagannath in this region.