



# Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri: The Famous Diamond Triangle Blessed With Buddhist Culture

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**Abstract:** Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri are unitedly known as the famous Diamond Triangle associated with Buddhist Culture situated in Cuttack and Jajapur of Odisha are the glowing and lively evidence of presence of God Buddha and Buddhists in the caves of these hills is definitely a matter of proudness for every Indian. The Lalitagiri is 11 kms from Ratnagiri and 6 kms from Udayagiri whereas the distance separating Ratnagiri and Udayagiri is 6 kms i.e. Udayagiri is 6 kms equidistant from Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri. The visit of Chinese Traveller Hiuen Tsang to this Buddhism site the Diamond Triangle of Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri and his writings on this Diamond Triangle reinforces the glorious chapter of Buddhism in Odisha. Odisha born famous Sanskrit Poet Shree Jayadev described God Buddha as one of the incarnations of God Vishnu in his book "Gita Govindam" written in the language of Sanskrit.

**Index Terms** - Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, Diamond Triangle, Buddha, Buddhist, Buddhism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri the Diamond Triangle in India consists of three nearby hills positioned at three angles of a triangle, where Buddhists monks and many people related to Buddhism were residing; The Holly Relics of God Buddha was unearthed from Lalitagiri, boxed in stone boxes and gold foils is the great achievement of Archeological Survey Of India to rediscover the hidden truth. These three Hills attracted many Pilgrims from the remote past to till date for their significant natural atmosphere and Buddhists associated unearthed monuments, as the Authors of this article got inspiration to write something about Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri, the Diamond Triangle after visiting the historical monuments in the past that imprinted in the memory till date. All these places were in the district of Cuttack, until the district division in 1993, since then Lalitagiri is in Cuttack and Ratnagiri and Udayagiri are in Jajapur; are well approached from Cuttack by a distance of 60-70 kms travelling by Road and from Jajapur by a distance of 40 kms travelling by Road i.e. the Diamond Triangle of Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri is almost in middle of Cuttack and Jajapur.

## II. LALITAGIRI

Lalitagiri also known as Nalitagiri, literally meaning the beautiful hill, a Buddhist site situated in Cuttack District, is at 60 kms distance from Cuttack, 11 kms from Ratnagiri and 6 kms from Udayagiri, continued from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 14<sup>th</sup> century AD over 1500 years of continuous history; is part of the Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri Diamond Triangle blessed with Buddhist Culture. Buddhism development in Lalitagiri known from the existing monuments in the caves such as a number of well-built Monasteries, Mahastupa, Chaitya, and a plethora of small stupas. Initially, the makeshift enclosures housed the sculptures those were unearthed from the site for display, now establishment of permanent museum at the hill site houses unearthed sculptures of God Buddha from the Mahayana period. The massive stone built statues, with inscriptions on some of the statues, representing Buddha, Bodhisattva, Tara, Jambhala are significant. The statues of God Buddha, represented in a standing position and dressed with a drape adorned from shoulder level to knee level, is contemplative of the Gandhara and Mathura schools of sculpture. The bone Relic caskets recovered from the ancient stone Mahastupa on the Lalitagiri hill top wrapped in golden foils are also displayed and one sealing

reveals the name Chandraditya Mahavihara. The Lalitagiri encompasses Mahachaitya like Nagarjunkonda of Andhra Pradesh and a series of well-built monasteries for the monks. Apart from, sculptures, inscriptions of the Kushana Empire, Gupta and Post-Gupta periods reflect their philanthropy. The sculptures talk the phases of Buddhism i.e. Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The excavations performed by the Archeological Survey of India at Lalitagiri have unearthed remnants of a large stupa on the hill in which two rare stone caskets in the Stupa were found with Relics of Buddha; this was the first such discovery in Eastern India. The stone caskets discovered are like Chinese Puzzle boxes, made of Khondalite stone, revealed three other boxes found within them, are made of steatite, silver and gold respectively; the gold casket, which is the last one, accommodated a Relic or Dhatu of white colour in the shape of a small piece of bone is claimed to be of God Buddha.

An apsidal chaityagraha facing east, made up of stone bricks, of size 33 by 11 meters i.e. 108 by 36 feet and wall thickness of 3.3 meters i.e. 11 feet. This edifice of Buddhist structure found, is the first of it's kind in Odisha containing a circular Stupa in it's center. At the periphery of the edifice it is found a series of Kushana Brahmi inscriptions that are engraved on shells with cuts on moonstone. A piece of a pillar railing having a lens-shaped decoration with the theme of a half lotus Medallion was also found here in Lalitagiri. These findings ascertain that these structures belong to 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Remnants of four monasteries found out of which first one is largest, two storied structure facing east, measures 36 square meters i.e. 390 square feet and an open space at it's center that measures 12.9 square meters or 42 square feet size, that dates back to 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. A rainwater cistern built of stone bricks found adjoined to the rear end of the monastery. In the northern extremity of the Lalitagiri hill the second monastery found, is believed to have been built when the Buddhism in Lalitagiri was losing it's importance. The third monastery facing south-east direction is 28 by 27 meters or 92 by 89 feet dimensions with central open space of 8 square meters i.e. 86 square feet in dimensions and representing the end stage of apsidal chaitya. The fourth monastery measuring 30 square meters or 320 square feet size has many large sized Buddha heads challenging in the sanctum sanctorum. Dated back to the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, the terracotta monastic seal with inscriptions "Sri Chandraditya Vihara samagra Arya bhiksu sanghasa" was found.

The antiquities unearthed enlists a plethora of images of different meditative forms of Buddha from the period of Mahayana Buddhism, a gold pendant, a silver jewelry, imprints of Ganesha and Mahishasuramardini in stone tablets, an image of Avalokiteswara and a seal matrix cum pendant. An emanation form of Amitabha seated in Lalitasana posture along with images of Tara in the form of Tara Kurukulla have been found in Lalitagiri as well as in Ratnagiri and Udayagiri. Images of Hariti, the Goddess protecting children from disease, disaster and death, who once was a child abductor but persuaded by Buddha to become the protector of children, portrayed in a seated position, breast feeding a child or in a position of a child seated on her lap have been found in Lalitagiri as well as in Ratnagiri and Udayagiri. The post Mauryan period to 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century AD period potsherds with inscriptions found in Lalitagiri gives evidence that Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhists lived here; Vajrayana, the tantrik period of Buddhism is the last occupied period in Lalitagiri during the reign of Bhauma-Kara dynasty between 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### III. RATNAGIRI

Ratnagiri literally meaning the hill of jewels is located between the Birupa and Brahmani rivers, is 70 kms away from Cuttack is in now in Jajapur district of Odisha is famous for the Mahavihara i.e. major Buddhist monastery that was established in the hill of Ratnagiri witnesses the presence of Buddha and Buddhists on that hill. The Buddhist Monuments were built in the time range from 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, and in the mid point of this period i.e. during 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century AD the highest construction work was done.

Ratnagiri believed to be established during the reign of Gupta King Narasimha Baladitya, in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD and flourished for about six hundred years till 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. The principal edifice of monastery 1 under the rule of a Buddhist dynasty Bhauma-Kara had their capital nearer to Jajapur though no inscription records support at Ratnagiri by the dynasty. According to Tibetan history, the Pag Sam Jon Jang, pinpoints Ratnagiri as source of Kalachakratantra development in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, reassured after the discovery of votive stupas, plaques and artifacts reflecting Kalachakra imagery. There was a believe in the past that, Ratnagiri with the nearby Lalitagiri and Udayagiri, contributes to the Puspagiri Vihara as mentioned by the 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, till it led to confusion by the discovery of 1990s in Langudi Hill which is believed to be the true Puspagiri Vihara. Ratnagiri having hundreds of small votive stupas is highly suggestive of pilgrimage site linked to ancient Kalinga's trade network that spreaded to South-east Asia. Ratnagiri houses the statues of Tara, Avalokiteswara, Aparajita, Hariti, Manjusri and other bodhisattvas amongst which a larger population of female were there which is unique of Ratnagiri.

These little known monuments unveiled by the excavations done by the Archeological Survey of India in 1960s producing large quantities of finest sculptures. Monastery 1 as described is "the finest in terms of carved

stone decoration, survived in India". Some sculptures were removed to various museums elsewhere, leaving much of them on the site. A museum for on site exhibition have been opened, houses many pieces of monuments unearthed. The principal elements found were a monumental stupa, the Stupa 1, with various dimensioned several hundred smaller stupas surrounding it, three quadrangular monasteries namely Monasteries 1,2,3. Monastery 1, the largest of all the three monasteries, having a very beautiful carved doorway, spacious open courtyard, cells and verandah facing towards the courtyard, with a very widely spacious shrine centered on a colossal Buddha. The buildings were mainly made up of bricks, plenty of which has now been removed; the doorways, pillars and sculpture are made mostly in two types of stone, giving contrast attractively; a "blue-green chlorite and the local khondalite, a garniferous gneiss with plum-coloured overtones". The sculptures in large numbers are in stone, with a few (27 numbers) bronze and brass figures, excavated at the site are mostly in the "Post-Gupta" style while the earlier sculptures persisting the Gupta art classic style. The images reflected in sculptures are mostly of God Buddha and the Buddhist pantheon and suggests that Ratnagiri turned to become a Tantric Buddhism center, as did the Nalanda; Colossal Buddha heads over two dozen in number have been found.

Monastery 1, the largest of the three monasteries, having sizes of 55 square meters or 592 square feet, includes a paved central courtyard of area 21 square meters or 226 square feet; had at least a building structure of two storeys, but the structures above the ground floor has now been collapsed. A total of 24 surviving cells having wooden doors and locks but windowless are there on the ground floor, comparatively larger in size accommodating more than one monk in each cell except one cell that was used as the monastery treasury. From the entrance, across the courtyard, has two layers of porch, is the main shrine, whose elaborately sculpted facade is now isolated in the courtyard. The central shrine image is a 3.7 meters or 12 feet high colossal seated Buddha, flanked by smaller standing figures of Padmapani and Vajrapani holding chamas; in chlorite, with the Buddha carved in a number of horizontal sections. Monastery 1 built in at least two major phases, the first dating back to the late 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, and the second to the 11<sup>th</sup> or early part of 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. The style of sculpture gradually declined in later times of construction in "both moral and artistic standards", as the later work includes some erotic scenes. The main entrance to the monastery is through doorways made up of skillfully carved chlorite set back from the main outside wall, facing with stone at a later stage than the original construction. Mitra called it "the loveliest entrance to a structural monastery in the whole of India". It has three main zones- the innermost "an intricate foliated arabesque pattern" with a thin vine stem undulating up it. The second zone with stylized lotus petals, usually seen on curved surfaces, and "quite unique" shaped as a flattened pattern. The outermost elements switch from green chlorite to red stone in mid-composition in the large plant scroll inhabited by playing putti (gelabai), with some bodies half in one stone and half in the other stone. There was a relief of vidyadhara figures, across the top lintel, of which only the feet remains. In the center, an inset guardian figure of Goddess Gajalakshmi, excavated from the Hindu pantheon, runs through two zones. Two panels each with four richly but lightly dressed lay figures, one holding an umbrella seen at the foot of the sides. These are considered "door guardians" and the innermost figures are large males leaning on clubs; gives impression of the groups is hardly discouraging. A Pair of Pancika, the Hindu Kubera and his consort Goddess Hariti representing the material and spiritual wealth at multiple levels found in the Monasteries. A number of large relief panels of standing figures, around the entrance of the monastery were there, several of them removed elsewhere. The female figure holding a flowering branch and making the varadamudra with her right hand, is the only one left in place on the outside wall; is probably a river Goddess, Marici, is in a niche inside the porch, the image of the river goddess Yamuna with two smaller companions in "sisterly camaraderie". The matching Ganga panel on the other side is now missing; these figure pair are very common at the Buddhist and Hindu establishments. The pairs of Pancika, the Hindu Kubera and his consort Hariti, representing spiritual and material wealth are figuring in the monastery. The monastery courtyard once had a large verandah, mostly diminished now, presenting an sequel and usefulness very similar to the cloisters of European Christian monasteries. ASI's reconstruction by replacement of the missing elements with matching shaped but undecorated stone blocks, with a central doorway flanked on both sides by three niches, was a later addition, called by Reichle the "third facade to rear shrine".

Monastery 2, next to the Monastery 1, much smaller in size, a single storied structure hallmarked with a central paved courtyard flanked by a pillared verandah around which eighteen cells are there, a central shrine highlighting an image of Shakyamuni in Varada Mudra, flanked by Brahma and Sankara and skillfully ornamented entrance porticos. The monastery 2 may have been built first in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD with more buildings in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries whereas, monastery 1 built in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Monastery 3 is much smaller and having only three cells in a row and a portico stands on a small hillock to the north-west is an important element of Ratnagiri.

The main stupa at the highest point in the site built earlier to Gupta era dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, has a square base, 14 meters i.e. 47 feet on each side. The stupa is now reduced to 5.2 meters or 17 feet high, from its original higher height due to an unknown extent. A later addition was a pathway between the plinth and outer wall for ritual of pradakshina or circumambulation. In the niches of the portico there are Prominent, well-preserved standing statues of the bodhisattvas Vajrapani and Padmapani can be found.

The stupa is surrounded by large numbers of very smaller stupas, some of them having heights of four meters or more, but larger numbers of stupas are less than a meter height. Most of the smaller ones have a seated deity figure in a niche on one side, decorated with lotus petals and beaded tassels around their shaft, are mostly carved from a single piece of stone. Many Indian Buddhist sites though have some of these Stupas, but in Ratnagiri there are found in exceptionally large numbers more than 700 of them in total out of which 535 found in the area south-west to the main Stupa representing an exceptional range of deities, with 22 identified and some stupas made with blank space left for the deity to be finished at customer's choice but it is thought that they served as memorial for dead monks, made with a date range from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.

A total number of 1386 clay seals found, most bearing the legend "Sri Ratnagiri Mahavihariya Aryabhikshu Sanghasya", helped to identify the name of Ratnagiri monastery. One Buddha temple, converted to Hindu use as the "Dharma Mahakala temple" dated back to 11<sup>th</sup> century AD was built over an earlier made stupa and moved to the side of the hill site and re-erected by the ASI, contains a Buddhist standing relief figure of Manjushri.

The tailor-made Ratnagiri museum is a modern building having three storeys and four galleries with a wide range of objects found displayed on the site; three galleries mainly features with stone sculptures whereas the fourth gallery equips with bronze and ivory sculptures, terracotta, inscribed copper plates, clay seals and many other finds.

#### IV. UDAYAGIRI

Udayagiri, literally meaning the hill of rising Sun, is the largest Buddhist complex comprised of stupas and viharas i.e. monasteries, used by the Buddhists is located 6 kms from Lalitagiri and also 6 kms from Ratnagiri i.e. Udayagiri is 6 kms equidistant from Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri and is 70 kms away from Cuttack is now in Jajapur district of Odisha. It is part of the Diamond Triangle of Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri Buddhist Complex.

Udayagiri had been excavated too many times since 1958 by the Archeological Survey Of India; a depression between the two valleys, the Udayagiri Site 1, is the first site to be excavated; Udayagiri Site 2 excavated during the period between 1985-86 and 1989-90, exposed the antiquities comprised of a Buddhist Monastic complex enclosed within a compound wall, including a stupa of dimensions of 7 meters i.e. 23 feet height having four images of dhyanī Buddhas fixed at the four cardinal points of the stupa. This site is "Madhavapura Mahavihara" as concluded by the Archeologists basing on epigraphical evidence. The second part of Udayagiri-2 was discovered with additional monasteries and stupas during the large excavation from 1997 to 2000. The antiquities unearthed consist of two monastic complexes of 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., statues of Buddha, Tara, Manjusri, Avalokiteswara, Jatamukuta, Lokeswara and many terracotta earthenware seals. An epigraphically inscribed stepped stone well has been discovered. Nearby to one of the entry gates is a figure of a human with eyes closed showing his happiness, found swinging on a rope.

The antiquities unearthed during the recent excavations between 2001 and 2004 includes a stone finish flooring in the foreground of the excavated monastery, the main drain of the monastery draining out from all corners to the north, a 14.05 by 13.35 meters i.e. 46.1 by 43.8 feet sized large stone raised platform built in seven layers with ashlar masonry accessed through the steps in a series, and a chandrashila i.e. moon rock is evident in its northern end. Also found were apsidal chaityagruhas, an old one replaced by another built in brick, facing east with a stupa deified in it, built with stones and bricks, founded on the raised platform, and the remnant of stone jali beautified with a theme of three-hooded snake inferred as gavakshas, the horse-shoe arches.

An emanation form of Amitabha seated in Lalitasana Posture along with images of Tara in the form of Tara Kurukulla have been found in Lalitagiri as well as in Ratnagiri and Udayagiri. Images of Hariti, the Goddess protecting children from disease, disaster and death, who once was a child abductor but persuaded by Buddha to become the protector of children, portrayed in a seated position, breast feeding a child or in a position of a child seated on her lap have been found in Lalitagiri as well as in Ratnagiri and Udayagiri.

Remnants of a number of stupas in three groups, distributed in the western, southern and northern parts of the chaityagruha, built in stone with only their plain plinths found in preserved condition. In the confines of the chaityagruha, the discovery of statues of Tathagata, Avalokiteswara, Bhrukuti-Tara and Chunda embedded in niches, hallmarking the four cardinal points, along with the discovery of 14 stupas built in brick with mud

mortar of dates from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century AD and many epigraphs of dates from 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century AD strengthens the history of Buddhism in the Diamond Triangle of Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri.

Votive stupas made up of stone, are seen along a stone paved path. Residential houses consisting of six rooms with remnants of domestic goods at the eastern part of the chaityagraha are also additions to Buddhism in Cuttack, Odisha. There is no artifacts evidence found in Udayagiri in spite of it's location only 7 kilometers i.e. 4.35 miles away from Ratnagiri, to provide a link to the Vajrayana tantric cult found in Ratnagiri.

## V. THE DIAMOND TRIANGLE AND PUSPAGIRI

Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri, the Diamond Triangle, in whole or any one of these hills was once used to be thought as the Puspagiri Vihara according to Chinese history by Hiuen Tsang, is now convincingly located at Langudi Hill, 18 kms distance from Udayagiri after the excavation made by the Archeological Survey of India.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri, the Diamond Triangle, witnessed many Monks of Buddhism, comprised of three nearby hills situated near the rivers of Birupa and Brahmani so that plenty of water could be available for the monks and other people, attracted many Pilgrimage people from various corners of the World including the renowned Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. This Diamond Triangle of Lalitagiri-Ratnagiri-Udayagiri can easily accessible by road from Cuttack.

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