

70-ft Buddha statue to adorn tourist project in Ghantasala - ANDHRA PRADESH

To develop Ghantasala village in Krishna district as one of the prime Buddhist tourist spots in the State, decks have been cleared for the construction of a Rs. 1.5-crore project here.

“The new facility will be themed on the *Mahaparinirvana* of the Buddha. A two-storied structure in Buddhist architecture resembling a pedestal with a 100-ft wide and 70-ft high Buddha in the *Mahaparinirvana* posture will be a major highlight,” said Executive Director of the AP Tourism Development Corporation Mallikarjuna Rao.

Mr. Rao has worked on the design and architecture of the project which was released by Krishna district Collector B. Lakshmikantham on Saturday.

On top of the two-storey structure will be an imposing statue of the reclining Buddha.

This is a major iconographic and statuary pattern of Buddhism. It represents the historical Buddha during his last illness, about to enter the *Mahaparinirvana*. It shows Buddha lying on the right flank, his head resting on a cushion or on his right elbow, supporting his head with his hand. This pattern seems to have emerged at the same time as other representations of the Buddha in the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara.

The two floors will house a Buddhist library, a meditation centre, an auditorium for spiritual classes, an exhibition hall for digital replicas of the Buddhist antiques exhibited in the Paris museum and monasteries.

The project is coming up in a 2-and-half acre private land donated by a non-resident Telugu Gorrepati Ramanadha Babu on behalf of a Trust run in the names of his parents.

Tenders for the project have been finalised, designs approved and administration sanction given. The work may start in a couple of weeks.

In Buddhism, *Mahaparinirvana* means the ultimate state — everlasting, highest peace and happiness — entered by an Awakened Being (Buddha).

Ghantasala, known as Katakasila in the ancient times, was a renowned Buddhist centre located near the coast. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, had made a specific mention of an emporium of Kontakossyla in the region of Misolia (present Machilipatnam).

The maha stupa was once encased with well decorated sculptured slabs like that of Amaravathi and had an ornate railing.

Initially, the archaeological significance of Ghantasala was reported by Boswell in 1870-71 and the site was subsequently subjected to excavations by Alexander Rea which brought out the stupa architecture in detail.

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