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The Religious History of Odisha in the Writing of Prof. N.K. Sahu

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Abstract

From the ancient times, Odisha has become the cradle of many religious faiths. This land witnessed the growth of various religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Shaktiism, etc. Professor Nabin Kumar Sahu provided a thorough analysis of not just the secular history of Odisha but also the religious history of the region. His book '*Buddhism in Orissa*', which was published by Utkal University in 1958 under the programme of the University Grant Commission, is the updated version of N.K. Sahu's Ph.D. thesis. It is also one of the rarest of rare works that he produced throughout his lifetime. The book is valuable not only for its scholarly exposition of the origin and development of the *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, *Tantrayana*, and *Yogayana* systems of Buddhism, but also for its very interesting accounting of Tibet's cultural indebtedness to Odisha. Both of these aspects contribute to the book's overall value. The insightful and reliable comments made by Nalinaksha Dutt, a professor of Pali at the University of Calcutta, have contributed to the improvement of the work. Because of the work that he has done, Professor Sahu has been given the opportunity to study several extremely rare Buddhist manuscripts. I have tried to attempt to analyze and go into depth below as a researcher who relies only on facts and evidence rather than bias or belief.

Keywords: Buddhism, religious, history, Odisha, okra, Kalinga, and Utkal

Introduction

The work introduces the academic community to the origins and development of Buddhism in Odisha, as well as a study of Buddhist ruins located around the state in a variety of locations [4]. In addition to it, he shed light on other religious components of Odishan history that occurred at various moments in time. His study book, *Buddhism in Orissa*, is a historical analysis of the growth of Buddhism in Odisha from the 5th century B.C. to the early 16th century A.D. It is possible, however, to assert that this book is the first of its kind because up to now, no attempt has been made to shed light on the expansion and maturation of Buddhist culture in the state of Odisha. N.K. Sahu has conducted an in-depth investigation into every facet of Buddhism as it developed in Odisha over the course of approximately two thousand years, taking into account the contributions that were made by the people, saints, kings, and Buddhist scholars of Odisha for the growth of the religion. The work of N.K. Sahu has been bolstered by the inclusion of a reproduction as well as an analytical examination of the images and sculptures that have been found so far inside the boundaries of the province. It was the only province of India, with the exception of a few districts in Assam and East Pakistan, that preserved and nurtured the religion up until the seventeenth century A.D. Odisha played an important part in the growth and development of Buddhism, and it was the only province of India that did so. A historical discussion regarding the existence of Odra, Kalinga, and Utkal is presented here by

N.K. Sahu [5]. In addition to this, he has improved his work by doing an in-depth investigation into the several facets of Buddhism, taking into consideration the scholarly works, rock edicts, copper plates, and historical monuments. This has allowed him to enrich his work. He describes the stages that Buddhism went through during its development. The earliest phase is known as

- i). *Hinayana* or *Sarvakayana*, which is more ethical than Philosophical;
- ii). *Mahayana*, which is Philosophical and altruistic religion; and
- iii). *Tantrayana*, which believes in Sadhana along with the philosophical ideas of *Mahayana* [6]. *Tantrayana* is comprised of *Bajrayana*, *Kalachakrayana*, and *Sahajayana*. In addition to this, he illustrates the expansion and maturation of *Tantrayana* Buddhism in Odisha.

Materials and Methods

In this article I have used different research design and survey data methods. Data was obtained via consulting written primary sources and archives. Likewise, secondary data were collected from written materials such as internet, journals, newspapers, published and unpublished materials. Thus, consolidated sources about topics of the study and related issues were reconciled and interpreted by narrative analysis systematic methods.

Propagation of Buddhism in Kalinga and Burma

According to the Ceylonese Chronicle, Muggaliputta Tissa despatched prominent Theras such as Sona and Uttaras to Burma for the goal of spreading Buddhism during the time of Asoka. On the other hand, this position is not supported by the Edicts of Asoka. The statement made by Blagden, according to which these two monks are not mentioned in the Kalyani Inscriptions of Pegu, is dissected by N.K. Sahu [7]. The Theravada school of Buddhism was widely practised in Burma before to the third century A.D., as indicated by the Nagarjuna Konda Inscriptions. There is evidence from early Chinese sources that Buddhism was widely practised in Burma during the third century AD. By the 5th century A.D., the Pyu had captured the majority of Central Burma, and under their rule, the *Hinayana* Canons and the *Theravada* Culture spread throughout the region [8]. There is evidence of a close relationship between Burma and ancient Odra, Utkala, and Kalinga, which helped in the spread of Brahminical and Buddhist culture in Burma. N.K. Sahu refers to the view of A.S. Burma and states that, there was a strong Hinayanic faith in Pyu, which was brought here from South Eastern India. He states that, there was a strong Hinayanic faith in Pyu, which was brought Pegu was formerly known by its previous name, Ussa, which is a version of Odisha's name for the river Odra.⁹ The city of Srikset, located in what is now Puri, Odisha, served as the capital of Pyu. As to the foundation of the kingdom of Srikshetra and introduction of Buddhism in that land, the famous inscription of the Shwezigon Pagoda states:¹⁰Ananda asked the Lord Buddha what made him smile, and the Lord responded by saying, "Ananda, in the future, a sage named Vishnu who is great in supernatural power, great in glory, possessing five transcendental faculties together with my son Gavampati and King Indra and Bissukarmadevaput and Katakarmonanagaraja shall build a city called Sisit" (Srikshetra). After the guru Vishnu has completed the construction of the city of Sisit, he will leave that location and travel to the city of Arimaddanapura (Pagan), where he would eventually become King Sri Tribhubanaditya Dharmmaraja. After conducting an exhaustive study of these inscriptions, Professor Sahu has arrived at the conclusion that the Brahminical Hindus initially colonised the Srikshetra kingdom, but the Buddhists afterwards joined them there as settlers. These colonists most likely originated in Odisha and migrated to other parts of India.

In addition to this, he discovers proof that Odisha and Burma were intimately connected in the early days of their respective histories. The Mon texts make reference to a location in Burma known as Talaing or Trikalinga, both of which were centres of Buddhist activity during that time period. So, the author has a firm belief that the people of ancient Odra or Utkala and Kalinga countries were responsible for the development of Brahminical and Buddhist Culture in Burma during the early Christian ages [11]. In addition, N.K. Sahu notices that many Buddhist and Brahminical images in Burma share striking similarities with those discovered in Odisha, both in terms of their artistic characteristics and their styles. It is stated that the famed Ananda Temple in Burma was modelled by the "Anantagumpha" that can be found in the Khandagiri hills in the Khurda area at this time. According to N.K. Sahu, the aforementioned evidence demonstrates that Odisha had a significant impact on the spread of Buddhism in Burma. This may be deduced from the data presented.¹²

Spread of Buddhism in Kalinga

By conducting an in-depth investigation into the Nagarjuna

Konda inscription, N.K. Sahu came to the conclusion that the religious endowments of the Upasika Bodhisri were associated with the branch of Buddhism that originated independently of the Hinayanism. It was a dominant force in the religious life of the country, and it generated far-reaching repercussions in the history of Buddhism, which led to the construction of stupas, chaityas, and caves in various centres of Buddhism. Moreover, it was a force that influenced the political life of the country [13].

Stupas and chaityas were planned to be built in Kalinga at the following locations: Dantapura, Tosali, Hirumu, and Puspagiri. According to the accounts of Datha Vamsa of Ceylon [14] the development of popular Buddhism took place in Dantapura, where it was believed that the stupa contained a tooth relic of the Buddha. This relic had been brought by Khema Thera to king Brahmadata of Kalinga and was later kept in a magnificent stupa at Dantapura. In subsequent centuries, this location became the epicentre of the religious life of the people of Kalinga, and a succession of Kalinga rulers, such as Brahmadata, Kasiraja, Sunanda, and many others, devoted themselves to the preservation of the priceless relic, which they worshipped and paid homage to in ritualistic contexts. The subsequent notion that the tooth held magical efficacies contributed to the development of a mystic faith and superstitious belief among the people, who were moved to emotional devotion as a result of the tooth's supposed ability to stimulate emotional devotion. Pandu, the king of Pataliputra, tortured Guhasiva, the ruler of Kalinga, and put the relic through sacrilegious tests; yet, he was ultimately converted to Buddhism by the miraculous supramundane power of the tooth. As a result of King Guhasiva of Kalinga's tolerant outlook as well as his aversion to warfare and the spilling of blood, neighbouring states invaded his kingdom. When the king realised there was no way to defend his territory, he dispatched the sacred tooth to Ceylon, where it was placed in the care of his daughter Hemamala and son-in-law Danta-Kumara.¹⁵ This account, in the opinion of N.K. Sahu, does not accurately reflect historical events. On the other hand, he acknowledges that Dantapura was a significant Buddhist centre in ancient Odisha [16].

Origin of Mahayana Buddhism in Odisha

It is believed that the *Mahayana* school of Buddhism originated in the Indian state of Odisha. According to Taranath, shortly after the reign of King Mahapadma, there resided in the realm of Odivisa king Chandragupta to whose residence the venerable Manjushree came in the form of a Bhikshu and gave the various *Mahayana* teachings [17]. The venerable Manjushree even left behind a book. Hence, it is abundantly obvious that the *Mahayana* school of Buddhism was established in Odisha. Pag Sam Jon Zang provides evidence that supports this interpretation of Taranath [18]. In addition, Taranath reveals that during the reign of Kaniska, Kulika of Saurashtra invited the Sthavira and Arahanta Nanda, a resident of Anga, to learn about the new *Mahayana* teachings. This took place during the time of Kaniska. It indicates that at that time, a sect of *Hinayana* Monks was responsible for spreading *Mahayana* doctrine during the 1st century A.D. Even though he was a member of the Sarvastivadin school of thought, the famous poet and philosopher Asvaghosa wrote several *Mahayana* works. According to the literature of the Prajna Paramita, the *Mahayana* teachings first emerged in the Dakshinapatha region, then spread to the countries of the east, and finally flourished in the north. This particular school of Buddhism,

the *Mahayana*, truly developed and prospered in the north as a result of Kaniska and his successors' support for it. Prof. Sahu acknowledges the reality that the Sarvastivada tradition prepared the groundwork for the development of the *Mahayana* school of thought^[19].

After considering all of these sources and pieces of information, N.K. Sahu has come to the conclusion that the Buddhists have made a significant contribution to the growth of the Buddhist thought associated with *Mahayana*. It is uncommon to credit such a staunch *ayatanas*, *arya satyas*, *angas*, etc. and have utilised terms like *Paryavas*, *Samgrahavastu*, *Dvadasanga*, etc. to the Buddhists of this school because they are very strong *Mahasamghikas* and severe in matters of doctrine. In the annals of history, N.K. Sahu discovers that during the Post-Ashokan period in Odisha, both the *Mahasamghikas* and the *Sarvastivadins* had a period of great prosperity. With the migration of the *Mahasamghika* people from Magadh to Andhra, some of them choose to settle in the southern districts of Ganjam and Guntur in the state of Odisha. They were referred to as the "Saila Sangha." Since the period of Dhitika and Acharya Kala, who are credited with popularising the beliefs of the *Sarvastivadins* in both Odisha and Ceylon, the *Sarvastivadins* have also been practised in Odisha. Thus, N.K. Sahu is absolutely correct when he asserts that considerable advancements were made in both schools of Buddhism in Odisha prior to the commencement of the Christian era in that region^[20].

Buddhism and Tosali

During the third century A.D., Tosali was an important Buddhist centre in the state of Odisha. The ancient Sanskrit scripture known as *Gandavyuha* includes an evocative account of the city of Tosali. According to the information provided in the book, Tosali was a very significant city in *Amita Tosala*^[21]. On the hill of Sourabha, which was known as a significant Buddhist centre, there was a beautiful monastery that had been there for a long time. According to Prof. Sahu, the Surabha hill was an important Buddhist centre in Odisha, and he associates it with either Dhauri or one of the localities that are adjacent to it^[22].

Buddhism and Bhora Saila

N.K. Sahu discovers *Bhora-Saila*, which is another location in Odisha containing the ruins of a Buddhist monastery that dates back to the 4th century A.D. It is where the mystical philosophy of *Mahayana* was disseminated, and it was here that the *Samkhya* philosopher *Isvarakrisna* engaged *Dignaga* in a series of metaphysical battles. It is thought that the village of Delang, which is located in the Puri district, was named after Acharya *Dignaga*. His memory is preserved in the cultural legacy of Odisha^[23]. A remarkable group of low hills can be found stretching from Delang all the way up to the vicinity of *Bhuvaneswara*. The most prominent of these hills are the *Vindhyesvari*, *Saanla Paanra*, *Banivakres'vara*, *Jamunajhadapada*, *Aragada*, and *Dhauri*, all of which were once home to Buddhist monks until the late mediaeval period. During the early Christian era, when Tosali was at the height of its reputation as a prominent Buddhist centre, these hills gave the impression of being bustling with active monastic activity^[24]. According to N.K. Sahu's reasoning, *Dignaga* and the people who followed him may have been in existence throughout the fourth century A.D^[25]. There is a possibility that the *Bhora Saila* can be located within one of these hills.

Buddhism and Tamralipti

This is another *Mahayana* Buddhist site that may be found at the southernmost tip of India. It is known as the apex of the Indian Ocean. When Fa-hien arrived in India in the fifth century A.D., Tamralipti was home to 24 monasteries where priests, pilgrims, and other religious figures spent years at a time. By the time Yuan Chwang travelled to India, Buddhism was on the decrease, and in Tamralipti, a pilgrim could find approximately fifty *Deva Temples* to visit. It has been shown that Tamralipti corresponds to the contemporary town of *Tamluk*, which is located in the *Midnapur* district of West Bengal. In the past, this area was ruled by ancient *Odisha*.

Buddhism and Ratnagiri, Udaygiri and Lalitgiri

The *Mahayana* school of Buddhism was also very successful in the *Asia* range of hills, which consists of *Udaygiri*, *Ratnagiri*, and *Lalitgiri*. In these hills, monuments of *Mahayana* arts as well as the scattered ruins of stupas and shrines have been preserved; all of these things are evidence of the success of Buddhism in early mediaeval *Odisha*. In mediaeval India, *Ratnagiri* was noted for both its role as a centre of scholarship and its role as a centre of *Buddhist Yoga*. In order to teach *Yoga*, eminent teachers and *Acharyas* were residing at this location. *Acharya Pito*, who had obtained the *Siddhi* of invisibility, was a teacher of *Yoga* at *Ratnagiri*. *Abadhuti*, *Bodhisri*, and *Naropa* were some of his disciples^[26].

Origin of Tantric Buddhism

Tantric Buddhism is said to have been originated in *Odisha*, and Prof. Sahu has made an effort to discover its history there. According to the information that was obtained from the Chinese record *Pag-sam-jon-Zang*, Tantric Buddhism initially formed in a location known as *Uddiyana*. This location is regarded as the most significant of the four *pithas* that are commonly mentioned in both *Hindu* and *Buddhist Tantras*. As per the *Tibetan sources*, *Saraha*, *Kambala*, *Padmavajra*. All of the *tantric academics*, including *Luipa*, *Laltavajra*, *Gambhiravajra*, *Kakkuri*, and *Pito*, were connected with the *Uddiyana* school. According to the teachings of Prof. N.K. Sahu, *Uddiyana* is the epicentre of all *tantric knowledge* and an essential location for the practise of *Tantric Buddhism*. It was in this region that the various schools of *Tantric Buddhism*, such as *Vajrayana*, *Kalachakrayana*, and *Sahajayana*, developed. Although other academics, such as *H.P.Sastri*, *M. Levi*, and *P.C. Bagchi*, consider *Uddiyana* to be the *Swat Valley*, Prof. Sahu vehemently disagrees with this assessment. He rebuts their claims in the following paragraphs^[27].

N.K. Sahu has presented evidence that substantiates the presence of *Tantrapitha Uddiyana* in *Odisha*, and the uncontradicted nature of his arguments has silenced those who disagree. It is stated by him that it is important to keep in mind that *Uddiyana* is ultimately associated with the worship of the deities such as *Marichi*, *Kurukulla*, *Lokesvara*, *Urddhvapada*, *Vajravarahi*, etc.^[28]. However, since none of these deities can be found in the *Swat Valley*, its identification with the *Tantric land of Uddiyana* cannot be maintained. On the other hand, all of these deities are found in huge numbers, along with other pictures of *Dhyani-Buddha*, *Manjusri*, *Padmapani*, *Vajrapani* *Trailokyavijaya*, *Heruka*, *Jambhala*, *Bhairavi*, and *Chamunda*, etc., carved out in elegance and beauty with attention to the minute nuances stipulated in their *Sadhanas*. It is possible to say that the *Goddess Kurukulla* and *Vajravarahi*, who are described in the

Tantric literature as the presiding deities of Uddiyana, are found only in Odisha and nowhere else in India, to say nothing of the Swat Valley; consequently, in the light of it, Odisha may be identified with a great deal of certainty as Uddiyana [29].

N.K. Sahu has put in a lot of effort to prove that the location of Uddiyana Pitha, which is credited with being the birthplace of Tantric Buddhism, could not have been anywhere else but in the state of Odisha in the contemporary day [30]. All epigraphical evidences, historical facts, and archaeological reasons have conclusively established Uddiyana as the cradle of Tantric Buddhism, and the location has been determined to be Odisha. The majority of the Sadhanas in the Sadhanamala identify four locations in India that are significant to Tantric practise: Uddiyana, Purnagiri, Kamaksa, and Srihatta. Professor Sahu has determined that Odisha is in fact the location that is referred to as Uddiyana. It was by far the most important centre of the *Tantrayana* school, and it had an influence on the other three Pithas. Udayagiri, Ratnagiri, Lalitagiri, and Alatigiri are considered to be the four Pithas of Odisha, which are known for their effect on Tantric Buddhism. These places can be found in close proximity to the contemporary Jajpur area [31].

Tantric Buddhist Sadhakas

In his description of the Siddhas who were connected to Tantric Buddhism in Odisha, Professor Sahu has shown the utmost care and attention to detail. These Siddhas played an important role in the propagation of Tantric Buddhism in this region.

Saraha and Nagarjuna

According to Bastan-hygur Saraha or Sarahapada belonged to Uddiyana or Odisha. He is also known by the name Rahulabhadra, and he was at the height of his power during King Chandana Pala's rule in Prachya. It is generally agreed that he was one of the first people to study Tantric Buddhism. At the very least, he was the author of 25 books. P. Cordier, alluding to Bstan-hygur, states that there appears to be more than one Saraha, and that these multiple Sarahas are described as Mahabrahmana, Mahacharya, Mahayogi, and Yogisvara, etc. Analyzing the perspective of Saunders, N.K. Sahu states that there were at least two Sarahas: one lived during the time of Subhakaradev-I in the 8th century A.D., and the other, the author of songs and Dohas, lived during the 10th century A.D. Both of these Sarahas contributed to Hindu religious literature.³² Nagarjuna was a disciple of Saraha and was affiliated with Sri Parvata in the south, which was eventually called after him as Nagarjuni Konda. In addition, Nagarjuna was born in the city of Sri Parvata. He was a brilliant luminary of the *Tantrayana* school and possessed knowledge of the supernatural as well as the ability to perform mystical actions. In addition to writing the *Guhya Samaja Tantra*, two of his sadhanas were collected and included in the *Sadhanamala* text. He played an important role in the propagation of Tantric Buddhism in Odisha.

Savaripa and Laxmikara

Savaripa was a devotee of Nagarjuna's Vajra-Yogini Tantra and was one of Nagarjuna's disciples. Savaripa was the one who brought Yoginikula into *Tantrayana*, and Luipa was Savaripa's student. Luipa was also connected to the beginning of the Natha Cult. Vijraghanta, Kambala, and Padmavajra were three Buddhist academics from Odisha who are credited with introducing the Hevajra Tantra into Buddhist practise.

N.K. Sahu makes reference to them in his work.³³ Padmavajra's work *Guhya Siddhi*, which is a text on *Tantrayana*, is what made him famous. Padmavajra was Angavajra's teacher, and Angavajra was a notable practitioner in his own right. Prajnopaya Vinischaya Siddhi is a practise that is based on the Vajrayana philosophy. Jaina Siddhi, a text on Tantric Buddhism, was written by Indrabhuti. He was the creator of this work. Indrabuti, Padmasambhava and Laxmikara The writings of Indrabhuti represent the point in time when the Tantric doctrine reached its pinnacle of growth. He was the king of Uddiyana and was Kambalpada and Anangavajra's disciple. Anangavajra was his teacher. His work, *Jnana Siddhi*, which is an essential literature in tantric Buddhism, sheds light on the different esoteric ceremonies of Vajrayana. *Tantrayana* was brought to Tibet by his son Padmasambhava, who was also a significant religious reformer in his own right.

Another prominent figure in the development of Tantric Buddhism was Indrabhuti's sister Laxmikara. She brought about a change in the strictness of knowledge and yogic practises, and as a result, she gave birth to the Sahaja System, which revolted not only against the practise of worshipping Buddha but also against a wide variety of conventional and ethical injunctions. As a result, Laxmikara functions as a signpost pointing in the direction of *Sahajayana* in the development of Buddhist mysticism. Prof. Sahu mentions the names of Jalandharipada, Virupa, Kanhupa, Tilopa, and Naropa [34]. All of these individuals were scholars of Tantric Buddhism, and they all contributed significantly to the spread of Tantric Buddhism in Odisha.

Nathism in the State of Odisha

The Nathist movement in Odisha originated as a backlash against the sensual rituals that were associated with Tantric Buddhism. During the 12th century A.D. [35] Gorakhanath was the first notable exponent of this cult, and it flourished during his time. According to S.C. Das, Gorakha was at one time a cowherd; but, once he converted to Tantric Buddhism, he became known as the Sage Gorakha. His religious school lives on in what is now known as the Yogi Sect and was once known as Natha.³⁶ As a result of the fact that he steered the Natha cult away from Tantric Buddhism and in the direction of Saivism, Buddhists saw him as a heretic. Dr. S.B. Dasgupta contends that the Natha Cult developed in a manner that was apart from that of Tantric Buddhism. The Natha Cult was an offshoot of Tantric Buddhism, as Prof. Sahu maintains, despite the fact that he does not agree to this theory. The *Gorakh Samhita* was composed by Gorakha, and it includes several principles of Nathist literature. These principles share commonalities with the Buddhist-Tantra Texts, Charyas, and Dohas. As a result, Prof. Sahu arrives at the conclusion that Nathism was intimately connected to later Buddhism.³⁷ The ability of the Natha cult to transition from Tantric Buddhism to Yogic Saivism was made possible by the animosity that Nepalese Buddhists have towards Gorakha as a religious heretic who seceded from their faith [38].

Throughout a short period of time, Nathism expanded from Odisha to become a religious movement that was practised across the all of India. The doctrines of this Natha sect were the impetus for an influential yogic movement in Odisha, which in turn had an effect on the Jagannatha sect. The renowned Odia poet Saraladasa and other yogic philosophers who flourished in Odisha in the 16th century, such as Achyuta, Ananta, Yosovanta, Baranga, and others, based their yoga system on the hatha yoga practised by the Nath Cult [39].

Art in the *Mahayana* and Tantra Traditions from Odisha

In order to substantiate his views that Buddhism flourished in Odisha from its earlier days, N.K.Sahu has cited a lot of information about Mahayanic-Tantric Art in Odisha.⁴⁰ The Buddhist artistic creations and remains found in the state give a clear testimony of his hard work. N.K.Sahu has cited a lot of information about Mahayanic-Tantric Art in Odisha. The earliest known examples of *Mahayana* art date back to the Post-Gupta period and were discovered at locations such as Tosali, Palura, Pushpagiri, Bhora-Saila, Tamralipti, and Cheli-ta-lo, amongst others. The fresco paintings at Sitavinjhi, which are located in the Keonjhar district, as well as the remains of excavations at Sisupalgarh, shed light on the *Mahayana* Tantric Art that was practised in the state of Odisha^[41].

Udayagiri as a Popular Center of Buddhism

According to N.K. Sahu, Udayagiri is the most valuable of the Buddhist artistic creations^[42] and it contains several mounds of the ruins of Buddhist Monuments such as:

- i). The colossal image of 'Avalokitesvara'
- ii). The figure of Dhyani Buddha (Amitabha)
- iii). The figure of Goddess Ganga
- iv). The figure Vaisravana
- v). Goddess Kur

Sculptures of Buddhist Deities from Mediaeval Odisha

In Odisha throughout the mediaeval period, Buddhists gave the art form of sculpture a higher amount of attention than it had previously received.⁴³ The Mahayanic art are found now in Udayagiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitagiri, Solanpur, Khadipada, Baud and Narsimhapur, etc. Choudwar, Ayodhya, and Khiching are the locations where one can study the other tantric arts.

Buddhism at Lalitagiri

The mountain referred to by Professor Sahu is called Lalitagiri, and it may be found around 11 kilometres to the south of Udayagiri^[44]. It is comprised of three smaller hills, including Olasuni, Landa Parvata, and the Paravadi. Notwithstanding its notoriety as the location of Yogi Arakshita Dasa's seat during the 18th century A.D., Olasuni has the fewest Buddhist monuments of any of the islands^[45]. The Landa Parvata is home to the remnants of brick structures that once stood as monuments. Maitreya, Aparajita, and Sthira Chakra Manjusri are all graceful in their design. There is a massive image of Buddha seated in Bhumisparsha Mudra beneath a banyan tree on its summit^[46].

Buddhism Ratnagiri

A solitary hill located to the north-east of Lalitagiri, it overlooks the valley^[47]. It holds the huge statues of Buddha and Buddha Head, as well as the charming pictures of Taras and Bodhisattvas, among other things. He has provided graphical illustrations of various Tantric Buddhist figures not only from Ratnagiri but also from other areas in Odisha.⁴⁸ One of N.K. Sahu's Master-Pieces is the book Buddhism in Orissa, which he authored. This book is regarded as a valuable and scholarly exposition of the beginnings and evolution of the *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, *Tantrayana*, and *Yogayana* schools of Buddhism, and it has garnered widespread acceptance across the entirety of India. Due to the fact that it details significant aspects of Buddhist religion and culture, this book is an invaluable resource for academics, historians, and other professionals in the field^[49]. Given that

the book was first published in 1958, the author's work deserves recognition for the admirable job he did in gathering such a wide range of authentic material regarding Buddhist scholars, art, and philosophy. His Buddhism in Orissa has not been questioned to this day by any other adherents of the religion^[50].

Jainism in Odisha

Prof. Sahu has provided an in-depth analysis of the religious climate in Odisha from a more global perspective. He notes that this region was fertile ground for the development of Jainism, Buddhism, and Brahmanism. Although the advent of Jainism in the 5th-4th Century B.C. has not been proven by any archaeological records, Prof. Sahu argues that Jainism made its appearance during that time in Kalinga. He also claims that Jainism has been practised in Odisha since the distant past^[51]. In the 1st century B.C., while Kharavela was in control of Kalinga, Jainism had a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity. Kharavela had brought Kalinga Jina back with him from Magadha during the 12th year of his reign as king^[52]. According to him, Jainism was widely practised in the Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar area between the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. Prof. Sahu concludes, based on the Jaina ruins that can be found in Podasingidi, which is located close to Anandapur, Baidakhia, and Soso, among other places, that the Keonjhar region was home to a thriving Jain community around the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. Jainism saw a golden age in Kangoda during the seventh century A.D.. He makes reference to the Banapur Copper Plate Grant, which indicates that Queen Kalyanadevi had awarded land to Jaina arhat Prabuddhachandra for the growth of Jainism in that region.⁵³ When King Sasanka of Gauda established his authority over that region, both Jainism and Buddhism experienced a decline in popularity in Tosali and Kangoda, according to further statements made by Prof. Sahu. Jainism was eventually eradicated from ancient Odisha as a result of the emergence of Brahminism^[54].

Buddhism in Odisha

Immediately after Asoka's victory in the Kalinga War in 261, B.C., the Buddhist religion flourished in Odisha. In the fullness of time, it blossomed into widespread renown across every nook and cranny of this land. Throughout the early middle ages, *Mahayana* and Tantric schools of Buddhism flourished in the Indian state of Odisha. Tantric Buddhism began to be practised in a number of locations, including Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitagiri, amongst others^[55]. During that time period in Odisha, Buddhist art and architecture experienced rapid and significant expansion.

Bhagavatism (Vaisnavism) in Odisha

Around the 5th century B.C., devotion of the god Vasudev became widespread throughout India. Once some period of time had passed, Bhagavata came to be recognised as one and the same as Visnu. Moreover, Bhagavatism was the dominant religion in Odisha. Around the middle of the fourth century A.D., Visakhavarman, the very first Mathra Monarch, assumed the title of Paramadaivata for himself. It is known that Anantasakti-Varman thought of himself as 'Bhagabat Swami Narayana Padanudhyata', and this information comes from Ningodi Copper Plate. The worship of Visnu became very popular in Odisha during the Ganga period, as seen by the construction of the Jagannath Temple at Puri^[56]. This can be seen as an indication of the widespread devotion to Visnu during this time. The growth of Vaisnavism in Odisha

coincided with the dominance of the Suryavamsi dynasty, and it was further encouraged by the arrival of Sri Chaitanya. The Rama cult also gained a lot of followers in this region. Even in modern times, Vaisnavism remains a widely followed religion in the state of Odisha^[57].

Saivism in Odisha

Also, N.K. Sahu discusses the development and expansion of Saivism in the state of Odisha. He directs the audience's attention to the Asanpat inscription, which depicts Siva in a dance position. Saivism experienced a period of flourishing in Odisha during the time of the Sailodbhavas. The Somvamsis and the Gangas are credited with spreading Saivism over this region. Gokarnesvara Siva of mound Mahendra and Ekamrakshetra (Bhubaneswar), both of which were important Saiva centres in Eastern India, are discussed by N.K. Sahu. Even in modern times, Saivism has gained widespread popularity across all of Odisham^[58].

Saktism in Odisha

Professor Sahu directs the attention of academics to the Sakti movement, which was also prevalent in Odisha at the time. The Mahabharata makes reference to a place called Viraja-Kshetra, which was located on the bank of the Vairarani River and was a place of worship for the goddess Viraja. Inscriptions found in the Bhauma-Kara cave have been found to contain references to Chamunda Katyayani^[59]. In his Chandipurana, Saraladasa refers to a number of different Sakta deities, including Chandī, Chamunda, Mahisamardini, Viraja, Bhagavati, and others. Various forms of Sakti worship in Odisha have also been described by Prof. Sahu. Sakti worship continued uninterrupted in Odisha until the 15th century A.D.^[60]

Worship of the Sun God in Odisha

N.K. Sahu has also provided an explanation of the practise of sun worship in Odisha. Sun worship was quite common in India even during the time of the Vedic civilization. During the seventh century A.D., Maharaja Dharmaraja gave his own self-identification as Sahasrarashmibhakta.⁶¹ Professor Sahu is of the opinion that Dharmaraj was the first person in Odisha to worship the sun. It was not long before it gained widespread acceptance. The construction of the Sun Temple at Konark by Narasimhadeva-I of the Ganga dynasty is evidence of the practise of sun worship in the state of Odisha. Although other academics claim that worship of the sun took place at Udaygiri in Bhubaneswar, but N.K. Sahu does not subscribe to this theory.

Worship of the Naga

Worship of the serpent deity Naga was also common in Odisha. The Kanasa Copper Plate of Lokavighraha and Bhanudutta, respectively, is what Prof. Sahu is referring to when he talks about the projections of Maninagesvara Bhattaraka and Maninaga Bhattaraka. Maninagesvara Bhattaraka is linked with Nagaraja of Sundarapada near Bhubaneswar. After a sufficient amount of time had passed, he came to be venerated as a Naga deity in that region. In addition, Professor Sahu mentions the "Kaliyadalana image," which may be seen in the Odisha State Museum. It was intended to be mounted on the exterior of a temple in the city of Bhubaneswar in India. It dates back to the 7th century after Christ. According to Prof. Sahu, the practise of Nagaworship was common in Odisha during that time period.⁶² Professor Sahu was intrigued by this unusual facet of the religion

practised in Odisha since it was a new chapter in the story. His student Sadhu Charan Panda was able to finish his doctoral thesis, which was titled "Naga Worship in Orissa," because of the motivation he received from him. N.K. Sahu has brought attention to a facet of Odisha's religious culture that has been mostly ignored^[63].

Conclusion

Thus, N.K. Sahu has provided a detailed analysis of the religious climate in Odisha in times long gone. His laborious research made it possible for him to produce a massive work such as "Buddhism in Orissa," in which he covers the development of Buddhism in Odisha, in general, and Mahayanic Tantric Buddhism, in particular. In this work, he provides categorical information. With the purpose of piecing together the history of Buddhism in Odisha, N.K. Sahu has been to every nook and cranny of the state. In addition to this, he commented on other religious traditions practised in Odisha, such as Janism, Saivism, Vaisnavism, and Saktism, as well as the worship of the Sun God and Naga, which led to him gaining a great deal of popularity among the academics and residents of Odisha.

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