

Stupa: The image of Buddha

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Abstract

Buddhism was founded by Gautam Buddha around 2500 year ago. Thereafter Buddhism was spread allover India and also outside India. Buddha did not believe in image worshiping. He never supported the existence of god, He advised people that they should be their torch-bearer and surrender to themselves. Consequently 'Image' had no place at the time of rise of Buddisim. The image of Buddha comes into reality around six hundred years after the foundation of Buddhism. During the period various symbols were being searched out for Buddha i.e Buddha's footprints, Bodhi-tree, Lotus Flower, tree, Riderless horse, An empty throne, Stupa, etc. Rajgrah, Vaishali, Kapilvastu, and Kushinagar are places where the important events of the life of Buddha had taken place. Emperor Ashoka had contracted main stupa of Sanchi.

Stupa was contracted with specific objects which can be described as to preserve the remains of Lord Buddha and his followers ,to show the respect for statue of Buddha earlier to Gautam Buddha, to highlight, worship, the places where the important events of life of Lord Buddha had taken place. Some utilized things by Buddha were placed in stupa. Accordingly stupa is described as A. Physical stupa, B. Stupa having things utilized by Buddha C. Objective stupa.

Stupa was constructed with the object to spread the message of Gautam Buddha in public.

Keywords: Buddhism, Mahasanghik, Bodhi-tree, Lotus Flower , Wheel, Stupa, Mahaparinirvan, Vihar, Part of Stupa , rchitecture and sculptures of stupa

Introduction

Buddhism was founded by Gautam Buddha around 2500 year ago at Sarnath near Varanasi. Thereafter Buddhism was spread allover India and also outside India. Buddha did not believe in image worshiping. He never supported the existence of god, He advised people that they should be their torch-bearer and surrender to themselves. Consequently 'Image' had no place at the time of rise of Buddisim ^[1].

The second meeting of Buddhism was held at Vaishali under the presidency of Revat Bhikku on the occasion 'Mahasanghik' come forth as one of the branches of Buddhism. It was reformative and had the lion's share in the creation of Buddha-image. The image of Buddha comes into reality around six hundred years after the foundation of Buddhism. During the period various symbols were being searched out for Buddha as follows.

1. The Buddha's footprints which were often created at a place where he was know to have walked or was the scene of one of the Jataka Tales which recount his lifetimes as the Bodhisattva, striving to fulfill the perfections necessary in order to become a Buddha in the future. Such an image exists at Swat in Pakistan and indicates what is believed to have been the scene of the Deer or Migara Jataka Story. Another example of this type of narrative imagery is the depictions of the Atoka Tales at Barhut in India.
2. The Bodhi-tree which is symbolic of Gautham Buddha's enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. A cutting of a tree, believed to have been taken from the original Bodhi Tree is enshrined at Bodh Gaya in the grounds of the Mahabodhi Temple. The Bodhi-tree image was retained and used in many later examples of Buddhist art.

3. The Lotus Flower which symbolizes both purity and enlightenment and is a popular motif in much Buddhist art and architecture and is very widely used in Tibetan Buddhist Art.
4. The Wheel which is a reminder of the Buddha's First Sermon. 'The Turning of the Wheel of the Law' delivered at Sarnath in Northern India and where the ruins of the ancient Dhamekh Stupa commemorating this major event stand. The wheel has also been adapted to symbolize the wheel of suffering in Samsara in Tibetan Buddhism and many examples of it are beautifully and skillfully depicted in Tibetan Buddhist Art on mandals, a type of meditation-aid and on the cloth paintings known as thankgas.
5. A rider less horse which recalls Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of worldly life for the ascetic life and the beginning of his search for the path to Enlightenment.
6. An empty throne which serves as a reminder of his passing away and attainment of Parinibbana.

The symbol representing Buddha needed to be nearest to him. In other word they were expected to be the place where the body or its remains are buried. 'Stupa' could be the best symbol of Buddha from the above point of view. Thus Stupa, White Elephant, Lotus, Horse, Bodhivrikha, Vajrasan, Gandhkuti, Bhikashapatra, Dharamchakara and Triratna were the other important Buddha-images. Out of these 'Stupa' image and its nature and importance are discussed in this research paper.

Stupa

Stupa is erected in the memory of an important person who is dead. Infact the word stupa means heap. There is a tradition of creating the heap of clay and stone at the place where the

bones and ash or remains of great person were buried. Then the custom of covering the heap with bricks or big stones for its safety was started. The idea of 'Stupa' was in vogue since the time before Christ. In 'Mahaparinirvana' Buddha himself had said that Tathagat, Samyaksmbuddha, the desciple of Thatagat and Chakaravarti are suitable for 'Stupa' In other word Stupa is the tomb of an important and respected man. [2] Five physical parts of the respected person was collected after his death ceremony and it was kept in a pot or cloth and the same was buried. Buildings (Stupa) were built around the said remains with help of bricks, lime, Stone, etc. This tradition had started for construction of Stupa. [3]

The followers of Lord Gautam Buddha had distributed bones, ashy, hair, etc after his Mahaparinirvan and constructed the stupa at Rajgrah, Vaishali, Kapilvastu, and Kushinagar. These places are the places where the important events of the life of Buddha had taken place. These are as follows.

Lumbini - Birth place of Lord Buddha.

Bodgaya - Place where Lord Buddha was enlightened with Devine knowledge.

Sarnath - Place where Lord Buddha given his first Lecturer (Pravachan)

Kushinagar - Place of Mahaparinirvan of Lord Buddha.

Besides above four places Shravassti, Sankashy, Rajgrah and Vaishali are famous places in Buddha literature known as 'Astham Sthan' It was faith of Buddhist that out of four teeth of Lord Buddha one was taken in the haven by God, second was taken by Naga to sea (Patal.) third was to taken by his follower to Gandhar country (Afghanistan) and forth was taken at Kalinga. Where the forth teeth was buried a stupa was build on it, which is known as 'Dantpur'. Stupa was also erected on the other article of Lord Buddha like Clothe, pot of Bhiksha, Foot Print (Paduka), etc. Emperor Kanishka had built a stupa at Peshawar on the Bikshapatra of Lord Buddha. References were also found in Pali literature "Dipbandh" for worship of holey thing of Buddha earlier to lord Gautam Buddha. [4] Initially the stupa was constructed in the memories of Buddha, but later the Buddhist had started worshiping the remains of Lord Buddha in stupa. Stupa was constructed on a place of height on a square construction (Chatyagrah), Path way was constructed around the stupa to circumambulate and wooden or stone railing was also build around the path way for safety. Meeting hall was also constructed near the stupa for prayer after worship, which was called as Chaityyagarh. [5] Lot of Stupa was constructed in the Northern India by the followers of Buddha. Pilgrimers of China had noted the same in their travel accounts. Most of stupa was now ruined and remains of the same are still present. The oldest stupa was found at Piperava in Basti District of Utter Pradesh. [6] It was constructed in B.C.450 One stone sculpture (Shelalekh) in the ruins of the stupa gives the details that the stupa was built on the bones of Shakya people of Buddha followers. The base of the stupa was 90 feet and diameter of round shape was 62 feet. Some stupa was also found at Nalanda, Pouni and Shalmalji. Emperor Ashoka had constructed near about 8400 stupa in his state.

Emperor Ashoka had contracted main stupa of Sanchi. It was contracted by bricks. The big square was constructed and a small egg shape round was erected on it. The bricks were covered with lime layers. Some places are created for lights. Wooden structure was constructed above eggs shape round. The Stupa was decorated with flower and lights at special

events. Flag was placed on the Stupa. These stupa was worshiped as like as lord Buddha. It was circumambulated and path way was created around the stupa with railing. Path way was having entrance at four main directions. Flag sticks were also erected near stupa. The construction style of stupa is having special meaning as per literature of Buddhist. Whole stupa treated as universe, the square contraction treated as earth and eggs shape round is treated as sky. Harmika at center of stupa was treated place of God and umbrella shape top as heaven.

Vihar was constructed for residences of Buddha Bikshu. Each vihar is having Stupa for worship. Therefore Chaityyagrah and Stupa were found in the Buddha caves in western India. One stupa found in the center and Vihar was constructed around the stupa. The same structure was found at Vairat. It contents round shape stupa and round column around it. Circumambulation path was found around the stupa between walls and columns. Umbrella shape covering was found on all above structure. There was tradition to construct two Chaityyagrah at Vihar. One Chaityyagrah content small stupa and another was statue of Lord Buddha.

Object of construction of Stupa

Stupa was contracted with specific objects which can be described as follows.

1. To preserve the remains of Lord Buddha and his followers
2. To show the respect for statue of Buddha earlier to Gautam Buddha.
3. To highlight, worship, the places where the important events of life of Lord Buddha had taken place.
4. Small stupa was constructed with view of donations. [7]

Types of Stupa

It was never possible to keep the physical part of Buddha in each and every stupa. Some utilized things by Buddha were placed in stupa. Accordingly following are types of stupa.

1. Physical stupa- where the physical part like ash, teeth, hair of Buddha were placed.
2. Stupa having things utilized by Buddha- Where the things like. Turban, Bhikshapatra, Vajrasana where Buddha had sited under the tree of Bodhi in Vajrasana.
3. Objective stupa- This stupa was constructed in the memory of Gautam Buddha or Buddha earlier to him for worship. In the period of Emperor Ashoka lot of stupa was constructed with this object. At the pilgrim places of Buddha, these types of votic stupa (Stupa for Worship) were constructed in multiple numbers. [8]

Four type of stupa was elaborated in the Mahanirvan as follows.

1. Stupa in memories of Tathagat Gautam Buddha.
2. Stupa in memories each Buddha earlier to Gautam Buddha.
3. Stupa in memories of main Buddha Sharavak
4. Stupa in memories of Buddhism follower emperor.

First three types stupa was constructed in the period of 'Satvahan'. It is not necessary to have physical part or thing in each stupa. Same stupa was constructed for spreading the religion. [9]

Architecture and sculptures of stupa

The special architecture style of stupa was developed by Buddhist according to their mythology. It had become place of worship of God. In the early age it was tradition to create a small heap on the ash of deceased person. Stupa was developed from this tradition. The stupa of Beirut, Sanchi, and Budhagaya was constructed during rule of Shung, Andhra and Ashoka. The stupa was build at the main road of city with the object that the people shall visit stupa. It shall become a pilgrim places. With the object to spread the message of Gautam Buddha in public, Emperor Ashoka had build the stupa and made the tradition to visit the stupa.

Part of Stupa

Stupa was having special architecture structure and it had a special meaning according to Buddhism mythology. Round shape dome like structure known as Canola. It is having eggs shape or water bubble shape. The Cupola is indicating as the Universe. Above the cupola two or three square structure with railing is there which is called as Harmika. As per Buddhist thought God was living at the place 'Harmika' Two or three umbrella type structures was there above the Harmika, which is called as umbrella(Chatra). This place is presumed by Buddhist as Heaven. There was path way around the stupa for circumambulation. It is having four gat ways at four main directions which are having stair cases. The circumambulation path was having stone or wooden railing. This is called 'Vedika.' Circumambulation Pathway is having four gates, which is called as 'Toran' Stupa is treated as symbol of Mahanirvana of Gautam Buddha. Stupa is treated as holy temple in Buddha mythology. Contraction of stupa is treated as work of God. [10]

Details of some stupa are given as follows.

1. Stupa at Junner – In the caves of Tulja at Junner, Maharashtra stupa was constructed in the Chaityagraha. It is having diameter of 20 feet. It is having round shape is having height of 18 feet. Twelve pillars were found around the stupa. [11]
2. Stupa at Paurushpur – Emperor Kanishika had constructed a stupa at south west India at Paureshpur in 1st century. Its height was 500 feet's. It was having five floors. On top of the stupa 25 wheels of copper and gold was erected. But it was ruined, remain of the same was not found. Lot of Gandhar style Stupa was constructed in Afghanistan up to 5th centuries. It was constructed with the help of stone. It content the statue of Gautam Buddha [12].
3. Stupa at Mirpurkhas – Mirpur stupa is of Gandhar style. In Gandhar style stupa, lower portion was very big and it was having two or three floor. Mirpur stupa is having three rooms which are having Buddha statue. [13]
4. Stupa outside India-
5. Takth-E-Bahai, Peshwar-Stupa at Takth-E-Bahai having difference in construction style. It was situated in Buddha Vihar. First two floors are of round shape, above round shape floor egg shape are constructed and on above Harmica and Umbrella shape were constructed at the top Of stupa [14].

Stupa as Sahabaj ke Dehari- Emperor Kanishaka had constructed the stupa at Sahabajke Dehari in the same style like Takth-e-Bhai. Its lower four floor constructed with stone.

Above it 13 floor building was constructed with the help of bricks and wood. One iron pillar was erected and it was having 13 copper umbrella shape cover. Total height of the stupa is 700 feet. [15]

Stupa was also constructed in Shri Lanka, Nepal, Brahmadesh. Java. Stupa at Brahmadesh (Myanmar) was called as Pagodas. It was very big shape and having lot of sculptures and big umbrella type top. A famous stupa is situated at Barobudur at Java. It contents 7 floors. Its sculptures contents 72 small stupa and statue of Lord Buddha. Sculptures contents various event of life of Lord Buddha [16].

Sculptures on Stupa

Bharhut

Emperor Ashoka had constructed a big stupa at Bharhut. Diameter of the stupa was 67 feet. Foundation of the stupa was constructed with stone and upper stricture with bricks and layer of lime. It is having four gates which are called as Toran (Picture No.1) and having railing (Vedika) Circumambulation path of 10 feet was constructed between stupa and railings. The railing is having 90 pillars and measurement of railing is about 330 feet. Various decorative sculptures were drawn on gates, pillars and railing of this stupa. It contents various natural seen, folk sculptures. Some picture of Jatak tale was sculptured like Mahakapi Jatak Tale (Picture No.2) Dream of Mayadevi, Mother of Buddha. (Picture No. 3) Dharma Yatra of kings and common people. View of worship like Elapatra worshipping Buddha. (Picture No.5), Kubera and Yeksha, Chakrawak, Naag and picture of God and Goddess. Famous picture of purchases of Jaitwan is also there Pillars of stupa at Bharhut content lot of sculptures of Yaksha and Yakshani.. (Picture No. 4) It is assumed that the arrangement of this sculpture is made for security of the stupa. All the sculpture at Barhut is related with life of Lord Buddha and based on "Jatak Tale". The existence of Buddha is in the form of Paduka, Throne, Bodhitree, and Dharma Chakra. But no physical statue of Buddha was sculptured any where in the stup. It does not content any sculpture of war or fighting. [17]

Bodhgaya

Big stup was constructed at Bodhgaya where Lord Buddha had been enlightened with divine knowledge under the tree of Bodhi. This structure was in the age of shuing. The railings and pillar of stup were in the rectangle form. The structure contents some important event of life of Buddha. It also content some events narrated in" Jatak Tale" Vedika contents sculpture of Lord Indra. One railing is having sculpture of Lord Sun as the symbol of Lord Buddha [18]. (Picture No. 6)

Stup of Sanchi

The sculpture of Sanchi is of the age of Shung and Andra. The top of south gate (Toran) contents sculpture from "Chdant Jatak Tale" The another sculpture of this gate is war of Kushinagar. From this sculpture, the management of war, Weapon, cloth and life style of people of the age can be analyzed. (Picture No.7&8) East gate (Toran) contents the sculpture of Prince Siddharth leaving capital Kapilvasthu for obtaining Devine knowledge.

This gate also contents sculpture related to life of Gautam Buddha in symbolic form. Out of them two sculpture is of Godess Shri Laxmi. The incidence of acquiring the Devine

knowledge by Buddha was sculptured in the form of Bodhi Tree, Round wheel was sculptured in symbol of Dharma Pravachan. Sculpture of Yaksha and Yakshani is very delightly sculptured which is available in Boston Museum.^[19] The stupas are very important type of Buddhist Architecture. It contents the various sculptures God, Goddess, Yaksha, Yakshni statue of Buddha, Trees, Nagas, Elephant, Bullocks, Deer, Buffalo, and Peacock etc. It indicates the life style of the people in the period of Buddha (Tradition, Cloths, Houses, Temples, Arrangement of cities). It is simply the image of Gautam Buddha preserved for long time for educating people and spreading the message of Buddhism for the world.



Fig 1: Gateway and railings of the Bharhut "stupa", 2nd century B.C., Madhya Pradesh. Very little of the "stupa" itself remains today. A portion of the railings that surrounded it and one of the gateways are preserved in the Indian Museum, Kolkata



Fig 2: Mahakapi Jataka, Railing of the Bharhut "stupa". The railings of Bharhut have the earliest known representations of the "Jataka", stories of the Buddha in his previous lives, in the form of different men and as animals. One of most marvelous aspects of early Buddhist art is the portrayal of fine ethical qualities in the world of animals, often missing even in men. This roundel depicts the story of the Buddha when he was born as a virtuous monkey, the "Mahakapi Jataka". Many incidents of the story are shown very skillfully in a small space.



Fig 3: Maya's dream, preceding the birth of the Buddha, railing of the Bharhut "stupa". The railings are made of sandstone and are engraved with sculptures representing incidents from the Buddha's life, the "Jataka" stories and other scenes. In the early art of Buddhism, the figure of the Buddha was never represented. Instead, there were symbols of him, such as a seat, footprints, the Bodhi tree, the wheel and the "stupa". The sculptural reliefs of the railings are a virtual library of early Buddhist iconographic motifs.



Fig 4: "Yakshi", Railing of the Bharhut "stupa". The "yakshi" is intertwined with the tree, presenting the early Indic view of the interrelatedness of the whole of creation. The touch of the young woman makes the tree blossom and bear fruit.



Fig 5: Elapatra, Naga Worshipping Buddha (Bharhut)



Fig 6: Stup at Bodhgaya



Fig 7: Stupa at Sanchi



Fig 8: Architraves of the north gateway (toran) to the Great Stupa (stupa No. 1) at Sanchi, Madhya ... (credit: Art Resource, New York)

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