Religious faith and beliefs have been in existence in this world from the very beginning of the human civilisation. The various aspects of nature like sun, moon, air and water etc. have been universally adored. In course of time image worship began with different rituals, ceremonies and prescribed philosophies. The gods and goddesses were conceived with form and shape to fulfil different aspirations and to channelise different faith and beliefs. Religion created a concrete form of social order and demanded allegiance from its adherents. Man in that system has to accept some faith for his existence in the society.

India through the ages had experimented with many religious systems. Every religious system that has developed in this country has left indelible mark in the socio-religious life of its people and Buddhism was no exception.

Buddhism, brought out of protest was a distinct religious movement of the sixth century B.C. which profoundly affected the moral ideas of the time and it became a dynamic factor on changing the social order. Thus Buddhism as religion emerged as a protest against the corrupt practices of the Brahmin priestly class, old philosophical dogmas and cult of sacrifice with elaborate rituals. It was an age when people were striving for simple methods of worship and easier means of escape from
the ills of this mundane existence. Buddhism gave a new orientation to life in the country. The new philosophy of revolt was against the social structure in vogue. It discarded the principle of inequality and injustice in the society. Buddhism became a strong cultural force in the succeeding periods through which the down-trodden classes in the graded society were mostly benefitted. The great personality of Lord Buddha, a unique combination of wisdom, ability and kindness attracted many people of India who became his followers. The newly preached religion soon became a religious order and spread far and wide. This religion gained its popularity due to the patronage of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (3rd century B.C.). During the Gupta Age (320-540 A.D), Buddhism was marked by philosophical and literary development producing many outstanding logicians and philosophers like Asaṅga, Vasuvandhu and Dignāga. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien (394-414 A.D) saw this religion in a prosperous condition in most of the centres like Gandhāra, Mathurā, Kanauj, Kośala, Uḍḍīyāna, Tāmralipti etc. In 7th century A.D. Hiuen-Tsang (629-45 A.D) saw that Buddhism was in a flourishing condition in major parts of India and Nālandā and Valabhi were two great centres of this religion.

The inscriptions and literature and the presence of the numerous stupas, vihāras, images and associated mounds prove that Buddhism was in a flourishing state in Orissa, which forms a substantial part of Buddhist heritage of India. The Buddhist traditions recorded in Dāṭhāḍhātuvaṁśa and Buddhavāṁśa make
it clear that after the death of Buddha, one of his tooth relic was carried to Dantapura, the capital city of Kaliṅga and was enshrined in a magnificent Chaitya. It is also mentioned in the early Pāli literature that two merchants of Ukkala named Tapassu and Bhallika were the first lay disciples of Buddha. The Buddhist text Aṅguttara-Nikāya also referred that Buddha gave them his hair which was deposited in a chaitya built by the two merchants in their native town called Asitāñjana. The Nikāya also stated that the Vassa and Bhāna people of Utkala accepted the teachings of Buddha after hearing his discourses which he delivered at Jetavana. From a passage of Major Rock-Edict XIII of Emperor Aśoka, it appears that there were sramanās along with other sects in Kaliṅga before the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka invaded that country. All the above statements give a clear picture of the existence of Buddhism in Kaliṅga prior to the invasion of Aśoka to this country. But after the Kaliṅga War Buddhism flourished in Orissa tremendously due to the missionary activities of Emperor Aśoka. A number of eminent Buddhist Āchāryas came to Orissa and popularised both Theravāda and Sarvastivāda school of Buddhism. This religion embraced the common folk and a number of stupas and chaityas were constructed in different parts of Orissa.

In the ancient and medieval period different regions of Orissa were known in the names of Kaliṅga, Utkala, Odra, Dakshiṇa Kośala (South Kośala), Koṅgoda etc. The origin of the kingdom of South Kośala goes back to the age of the Rāmāyaṇa
where it is stated that the kingdom of Kośala after the death of Rāma, was divided between his two sons Lava and Kuśa. While Lava got the northern part of Kośala, Kuśa received the southern part. Thus South Kośala originated in the Epic period, which roughly comprised the Western part of Orissa and the districts of Raipur and Bilaspur of modern Chhattisgarh state.

South Kośala was inhabited by pre-historic men which is evidenced by the discovery of ancient rock-paintings and rock-shelters at Guḍahāṇḍi, Jogimāṭha, Uṣākotī, Vikramkhol etc. In the historic period, it saw the rise and fall of many ruling dynasties like the Chedis, the Guptas, the Nalas, the Vākāṭakas, the Parvatadvārakas, the Saravapurīyas, the Pāṇḍuvamsīs, the Telgu-Choḍas, the Kalachūris and the Chauhāns.

Regional history helps in strengthening the history of a nation. Of late, therefore, much emphasis is given to the study of regional history, culture and religion as the determinants of the heritage of a nation. Religion as a significant aspect of culture has the most dominant role to play in human life. The history of a region will remain incomplete without a proper study of its cultural aspect.

The territory of South Kośala has significantly contributed to the richness of socio-political and cultural heritage of Orissa through her sons and soil as evidenced from the chequered history from the rule of the Chedis to the downfall
of the Chauhāns. Dedicated services have been done in this respect by the Mahakośala Historical Society, Bilaspur, the Kaliṅga Historical Research Society, Bolangir and Prāchya Pratibhā, Bhopal. It is worth mentioning that many erudite scholars like Cunningham, R. B. Hiralal, Dr. S. K. Pandey and Dr. K. D. Bajpai, Dr. V. S. Thakur, Dr. N. K. Sahu, Dr. S. C. Behera, Dr. J. K. Sahu, Dr. S. N. Rajaguru, Dr. S. C. Panda, Dr. J. P. Singhdeo, Dr. S. P. Tiwari, Dr. S. R. Nema, Dr. N. K. Dash and others have thrown a flood of light on the history and culture of South Kośala by their valuable works and articles published in various journals and periodicals. In many modern works like ‘Buddhism in Orissa’ by N. K. Sahu, ‘History of the Art of Orissa’ by Charles Louis Fabri, ‘Nāga Cult in Orissa’ by S. C. Panda, ‘Rajim’ (in Hindi) by V. S. Thakur, ‘Malhar’ by K. D. Bajpai and S. K. Pandey, ‘Inscriptions of the Central Provinces and Berar’ by R. B. Hiralal, ‘Dakshin Kośal Ki Kalā’ (in Hindi) by Hemulal Yadu, ‘Inscriptions of Orissa’ Vol. IV, by S. N. Rajaguru, ‘Cultural Profile of South Kośala’ by J. P. Singhdeo, ‘Dakṣiṇa Kośala Under the Śaravapuriyas’ by S. P. Tiwari, ‘Political History of the Somavamśī Kings of South Kośala’ by S. R. Nema, ‘Life and Culture of Medieval South Kośala’ by N. K. Dash ‘Early History and Culture of South Kośala’ (Ph. D. Thesis, Sambalpur University, 1986) by J. P. Sahu, ‘A Study on the Religious Faith and Beliefs of the People of South Kośala From Early time till 1350 A.D.’ (Ph. D. Thesis, Sambalpur University, 1996) by B. P. Sahu etc. have highlighted the various aspects of the
political and cultural history of South Kosala. But specific attempts are yet to be initiated for the detailed study of Buddhism in South Kosala. However, the study has so far revealed a congenial atmosphere for the growth and development of the cultural heritage with social cohesion and religious toleration. It is found that at a given time there developed religious establishments of different creeds. The acceptance of the dogmatic religious order by the natives of South Kosala was so open that there developed a religious harmony encouraging unhindered growth of all the religious systems simultaneously.

There is a rare instance of religious co-existence at Sirpur, where we find Buddhism (Anandaprabhu Kuṭī Vihār), Śaivism (Gandhesvar Śiva Temple) and Vaiṣṇavism (Lakṣmī Temple) having a balanced growth within a radius of 3 kilometres at a particular time. This religious trend of co-existence is found at Narsinghnāth (Buddhism and Vaiṣṇavism), Gandharādi (Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism) and Rāṇīpur-Jhariāl (Śaktism, Tāntrism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism). The religious atmosphere was so clear and free that while it encouraged large migration and influence of Brahmans, it attracted into its fold eminent exponents and philosophers like Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Gaganaśiva, Rudraśīva and others.

The state of Buddhism in South Kośala is no way insignificant since we get a lot of evidence in the form of monuments, sculptures, viharas etc. right from the 2nd century A.D. down to the 9th and 10th century A.D. Mention may be made
of places like Narsinghnath, Ganiapali, Baidyanath, Mahadevpali, Rapingpur-Jhariyal, Baud, Sirpur and Malhar, which bear testimony to the fact that Buddhism was in a flourishing state in South Kosala. The Buddhist Pithas in this area were adorned by Acharya Nagajuna of Prajñāpāramitā fame, Āryadeva, Indrabhuti, Padmasambhava, Lakṣmīkarā and others. Archaeological remains connected with Buddhism are found in different parts of South Kosala. It may be mentioned that a Buddhist monastery has been excavated at Ganiapali in Bargarh district of Orissa, which according to Dr. N. K. Sahu is the earliest of its kinds in Orissa. Further two great monasteries (Anandaprabhu Kujī Vihāra and Swastika Vihāra) have been brought to light at Sirpur (near Raipur) in Chhattisgarh state.

The Sahajā Cult of Vajrayāna which is associated with the decline of Buddhism is said to have started in this region. Mantrayāna or Tantric Buddhism first developed in a country called Uddiyāna in which were located two significant kingdoms called Sambhala and Laṅkāpurī. Indrabhuti was the ruler of Sambhala and Laṅkāpurī was ruled by king Jalendra whose son married Lakṣmīkarā, the sister of Indrabhuti. Sambhala has been identified with modern Sambalpur by Rahula Sankirtiyayana. Dr. N. K. Sahu identified Uddiyāna with Orissa and Laṅkāpurī with modern Sonepur in Suvarnapur district of Orissa. Indrabhuti organised Mantrayāna Buddhism into Vajrayāna while Sahajayāna was propounded by Lakṣmīkarā. She advocated the importance of sexo-yogic practices rather than the
supression of the sex-instinct and other primitive desires of man. She challenged all other established religions with their rigorous discipline, orthodoxy and formalities. She also denounced the worship of gods and goddesses and declared that all the deities including Pañcha-Dhyānī Buddhas resided in the body of man. Therefore, the Sahajiās preferred the principle of satisfying all the needs of the physical body which is the abode of all the deities, without which no siddhi could be attained. The Sahajiā cult preached by Lakṣmīkarā expanded towards Eastern India. She had many followers in Sambalpur, Sonepur and Patnagarh region of Western Orissa. The people of South Kośala had great contribution to the Buddhist literature and philosophy. But the introduction of female element in Sahayāna led to the downfall of Buddhism. It also declined due to lack of patronage and stiff competition of Brāhmaṇism. In course of time Buddhism was absorbed by the Jagannāth Cult. Buddha was considered as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In name Buddhism has perished in this land but its spirit survived till today. Some aspects of Buddhist heritage are found even today in the cultural life and folklore of the people of South Kośala.

Buddhism as a protestant Hinduism moulded the life of the people of South Kośala 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 Mahayāna and Vajrayāna school of Buddhism have enough scope to satisfy the tribal faith and beliefs based on natural feelings. Tribals found Buddhism preaching a simple and puritan way of life without intricate rites and rituals of the Hindus. It appeals nearer to their way of life which was least philosophical, ethical etc. which characterises the higher religious order of the Hindus.

We get a good account of Buddhist heritage of coastal belt of Orissa from the work ‘Buddhism in Orissa’ (Utkal University, 1958) by Dr. N. K. Sahu, but a systematic and exhaustive study of Buddhism in South Kośala co-relating it to the rich heritage of Buddhism in Orissa from early time to the late medieval period is yet to be done. Here an attempt has been made to codify, interpret and analyse the Buddhist vestiges in this region.

As to the methodology and sources adopted for the present work, we have utilised the various archaeological findings for critical analysis and historical interpretation. As primary sources we have made use of the inscriptions and copper-plate charters connected with South Kośala while ascertaining facts about Buddhism in South Kośala. In this connection R. B. Hiralal’s ‘Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar’, S. N. Rajaguru’s ‘Inscriptions of Orissa’, ‘Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum’ edited by V. V. Mirashi and ‘Epigraphia Indica’ are notable. We have also referred to the
early literary works. In order to get first hand information and acquaintance with the sites and monuments we have conducted field-works. For the proper codification we have taken the photographs. We have utilised the internet to study the reports of the excavations. We have referred to the authoritative works on the allied subject written by eminent scholars and authors like J. N. Benarjee, V. S. Agrawala, A. L. Basham, B. Bhattacharyya, N. N. Bhattacharyya, T. W. Rhys Davids and others. Modern works on Art, Architecture and Sculptures such as ‘Development of Hindu Iconography’ by J. N. Benarjee, ‘The Indian Buddhist Iconography’ by B. Bhattacharyya, ‘Indian Architecture’ by Percy Brown, ‘Buddhist Monuments’ by Debala Mitra, ‘History of the Art of Orissa’ by C. L. Fabri, ‘Dakshin Kośāla Ki Kalā’ (in Hindi) by Hemulal Yadu, ‘Madhya Pradesh Purātattva Kā Sandarbh Granth’ (in Hindi) by R. K. Sharma, ‘Sculptures of Ḍāhāla and South Kośala and their Background’ by R. N. Mishra, ‘Riddle of Indian Iconography (Zetetic on Rare Icon from Tālā)’ by L. S. Nigam have been utilised as and when necessary.

This present work entitled “Buddhism in South Kośala” contains Six Chapters. Chapter I being the Introductory one deals with the beginning, development and status of Buddhism in India in general and Orissa in particular. In this chapter we have described in brief the historical geography and political history of South Kośala to focus the area covered for our study and to visualise the importance of ‘Time and Space’ in historical analysis.
Chapter II deals with the history of Buddhism in South Kośala enumerating the status of Hinayāna, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and Sahajayāna in its content and popularity. This chapter also traces the origin and development of Buddhism with different sites and Sādhakas. Tāntric Buddhism originated in Orissa, the ancient Oḍḍīyana or Uḍḍīyana. Here we have analysed the different views advocated by eminent scholars in the identification of Uḍḍīyana, Sambhala and Laṅkā and accepted that ancient Uḍḍīyana, Sambhala and Laṅkā are presently known as Orissa, Sambalpur and Sonepur respectively. In this chapter, we have also discussed the contribution of the Siddhāchāryas like Indrabhuti, Padmasambhava and Lakṣmīkarā to the Tāntric Buddhist culture of South Kośala.

Chapter III is devoted to the description of both Buddhist monuments with their architectural peculiarities and Buddhist sculptures with their specific iconic features. It may be noted that the manifestation of religious faith and belief in most popular form is found in the form of monuments and sculptures.

Chapter IV is confined to Tāntric Buddhism and the gradual decline of the creed. It may be mentioned that the teachings of Buddha degenerated as a consequence of the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and tribal religion and as a result of internecine conflict among the different groups of people and comparative popularity of different faith. Attempts have been made to put easier norms and practices in Buddhism to
make it popular. It was through esoteric practices that Tantra and Yantra appealed to the masses and became popular. However, this popularity led to the emergence of the Sahajīā cult which ultimately caused the decline of Buddhism.

Chapter V contains the various traits of Buddhism as found in the culture and folklore of the people of South Kośala. It is a common thing that a religious faith and belief generate and build up a heritage of the people of an area. Buddhism as one of the oldest religions in South Kośala has created and generated its heritage in the cultural life of the people of this region.

Chapter VI contains the summary and assessment of our study in Buddhism in South Kośala. 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 also desirable to summarise its content as underlying favour in shaping the life and culture of the people of South Kośala.

Buddhism in South Kośala was not only a means for spiritual attainment 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 Stambhesvarī or Khambeśvarī worship by the common man but also responsible for the growth and development of cults like Mahimā and Jagannāth in this region.

Tarangini Patel
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