

## EVOLUTION OF STŪPA AND PAGODĀIN INDIA AND MYANMAR: ARCHITECTURAL PLAN AND CEREMONIAL PRACTICES

Vinay Kumar Rao<sup>1</sup>

A religious practice of erecting Stūpas over the last remains of a beloved person was in existence much before the *mahāparinirvāna* of Buddha in India. Buddha was well aware about the architectural concept of Stūpa and he made clarification about the erection of Stūpas and recommended carving a Stūpa in the likeness of the *Čakravatīna* king to his prime disciple Ānanda. After the *parinirvāna* of Buddha, a number of Stūpas were erected over his last remains. In Buddhist architecture a Stūpa was conceptualized in the form of a semi-circular dome emerging from the ground. A Stūpa was known as *sāririka* if it contained the relics of Buddha, *pāribhogika* if erected on auspicious materials used by Buddha, *uddeśika* if planned at places having any religious importance for its followers and *vratānuṣṭhānika*— which is generally monolithic in nature— if erected over fulfilment of some vow.

The Stūpa built in earlier period is simply carved in form of a dome and there is a complete absence of *medhi* and was non-metalled. The concrete evidence of erecting a Stūpa with durable and strengthened material comes from the times of Aśoka. The earlier Stūpa has no provision of *vedikā*. The inscriptional evidence affirms that king Aśoka took a personal initiative to refine the existing Stūpa and constructing new ones. A new era of Stūpa construction was witnessed during the Śuṅga-Sātavāhana period, wherein amongst other places, a large number of Stūpa was erected at Bharhut, Sāñcī, Andher, Sonārī, Satadhārā, Amarāvātī, and Jaggayepetta.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor (History), Assam University, Silchar-788011, Assam, INDIA. vinaysrijan@gmail.com

But the Stūpa erected in northern and southern India followed different styles.

Myanmar was inhabited during first millennium B.C. Its northern part was occupied by *Pyu*'s of central Asian origin and southern part by *Talaing*'s of Mon-Khmer origin. During 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, the *Talaings* conquered the northern part of Myanmar and established a mighty empire establishing their capital at Pagan. Regarding the origin of Buddhism it is believed in Myanmar that it became popular in Myanmar just parallel to Indian counterpart. But this claim is not supported by any other *Pāli* text or any inscriptions of *Aśoka*. Eventually, it is assumed that Buddhism became popular in Myanmar during the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and has strengthened its position prior to 8<sup>th</sup> Century CE. The writing of *Pāli* canons was almost started to take form during first century B.C. in Ceylon and some of its excerpts started to reach Myanmar in parts. It was only during 11<sup>th</sup> century CE that the complete *Piṭakas* reached central Myanmar and it attracted the Myanmar kings and Buddhist clergies to build various kinds of Buddhist religious establishments. Likewise Stūpas of India, Pagodās in Myanmar are structural monuments and contains the potent image of Buddha made from precious stone, wood (preferably of sacred banyan- tree), gold, silver, ivory and sandal wood. They are also constructed to fulfil the purpose to keep copies of various religious scriptures. These Pagodās's has followed Indian Stūpas as source for its derivation but has some peculiar formations. Architecturally a Pagodā is based usually on squarish pattern but the occurrence of five sided one is also not uncommon. In case of four sided structure it is called *lei-myet-hna* and five sided as *nga-myet-hna*. The addition of fifth side symbolically indicates the possible presence of *Mettaya*. The Pagodā generally contains 3 to 5 terraces resting on elaborately molded plinth. The multi-terraced platform is surmounted by the dome of circular basement. Some Pagodās have provision of nice niches on the dome to intact the images of Buddha preferably on the four cardinal points. The uppermost part of the dome contains the frieze. The dome is further supplemented with inverted moulding enjoined with a boss on it. A *harmikā*,



reliquary casket or a bulb is integrated between dome and the finial. The top most part of the Pagodā is enhanced with an ornamental pennon and diamond, which symbolically represents the royalty of the subject and indulgence of Buddha's *śāsana*. The magnificent structure is slashed by a medial stairway through the terrace and ends to the upper platform from which dome rises to a square or octagonal band. The whole Pagodā itself is supplemented at the terrace corners with mini Stūpas on descending terraces or each cordial corner at some places; and at some places with *kalāśa* motifs. Generally, the Pagodā is covered with a protective plaster, whitewashed with lime band coating and stucco flourished by bright colours. The building material used in Myanmar is primarily wood and brick and at very limited instances to stone. In contrast to India where large numbers of Stūpas were built on corporal relics of Buddha or his disciples or over the objects believed to have been used by Buddha, the Pagodās of Myanmar are built on images of Buddha or religious scriptures. Before constructing a Stūpa in India or Pagodā in Myanmar some ceremonial practices are performed.

The present paper intends to trace and elaborate the evolution of Stūpas in India and explore its motivation and influence over Pagodās of Myanmar. The paper is supplemented with architectural plans and plates illustrating the characteristic features of Stūpas and Pagodās. The paper presenter has taken reference from various epigraphical sources to elaborate the ceremonial practices performed during laying foundation of a Pagoda in Myanmar.

**Keywords:** Stūpa, śāririka, pāribhogika, uddeśika, vratānuṣṭhānika, Pagodā, lei-myet-hna, nga-myet-hna