

SANCHI: DESIGN OF STUPA NO. 1 - AS AN EXPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

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In the birthplace of Buddhism, India, there are many important historical sites, but if thinking about Buddhist architecture is the objective, the architectural complex at Sanchi and cave architecture of western Deccan are important. Due to space limitation, only the former will be dealt with here. Among many works of architecture at Sanchi, Stupa no.1 (photograph 1), temple no.17 (photograph 2) and monastery no.45 (photograph 3) are good examples that relate the history of Buddhist architecture. Stupa no.1 will be elaborated later. Temple no. 17 (c. 5th cent. AD) has only the 'garbhagriha' (sanctum) and entrance porch but no super-structure, as an earliest example of the masonry temple architecture of India that later developed centrally around the Hindu temple. Monastery no.45 (c. 10th cent. AD), which in the inner part of vihara has a garbhagriha, the superstructure ('sikhara') of which cannot be differentiated from a Hindu temple, is the embodiment of the trend of Hindu influence on Buddhism.

Stupa no.1, Sanchi

It is not an exaggeration to say that the distinctive features seen in Stupa no. 1 (c. 3rd cent. BC ~ c. 1st cent. AD) can be comprehended as the basis of all of Indian architectural spatial expression, making no distinction

◆Photograph 1: Stupa no.1



◆Photograph 2: Temple no.17



◆Photograph 3: Monastery no.45



between religions, the sacred or the secular. The vedikas or railings surrounding the main body of the stupa are fences used to protect the domain of sacred things like bodhi trees etc., generally called 'chaitya', a universally important spatial compositional element in India. The 'torana' (gateway) is famous for its sculptural relief depicting Buddhist narratives, including the guardian on the side-column or the figure of the nymph on the bracket etc. Its composition survives in the design of the doorway to the garbhagriha of masonry temples later on (especially in north India). Moreover, worshiping the central stupa by moving clock-wise around it along the circumambulating path in the space within the railings is also generally seen in the Hindu temple and elsewhere. The chattras on top of the stupa, which is the symbol of nobility, originates from the umbrella used to shield the noble from strong sunlight. More than religious, it may be said to be a simple form of 'consideration' of the people. The design of the Ashokan pillar in front of the southern 'torana' is the model of columns in all temples. Even the main body of the 'stupa' is not limited to Buddhism alone, and has Jain examples. In other words, the form of 'stupa' no.1 is simply not created from concepts of Buddhism per se. It already existed within the Indian socio-geographical environment, as a basic form for worshiping or venerating monuments or in the bases of daily propitious observations for good omen in day-to-day living space. The content of the sculptural relief or the storage of Buddha's bones are definitely Buddhist elements, but in the architectural design it can even be said to have none whatsoever. But once given form, as is the way of the world, it gained an independent identity and in countries like Sri Lanka, South Asia, China, Japan etc., where Buddhism spread to, it was truly accepted as the symbol of Buddhist architecture and achieved a characteristic evolution of its own. On the one hand, as a result of symbolization of the 'stupa', it lost its actual content and cultural background within India. Hence, it lost its place as the chief object of veneration to the image of Buddha, which provided more concrete possibilities and formal diversity for symbolic expression. Consequently, as

serious consideration was focussed on temple architecture to house the image of Buddha, the body of the 'stupa' itself went out of use.

Most of the Indian architectural heritage before the 5th century, including cave architecture, was related to Buddhism. Though they were the fountainhead of Buddhist architecture established as such in countries that it spread to, in India, in addition to 'Buddhist related', they were also important as 'Architecture' that expressed everyday architecture via the presently non-existent wooden framework. Further, through the process of change in the material from 'wood' to 'stone', they sublimated the expression of everyday architecture into the 'traditional expression' that the later developed masonry architecture furnished, undertaking a very important role in the history of Indian architecture, as a consequence. At that point it may also be said that they were like the womb in which 'a classical form' for Indian architecture took shape.

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