

Cultural Relationship between India and South-East Asia

Kadambini Singh^{1*} Dr. S. K. Mahto²

¹ Research Scholar, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh

² Research Supervisor, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract – Indian relations with Southeast Asia can be generally ascribed to the invasions of the Kushans into India in the 1st century AD; seeking fortunes overseas by high-caste Indian adventurers and their colonization of the locals. Traders were the key to the dissemination of social and cultural practices. Brahmanic rituals at the Khmer courts could only have been introduced by Brahmans, just as Buddhist monks spread the British doctrine. The practice of stamping tablets originated in India around the beginning of the Christian Era but it became more popular during the Gupta Empire. A lot of coins were discovered at Kyaikkatha in Lower Myanmar. Kyaikkatha was first identified on aerial photographs by U Aung Myint in 1976 and verified on the ground in 1981. Another old Pyu city, which yielded Buddhist archaeological evidences is old Halin city. It is situated in Wetlet Township, Shwebo District. Preliminary excavations were done by Taw Sein Ko, Director of the Burma Archaeological Department in 1905. From the end of first millennium B.C, in Southeast Asian regions, evidences of more complicated social structural development can be found in the early chieftain states. In conclusion, Indianization was widespread throughout Southeast Asia. Myanmar also is one of the Indianized states of Southeast Asia. There were elements that were seen as useful and practical to local communities, especially in relation to ideas of kingship. Buddhist, Hindu and Brahmanic concepts of the universe endowed the king with particular powers in the physical and metaphysical worlds.

Key Words – Cultural, Relationship, India, South-East Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Indian relations with Southeast Asia can be generally ascribed to the invasions of the Kushans into India in the 1st century AD; seeking fortunes overseas by high-caste Indian adventurers and their colonization of the locals. There are reliable evidences regarding the sea-routes followed by the Indians. Beginning from the north, there was first the famous port of Tamralipti (Tamluk) in Midnapur district of West Bengal. From this port, there was a regular sailing of vessels which proceeded along the coast of Bengal and Burma (Myanmar). At least as early as the 2nd century BC, there was a regular trade-route by land Bengal and China through Upper Myanmar and Yunnan. Through this route, the Indians came and established their colonies not only in Myanmar but also in the mountainous regions of upper valleys of the Chindwin, the Ayeyawady, the Thanlwin, the Mekong and the Red River as far as Yunan

Traders were the key to the dissemination of social and cultural practices. Brahmanic rituals at the Khmer courts could only have been introduced by Brahmans, just as Buddhist monks spread the British doctrine. Buddhist and Brahman priests also

established permanent bases. They built temples for worship, exposing indigenous population to these rites and rituals. The archaeological evidences show that Myanmar had the impact of "Indianization" in religious belief, the art of writing, culture and civilization.

The relations of Myanmar with India can only be safely said to date from the 5th century, on the strength of the 5th century Kun-Zeik Stone Inscription, the 6th century Botahtaung Votive Tablet, Amravati, Gupta Style Buddha images etc. found in Lower Myanmar, Myanmar. Buddhist legends, however, claim that two merchant brothers Taphussa and Bhalika of Ukkalapa of Lower Myanmar visited Majjhima of India during the life-time of the Buddha and that in the 3rd century BC, the famous Mauryan emperor Asoka sent the Buddhist missionaries Sona and Uttara to Suvarnabhumi, Thaton (Golden Land). Apparently Lower Myanmar had relations with India before 100AD. Indian merchants and traders arrived in Myanmar by sea and overland before that time.

Archaeological Findings in Myanmar

A large number of Buddhist Archaeological findings have been discovered in Myanmar. They include stone inscriptions, Buddha images, votive tablets, terra-cotta plaques, pot-sherds, etc. They constitute solid documents confirming the dates of the arrival of Indian culture and religions at Lower Myanmar and Upper Myanmar.

Stone Inscriptions

A considerable number of stone inscriptions were found scattering in Ramannadesa of Lower Myanmar. Most of them were written in Mon scripts. The Mon used Pallava scripts. Nai Pan Hla says that they derived the Pallava scripts from the Southeastern part of India in the 6th century AD.¹ Forchhammer thinks that Mon alphabets may have originated in one of the Telgu-Canarese alphabets.

Pyu Stone Inscriptions

In 1897, two gold plates bearing Pyu inscriptions were found at Maung Kan's field in Lebow village, Pyaw. The script is identical with the Kadamba script of South India of 5th century AD. Each plate contains three lines of Pali beginning with the popular Buddhist formula "Ye dhammāhetupphabha".

At Halingyi, a stone slab bearing Pyu inscription was brought to light in 1964 (Figure 5.1). There were six and a half long lines of Pyu writings with the same script found in Sri Ksetra. Although all the words are not decipherable, the Royal Titles "Sri Trivikrama" and "varman" are quite clear. Regarding these titles, U Aung Thaw remarks in his recent book "*Historical Sites in Myanmar*" on page 13: "It may be presumed that this inscription records a certain event associated with the Vikrama dynasty or the Varmans of Sri Ksetra".

Kaw Gun Cave Inscriptions

Kaw gun cave is located on the western bank of the Thanlwin River, 28 miles north of Mawlamying and 6 miles south of Pa-an in Lower Myanmar. This cave yields remarkable antiquities. A three-line old record inscribed on the stone wall of the audience hall of the cave in and Sanskrit mixed with Mon begins with the Hindu god Paramesvara.

Shwedagon Pagoda Stone Inscription

This stone inscription was found by Forchhammer on the eastern side of Singuttara Hill where the Shwedagon Pagoda stands. It contains 3 large stone slabs standing about 4 feet apart from each other. They were erected by king Dhammaceti in 1485. This stone inscription is the only epigraphic evidence which mentions oceanic journey of Taphussa and Bhallika of Lower Myanmar to Majjhima-desa.

KunZeik Stone Inscription

It is found at KunZeik Village sitting on the Sittaung River, ShweGyin Township, Bago Division on the Gulf of Muttama. It is now kept at the Kambojasadi Palace in Bago. It includes 19 lines written in Kadamba script on the front face. The portion from the 14th to the 19th line is a mixture of Anuloma Patikasamuppādapatiloma Patikasamuppāda.

Kalyānī Stone Inscription

It was inscribed by king Dhammaceti in 1479 (843 M.E) in Hamsāvati. It includes 10 stone slabs, 3 of which were inscribed in Pāli while 7 in Mon. As both sides of the slabs were written, pages totalled 20, 6 in Pāli and 14 in Mon. Today, it is housed in the KalyānīSima in Bago. It records not only the brief history of Buddhism in Majjhima-desa after the demise of the Buddha but also those of Buddhism in Lankadipa and Myanmar. Famous Myanmar treatises on religion such as, Sāsana-lankāra, Sāsana-vamsappadipika, Vamsamedappakasanī and Sāsana-bahusutappakasanī are found to have much religion of Myanmar.

Votive Tablets

Votive tablets are small Buddha icons, usually made out of baked or unbaked clay by a press-mould technique, a process that has been used for many hundreds of years to produce religious objects. The practice of stamping tablets originated in India around the beginning of the Christian Era but it became more popular during the Gupta (4th -6th centuries AD). These tablets display figures of Buddha, Bodhisattva or Tantric divinities and often include Buddha creed-the Yedhamma stanza. They are made as a means of acquiring merit. Coedes is of opinion that the practice of making clay votive tablets was confined only to the Buddhists but Dr ThanTun argues against his opinion by asserting that the tablets are also being used by devotees of Hinduism. Myanmar votive tablets belong from the 6th to the 15th centuries AD.

Buddha Images

Buddhists have the tradition of making Buddha images for worshipping on the Buddha's behalf. The Buddha images are regarded as Uddissa-Cetiya; one of the four types of Cetiya. But it is hard to trace back to the time of inventing Buddha images. During the life time of the Buddha, created Buddha (nimitta Buddha) was made by the Buddha himself when he went down to the Uttarakuru for alms-meal while he was preaching the Abidhamma-Pitaka in Tāvātimsa. It is said that although the art of making Buddha images started in the 2nd century AD, the symbols representing the Buddha such as wheels of the Dhamma, deers, etc. may date as far back as Asoka Period (3rd to 1st century BC). The earliest Buddha images are said to have been made in

Mathura in India. In general, there are five positions for seated Buddha images (1) Dhammacakkamudrā (2) Dhyānamudrā (3) Abhayamudrā (4) Bhumisparśamudrā and (5) Varadamudrā.¹⁶ A considerable number of old Buddha images were found scattering over Ramaññadesa.

Finger-marked Bricks

Finger-marked bricks are found at Thaton and nearby sites such as Kyaikkatha, Sanpannago and Dawei. The origin of finger marking in South Asia, however, remains unclear. Preliminary survey of Buddhist sites in India and Nepal recorded finger-marked bricks in Bihar (at Kosambi, Rajagriha and Vaishali), Uttar Pradesh (at Kusinara, aravasti and Varanasi [Sarnath], and Kapilavastu¹⁸. Finger-marking can be used as a rough guide only, but provides valuable evidence of first millennium AD habitation.¹⁹ The use of finger-marked bricks in Myanmar indicates the relationship between Myanmar and India since first millennium AD.

Coins

A lot of coins were discovered at Kyaikkatha in Lower Myanmar. Kyaikkatha was first identified on aerial photographs by U Aung Myintin 1976 and verified on the ground in 1981. The site occupies a unique position at the mouth of the Sittaung River, linking it to the Gulf of Muttama. During the 1981 survey, a horde of coins was found at Kyo Bin Kone Kyaung, a monastery to the southeast of Kyaikkatha. These were decorated with conch or Sankkha and Srivatsa motifs and stylistically dated to the 5th century AD. The design of the silver coins was adapted from South Asian pieces—notably of Andhra region—in the early centuries AD and employs a common repertoire of symbols.²⁰ In addition to Kyaikkatha coins, two silver coins with Srivatsa and conch shell and Srivatsa and a radiating sun were discovered at Winka²¹ and Ayetthema villages at the foot of Mt. Kelāsa. The four symbols most often seen in Myanmar are Srivatsa, the Baddapitha, and the swastika rising sun, and the Sankha or conch. These are dated back to the 6th to 7th century AD, but others are of early centuries AD.²² Coins were also discovered in Pyu City-States namely Beikthano, Halin and Sriksetra and Hmaingmaw (Pinle).

Urbanized Pyu City-States in Myanmar

In Myanmar, transition to urban civilization was made in the 2nd century BC. The earliest settlers in Myanmar were the Pyus. They lived along the Ayeyawady. They built city-states namely Beikthano, Halin, Sreksetra and Pinle. Monumental evidence, literary evidence, and sculptural evidence show that Pyus were the good Buddhists.

The site of old Beikthano is located near Kukkogwa village, 12 miles west of Taungdwingyi, Magwe

Division. Its city-wall is nearly in the rectangular shape. Old Beikthano is also called Panhtwamyō. Later, King Duttabaung occupied Beikthano and married princess Panhtwar. As it was the city destroyed by King Duttabaung who ascended the throne in 442 BC, it can be assumed to be the city which emerged in about 5th century BC.

Through the analysis of the building in the north-south alignment, the north-south city-wall deviates 13 H towards the west. So, Dr Than Tun ascribed the age of Beikthano to late 2nd with a peculiar structure, and, Buddhist artifacts such as bronze Buddha statue, bells, etc. were unearthed (a bronze Buddha Statue, a bronze bell, four bronze lamps of various sizes, etc. were recovered from the mound No.13 on 10.6.2004). The ears of the Buddha statue are long and a little broader in their upper parts and droop downwards almost enough to touch the shoulders. The hairs on the head are balled in spirals. The hem of the robe is folded in two or three layers.⁴ It is learnt that the religious objects found in Beikthano were Theravada Buddhist artifacts. When the Buddha statue excavated from Beikthano were shown to the learned scholars of India, it is learnt that they are in close affinity with those housed in Ajantar Rocky Cave in the western part of India and they are the ancient Buddha images.

It seems that Buddhism arrived at Beikthano earlier than at Srikhestra. Only buildings were discovered in the early phases. But no image or icon was discovered at all. Therefore, it can be assumed that practice of iconic (practice of worshipping no image) was introduced earlier into Beikthano. This testifies to the fact that the founding of Beikthano may be earlier than the 2nd century BC or contemporary with King Asoka. However, it is believed that the practice of worshipping Buddha images at Myanmar may have been attributed to the 3rd or 4th century AD, or later. It is considered that Beikthano may have continued flourishing up to the 5th or 6th century AD.

Halin City-State

Another old Pyu city, which yielded Buddhist archaeological evidences, is old Halin city. It is situated in Wetlet Township, Shwebo District. Preliminary excavations were done by Taw Sein Ko, Director of the Burma Archaeological Department in 1905 and by Duroiselle, Director of the same department in 1929. Two Pyu stone inscriptions were unearthed from these excavations. These scripts go back to the 4th century AD.

As one of the stone inscriptions contains the name 'Srivikrama', which is found on the burial urns in Srikhestra, there might have been some connection between Halin and Srikhestra. No Buddha statue and votive tablet were discovered in Halin as in Srikhestra. Since there is a lid of a pot resembling a

stupa in Halin, it is presumed that Buddhism reached Halin. It is found that the stupa engraved on the lid is the one containing terrace, down-turned lotus, up-turned lotus, bell-shaped floral design, etc.

Pinle City-State

Another ancient Pyu city in which Buddhist artifacts and buildings were discovered is old Pinle city. It is located 5 miles southeast of Kume by the side of Yangon-Mandalay High Way in Myit – Thar Township. As it lies closest to the Nathtaik pass out of the old cities scattering over the Kyaukse plain, it would have been a commercial hub in those days.³⁰ It can be assumed that as it was an important city on one of the two China-Pyu-India land trading routes, it was a militarily, economically and religiously significant centre at that time.

Regarding Pinle, the Jambukonchar Treatises states thus:

“...The four previous Buddhas had lived in that region in their previous births. The first king of the dynastic line ruling the region was king Wanatakakutappa and the last king Cetissa...It was known as UatyaungPancalarit during the life time of the Gotama Buddha but as Pinle in Pyu Period...”

During the excavation of No (8) mound in old Pinle City in the 1981-82 field season, a hollow silver Buddha statue and an Arahata statue under the debris of bricks in the No (2) layer were found. Therefore, it can be said definitely that Buddhist objects including a Buddha statue, an Arahata statue, religious edifices, etc. found in Pinle are Uddiyaceti of Buddhist. These excavated objects are very important religious artefacts for the Buddhist.

Trade as the exchange networks in South and Southeast Asia: Literary and Archaeological aspects:

“Trade” is one of the important aspects which lead to the foundation of the Southeast Asian states. This is because the expansion of trade system rested upon the more complicated level of society. Thus, the development of urbanization is identified with the growth of commercial system. Moreover, the invention of coinage system was introduced in order to support and facilitate the trade over a larger expanse of area for the far distant connections.

The scene of ancient trade journeys to far distant regions have been clearly narrated in several early literatures. The Jatakas had given an account of traders who used to travel on various vehicles; their activities such as of establishing basic civic amenities like wells and tanks along the roads as well as rest houses for staying over nights. Generally, the Jatakas also mentions about the location of ports and commercial city centers that connect. Along with this, the Jatakas often referred that the group of

traders hailed from different social classifications but entered into partnership while going on for long distant trade journeys (Chandra 1977: 56-57; Sigh 2009). In addition to the detail of traders, there are some references from literary sources that mentions about the various items involved in trade exchange between different regions of the subcontinent. These trade items included cotton textile, sandal wood, silk, fine muslin, horses, camels, elephants and steel weapons from several parts of country. The Arthashastra also has given a special detail of south cotton textile from Kanchi and Madurai as well as other trade commodities like shells, diamonds and other precious stones, pearls and Golden items (Kulke and Rothermund 1987: 98).

Contemporary settlements in the peninsular India included iron- using communities that emerged around the early part of the first millennium B.C. The available evidences indicate that it formed the nucleus in the upland region. Megalithic sites expanded into the river basins and coastal areas, thereby involving a shift in the subsistence pattern. Generally, a majority of the Megalithic sites in South India have been postulated with the time bracket ranging from 1000 BC to 300 A.D. (Ray 1994 : 13 ; McIntosh : 1983).

The traces of inter-regional trade can be substantiated with archaeological evidences like grave goods or raw-materials used for making the ornaments. Especially in the peninsular region, there had been a network extended along the Andhra and Tamil coast into northern Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in accordance with the deposits of copper, iron and high quality garnets. Apart from these items, the fisheries materials like chanks and pearls had been most productive in the peninsular region where facing the north of Sri Lanka founding along with the Megalithic sites in both countries. Another indicator of the prosperity which is not included in these exchange networks is the uneven distribution of gold ornaments in Megalithic burials. The fact that some of the richest sites of such type are located in Soutteoukey near Arikamedu and Adichanallur (Casal: 1956; Rea: 1915). The Kaveri River provided a link between the coastal Megalithic sites and those further inland as indicated by the similarities in gold jewellery from the burials of the Nilgiri Hills (Knox 1985: 523-533).

States formation in Southeast Asia: political history and social-economic structures the beginning of “Indianization” process

The diffusion of Indian culture to distant parts of Central Asia, China, Japan and especially Southeast Asia is certainly the greatest development of Indianized culture. In Southeast Asian countries, there are numerous splendid monuments reflecting the intensive complications of Indian arts as well as the sophisticated philosophy such as Pagan (Burma: 1044-1287 A.D.), Angkor

and the group of monuments (Cambodian: 889-1300 A.D.) and Borobudur (Indonesia: early of 9th century A.D.). Though they were influenced by Indian culture, nevertheless they have shown their native aesthetic concepts and had portrayed an important character in history of representative countries.

First of all, there are some fundamental problems concerning the transmission (diffusion) of Indian culture to the vast regions of Southeast Asia. The Historians have formulated several theories regarding the spread of Indian culture to the Southeast Asia: 1) The Kshatriya theory; 2) the Vaishya theory; 3) The Brahmins theory.

The first theory states that Indian warrior clan like princes or Kings had colonized Southeast Asia. Presently, this proposition has been rejected by most scholars though it was very much accepted some time back. The Vaishya theory contributes the expansion of Indian culture to guilds and traders. It is certainly much more plausible than the Kshatriya theory, but it seems not well enough to explain an intensive cultural impact that demanded higher capability to initiate like Sanskritized literatures and complicated religious ritual. The last theory is concerned on the role of Brahmanas as the major introducers of Indian culture to the Southeast Asia due to their finest knowledge on religious rituals as well as literatures, but it may need to be substantiated more firmly by other references of the Buddhists as well as the traders.

The emergence of early state formation in Southeast Asia

From the end of first millennium B.C, in Southeast Asian regions, evidences of more complicated social structural development can be found in the early chieftain states. Gradually, the local rulers had started contributing themselves in the process of social hierarchy and tried to upgrade their positions as chieftains for being more intensively "centralized" society by the expansion of dominance over dependent settlement. Actually, according to archaeological evidences from some megalithic sites in Southeast Asia, the trace of primary aristocratic society had been revived in the simplest forms which are apparent from the various grave goods and burial pattern.

Thus, it can be assumed that the concepts of social ranks had been practiced continuously and had improved to be more distinct for the benefit of certain state administration.

Generally, the development of the early states has involved several aspects of cultures such as technology, crafts specialization, literature, long distance trade, public sustainable functions and administrative system. The most striking variable was the social organization in which successive leaders

from elite families in different regions sought the superior position of eminence. To approach the goal, there were several common ways like attracting a large number of loyal followers, establishing the royal power to be more centralized conducted by sophisticated sacred ritual and military forces. There were some reputed lords who had proved to be perfect in this grand royal concept and had magnified their political power, not only in the region of their dominance but also far beyond their territories into larger and more complex form of social organization. This kind of state formation that mainly governed and occasionally expanded its area of domination without exact boundary depending on the strength of central power was particularly formed in early Southeast Asian urbanization.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Indianization was widespread throughout Southeast Asia. Myanmar also is one of the Indianized states of Southeast Asia. There were elements that were seen as useful and practical to local communities, especially in relation to ideas of kingship. Buddhist, Hindu and Brahmanic concepts of the universe endowed the king with particular powers in the physical and metaphysical worlds. Textual and archaeological evidences show that Indian civilization had great influence on the religious belief, art of writing, coins, votive tablets and inscription and India and Myanmar had very strong civilizational linkages.

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Corresponding Author

Kadambini Singh*

Research Scholar, Shri Venkateshwara University,
Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh