
UNIT 7 EMERGENCE OF BUDDHIST CENTRAL AND PENINSULAR INDIA

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is to:

- familiarise you with the spread of Buddhism in Central and Peninsular India; and
- give you an idea of the social factors which led to popularity of Buddhism in this region.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The rise of Buddhism in Gangetic valley during 6th century B.C. was an interesting phenomenon set against the changing milieu of the period. Even more striking was the subsequent spread of Buddhism in almost all parts of the country as well as Ceylon and various southeastern countries where it rose to a foremost position. The process of this spread makes a fascinating study.

7.2 SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

Early Phase: Buddhism was well established in Bihar during the lifetime of Buddha. He moved from town to town, village to village and *janapadas* to *janapadas* throughout this region, preaching his creed. He wandered in Magadha, Kosala, Anga, Sakya and Vajji territories. By his commanding personality and excellent techniques of communicating with the people, he soon gained the patronage of many kings, chiefs, important dignitaries as well as people from all walks of life. He organised the orders of monks and nuns, who were recruited from various layers of the society. Magadha king Bimbisara and his son Ajatsatru were close to Buddha and had leanings towards Buddhism. Thus, during this period, *Majjhimadesa* (*Madhyadesa*) was the limit of Buddhism. *Majjhimadesa* was the region which was travelled over by Buddha, comprising of mainly modern Bihar. All the important cities of the region such as Sravasti, Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Kusinagara, Pava, Vaisali, and Rajagriha emerged as powerful centers of the sect. However, the monks and lay disciples were forbidden to travel beyond this region, into the *paccantima janapada*, which was said to be inhabited by *milakkhas* or barbarians. This region was the area outlying *Majjhimadesa*, possibly tribal areas such as the forested regions of the Vindhya.

The monks were forbidden to mix with them as tribesmen often followed a primitive means of livelihood incompatible with the basic principles of Buddhism. However, it held pre-eminent position in Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh with a large following.

After Buddha, the religion slowly expanded and spread, both in numerical and geographical terms, though it split into various sub-sects owing to conflicting attitudes and practices of different groups of monks. Immediately after the death of Buddha, the first Buddhist council was called by Magadha king Ajatasatru near Rajagriha under the presidency of the aged Maha Kassapa, one of the first members of the Order, to draw up the canons. The second council was held at Vaisali, about 100 years after the first, for settling differences over the practices followed by the monks of Vaisali. This council marked the first open schism in the sect, which came to be divided into 18 sub-sects. During this period too, the sect was more or less confined to its earlier limits, though small communities of brethren may have come into existence as far south as Ujjain. At the time of second council, invitations were sent to communities in distant places like Patheya and Avanti.

Later Phase: Role of Asoka (273-232 B.C.):

However, it was under the Mauryan king Asoka that the sect spread to distant lands. Asoka is held to be the greatest follower and the first royal patron of the sect. He is believed to have converted to Buddhism after the great war of Kalinga in the 8th regnal year of his reign, when he was filled with remorse at the loss of a number of lives in the fierce battle and turned to Buddhism. He had the moral preaching of Dhamma written on specially built pillars or rocks all over his empire. He appointed *dhammamahamatras* (religious officers) to go round the country on religious missions. Though a few scholars believe that the Dhamma preached by Asoka with emphasis on moral conduct and tolerance towards all the sects was a general ethical teaching rather than Buddhist Dhamma, the similarity between some portion of a few edicts with passages from Pali Buddhist literature and his highly acclaimed position as a patron in the Buddhist literature indicate that he definitely had leanings towards Buddhism. He is also said to have paid visit to the places associated with Buddha, such as Bodhgaya, Lumbini, and Sarnatha, places of Buddha's enlightenment, birth and first sermon, and the presence of his pillars at last two places point at the Buddhist affiliation of his edicts. He is said to have erected a large number of *stupas* and Buddhist monasteries, but none are extant today, though the beginning of some of the famous *stupas* such as those at Bodhgaya, Sarnatha in Bihar and Sanchi, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh might date back to the Mauryan period. He also organised the third Buddhist council under the presidency of famous monk Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputra to establish the purity of the Canon, which had been imperiled by the rise of different sects and their rival claims. In this council it was decided to dispatch missionaries to different countries for the propagation of the sect. Consequently, the missions were sent to the land of Yavanas, Gandhara, Kashmir and Himalayan regions in the North, to Aparantaka and Maharattha in West, to Vanavasi and Mysore to South and to Ceylon and Suvarnabhumi (Malay and Sumatra) further southwards. Asoka sent his son Mahendra and daughter *Sanghamitra* to Ceylon. It is clear that the efforts of Asoka were largely responsible for the spread of Buddhism in distant parts of the country and outside the country.

7.3 EMERGENCE OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN INDIA

Central India: Buddhism was introduced in central India soon after Buddha. As stated above, Avanti with its capital at Ujjaini was an important centre of Buddhism as the invitation for the second Buddhist council was sent to the community of monks here.

During Maurya and post-Maurya period, Buddhism gained popularity and emerged as a stronghold of the sect. The greatest centers came up at Sanchi and Bharhut, which emerged almost as pilgrimage sites. A number of *stupas* were built here. Although these *stupas* were enlarged and renovated over a long period, its beginnings were perhaps made during Mauryan period. The additions in the form of stone encasing, stone railings, stone toranas (gateways) and finally the icons of Buddha were made during Sunga-Kusana and Gupta periods. Thus, both these site continued to be a significant centres of Buddhism from the Mauryan period to Gupta period.

Southern India: The South India was traditionally known as Dakshinapatha, which was generally considered to be the country South of Vindhya, though there are different traditions about its exact northern limit. A number of *janapadas* of this region such as Asmaka, Mulaka, Bhogavardhan, Andhra and people of the region such as Damila (Tamil), Pandya, Chera, Chola are known from literary texts, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, as well as early inscriptions. The definite date of the introduction of Buddhism in South India is not clear. There are stray literary references to the presence of Buddhism in pre-Mauryan period. A few later Buddhist traditions associate some sites in south India with the visit and preaching of Buddha himself, though they are treated as later fables. Although Buddhism might have been introduced here in pre-Mauryan period, the Mauryan period is considered the datum line. As stated above Asoka sent missions to South India. His edicts are found at a number of sites. The Chinese traveller, Hieun Tsang, who visited India in 7th century A.D., has recorded traditions about association of Asoka with many *stupas* and monasteries of South India. Thus, Buddhism gained ground in South India during Mauryan period.

Deccan: The modern states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, forming the traditional Deccan region, were actually group of different geographical units known by separate appellations.

Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan phase: There are scanty references to Aparanta and Maharattha in early Buddhist texts as a region beyond Majjhimadesa. Aparanta was the coastal region of northern Konkan in modern Maharashtra or the entire western seaboard. Aparanta with its capital at Surparaka (Sopara, suburb of Mumbai city) was an important political unit of the ancient India, mentioned in various literary texts as well as in numerous early inscriptions including the Asokan edicts. Maharattha more or less denoted to the plateau region to the east of Sahyadris of modern Maharashtra. Not much is known about Buddhism during pre-Asokan times in these regions. At the end of third Buddhist council, Yonaka Dhammarakkhita and Mahadhammarakkhita were deputed by Moggaliputta Tissa for propagating the religion here. Yonaka Dhammarakkhita is said to have converted a large number of people. The occurrence of Asokan Rock Edict and a *stupa* at Sopara and a structural *stupa* at Pauni, Bhandara district, both of which might date back to the Mauryan period, point at the presence of Buddhism during Mauryan period in this region.

Post-Mauryan Phase: The post-Mauryan period witnessed a phenomenal expansion of Buddhist sites and the rise of Buddhism to a prominent position in this region. Under the Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas, Buddhism received royal patronage. But more than the royal patronage, it was the popular support and patronage of the common people from all classes of the society that led Buddhism to such a high position. Buddhism continued to be a popular and prominent sect under Vakatakas and subsequent period, at least up to 7th-8th century A.D.

Hinayana Faith: Buddhism was powerful and popular sect during the early period from around 2nd century B.C. to 2nd century A.D., when Hinayana faith, characterized by symbol worship, was prevalent. Sopara and Pauni were the earliest centers of the sect in this region. Subsequently, a large number of Buddhist sites emerged. These sites are in the form of rock-cut caves excavated in the hill ranges of mountainous region of western Maharashtra. These caves were primarily *viharas*, the rain retreats

or residential cells meant for monks to stay during the four months of rainy season, when they were forbidden to travel and expected to stay at one place. Though originally a residence for a specific period of time in a year, it gradually turned into permanent residence for the monks. To each *vihara* complex was added one or two *chaitya* caves, which was the worship area for both, the monks as well as laity. The *chaitya* cave contained a *stupa*, originally a funeral monument and a memorial relic later on, which was the main object of worship in Buddhism before the introduction of image worship. The *chaitya* cave contained either an apsidal, vaulted-roofed or a square, flat-roofed hall with the rock-cut *stupa* at one end having circumambulatory formed by a row of pillars around and a verandah. A *vihara* was basically a hall with a number of cells along all sides and with or without a verandah. These caves were simple with sparse decoration in the form of ornamental pillars, elaborate façade and a few auspicious symbols occurring above the cell doors.

About 800 such rock-cut caves were excavated at various sites in western Maharashtra during a span of about four centuries. Some important centres were Junnar, Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Shelarwadi (Pune dt.), Nasik (Nasik dt.), Kanheri (Thane dt.), Mahad, Kondane, Kuda (Raigad dt.) and Ajanta (Aurangabad dt.). Some of the sites such as Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Kanheri and Ajanta have very large and highly embellished *chaitya* caves, while most of the sites have very simple caves. The largest cluster of caves was at Junnar with 184 caves, excavated in the hills encircling the town of Junnar within a radius of 8 kms. Kanheri with more than 100 caves was another large centre, which also have caves of later period. Nasik and Karle also were sites of considerable size with about 20 to 30 caves. These caves contain a large number of donative inscriptions recording the excavation of the cave or a part of the cave such as pillar or a cell and water cistern and endowments to the monastic establishments in the form of land, money or commodities for the maintenance monks. The caves at Nasik and Karle record royal donations of Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas. A few caves at Nasik were excavated and endowed with donations by famous Satavahana rulers such as Gautamiputra Satkarni, his wife Balasri and his son Vashisthiputra Pulumavi. A cave at Nasik was excavated by Usavadatta, son-in-law of famous western Kshatrapa ruler Nahapana, while a cave at Karle was endowed with a donation by Nahapana himself. However, most of the caves were excavated and supported by the people from all layers of the society such as traders, craftsmen, farmers etc.

The number of caves and spread of these sites give an idea about the numerical strength of Buddhist monks as well as laity and the popularity of the sect during this period. It is also clear that the sect was well organised with proper orders of monks, who maintained the donations in cash as well as kind.

Mahayana and Vajrayana Faith: The Mahayana or later phase of Buddhism, which was characterized by the introduction of icon worship, was confined to much less sites compared to the earlier period. While a few Hinayana centres such as Kanheri, Nasik and Ajanta continued to be significant, few new sites such as Ellora and Aurangabad (Aurangabad dt.) appeared. A new cave type, *chaitya-vihara*, appeared owing to the demands of Mahayana faith. A *chaitya-vihara* cave contained a pillared verandah, square hall with cells along three sides and a shrine with an icon of Buddha in the back wall of the hall. Thus, it was the combination of residential and worship areas in a single cave. The caves of this faith were very ornamental monuments with a large number of icons of Buddha-Bodhisattvas and decorative architectural components. The famous caves at Ajanta, datable to 5th-6th century A.D. are most elaborate structures filled with beautiful paintings, while the caves at Ellora are large monuments, some of them being double and triple storeyed. The later caves at Aurangabad, Ellora, Kanheri and Panhale kaji (Ratnagiri dt.) also display a retinue of Buddhist deities of Vajrayana faith, which had tantric influence. Most of these sites except, Kanheri and Panhale kaji in coastal Maharashtra, declined by 7th century A.D.

7.4 ANDHRADESA (MODERN ANDHRA PRADESH)

Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan Phase: Andhra is the country of the Andhras, an ancient tribe of the Deccan. The Andhras of southern India are mentioned in many Sanskrit and Pali texts and also Greek texts. Andhra has been variously identified at the different points of time with the region of Krishna district or the country lying to the northern and southern bank of Krishna river. Andhradesa can be identified with the modern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Unlike Maharashtra, there are a few literary traditions about the presence of Buddhism in Andhra Pradesh during pre-Mauryan period. The famous Buddhist sites of Amaravati and Dhanyakataka are associated with Buddha, as a birthplace of one of the previous births of Buddha and a preaching site of Buddha respectively. However, as stated above, these could have been later fables, suggested to assign sacred nature to some famous sites. Another literary evidence is the occurrence of 'Andhaka' sub-sect of Mahasanghika School of early Buddhism, which is mentioned in the 'Kathavatthu', a text included in the Pali canon. According to the text Mahavamsa, this canon was written during the third Buddhist council convened at the time of Asoka. Thus, there already existed a community of monks in Andhra Pradesh known to be belonging to Andhaka sub-sect at this time. Again, the relic casket inscription from the famous *stupa* at Bhattiprolu is believed to be pre-Mauryan, recording the preparation of the casket to deposit the relics of Buddha and the bone relic from the *stupa* is believed to have been that of Buddha himself. These are scanty and indefinite references and are debatable. However, with the Mauryan period, the history of the sect in this region acquires a firm and definite footing.

Though there is no specific mention of any mission sent to Andhradesa by Asoka, its location between Magadha and Ceylon, where an important mission was sent, must have helped in the establishment of Buddhism here. Asoka's Thirteenth Rock edict refers to the Andhras along with Pulindas and other southern people. His *dhamma-vijaya* prevailed among the Andhras. His edicts are found at Amaravati and other sites. The *stupas* at Amaravati and Bhattiprolu definitely had early beginning, dating back to the Mauryan period and were important centres of the sect since then.

Post-Mauryan Phase: As Maharashtra, Andhradesa or Andhra Pradesh also emerged as stronghold of Buddhism in post-Mauryan period. It reached the zenith of its popularity roughly during 2nd century B.C. to 3rd-4th century A.D. under the Satavahana-Ikshvaku rulers. A large number of Buddhist sites emerged during this period. Nearly 60 Buddhist sites dated to the early centuries of the Christian era were located in the Krishna-Godavari delta and distributed along the east coast. These sites with structural *stupas* as well as monasteries were important centres of Buddhism, where a large number of monks resided. Some of the important sites were Amaravati, Bhattiprolu, Chezrala, Goli (Guntur dt.), Jaggayyapeta, Gudiwada, Ghantasala (Krishna dt.), Guntapalle (West Godavari dt.) and Bezwada or Vijayawada (Vijayawada dt.). These sites contained stone-built *stupas*, *chaityas*, brick or stone-built *viharas*, apsidal-circular-square temples and other structures, built during the period from 2nd century B.C. to 3rd-4th century A.D. These were relatively plain structures, though some of the *stupas* covered with minutely carved stone slabs, were quite elaborate monuments. Since many of the sites continued to hold significance over a long time, these relics came up in successive stages as the site developed. A number of sites have also revealed icons of Buddha. Other than these structural monuments, some rock-cut caves were also excavated near the hilly region of Vijayawada at Mogalarajapuram, Sitaranagam and Undavalli, which are believed to have been Buddhist. These are plain *viharas*, but of substantial size. The caves at Undavalli are multi-storeyed. A large number of donative inscriptions found from many of these sites reveal that

while a few sites like Nagarjunakonda received royal patronage of Ikshvakus, most of the sites were primarily patronised by a variety of people from all classes of society. Of these sites, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda with a large number of structures were the most important sites of the period.

Amaravati and Dhanayakataka: Amaravati, about 29 km from Guntur was a great Buddhist center of the region, famous for its exquisitely carved *stupa* and structural monuments. Amaravati and Dharanikota, both formed part of ancient Dhanyakataka, the capital of later Satavahanas. However, the *stupa* at Amaravati dates back to Mauryan period as attested by presence of an Asokan edict at the site. This *stupa*, the largest in Andhra Pradesh and referred to as a '*mahachaitya*' in inscriptions, was built over successively in later centuries with major additions of ornamental vedika railings, stone encasing, other embellishments and enlargements. At least five phases of construction are known, datable to Asokan, post-Asokan, Satavahana, Ikshvaku and early Pallava or late medieval periods. It received endowments as late as the 12th century A.D. The site was the stronghold of Mahasanghika school of Theravada Buddhism.

Nagarjunakonda (ancient Sriparvata) and Vijayapuri: Nagarjunakonda, 'hill of Nagarjuna', a site of outstanding importance in the history of Buddhism, is situated on the south bank of the Krishna river in Guntur dt. All round the site is a girdle of lofty hills, which forms a natural, secluded valley. In the middle of the valley was situated the ancient city of Vijayapuri, the capital of Ikshvakus. The site contained a large number of monuments containing at least nine *stupas* of various sizes, numerous *viharas*, stone or brick-built apsidal temples, halls, cloisters, *ayaka* (auspicious) pillars and other structures, all decorated with beautiful carvings and sculptures. The site assumed importance under the Ikshvakus from the second quarter of 3rd century A.D., before which Dhanyakataka under later Satavahanas was epicentre. The Ikshvakus, mainly the ladies of royal family, built a number of structures and made elaborate donations to monastic establishments here. It was a large centre with large monastic orders. It emerged as a great pilgrimage centre and a seat of learning as pilgrims and visitors came from all parts of India, Ceylon and even China. Almost all the important structures were built during the Ikshvaku period. After this period, though the site continued to exist, it lost its earlier glory.

Mahayana Faith: Andhra Pradesh is considered to be the birthplace of Mahayana philosophy. It was propounded by famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (2nd century A.D.). However, a very few dominant sites of this faith flourished, though a number of Buddha icons have come to light from Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and other sites.

After the Ikshvakus, the heydays of Buddhism were over, though it continued to exist as late as 16th century A.D.

7.5 PENINSULAR INDIA

Unlike Deccan region, Buddhism never gained great popularity and support in the peninsular states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, though it flourished in few pockets from 3rd-2nd century B.C. to 13th century A.D.

Karnataka: Buddhism in this region was introduced by Asoka, who sent Mahadeva to Mahishmandala and Rakkhita to Banavasi, both in Karnataka. A number of Asokan edicts are found from Karnataka such as at Siddhapura, Brahmagiri and Jatinga in Chitradurga dt., Nittur and Udgola in Bellary dt., Koppal in Raichur dt., Maski, Sannathi in Gulbarga dt.

The post-Mauryan period witnessed the spread of Buddhism in various parts, though none of the sites were as prominent or famous as the sites in Maharashtra and

Andhra Pradesh. However, Chandravalli and Banavasi were important centres. Among the monks, who took part in the ceremony of consecration at Bhattiprolu, Andhra Pradesh, Candagutta Maha-Thera belonged to Banavasi. Except a few donative inscriptions and icons of Buddha from Chandravalli, no other structural remains have come to light, though Hieun Tsang (7th century A.D.) refers to many monasteries of both Mahayana and Hinayana faiths at Banavasi. A double-storeyed structural Buddhist *vihara* exists at the famous temple-site of Aihole built during the early Chalukya period.

There are a number of direct and indirect references to Buddhist temples, monks and Buddhism in the literature and inscriptions of early and late medieval periods, especially late Chalukya period (973-1189 A.D.). Few Buddhist temples must have existed at Balligave, Dambal, Terdal etc. The presence of Vajrayana faith is indicated by discovery of icons of a few Vajrayana deities such as Tara. However, none of these were great centres.

Tamil Nadu: Asoka mentions Tamil country of Codas and Pandyas where his *dhamma-vijaya* prevailed. One of the monks, who took part in the ceremony of consecration at Bhattiprolu, Andhra Pradesh, Mahadeva Maha-Thera belonged to Pallavabhoga. The famous Tamil epic Manimekhalai is a great saga of Buddhism. There are very few references to the position of Buddhism in this region during early period, when Jainism was prevalent.

However, a few important Buddhist settlements of early medieval period were at Nagapattam, Kanchi and Kaveripattam. A king of the Sumatran empire of Srivijaya erected a large monastery at Nagapattam for the use of his subjects when they visited the region, as Nagapattam was the first South Indian port from Malaya and Indonesia. This monastery was endowed with a donation by the Chola king Rajaraja. Hieun Tsang refers to the presence of 100 Buddhist monasteries with 10,000 brethren at Kanchi. However, except five Buddha images from around Kamakshi temple, no remains have come to light. It is believed that Kamakshi was originally a temple of Buddhist goddess Tara. Kanchi continued to be an important centre of Buddhism as late as 14th century A.D.

Kerala: Very little is known about Buddhism in Kerala. Asoka mentions Keralaputyas. According to a tradition, one of the Bana rulers of Malbar converted to Buddhism. A few monasteries must have existed. The Tamil epic, Manimekhalai, refers to wide prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Kerala and there were *chaityas* at Vanji.

7.6 PROCESS AND FACTORS OF THE SPREAD/POPULARITY OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL AND PENINSULAR INDIA

It is clear from the above survey that Buddhism appeared in central and southern India by Mauryan period and was most prominent during 2nd century B.C. to 2nd-3rd century A.D., though it continued to flourish till 5th-6th century A.D. in fewer pockets before declining by 7th-8th century A.D. and surviving insignificantly at stray sites as late as 13th-14th century A.D. What were the reasons behind such development of the sect? Why and how did Buddhism gain such prominence in these regions during early historic period?

The spread of Buddhism to distant lands of peninsular India, central India and also to other countries is often associated with the mechanism of expanding trade networks and empire building activities. There is no doubt that it was primarily the proselytizing efforts of dynamic and enterprising monks, who ventured through unknown lands to preach the creed, that led to the spread and popularity of Buddhism in far-off lands.

But the process of second urbanisation, which spread from the Gangetic valley to the rest of the country, with its growing trading networks, definitely accelerated the spread of Buddhism.

The phenomenon of urbanisation and trade, which started in 6th century B.C., gained momentum in the subsequent centuries. The volume of trade increased immensely as the trade with the Mediterranean world, which probably existed for a long time, was intensified. By 3rd-2nd century B.C., almost all parts of the country experienced a phase of urbanism, accompanied by the emergence of a powerful imperial state, agricultural expansion and growing economy characterised by increased volume of trade, appearance of metal currency as well as craft specialization. The marginal areas or 'prohibited areas' outside the pale of mainstream Brahmanical culture of Gangetic valley became accessible through various trade routes. The knowledge of the earliest routes comes from the religious texts, which mention the travels of stray persons from place to place. With the intensification of trade, especially with the Mediterranean world, the western texts mention a number of cities and urban centres. Much information is also gathered from the archaeological evidences testifying to long-distance exchange of goods. Thus, a broad, but indistinct picture of a network of trade routes emerges. The most important among these was the 'Dakshinapatha', a route to south, which opened up the areas south of Vindhyas. So important was this route that the whole country to the south came to be designated 'Dakshinapatha'. A large number of articles, primarily raw material of different type, were exported to the Mediterranean world, while a few were also imported. The southern region comprising of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with its long coastline actively participated in this trade mechanism. A number of large cities emerged on strategic locations of trade routes and also as ports. Thus, the expanding trade definitely opened up distant lands for the monks to venture out and preach.

This process was accelerated and strengthened by emergence of powerful imperial states. During this period emerged the Mauryan empire, the first major example of the centralised kingdom controlling large geographic areas. The extent of Mauryan empire is known from the locations of Asokan edicts, which are found as far south as Chitradurga district in Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. It is postulated that subsequent emergence of the powerful state of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus in Deccan, helped the spread of Buddhism in this region, which is marked by proliferation in Buddhist monastic sites during this period.

The association of trade, urbanism and powerful states with Buddhism is indicated by occurrence of most of Buddhist sites of the period on strategic locations, either on trade route or near large urban centre. Bharhut in central India occupied the northern end of the valley, in an area rich in mineral resources. The sites in Maharashtra were located on major trade routes. Junnar, with largest cluster of caves was located at the head of Naneghat, an important pass. Similarly, Kanheri, another important site, was located in the vicinity of port of Kalyan. Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh were located near the flourishing capital cities of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus. The other sites were located within rich, fertile, rice-growing Krishna delta and along arterial routes.

Buddhism came to be favoured by traders. Buddhism, with its opposition to the Brahmanical taboos on purity and contamination, encouraged travel and in turn accelerated long distance trade. The literary and archaeological records link Buddhism with king and the merchant. These sources portray the social milieu of Buddhism as a complex urban environment with kings, wealthy merchants, craftsmen and professionals. There is large number of references to urban centres in Buddhist literary sources as opposed to stray references to rural settlements. The largest number of monks and nuns of early *sangha* came from large towns and from powerful, wealthy families. There is a marked preference to trade over other professions in the Buddhist literature. The donative inscriptions from almost all Buddhist

sites in central and southern India record donations primarily by traders, and various craftsmen, occasionally from far off places.

Buddhism also provided much-needed support system to the changing cultural milieu. At the ideological level, it influenced and encouraged the accumulation and reinvestment of wealth in trading ventures by lay devotees, at the social level, donations to Buddhist monasteries provided status to traders and other occupational groups, while at the economic level, the Buddhist monasteries were repositories of information and essential skills such as writing. Moreover, the organised institution of Buddhist *sangha* brought monasteries into closer contact with lay community and provided identity and cohesiveness to trading groups.

Thus, Buddhism spread against the background of expanding trade network and empire building process of early historic period, both of which opened up routes to distant lands of southern India. The well-organised institution of Buddhist *sangha*, the proselytizing efforts of dynamic monks and the nature of Buddhism, which favoured trade and urban life-style, were some of the factors that led to immense popularity of the sect during this period in central and southern India. A large number of monasteries emerged on major trade routes and/or near large urban centres and thrived on the large-scale donations, primarily by the trading community. When the trade dried up and trade routes became inactive, the sect declined, though continued to survive in stray pockets till very late.

7.10 SUMMARY

We took you through the process of the spread of Buddhism in Central and Peninsular India. We described to you some of the evidences we encountered in the examination of this spread. Finally we gave you a picture of the social and economic milieu which underlined the spread of Buddhism in this region.

7.8 GLOSSARY

Edicts : Stone or pillar inscriptions which conveyed the orders of the king.

Symbol Worship : The worship of icons representative of animate and inanimate forces.

7.9 EXERCISES

- 1) Examine some aspects of spread of Buddhism in central and peninsular India.
- 2) Discuss some of the social factors which account for the spread of Buddhism in central and peninsular India.

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