

# Amaravati Saga - A Study of Mythological Origins, Buddhist Heritage, and Historical Continuity in the Making of a Sacred City

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**Abstract-** Amaravathi, situated on the southern bank of the Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh, India, occupies a layered position in Indian cultural history as a site of Puranic mythology, Buddhist monastic scholarship, medieval Saiva temple patronage, maritime commerce, and, most recently, planned urban development as the designated capital of Andhra Pradesh. This paper compiles and synthesizes textual, epigraphic, and traditional evidence relating to Amaravathi's origins, tracing the Puranic narrative of the demon Tarakasura and the birth of Skanda (Kartikeya) as recounted in the Valmiki Ramayana, the resulting Pancharama Kshetra tradition, the site's identity as ancient Dhanyakataka and its role in the development of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, its epigraphic significance for the Bhattiprolu script, its function as a node in Indian Ocean maritime trade, and its colonial-era rediscovery and modern designation as a greenfield capital city. The study also compares divergent regional traditions locating the mythological battlefield of Kartikeya and Tarakasura, and evaluates the relative strength of the Amaravathi association against competing claims. The compilation was undertaken as research and narrative groundwork for a historical strategy game, and is presented here in a structured academic format for reference and further scholarly use.

**Index Terms** - Amaravathi, Dhanyakataka, Pancharama Kshetras, Amareswara, Amaravati Stupa, Bhattiprolu script, Acharya Nagarjuna, Kalachakra Tantra, Andhra Pradesh capital, Amaravati Games, Fortnite Game, UEFN, Epic Games.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The region encompassing present-day Amaravathi and the adjoining town of Dharanikota in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, has accumulated an unusually dense sequence of religious and political identities over roughly two and a half millennia. The same twenty-square-kilometre stretch of the Krishna River floodplain has been described, at different points in the textual and archaeological record, as the mythological refuge of the Vedic gods, the political capital of the Satavahana dynasty under its ancient name Dhanyakataka, one of the earliest and most influential centres of Mahayana Buddhist art and philosophy in South Asia, a Saiva pilgrimage site associated with the Pancharama Kshetra tradition, a node in Indo-Roman maritime trade, and, since 2014, the site chosen for the planned capital of the bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh.

This paper draws together the mythological, epigraphic, art-historical, and colonial-era antiquarian record concerning Amaravathi, as compiled during background research for a narrative-driven historical game. The material is organized here into a conventional structure moving from the earliest textual layer - the Puranic legend of the demon Tarakasura and the birth of the God of War - Skanda (Kartikeya) - through the historical Buddhist and Saiva phases of the site, to its nineteenth-century rediscovery by colonial surveyors

and its twenty-first-century re-emergence as a modern capital city.

This paper not only verifies the ancient literature but also verifies the voice of distinct people submitted their inputs in the form of text, audio, video and images in several forms, including social media that are included in references.

## II. PURANIC ORIGINS: TARAKASURA AND THE BIRTH OF SKANDA

### A. The Boon of Tarakasura

According to the Shiva Purana and related sources, the asura Taraka performed prolonged austerities in Madhavana, a forest traditionally identified near Mathura in present-day Uttar Pradesh, and obtained from Brahma a boon of near-invincibility, subject only to the condition that he could be slain by a son of Shiva - a condition presumed impossible given Shiva's ascetic withdrawal from marital life [22], [23]. Taraka, thereafter known as Tarakasura, subsequently propitiated Shiva directly and received an Amrita Linga, a nectar-charged emblem worn about his neck that rendered his body self-restoring and effectively unkillable in battle [22]. Fortified by this boon, Tarakasura established his capital at Shonitapura - identified by tradition with present-day Tezpur in Assam, where the Sonitpur district preserves the name - and, after a war lasting a mythic ten thousand years in human

timeline-scale, defeated Indra and occupied Amaravati, the capital of Swarga [22], [24].

### ***B. The Birth of Skanda and the Refuge at Dhanyakataka***

On the request of all Devatas and great penance of Parvati Devi, Lord Shiva accepted to marry her and the subsequent union of energies of Shiva and Parvati produced a radiant divine seed that, unable to be borne by any single vessel, was carried in succession by Agni and by the river Ganga before coming to rest in a reed-forest (Saravana); because the seed had "slipped" (skanna) in this process, the resulting child was named Skanda, and, having been nurtured by the six Kritika sisters, was also known as Kartikeya [7], [52], [53]. This nativity narrative - termed Skandotpatti - is recounted by the sage Vishwamitra to Rama in the Valmiki Ramayana (Bala Kanda, Sarga 37), set in the Treta Yuga [50], [51]. Anointed with sacred waters, Skanda was installed as Senani, commander-in-chief of the divine armies, with the explicit charge of defeating Tarakasura [7], [53], [54].

Displaced from their heavenly capital, the Devas are said to have descended to the vicinity of Dhanyakataka (Dharanikota), on the bank of the Krishna River in the Deccan, to seek refuge and to propitiate Shiva; the tradition holds that it is from this episode that the terrestrial site takes the name Amaravathi, an "abode of the gods" mirroring the lost heavenly capital [27], [28]–[31]. On the advice of Vishnu, Indra sought a champion born specifically of Shiva and Shiva deputed Kartikeya to destroy Demon Tarakasura.

### ***C. The Celestial War and the Shattering of the Linga***

The war between Kartikeya and Tarakasura is described as ranging across both land and sky, beginning in the region of Kedarnath and the Mandakini and continuing over the Krauncha mountain, where, according to the Skanda Purana and the Mahabharata, Kartikeya's lance (Vel or Shakti) split the mountain to free celestial commanders trapped within it by Tarakasura's sorcery [7], [12].

Because the Amrita Linga permitted Tarakasura's severed body to continually rejoin, Kartikeya could not secure a decisive blow until Vishnu counselled him to destroy the Linga itself rather than the demon's body directly [3], [4]. Employing the celestial fire-weapon Agneyastra, Kartikeya shattered the Amrita Linga into five fragments over the Amaravathi region while fighting Tarakasura, removing the source of Tarakasura's invincibility and permitting the demon's subsequent defeat; regional Tamil tradition further associates the culminating battle and the destruction of Tarakasura's forces with the coastal town of Thiruchendur in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu, where the Arulmigu Subramania Swamy temple commemorates the victory [14], [15], [21].

## **III. THE PANCHARAMA KSHETRAS AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF AMARAVATHI**

The five fragments of the shattered Amrita Linga are held to have fallen at five distinct sites in present-day Andhra Pradesh, each subsequently consecrated by a different deity: Amararama at Amaravati (Guntur district), installed by Indra; Kumararama at Samalkota (Kakinada district), associated with Kartikeya himself; Ksheerarama at Palakollu (West Godavari district); Somarama at Bhimavaram; and Draksharama at Draksharamam (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Konaseema district) [1], [2], [5]. Collectively termed the Pancharama Kshetras, these five Shiva temples remain active pilgrimage sites [1].

Tradition holds that Indra, together with the gods' preceptor Brihaspati, installed the principal fragment on the bank of the Krishna River and named the resulting deity Amareswara - today enshrined at the Sri Amaralingeswara Swami Vari Devasthanam in Amaravati - and that the town itself derives its name from this act of divine worship [32]–[34].

The Pancharama tradition thus operates on two chronological registers: a Puranic register locating the origin of the five shrines in the Tretayuga war between Kartikeya and Tarakasura, and a historical register in which the standing temple structures were founded and repeatedly renovated across more than a millennium.

The initial structural core of the Someswara Swami temple at Bhimavaram (Somarama) is conventionally dated to the third century CE, while epigraphic evidence attributes major construction and expansion at several of the Pancharama sites, including the Bhimeswara temples, to the ninth and tenth centuries CE under Eastern Chalukya patronage, notably that of Chalukya Bhima [46], [47], [48], [49]. The Amaralingeswara temple at Amaravati underwent substantial renovation in the late eighteenth century under Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Nayudu, the Zamindar of Chintapalli.

## **IV. DIVERGENT REGIONAL TRADITIONS OF THE WAR-SITE**

Because the war between Kartikeya and Tarakasura is described in the source texts as occurring across the sky as much as upon the earth, later regional traditions have attached the narrative to several geographically distant locations, each preserved in local temple lore and each supported to varying degrees by textual and epigraphic evidence. Temples were created after the incidents took place in particular regions, which can be cross checked from Puranic literature. Depending on the logical correlation capabilities, readers may look at these incidents either myth or mystic historical events.

**A. Krauncha Giri, Karnataka**

Krauncha Giri, an elliptical hill in the Swamimalai range roughly ten kilometres south of Sandur in Ballari (Bellary) district, Karnataka, is identified by local tradition as the mountain pierced by Kartikeya's lance; the hill's distinctive natural gap, through which a state highway now passes, is presented as physical corroboration of the episode. The site hosts the historic Kumaraswamy temple complex, attributed to the Badami Chalukya and Rashtrakuta periods [8]–[13].

**B. Thiruchendur, Tamil Nadu**

Tamil regional tradition situates the culminating battle at Thiruchendur on the Tamil Nadu coast, where Lord Murugan (Kartikeya) is held to have camped and defeated the demonic forces; in this telling the antagonist is frequently identified as Surapadman, brother of Tarakasura, reflecting a partial conflation of the pan-Indian Puranic account with the regional Skanda–Murugan cycle central to Tamil Saivism [14]–[20].

**C. The Madhuvana–Shonitapura–Kedarnath Tradition**

A third strand, closest to the Shiva Purana account, anchors the narrative in North India: Tarakasura's penance at Madhuvana near Mathura, his subsequent rule from Shonitapura, and a later regional association of his defeat with the Kedarnath–Mandakini area of the Himalaya [22], [24], [25]. This tradition acknowledges that the geography of the tale is not uniform across sources, with local temple traditions extending the narrative into both Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand [22].

**D. Comparative Assessment**

Of these traditions, the Andhra Pradesh association - centred on the Krishna River, Dhanyakataka, and the Pancharama Kshetras - carries the most substantial and continuous textual, epigraphic, and institutional support, including the surviving Amareswara shrine, the standing Pancharama temples, and the etymological link between the toponym Amaravathi and the refuge of the Devas [27], [32], [35]–[37]. The Krauncha Giri and Thiruchendur traditions are locally well-attested but pertain to specific episodes within the wider war narrative - the freeing of Veerabahu and the final rout of the demonic army, respectively - rather than to the central act of the Linga's destruction, and are best understood as complementary rather than competing locations within a single itinerant celestial conflict.

**V. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL TIMELINE OF THE TEMPLE COMPLEX**

The material history of Amaravathi's Saiva establishment can be summarized as a sequence of construction and

renovation phases superimposed upon the Puranic foundation narrative: an initial structural core at the Somarama site attributable to the third century CE; major expansion at several Pancharama sites under the Eastern Chalukyas in the ninth and tenth centuries CE, corroborated epigraphically; the continuation of Saivism at Dharanikota through the Eastern Chalukya period (624–1189 CE); and a late-eighteenth-century renovation of the Amaralingeswara temple under Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Nayudu [43], [47], [49]. This sequence indicates that the site's Saiva identity, while rooted in Puranic scriptures, achieved its present architectural form only after - and in continuing dialogue with - its earlier Buddhist phase, discussed below.

**VI. BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF DHANYAKATAKA****A. Etymology and Political History**

The ancient name of the Amaravathi–Dharanikota site, Dhanyakataka, combines the Sanskrit dhanya (grain, crop, or that which is auspicious) with kataka (a fortified settlement, camp, or capital), yielding a toponym signifying an abundant, fortified capital [26], [38]–[41], where both the locations are situated within 2 kilometres distance. Dhanyakataka served as a political and administrative centre of the Satavahana dynasty from approximately the second century BCE to the third century CE, during which period it also flourished as a principal seat of the Mahasanghika school of Buddhism [38], [41], [42].

**B. The Amaravati Mahachaitya**

The Great Stupa of Amaravati - the Mahachaitya - was founded in the third to second centuries BCE, in a period associated with the reign of Ashoka and the Mauryan patronage of Buddhism in the Deccan; the earliest structure was a comparatively simple brick stupa [89]. Under Satavahana and subsequent Ikshvaku patronage, between roughly the second century BCE and the third century CE, the stupa was progressively enlarged and its sculptural programme replaced in phases conventionally dated to circa 50–1 BCE, 50–100 CE, and 200–250 CE, the last phase cross-dated by comparison with the sculpture of Sri Parvata (Nagarjunakonda); scholars note that these phase boundaries remain the most contested element of the site's chronology [89].

At its height, the Mahachaitya comprised a great chaitya encircled by an elaborately carved limestone railing, drawing monks, traders, and pilgrims from distant regions. Ikshvaku patrons added further structures and decoration in the third and fourth centuries CE, in the same period and milieu as the neighbouring site of Nagarjunakonda. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang and, later, the Tibetan historian Taranatha both

recorded the site's continuing eminence, indicating that it remained an active and celebrated centre of Buddhism into the seventh and eighth centuries CE, with additional sculpture, including standing Bodhisattva and goddess images, datable to this period [110]. The site continued to receive patronage under successive dynasties - the Satavahanas, Ikshvakus, Chalukyas, Pallavas, Vishnukundins, Kakatiyas, and the Kota chiefs - remaining active into approximately the thirteenth century and a recognized centre of religious activity until roughly the fourteenth century CE, after which it fell into disuse and was gradually buried [110].

### ***C. Nagarjuna and the Amaravati School of Art***

Acharya Nagarjuna, the second-century CE philosopher credited with founding the Madhyamika school and articulating the doctrine of emptiness (*shunyata*), is associated with the lower Krishna River valley, his active ministry closely linked to Amaravati and, in his later years, to the nearby site of Sri Parvata (Nagarjunakonda) [129]–[104]. The distinctive white-limestone carving tradition that developed at Amaravati under Satavahana and Ikshvaku patronage - the Amaravati School of Art - is recognized for its fluid, narrative treatment of scenes from the Buddha's life and exerted stylistic influence beyond South India [100], [109]. Amaravati is accordingly described in the secondary literature as a cradle of Mahayana Buddhism, a monastic and scholastic centre in which early Prajnaparamita literature was studied, with teachings propagated along regional trade and river routes eventually influencing Buddhist thought in China, Japan, Tibet, and Southeast Asia [102], [105], [106], [107], [108].

### ***D. The Kalachakra Tantra Tradition***

Tibetan Buddhist tradition holds that, at the request of King Suchandra of the mythical kingdom of Shambhala, Shakyamuni Buddha manifested as the Kalachakra deity and first taught the Kalachakra Tantra at Dhanyakataka - the historical Amaravati region - rather than in Shambhala itself, so that lay rulers might practise the Dharma without renouncing worldly duties [55]–[63]. King Suchandra is said to have carried the teaching back to Shambhala and established its transmission lineage there [63]–[69].

The Mahayana tradition, oriented around the bodhisattva ideal of deferred liberation for the benefit of all beings, and its tantric sub-tradition Vajrayana, which employs esoteric ritual methods transmitted directly from teacher to student, are both associated with Amaravati's Buddhist milieu [70]–[88]. This lineage is presented in the tradition as living rather than purely historical: the Dalai Lama conferred a Kalachakra

initiation at Amaravati in January 2006, and a large Dhyana Buddha statue stands in the vicinity today.

## **VII. EPIGRAPHIC LEGACY: THE BHATTIPROLU SCRIPT**

In the Guntur district locality of Bhattiprolu, historically known as Pratipalapura, stone relic caskets recovered from a Buddhist stupa preserve inscriptions in the Bhattiprolu script, dated to the third to first centuries BCE [90], [91]. This script is regarded by linguists as a distinctive southern variant of the Brahmi script and among the earliest attested writing systems of South India [96], [97]. The Brahmi script itself, popularized in monumental form through Ashoka's third-century BCE rock and pillar edicts, functioned as the root system for nearly all subsequent Indic and many Southeast Asian scripts, subsequently diverging into northern and southern stylistic branches [92]–[95]. The Bhattiprolu script is regarded as an important antecedent, via intermediate systems such as the fourth-to-fifth-century CE Kadamba script, of the joint Telugu–Kannada script family, situating the Amaravati–Bhattiprolu locality within the epigraphic prehistory of Telugu writing [98], [99].

## **VIII. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE "CITY OF TOLERANCE"**

The historical record indicates a gradual rather than abrupt transition in the religious character of Dhanyakataka. Buddhism, Jainism, and Saiva Hinduism are recorded as having coexisted at the site, which is accordingly remembered in regional tradition as a "City of Tolerance," with successive rulers refraining from imposing a single religious identity and each tradition emphasizing shared values of non-violence and respect for living beings. Jainism and Buddhism progressively lost institutional prominence as Saiva Hinduism gained ascendancy, a shift that coincided with the site's prominence under the Kakatiya dynasty and, subsequently, the Vijayanagara empire; the underlying process is best characterized as a gradual absorption of an older Buddhist religious centre into an expanding Saiva temple landscape rather than a discrete conversion event [44], [45].



***Pictures:** Buddhist monuments and artifacts regenerated by AI for a Game concept narration's sake - based on existing ruins found at Amaravati and Bhattiprolu.*

## IX. MARITIME TRADE NETWORKS OF THE KRISHNA RIVER BASIN

Beyond its religious significance, Amaravathi and its environs functioned as a hub of art, architecture, and riverine and maritime commerce, an advantage owed to the site's position on the Krishna River. Dharanikota served as a major inland port, with archaeological evidence of resident Roman traders exchanging cotton, gemstones, and spices; Ghantasala, near the river delta, functioned as a prominent seaport during the Gupta period; and Motupalli emerged in the medieval period as a hub for large-vessel international trade.

Machilipatnam - historically known as Maisolos or Masalia - served as a premier international seaport during the Satavahana Empire (1st century BCE – 2nd century CE), linking the Deccan interior to global maritime trade networks

spanning Rome, Southeast Asia, and China. Wealth from the port supported monastic communities across the Krishna River valley and financed expansive architectural additions, marble carvings, and sculptures, resulted to Buddhist Expansion [117, 118]. Recorded exports from the region included cotton textiles, diamonds, pearls, and spices, with pottery, gold, and wine among the principal imports, and trading partners extending to Rome, Southeast Asia, and Sri Lanka [115].

## X. COLONIAL REDISCOVERY AND MODERN CONSERVATION

The ruins of the Amaravati Stupa were first documented in the modern era by Colin Mackenzie, first Surveyor-General of India, in 1797, with a detailed programme of survey, mapping, and drawing undertaken under his direction in 1816–17. Subsequent excavation of the sculptural remains was carried out by Walter Elliot, James Burgess (1881), and Alexander Rea (1888–1909); a substantial portion of the recovered limestone reliefs - collectively known as the Amaravati Marbles - was dispersed to the Government Museum in Chennai and to the British Museum in London [114]. The British Museum today holds more than 120 Amaravati Marbles, dated from the first century BCE to the eighth century CE, displayed within its dedicated South Asia galleries [111]–[113]. The site is presently a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India and includes an on-site archaeological museum, sustaining both scholarly and devotional engagement with the location.

## XI. FROM ANCIENT CAPITAL TO MODERN CAPITAL

Amaravathi's political significance was renewed in the twenty-first century. Following the 2014 bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh and the transfer of the former joint capital, Hyderabad, to the newly created state of Telangana, Amaravati was selected by Chandrababu Naidu, the first Chief Minister of the reorganized Andhra Pradesh, as the site of the state's new capital. The project was further framed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a flagship greenfield smart city intended to serve as a model for energy-efficient, sustainable urbanisation under the national Smart Cities initiative, linking the region's ancient identity as a planned religious and commercial centre to a contemporary programme of planned urban governance.

The region's history of extractive wealth is relevant context for this modern development: the Vijayanagara empire (1336–1646 CE), which drew substantial revenue from diamond mines in the Krishna, Godavari, and Penner river basins, made India the world's sole known source of

diamonds until the eighteenth century, with gems traded through the Golconda market under the subsequent Qutb Shahi dynasty (1518–1687). Stones traced to the Kollur mine, operative from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, include the Koh-i-Noor, now part of the British Crown Jewels, and the Hope Diamond, originally known as the Tavernier Blue and purchased by Louis XIV of France in 1668, today held at the Smithsonian Institution.

## XII. GAME EPISODES

Author prepared digital pilgrimages through sacred history, and civic imaginations to learn about sustainable greenfield cities through virtual gameplays that includes STEAM education within. Unreal Editor for Fortnite (UEFN) from Epic Games has been chosen to develop the two episodes, where the first episode is targeted to simulate standalone, single-player linear Fortnite experience, being developed is a mythological and historical exploration game written after a careful scrutiny of people's writings and expressions from distinct sources about People's capital Amaravati; and its core concept and storyline were derived from the ancient records of Shiva Purana, Skanda Purana, a few other Sanatana (ancient) Buddhist scriptures, plus Kālacakra Laghutantra and other Tibetan sources, and the second episode concept is written to be a multiplayer game to build a modern sustainable city game experience that is inspired by the concept of Greenfield cities. Though it is inspired by publicly available designs of Modern Capital City of Amaravati, the game is not an exact replica of any actual designs of Amaravati Capital, from various stake holders working with Government of Andhra Pradesh, in order to avoid copyright issues at early stages of the design. Both the Fortnite episodic experiences stand fully autonomous. Players can restart historical expedition or independently continue further exploration of building the modern capital region of Amaravati, with a sustainable score. Authors combining a tiny portion of fiction attached to the overall studies for Game-progression and user-retention's sake.

## XIII. CONCLUSION

The compiled record indicates that Amaravathi's identity as a sacred and politically significant site is not the product of a single historical episode but of successive, overlapping layers of meaning: a Puranic narrative of divine refuge and cosmic war that furnishes the site's name and its Pancharama temple tradition; a documented Buddhist phase, spanning roughly the third century BCE to the fourteenth century CE, in which Dhanyakataka served as a Mahasanghika and later Mahayana centre of major art-historical and philosophical importance; a parallel and ultimately dominant Saiva temple tradition substantiated by epigraphy from the ninth–tenth centuries CE

onward; a role as a node in regional and Indo-Roman maritime trade; a nineteenth-century colonial rediscovery that dispersed but also documented the site's Buddhist sculptural heritage; and, most recently, a twenty-first-century designation as a planned state capital. Read together, these layers position Amaravathi as a distinctive case of long-duration continuity in South Asian sacred geography, in which mythological, religious, commercial, and political significance have repeatedly been renewed at the same location across more than two millennia.

Hence, Amaravathi-Dharanikota land has been carrying a deeply rooted Hindu historical legacy from ancient times, strong medieval evidences of Buddhism, solid proofs of mother scripts for Telugu and Kannada languages, and was awarded a great title – “The City of Tolerance” with immense harmony between distinct traditions, culture, and its rich heritage. This land has given birth to greatest treasures like Kohinoor and else diamonds and is fortified with crops, grains and paddy, and exists in the rich delta regions of the Godavari and Krishna rivers, which is called “Annapurna (*Abundant source of food*) of Andhra Pradesh”. This Amaravati land now it set to serve public as not only one of the richest historical pilgrimages for Tourism sector, but also as a futuristic greenfield capital city that moulds the future of Sunrise state of Andhra Pradesh.

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