Research Paper History

The Historical and Religious Significance of the Erection of Stūpa

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ABSTRACT

Stūpa is the earliest and very sacred tool for Worshipping to the Buddhists in any country. They believed that Stūpa is "the body of the Buddha." Primitively the Eighth Stūpas were constructed on the Relics of the Buddha. According to Hiuen-Tsiang the king Aśoka collected the Relics of Eighth Stūpas and kept them in 84,000 Stūpas which are constructed by him. Gradually Stūpas erecting in different types and each Stūpa was having the own salient features. The Stūpa and its parts indicated the life and fecundity. The Buddhists Worshipped the Stūpa through to serve the sixteen items to the God i.e. śhoḍaṣopachāras.

KEYWORDS

In Buddhism, the earliest object of worship was the Stūpa .In the Pali text it has been mentioned that; the Stūpa is the body of the Buddha, the Stūpa is the Buddha, and the Buddhist Stūpa. It is an object of veneration in its own rights, as a replacement of Buddha himself, became very popular with Buddhists although Jainas also erected Stūpas. The Sanskrit word Stūpa derives from the root Stup, which means to heap up, pile or erect. Stūpa itself thus signifies a heap or pile of earth or bricks. Stūpa is, in fact, a sepulchral monument, i.e. burial inwhich the ashes of the cremated bodies of the saints were buried .In Sri Lanka the Stūpa is known as a dagaba (heart of womb), a word having its origins in the Pali dhatugabbha, literally "a construction with relics in its womb". The Stūpa originally had the characteristics of tomb and its beginnings predate Buddhism.



STŪPA AT CHANDAVARAM 250 B.C

Erection of the Stūpa

A Stūpa is a structure conceived either on a sepulchral monument or intended to Commemorate some particular event .The objective of the construction of Stūpa is twofold; merit may be acquired and so that this merit may be turned over, transferred to the others (parinamana). It appears that Stūpa was already being constructed during the Buddha's Life time. There are records showing that the rich merchant Anadhapindika built a Stūpa to hold the Buddha's hair and nail cuttings and that king Prasenajit erected one for Kaśyapa Buddha, one of the six Buddha's believed to have preceded Shakyamuni. The Buddhist Stūpa Developed from the eight memorial mounds constructed by king Ajatasatru of Magadha and other royal families to who portions of the relics (sarira) of the Buddha had been consigned after his entry into Nirvana.

The popularity of building and worshipping at Stūpas in India owed much to enterprise of King Asoka. According to legend, the king opened seven of the eight Stūpas that had been built after the Buddha's death and redistributed the relics all over India, depositing them in 84,000 Dharma Stūpas (dharmarakika).The present Stūpas at Kusinagara, Vaisali, Bharhut, Sanci, Amaravathi, and Sopara can be assumed to have resulted from this undertaking by the king. Other Stūpas were erected to venerate the relics of respected teachers, such as those for the Buddha's disciples Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, who predeceased him, and for the missionaries of Anoka's time. Evidence for this comes from Archaeological remains that testify to the enshrinement of their combined relics at Sonari, Satdhara, Bhojpuri, Andher, and Sanchi.

The enshrinement of relics and the construction of Stūpas and associated facilities were undertaken on a large scale between the first century B.C, and the third century A.D. After statues of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas began to be produced in Gandhāra and Mathurā in the second century A.D, the object of veneration changed from relic Stūpas to statues. At the same time, however, the building of Stūpas which enshrined inscriptions of a verse describing the essence of dependent origination gained in popularity.

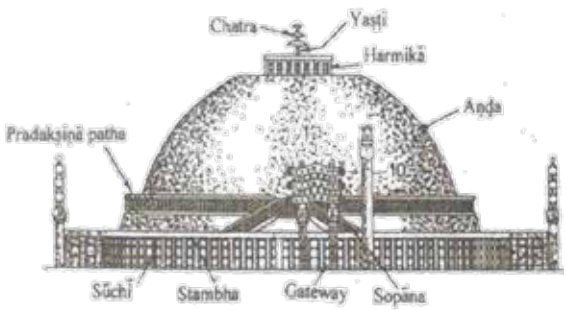
Types of the Stūpas

Buddhist Stūpas can be divided into four types. The first, the Relic Stūpa (Śaririka-Stūpa), was built to contain the bodily relics of the Buddha, his disciples, and other holy figures. The second type, called paribhogika-Stūpa, enshrined robes or bowls believed to have been used by the Buddha. The third, the Memorial Stūpa (uddeśika – Stūpa), commemorated events in the Buddha's life and records of these are contained in the travel diaries of the Chinese Priests Fa-hsien and Hiuen Tsang. The fourth type, Votive Stūpas (pūja-Stūpa), were miniature Stūpas erected by pilgrims at Buddhist sites for the purpose of Gaining merit; large numbers of these can be seen at Bodh Gaya, Sanci, and Taxila. Votive Stūpas contained within their recesses statues of Buddha's and deities, while those made of bricks or stone had statues, copies of sutras, and dharani spells placed in them.

Salient features of Stūpa (or) parts of the Stūpa

Stūpa is domical structure, called aṇḍa, erected on the ground or a plat form. At the later date, a railing vedika was erected round it on the ground level, leaving in between sufficient space patha for the devotees to go round it. The ritual called pradakṣiṇā. If the Stūpa is very large, such as at Sanchi, path was also created on a higher level, approached by a series of steps called sopana. Generally a Stūpa has on the top of the

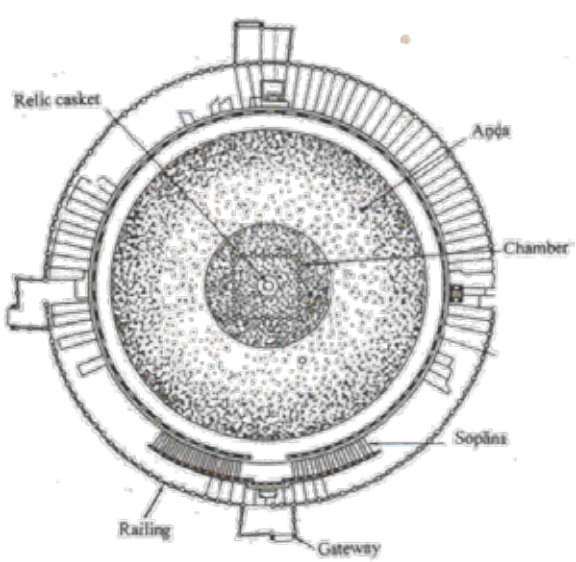
aṇḍa a small square railing called harmikā, in the centre of which one can see a stick yaṣṭi with three discs called chatra in diminishing sizes placed one above the other. Than the Relic-casket containing the relics of Buddha is placed on the throne. Chatra is the top portion of Stūpa which symbolizes Buddha's Mahaparinirvana, the chatra or umbrella also was one of the symbols representing Buddha. The original function of a chatra lies in its quality of giving shade or shelter (chhāya). This is in accordance with the fact that the head of a great person has the form of an umbrella. Thus the chatra always symbolizes the head (sīrsha) or the top portion of a great person (Buddha). As time passed, the hemispherical or bubble like aṇḍa started becoming elongated, so much so it become to tower with several storeys or floors as in China and Japan. Stūpa of earth, brick or stone, is also called ćitya because it was to begin with raised at the very placed, where the dead body was cremated on ćita, the pile of wood. As a matter of fact, this term was used for all sacred items which the Buddhist worshipped, including the image of Buddha and Bodhisattvas.



Plan of the Stūpa, Sanchi.

There are some regional variations also. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, the Stūpas had on four sides small plat forms and five independent pillar standing in a row. These are called ayaka plat form and ayaka pillars. On the plat form offerings were placed. Amaravathi and Nagarjuna Konda have such Stūpas.

A large Stūpa in the open, as noted above, is seen surrounded by a vedika or railing. This is also a copy in stone of an original wooden fencing with uprights, stambhas and cross-beams Sūcīs topped by coping Usniśa.



Plan of the Stūpa, Sanchi.

The railing had one to four gateways erected on two uprights and three cross-beams, the entire surface of which is embellished with various kinds of decorative elements, sacred as well as non-sacred, such as the scenes of every day life.

Symbolism of the Stūpa

A number of theories have been advanced to account for the origins of the Stūpa, including that it derives from a dome, a skull, a grave mound, or a burial or funerary burning ground, or that it comes from outside India, or that it combines complex symbolism. According to the last theory, the Stūpa represents a closed microcosm, containing a miniature cosmic mountain under the round roof, which represents the heavens. This cosmic mountain is expressed as a small building atop an inverted terraced pyramid, that is, a palace of heavenly beings (prasda). The central construction is sunk into the core of the Stūpa. The symbolic summit of the cosmic mountain pierces the roof and then the harmika (the square pavilion atop the dome) and reaches to the sky. From the point of view of the Indian conception of the universe, the Stūpa combines and supports the furthest reaches of heaven and earth and occupies the space between the two. This it exists in a symbolic world that might be called 'middle space'. The Stūpa of the precious seven in 'beholding the precious Stūpa' which remains mountains in the sky is connected to the way of thinking. John Irwin pointed out that 'the Buddhist Stūpa was not a sepulcher but a symbol of life and fecundity.'

Stūpa Worship

That Stūpa worship existed at the time of the Buddha can also be surmised from Asoka's Nigali sager pillar edict. In order to involve the common people in the religious activity, the Buddhists encouraged public participation in constructing and worshipping the Stūpa. The work Mahāvastu recommends that even carrying of the bricks for the constructing of the lord's chaitya is meritorious. He who decorates the Stūpa with manner of garlands (Malavihara) becomes a king .He who honours a chaitya of the Jina by incense and fragrance Secures perpetual happiness of mind and enjoyment of the senses. He who sets up a flag (pataka) on the chaitya of the lord inspires the rhythmic activity in the world of the Buddha and he is worshipped by all. A group of verses is devoted to recite the merit of one who sets up even a single lamp on the Stūpa of the Buddha. Similarly some verses are devoted to recite the merit of a person who decorates and makes a Stūpa of the Buddha beautiful to look at (subhadarsana) by the gift of an umbrella. A verity of merits accrues to one who celebrates the worship of the chaitya of the Jina by playing the musical instruments. Special virtues are said for those who honour the Stūpa with fragrant pastes. The Mahāvastu further states that if one is unable to honour a Stūpa by indulging in the expensive garlands or other presents, one can acquire merit even by removing the tarnished flower from the Stūpa. Similarly, he who cleans and renovates a Stūpa of the great one also acquires a string of merits. He goes to the abode of the gods and becomes the king of the gods.



Stūpa Worship by the Nāgas and Nāginīs, Amarāvatī.

A special worship was done to the Buddha in the bright fortnight of the month of vaiśakha. This particular full moon day is called Armapurnima indicating its observance in the Bauddha Aramas. On that day the Buddhist Stūpas, Chaityas and

residential quarters are to whitewashed and decorated with paintings. The festival is to be observed with performance o f music and dance .The monks are to be honoured with offering of clothes, food and books. This prescription obviously relates to the Buddha-Pūja.

The cult of the Stūpa Worship had thus furnished the seeds of the Buddhist art, architecture and literature. The Stūpa worshiped not only by ordinary peoples also Nāgas, Yaksha Garuḍas etc. The Buddhist way of Stūpa worship is almost taken for the worship of The Gods in the Hindu temples. The sixteen items of service to the god i.e., shodasopachāras like dhyāna, āvahana, ārghya, padya, dhūpa, dīpa, nṛtya, gīta etc are all brought into familiar practice from the Stūpa worship.

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