

The devotion of *Stūpas*

Kay Thi Kyaw,¹ Thandar Htwe²

Abstract

It was the devotion of the *Stūpas* the Buddhism made its own. When the Buddha began to be worshipped in the form of an image. According to tradition *Stūpas* were built by the recipients over the divided ashes of the Buddha. Our Ominiscience Buddha made starting to fulfill his perfection. In assening the *Stūpas* from the religious point of view rather than from the point of view of literature or history, it will be found that it is invaluable. This is a research that will continue to take place of importance in the heart of new generations.

Key Words: “*Stūpas*, devotion, worshipped”

Introduction

The term *Cetī* derived from the *Pāli* word ‘*Cetiya*’ and Sanskrit word ‘*Caitya*’. It is grammatically analyzed *Cita+ṇya*.

The meaning of *Stūpa*

Pāli term derived from *thūpa* > *pūtha* > *pūtho* method of *vaṇṇavipariyāya*.³ *Stūpa*, means sacred depository, shrine, relic. The *Stūpas* are divided into three kinds as follow:

(1) *Paribhogacetī*

(2) *Dhātucetī*

(3) *Uddissacetī*.⁴

Cetiya means a sepulchral monument but with its extended meaning it includes *sārīrika* (bodily relics of the Buddha), *Paribhoga cetiya* (a thing used by the Buddha), *Uddissaka* (a thing made sacred by dedication). *Uddissaka* again is of many varieties- the images of the Buddha made in various postures as suggested by his life stories form the major kind of *uddissaka* and so too are the votive tablets. Besides, *dhamma cetiya* (a memorial in honour of the Law).⁵

The devotion of *Stūpas*

The whole top which is known as the *śikhara* looks like the *Mahābodhi stupa* of Buddha Gaya. On each side of the *śikhara* grow Bodhi trees and two lotus buds hang from the pillars that stand on either side of the Buddha. There is a beaded border and the whole scene depicts the Enlightenment of the Buddha.⁶

¹ Dr. Professor & H, Department of Oriental Studies, Taunggyi University

² Dr. Professor, Department of Oriental Studies, Taunggyi University

³ အရှေ့တိုင်းယဉ်ကျေးမှု ဝိဇ္ဇာဘိတ်များ၊ တွဲ- ၂၊ ၈၁-၃။

⁴ Sārattha, ṭī, Vol.I, 172, Khuddaka, ṭṭha, 188, Jā, ṭṭha, Vol.IV, 229.

⁵ Myanmar terracottas Pottery in Myanma & Votive Tablets of Myanmar, 53-54.

⁶ Myanmar terracottas Pottery in Myanma & Votive Tablets of Myanmar, 53-54.

The *stūpa* began as an earthen burial mound, which was revered by the local population and we have seen that the devotion of *stūpas* was taken up by Buddhism, and that *Aśoka* raised *stūpas* in the Buddha's honour all over India. Only one *stūpa*, in Nepal, survives in the form in which the great emperor left it, but excavations of existing *stūpas* have shown the character of the earlier ones. They were large hemispherical domes, containing a small central chamber, in which the relics of the Buddha were placed in a casket, often beautifully carved in crystal. The core of the *stūpa* was of unburnt brick, and the outer face of burnt brick, covered with a thick layer of plaster. The *stūpa* was crowned by an umbrella of wood or stone, and was surrounded by a wooden fence enclosing a path for the ceremonial clockwise circumambulation (*pradakṣinā*), which was the chief form of reverence paid to the relics within it.

In the period between the Maurya and the Gupta much wealth and energy were spent on Buddhist architecture and the older *stūpas* were greatly enlarge and beautified. Of these three are specially noteworthy those at *Bhārhut* and *Sānchī* in Madhya Pradesh, and at *Amarāvātī* in the lower *Kistnā* Valley. The *Bhārhut stūpa* perhaps in its present form dating from the middle of the 2nd century B.C, is important chiefly for its sculpture, and the *stūpa* itself has now vanished. That at *Sānchī*, on the other hand, is one of the most striking architectural remains of ancient India.

In the 2nd century B.C the old *Sānchī stūpa* was enlarged to twice its original size, becoming a hemisphere of about 120 feet in diameter. It was then faced with well-cut masonry Laid in regular courses, and besides the lower path on ground level, an upper terraced path some 16 feet from the ground was added. The old wooden railings were replaced by stone ones 9 feet high, tenoned and mortised in imitation of carpentry. Finally, towards the end of the 1st century B.C, four glorious gateways were added at the four cardinal points. Lesser *stūpas* and monastic buildings surrounded the great *stūpa*.

The *Sānchī* gateways are perhaps more noteworthy for their carved ornamentation than their architecture. Each consists of two square columns, above which are three curved architraves supported by animals or dwarfs, the whole reaching some 34 feet above ground level. The construction of these gateways, from the technical point of view, is primitive, and it has been suggested that their design is based on the log or bamboo portcullis of the ancient Indian village. The finish, on the other hand, is remarkably good, and the carvings are among the most fresh and vigorous products of the Indian sculptor.

In respect of size few Indian *stūpa* greatly exceed that of *Sānchī*, but in Ceylon the *stūpa* reached tremendous proportions. The *Abhayagīrī Dāgāba* at *Anurādhapura*, the

capital of the early kings of Ceylon, was 327 feet in diameter, and larger than some of the pyramids of Egypt. It reached its present size, after a succession of enlargements, in the 2nd Century A.D.¹

In India *stūpa* architecture became more and more ornate. The *stūpa* of *Amarāvati*, which in its final form was completed A.D 200, was larger than that of *Sānchī*, and it was adorned with carved panels (some of which can be seen in the British Museum telling the story of the life of the Buddha. Mean-while in Northern India *stūpas* grew taller in proportion to their bases. They were often set on square platforms, which in Burma and Indonesia were developed into stepped pyramids, the largest of which is the enormous *stūpa* of *Borobodūr*, in *Jāva*, built in the 8th century A.D. Pinnacles became higher, and developed towards the spiring forms of the presented day temples of Myanmar and Thailand.²

Of later Indian *stūpa* the two most famous are those of *Sārnāth* and *Nālandā*. Of the tall *stūpa* of *Sārnāth* near *Vārāṇasī*, the scene of the Buddha's first sermon, now little more than the inner core remains. It was once a most imposing structure of beautifully patterned brickwork with a high cylindrical upper dome rising from a lower hemispherical one, and with large images of the Buddha set in gable ends at the cardinal points. In its final form it dates from the Gupta period. The *Stūpa* at *Nālandā* seven times successively enlarged, in its present ruined state gives the impression of a brick pyramid with steps leading up to its terraces. It was originally a tall *stūpa* raised on a high base, with a smaller *stūpa* at each corner, but the monument underwent so many alterations in *Gupta* and *pāla* times that it is now difficult devotion for the untrained eye to recognize its original form at any one stage of its development.³

Around the great *stūpas* were lesser ones, often containing the ashes of monks famous for their piety and learning, and a whole complex of buildings monasteries, shrine-rooms, preaching halls and rest houses for pilgrims.⁴At the greater Buddhist sites such as *Nālandā* the groups of monastic buildings were usually surrounded by fortress-like walls.⁵

In their present partial, dilapidation the heavy domes of the great *stūpas* sometimes seem a little forbidding. Originally the lime-washed or plastered *stūpa* shone

¹ The Wonder that was India, 349-350.

² Ibid., 350-351.

³ Ibid., 351.

⁴ Figure-1.

⁵ The Wonder that was India, 351-352.

brilliantly white in the tropical sunlight, its pinnacle, now generally broken, rising like a golden spear from the ceremonial stone umbrella on top of the dome. Then it must have given a different impression. The great *Runanvāli Dāgabā* at *Anurādhapura* in Ceylon, which in recent years has been restored and is once more used in Buddhist worship, rising white in the distance out of the plain, shows the *stūpa* at its best, as a worthy emblem of a great religion.¹

Conclusion

The *stūpas* is the land mark of the *Buddha Sāsana*. It is rather a matter of surprise that it was only five hundred years after the Buddha's death that a theology developed which gave full recognition to this state of affairs.

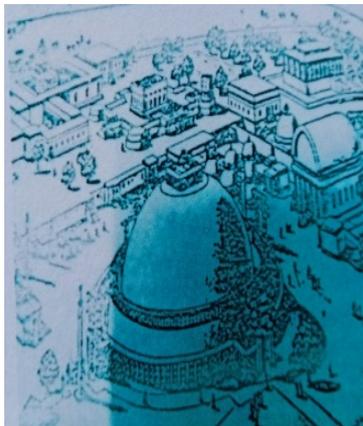


Figure-1, *Stūpa* & monasteries at Sānchī

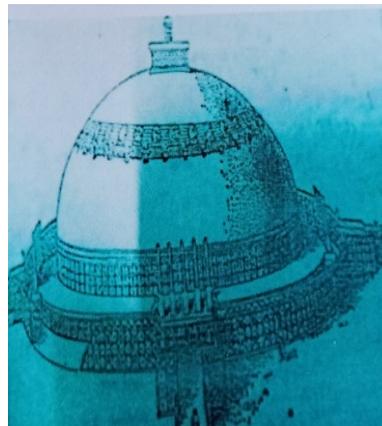


Figure-2, *Amarāvati*



Figure-3, Standing Buddha of *Mathurā*

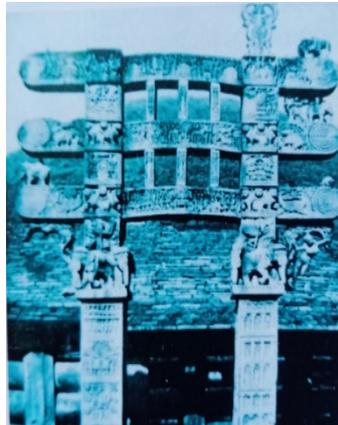


Figure-4, East gate of Great *Stūpa*, *Sānchī*

¹ The Wonder that was India, 352.



Figure-5, Great Stūpa at Sānchī from North East

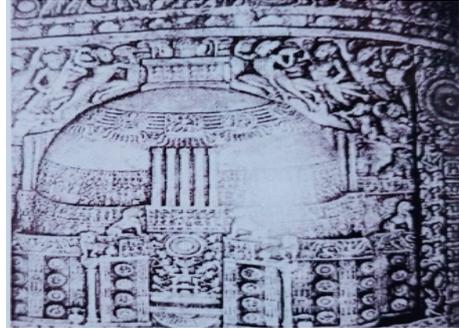
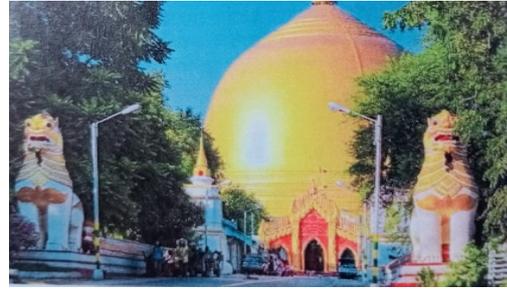


Figure-6, View of the Great Stūpa



Figure-7, Today, Rājmanicūlā Kaung Hmu Taw Pagoda



Acknowledgements

I owe unrivalled great gratitude to Dr. Mu Mu Myint, Rector of Taunggyi University, Dr. Win Win Ei Pro- Rector of Taunggyi University, for their permission to carry out this research.

References

Ganthantara (General Text in Myanmar)

1. A.L BASHAM, THE WONDER THAT WAS INDIA, London, 1963.
2. Department of the Myanmar Language Commission, Myanmar-English-Dictionar, Ministry of Education Photolitho Press, yangon, 1993.
3. Hoke Sein, U, The Universal Burmese- English-Pāli Dictionary, Printed in the Union of Burma, Rangoon, 1980.
4. Hoke Sein, U, Pāli Myanmar Abhihāna, Union of Myanmar Press, Yangon, 1999.
5. Lester Robert, C. Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia, Michigan: university of Michigan Press, 1973.
6. Mahābuddhaghosa, Ven., Khuddakapāṭṭhaaṭṭhakathā, Association of Myanmar Buddha Sāsana Press, Yangon ,1958.
7. Mahābuddhaghosa, Ven., jātakaatṭhakathā, Vol.IV, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Yangon, 2000.
8. Mālālāsekera, G.P, Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names, Vol. II, Luzac & Company LTD, London, 1960.
9. Myanma Terracottas pottery in Myanma & Votive tablets of Myanma, Myanmar Historical Commission, Mandalay University and YangonUniversity, 1981.
10. NIKOLAUS PEVSNER, THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA BUDDHIST, HINDU, JAIN, Published by PENGUIN Books LTD, 1953.
11. Sāriputta, Ven., Sāratthadīpanīṭikā, Association of Myanmar Buddha Sāsana Press, Yangon ,1981.
12. အရှေ့တိုင်းယဉ်ကျေးမှုပို့ချချက်များ၊ အတွဲ- ၂။ တတက္ကသိုလ်များပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၈၇။

