

## THE CONCEPT OF THE TRIPLE STŪPA AND THE RELIC STŪPA IN SRI LANKA

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### Introduction

The invention of the Buddhist art goes back to the 06<sup>th</sup> century BC of Lord Buddha's living age. Erecting of Buddhist Stūpas to commemorate very important persons started according to the advice of Lord Buddha. In *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, four persons are eligible to make Stūpas in honour of respecting them as Lord Buddha, The *Paccēka* Buddha, *Arahath* and king *Cakkavatti*. By erecting commutative Stūpas, gradually guided the way to establish a Buddhist Art.

### Aims and Method of Collecting Data

The aim of this research is to identify the origin and the evolution of Triple Stūpa and make a research about Stūpas and Relic Stūpas from very beginning to Polonnaru period. The data collecting method of this research basically depends on by original and secondary sources.

### The Origin and Evolution of the Triple Stūpa Practice

It is very important to identify the concept of origin and evolution of Tripe Stūpa tradition in Sri Lanka. Lord Buddha after attaining Nibbana paid respect to the Bo-Tree which gave him shadow, stayed looking at it for a week (*Animisalōcanapūja*) is one of the main example to emerge such kind of concept. Buddhists started worshipping the Bo-Tree as disciples of Lord Buddha and the tradition continues even today. The Buddhist art and architectural tradition linked with Sri *Maha Bodhi* is one of the considerable

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factors. In Lord Buddha's time, beside the Stūpas erecting of *Āsana* (Seat), Symbol of footprint (*Siripatula*) and Buddha's statues were erected to commemorate Lord Buddha is one of the continuous traditions. For instances, the invented Stūpa enshrining holy relics of *ArhantBahiyadaruciriya*, according to the advice given by Lord Buddha himself is one such incident and the *Girihandussēya Stūpa* which was erected by merchants of *Tapassu* and *Bhalluka* enshrining holy hair relics of Lord Buddha (Mahāvamsa: 1941), according to the advice given by Lord Buddha, erecting Stūpas to commemorate his main two disciples *Sariyuth* and *Mugalanare* other instances. After Lord Buddha's *Parinirvāna* (Passing away) erecting of Stūpas enshrining holy relics of Lord Buddha is seen in various parts in India including *Bhārut*, *Sānci*, *Amaravati*, *Nagarjunakonda* and *Kapilavastu*. (Brown: 1949, 2002)

The foundation of the Buddhist art is based on Triple Stūpa. These Triple Stūpa means symbols of bodily (*Sārīrika*), consumable (*Pārībhōgika*) and the sculptures made on behalf of Lord Buddha similar to him (*Uddēsika*). This kind of art basically belongs to Buddhist means gradually the Buddhist religion established their own art and architecture tradition to suit their religious principles. It contains not only the auditory and visual arts but also architectural creations.

The time of Lord Buddha started to erect and worship Stūpa as revealed by the *Tipitaka* literature. For instances, Lord Buddha located his footprint in several places by using determination power, erecting Stūpas enshrining holy relics for *Arahant Bhiksu* and nuns, planting of *Ānanda* Bodhi tree are available in *Tipitaka* Literature. These examples prove that Lord Buddha himself has advised to erect Stūpas. In all part of India and beyond, where Buddhist establishment was occurred, started to create Stūpas in various shapes and a tradition of worshipping by enshrining holy relics of Lord Buddha in Stūpas, holy caskets, as well as in Buddha's statues.

Worshipping of consumable Stūpa started by considering the help which given by Bo-Tree to Lord Buddha to obtain enlightenment and it became a sacred tree. After that the seat where Lord Buddha seated to obtain

enlightenment and foot print which Lord Buddha placed by using his supernatural power, also used as symbols to respect of Lord Buddha to worship. Similarly the figure similar to Lord Buddha made of various materials also symbolizes the Lord Buddha called *Uddēsika Stūpa*. According to the literature, it was started three centuries after the *Parinirvāna* (Passing away) of Lord Buddha but archaeological evidences proved that the invention of Buddha's statue was started 1<sup>st</sup> century BC or 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Before the invention of the Buddha's statues as material arts on behalf of Lord Buddha, artists have used various symbols such as foot print, Lotus flower, *Thirathna* symbol, Holy umbrella, sitting seat (*āsana*) and Bo-tree (Zemer. 1954. Senadeera, 1992). Erecting of Triple Stūpas, corporal (*Sārīrika*), and consumable (*Pāribōgika*) and the sculptures made on behalf of Lord Buddha similar to him (*Uddēsika*) symbolizes Stūpa, Bo-tree, and Buddha's statue respectively. These factors prove that the origin of Buddhist art depended on those Triple Stūpas.

Triple Stūpa	Invented Category
Corporal ( <i>Sārīrika</i> )	<i>Stūpa</i> with holy relics Caskets with holy relics Buddha's statue with holy relics
Consumable ( <i>Pāribōgika</i> )	Bo-tree (Begging) Bowl (of monks) Robe and parts of it Symbol of foot print
Statue similar to Lord Buddha ( <i>Uddēsika</i> )	Symbol of foot print Holy umbrella Wheel ( <i>Dharma cakra</i> ) Seat Buddha's statue

### Stūpa with Holy Relics

The meaning of the architectural creation called "*Stūpa*" in Sanskrit language and *Thūpa* in *pālī* language means "bulk", bulking, batching or

erecting. According to the Monier William's explanation, it has several meanings such as hair (*bun*), peak, mound and mound of bricks. There are several similar words in Buddhist literature mentioned as *Cetha*, *Chaitya*, *tumba* and *Thūpa*. The word *caitya* has been used to introduce the place names such as *Udenacaitya*, *Goutamakacaitya*, *Saththambhacaitya*, *Bahuputracaitya*, *Sarandadacaitya*, and *Chāpālacaitya*. (මහවිජයාචාර්ය 1993). In Sri Lanka, special words appear as *Sēya* and *Dāgaba*. In Nepal and Thailand, it well known as Pagoda (Paranavitana 1963).

According to the archaeological evidences, there are relics of *Dharma* (*Dharma Dātu*), *Dharma* written materials also have been enshrined besides corporal (*Sāririka*) consumable (*Pāribōgika*) relics. As examples, relic chamber (*DatuGarbha*) of *Idikatusēyastūpa* of *Mihintale* contains the bronze plaques which were written with the Mahayana *Dharmadatu Sūtras* (අමරසිංහ, 2005). According to the oldest record in Sri Lanka about erecting of *Stūpa* is in *Tiriyay*. There enshrined relics of hair of Lord Buddha by two merchants called *Tapassu* and *Bhalluka* belonging to the 06<sup>th</sup> century BC. Lord Buddha himself had come to Sri Lanka thrice and in those tours the knowledge of erecting *Stūpa* may has been given to Sri Lankans and *Mahiyangana* and *Kelani Stūpas* may has been started. The revelations of Mahavaṃsa regarding these matters cannot be rejected (මහවංසය: 1941).

No	Name of the Stūpa	Creator	Special Holy Relics enshrined	Shape of the Stūpa	Present Height in feet	Present diameter in feet
01	<i>Girirhandusēya Tiriyay Nitupathpana Kandasamimal ei</i>	Brother merchants Tapassu and Bhalluka	Relics of Hair ( <i>Keshadhātu</i> )	Cannot identified	--	32.6



02	<i>MahiyanganaStūpa (Miyuguna mahasēva)</i>	God <i>Sumanasaman</i> 06 BC.	Relics of Hair ( <i>Keshadhātu</i> ) Relic of Throat Relic of jaw	Bell shape	80	60
03	<i>Kirivehera at Kataragama (MagulmahaVehera)</i>	Rural Ruler called <i>Mahasēna</i>	Relics of Hair	Bulbous Dome-shape	54	90
04	<i>TūparamaStūpa</i>	King <i>Devanam piyatissa</i> 250-210 BC.	Relic of Jaw	Bell shale	63	59
05	<i>SandagiriStūpa</i>	King <i>mahānāga</i>	Relics of Lord Buddha	Bulbous Dome-shape	--	--
06	<i>SēruvāvilaStūpa</i>	King <i>Kāvantissa</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> century BC.	Relic of forehead and Relics of Hair ?	Bulbous Dome-shape	100	280
07	<i>TissamahārāmaStūpa</i>	King <i>Kāvantissa</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> century BC.	Left under jaw's toothrelic, Relic of forehead ?	Bulbous Dome-shape	186	550
08	<i>Sōmāvateestūpa Polonnaruwa</i>	King <i>Valagamba</i> 2 <sup>nd</sup> century BC.	Right tooth relic	Bulbous Dome-shape	76	82

09	<i>Ruvanvalisēya</i>	King <i>Duttagāmi ni</i> 161-137 BC.	Relics of Lord Buddha	Bulbous Dome- shape	338	298
10	<i>Mirisavatiya</i>	King <i>Duttagāmi ni</i> 161-137 BC.	Relics of Lord Buddha And chaplet of victory	Bulbous Dome- shape	192	141
11	<i>DeegavāpiStūp a</i>	King <i>Saddhatis sa</i> 137-119 BC.	Relic of nail	Cannot be identified	185	1000
12	<i>Kotavehera at Dālivala</i>	<i>Keerthitis sa</i> Sub-king 1 <sup>st</sup> century BC	Relics of Lord Buddha	Cannot be identified	--	--
13	<i>AmbastalaStūp aat Mihintalē</i>	King <i>Mahadāti kaMahāna ga</i> 09-21 AD.	Relic of <i>ūrnarōma</i>	Bulbous Dome- shape	145	136
14	<i>MadirigiriyaVa tadāgēStūpa</i>	King <i>Kaniṭṭatis sa</i> 164-192 AD.	Relics of Lord Buddha	Cannot be identified	--	26
15	<i>MutiyaṅganaSt ūpa</i>	King <i>Jeṭṭatissat he First</i> 266-277 AD.	Relics of hair Relic of right Jaw	Bell shape	65	270

When considering the Buddhist Stūpas according to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* in *Dēghanikāya* mentioned that the relics of Lord

Buddha were divided among eight kingdoms. Stūpas were made in all those kingdoms enshrining the holy relics (මහාවග්ගපාලි :1983). It proves that the Stūpas were made to enshrine Relics of Lord Buddha. According to the archaeological evidences *Tūpārāmadāgaba* is the first erected Stūpa in Sri Lanka after the arrival of *Arhant Mahāmahinda*. Nowadays, it does not contain the primitive shape of it because under many re-construction projects in several occasions in the history made its vicinity different. Other discussed Stūpas of this article also underwent to the same treatment in several occasions as history reveals.

*Stūpa* erection tradition of Sri Lanka cannot be equated to any other country because Sri Lankan has had enough practice by building colossal Stūpas like *Ruwanvalisēya*, *Abhayagiriya*, *Jethavanaya*, *Demalamahasēya* and in the modern society of Sri Lanka having same kind of practice by building *Sandahirusēya*.

**Keywords:** Stūpa, relics, tradition, art, architecture

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