

The *Mahādhammarājika* Pagoda, the Historical Monument in Meiktila Township

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Abstract

This paper ‘The *Mahādhammarājika* Pagoda, the historical monument in Meiktila Township’ is divided into three parts. In the introductory, various etymological meanings and definitions of the *Cetiya* are discussed at length. When talking about the history of the Pagoda, it is mentioned with special reference to the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the *Dhīghanikāya*, which says that the benefits of building and venerating the pagoda lead the ones to gain the spiritual progress. And then, the location, history and the Buddhist Arts in the Pagoda are presented. Finally, the historical facts of the pagoda and its art and architectures are also discussed in detail in this research paper.

Key words – history, Buddhist arts, culture

Introduction

The place where *Ceti* or pagoda is built is directly related to the religious matters. When paying attention to the *Theravāda* Buddhist Pāli Canonical texts, it can be found that pagodas or *stupas* have been in existence since the lifetime of the Buddha. In the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, the Buddha tells Venerable *Ānanda* thus: “*Ānanda*, *Udenacetiya* at *Vesāli* is very delightful. *Gotamacetiya* is very delightful. *Sattāmbacetiya* is very delightful. *Bahuputtacetiya* is very delightful. *Sārānadacetiya* is very delightful. *Cāpālacetiya* is very delightful” (*Dī*, , I, p- 134-137). From this evidence, it is obvious that the worshipping of the pagoda has existed even in the Buddha’s time. Furthermore, the commentary on the *Khuddakapāṭha*, (*Khuddakapāṭha Aṭṭhakathā*) enumerates that there are three types of *Cetiya* -*Paribhogacetiya*, *Uddissacetiya* and *Dhātucetiya*. According to this *Sutta*, one can understand that Buddhist *stupas*, for instance, the *Dhātucetiya* (the pagoda enshrined with the relics) used by the Buddhist people had prevailed since the ancient time (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>., <https://www.wisdomlib.org>., <http://www.myanmar.net/net/dhamma/sunlun/images/sunlun...>).

Moreover, in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* too, Venerable *Ānanda* poses the question to the Buddha about how to use the death body of the Buddha after the Buddha passes away. Then, the Buddha replies to Venerable *Ānanda*, stating “*Ānanda*, they should be dealt with like the remains of a wheel-turning monarch.’ ‘*Ānanda*, the remains of a wheel-turning monarch are wrapped in a new linen-cloth. They are wrapped with the new teased cotton wool. Having

done this five hundred times each, they enclose the king’s body in an oil-vat of iron, which is covered with another iron pot. Then having made a funeral-pyre of all manners of perfumes they cremate the king’s body, and they raise a *stupa* at a crossroads. That is how, *Ānanda*, is built with the remains of a wheel-turning monarch, and they should deal with the *Tathāgata*’s body in the same way. A *stupa* should be erected at the crossroads for the *Tathāgata*. And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colours with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time”(*Dī*, I, p-134-137). These evidences clearly prove that the art of worshipping the *stupa* existed even before the Buddha appeared in the world and that within the Buddha’s ministry and after his demise, Buddhist *stupas* have increasingly developed to a great extent.

Buddhist pagoda can be roughly divided into two, basing on (1) Pagoda with or without relics and (2) Pagoda with Buddha statue and relics as well as the teachings of the Buddha. Of them, in the first group, several kinds of *stupa* can be categorized in detail such as (1) *stupa* with relics, (2) *stupa* without relics (3) *Hollow stupa* (4) *Unhollowstupa* (5) *Golden stupa* (6) *Rubystupa* (7) *Stupa* made of brick (8) *Stupa* made of earth (9) *Bone stupa* (10) *Sand stupa* (11) *Bamboo stupa*. In the second group, three types of *stupa* can be enumerated such as (1) *Paribhogaceti* (2) *Dhātuceti* and (3) *Dhammaceti*.

The *stupa* in which the filter, the girdle, a piece of robe, alms-bowl etc., used by the Buddha himself are enshrined is called *Paribhogaceti*. The pagoda in which the relics of the Buddha or *Arahantsare* enshrined is considered as the *Dhātuceti*,

and Buddhist texts and scriptures are known as the *Dhammacetī*.

Furthermore, it is also said that there are three kinds of *Cetiya*- (1) *Paribhogacetī* (2) *Uddissakacetī* and (3) *Dhātucetī*. The Bodhi tree where the Buddha attained Enlightenment is termed the *Paribhogacetī*, the Buddha statue is called the *Uddissakacetī* and the *stupa* inside of which the relics of the Buddha are enshrined is regarded as the *Dhātucetī*. Nowadays, Buddhist people accept that by combining these two concepts of *Cetiya* mentioned above, there are four types of *stupa* or *Cetiya*, for example, (1) *Uddissakacetī*, (2) *Dhātucetī*, (3) *Paribhogacetī* and (4) *Dhammacetī*. Out of two categories we can say with a degree of certainty that *Uddissakacetī*, *Dhātucetī*, *Paribhogacetī* and *Dhammacetī* are reverentially categorized by the Buddhist followers.

Materials and methods

In this research paper, all of the data about the history of *cetiya* and *stūpa*, the history of the *Mahādhammarājika* pagoda and Buddhist Arts of this pagoda were collected from libraries and field survey. Descriptive method was used. The materials used for the purpose of the research are Pāli Canonical Texts, Commentaries and Ganthantara Texts.

Findings

Location and Area of the *Mahādhammarājika* (Shwe Myin Tin) Pagoda

The *Mahādhammarājika*, also known as Shwe Myin Tin pagoda is situated at the top of the bank of the Nat Mout Lake and is the east of the Meiktila Lake. It was originally built by the emperor Śrīdhammāsoka. In 474 of Myanmar Era, the King Alaungsithu, who hoped to gain benefits in this life and the next life, rebuilt it which enshrines the relics of the Buddha at the top of the Shwe Min Wun hill which is located in the east of the Meiktila Lake in order that the *sāsana* of the Buddha endures for very long.

In the opposite of the *stupa*, Yangon-Mandalay highway road can be seen, and it is 126 feet tall *stupa*. The external premise of the *stupa* has 1320 feet and the internal premises of it are 600 feet. According to archaeological evidences, this Shwe Myin Tin *stupa* was renovated by Min Gyi Swar Saw Kae, the king of Ava.

The history of *Mahādhammarājika* (Shwe Myin Tin) Pagoda

The *Mahādhammarājika* Pagoda is a historical pagoda that appeared simultaneous with the Meiktila Lake. The Meiktila Lake was renovated by the ancient kings of Myanmar from generation to generation, and in 474 of Burmese Era, the king Alaungsithu, who

was on tour with a huge raft, landed the Meiktila Lake and restored it again as a twelfth time. Thereafter, in the same year, he successfully built this *Mahādhammarājika* pagoda at the top of the Min Wun hill on the east of the Meiktila Lake, enshrining various relics of the Buddha together with nine Buddha statues made of diamond, beryl (or emerald) and gold in order that the *Sāsana* would last very long.

It is said that in the reign of Swar Saw Kae, the king of Ava rebuilt it. From that time onward for several years, it was abandoned, and it was completely devastated during the war. According to the historical records, the British Army used that place where the *Mahādhammarājika* pagoda was situated as a military beacon in 1935 and the Myanmar leaders tried to control that place and rebuilt it again as an original form. Then, Buddhist people from generation to generation maintained it a great deal, and in 1982, trustee of the *Mahādhammarājika* Pagoda was organized in order to preserve the *stupa* in a great manner. The *Mahādhammarājika* pagoda was gilded with gold from its Banana Bud to nine Turban Bands (Meiktila Thamine, Ni Tut (MA), 1985, Meiktila Kantaw Mahar Thamine, Ko Tin Hlaing, 1997).

Buddhist Arts of the *Mahādhammarājika* (Shwe Myin Tin) Pagoda

It is, here, necessary to explore the arts and architectures of the *Mahādhammarājika*, Shwe Myin Tin pagoda. At the four corners of the pagoda platform, the figures of four lions, of four Gods and four large rice bowls can be seen. There are four archways in four cardinal directions of the *stupa* and in each archway, the Buddha statues are placed. In this *stupa* there are three parts above the plinth, and at their angles the three small *stupas* are built. At the Bell-like part, nine statues of the gigantic giant are decorated with a three-dimensional effect. In fact, the *stupa* adorned with gigantic giant can only be seen in this pagoda.

At the main entrance of the *stupa*, two very grand lion statues can be seen. Moreover, on the *stupa* platform, a vestibule is also erected and inside of it the Buddha image so-called *Mahādhammarājika* can be paid respect. On the walls inside of this building, the life stories of the Buddha are wonderfully painted. At the north of this vestibule, the banner post is constructed and on it, the statues of the members of a deviant sect of Buddhism prevalent in ancient Bagan before the advent of Theravada Buddhism are clearly carved.

On the same side, the great *Sīma* (Ordination hall) called *Aparājita* created and in the east part, the Bodhi tree and a banner post can be magnificently found. In the south-east of the *stupa*, the Buddha statue in the form of preaching the Dhamma to a group of five monks known as *Pañcavaggiya* can be precisely witnessed. And then, in the east of this *stupa*, there are two statues of two golden flies. It is said that the reason why these two statues are made is that when

this *stupa* was started to construct two golden flies are found. The historians claim that at the beginning, this *stupa* was called Shwe Yin Myin and subsequently it became Shwe Myin Tin.

Conclusion

The *stupas* are entirely related to the religious matters and that according to the Buddhist canonical texts, since the lifetime of the Buddha, the *stupas* were prevalent in the continents of India. In the *Nidhikaṇḍasutta* of the *Khuddakapāṭha*, the Buddha says that Buddhist followers should accumulate the merits at the *stupas* or at the *Samgha*, and if they offer flowers or fragrances, it will lead for them to keep good wealth and health for a long time. Additionally, worshipping of the *stupa* is a branch of the Buddhist art and architecture and it is originated from India. In the subsequently times, this art and architectural styles prevailed in the Buddhist countries such as *Sri Lanka*, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia, and at the very initiation the *stupa* was simply built and late on with the development of the architecture, it was decorated with various meaningful objects. It can be assumed that thereupon the names the various parts of a *stupa* were also increased in number. It is obvious that the first *stupas* in the Buddhist history are the ones built by the great emperor Asoka of India who gave his favor to Buddhism to a great extent. From these evidences mentioned above, it is clear that the worshipping of the *stupa* existed before the Buddha appeared in the world and during the Buddha's ministry and after his demise, the worshipping of the *stupas* and its architectural designs and structures were advanced gradually.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to Dr Ba Han, Rector of Meiktila University and Dr Tin Tun Aung, Pro Rector of Meiktila University, for their kind permission and encouragement. We would also like to express Dr Htay Htay Thein, Professor and Head, Department of Oriental Studies, Meiktila University for her encouragement and valuable advices in writing this paper.

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