

Architect of Anand Temple and its Social Relevance

DR. NISHAT TABASSUM

The Anand temple at Pagan has long been held the most interesting monument in Burma (Myanmar) and is famed as one of its national glories. Apart from its outstanding religious importance, it is unique store house of stone sculpture and terracotta bas-reliefs of the late medieval period.

It was founded by Kyanzittha. According to the Glass palace Chronicle, he worshipped the spirits when he ascended the throne, he dug tanks, repaired old monuments and did many other meritorious works but curiously enough no mention is made in any of his lithic records regarding the foundation of the Ananda temple. The date generally assigned for the foundation of the temple is A.D. 1090. This is a traditional date but evidence is not lacking to show that if it is not vigorously correct, it is only by a few on either side. A comparison of the characters of the inscriptions existing on the terracotta plaques discovered on the basement and terraces of the temple with those belonging to Kyanzittha's time (A.D. 1084-1112) leaves no doubt to the period of the foundation of the temple.

According to the legendary account, the site on which the Ananda was to build was pointed out by Kyanzittha by Indra. The foundation was sixty cubics deep and were strengthened by layers of stone thirty ft. in depth. These stones on the order of Indra, were brought over by 4,000 yaksas. The water for mixing the mortar was obtained from a river encircling mount Meru and the earth for use as mortar from the Grandhamadana hill. Four hundred architects and forty thousand workmen were employed in the temple and three were forty arhats, the four Lokapalas and Viswakarma supervising it. It is said that the underground relic chambers contained the images of Gods, men and scenes illustrating the life of the Buddha all in pure gold, besides corporal relics of the Buddha himself.

According to another tradition "this temple is said to have been built in the reign of Kyanzittha, about the time of the Norman conquest of England. It has the legend that five rohandals or saints of an order second only Buddha, arrived at Pagan from the Hemawoods or Himalayan region. They lived in the caves on the Nanda-Moola hills (probably the Nanada peak) and the King requested them to give him a model of their above, from which he might construct a temple. The Rohandals did as they were requested and the temple being built was called vandastee goon, or caves of India. The term ananda, which the temple is being now

known, is a corruption¹, arising from the name of ananda, the cousin and favorite disciple of Gautama.

There can be not doubt that architects who planned and the Ananda were Indians. Everything in this Temple from Sikhara to basement as well as the numerous stone sculpture found its in corridors and the terra cotta plaques adorning its basement and terraces, bear the indubitable stamp of Indian genius and creftmanship. It may be here remarked the from 1056-57 when, after the conquest of Thaton, the extraordinary architectural, sculptural and painting activity began in pagan to about the beginning of the 13th century, practically nothings is to be found that does not bear the stamp of Indian workmanship. In this sense, we may take it, therefore that the Anand, though built in the Burmese capital, is an Indian temple.

The main temple consists of a square basement measuring 175 ft. on each side, rising to a height of nearly 30 ft, its sides facing the cardinal points. It is surmounted by two receding terraces crowned by a spire, the total might from the base to the top of the iron hit or umbrella being 172 ft. A distinguishing feature of the Ananda is its cruciform shape in plan. From the center of each face of the basement there project a large gabled porch like an arm of a large Greek cross. Each porch is 57 ft. long and it double this, to make up the length of the two porches, one on either side, be added to that of a side the basement, we obtain nearly 290 ft. as the entire length of the Ananda as each way.

Internally the building is remarkably massive and solid, the walls being of enormous thickness. In the center, there is a huge cubical mass of brick work in each side of which has been left a deep recess enshrining a colossal standing Buddha-image². This cubical mass besides being the principal sanctuary of the temple with its four Buddha images facing the cardinal points, also acts as the mainstay of the building on which the greater part of the superstructure rests. Two circumambulatory and parallel corridors run round it covered over with lofty vaults and communicating with the deep recesses in the central block and the porches outside, by transversal corridors, each porch is divided into a nave and a row of side aisles by large brick columns.

There are other noticeable features in Ananda. One of them is that the plinth round the main temple and porches is divided into base moldings and cornices with a cresting of battlemented parapets. The frieze; or central space is set with small panels in which are embedded glazed terracotta plaques. On half of these plaques illustrate the hosts of Mara assaultint the Buddha stated under the Bodhi Tree, the other half represents his apotheosis after the defeat of Mara³, with hosts of heavenly being crowding round the master. At the bottom of

each plaque is a plaque is a short legend explaining, in the case of Mara's warriors, the nature of the warriors and in certain cases that of the amount of its hideous rider.

At every corner of the plinth, there is figure of a double bodied lion seated on its hind legs on a low pedestal projecting from the main building. The wall above the plinth of the basement rises to a height of 30 ft. It is ornamented with pilasters and capitals, and with frieze and cornice molding, the latter are crowed, as in the case of plinth, with a battlemented carpet. In each battlement were sunk, originally a green enameled plaque, many an example of which may still be notices on the battlements round the plinth. Most of the plaques on the wall have, however, disappeared or have been covered over with many coatings of whitewash. The two tiers of window openings flanked by plasters piercing the wall are prominent features. The latter stand out from the surface of the wall, and in the case of lower tier, each set of pollsters rests on a portion of the plinth, which is broken here and made to project beyond the main one. An arch-pointed in from, springing from the plasters and surmounted by flamboyant ornaments, is thrown over each opening.

Inside the wall is honey combed with niches arranged in four tiers. In the lower tiers are placed stone relief illustrating the principal episodes in the Buddha's life. The series opens with a scene in the Tushita heaven where the Bodhisattva svetaketu accedes to the request of the Devas that they should be reborn on earth as Buddha. and ends with the representation of his temptation by Mara's daughter and attainment of Buddhahood. These reliefs number eighty in all, and below mass of brick work in each of them explanatory level in Burmese painted on a wooden board has been recent years attached by a devout Buddhist. A frieze with a deep moldings separates these from the next two tiers of niches above, the latter enshrine images of Buddha in stone sitting cross legged in the usual earth-touching Mudra. Besides the niches, there are other smaller ones, one in each jamb of the window openings, also containing stone reliefs, some of which illustrate scenes from the anterior lives of the Buddha. The Buddha enshrined in the niches are of two types. One seated on a throne in the act of preaching with the hands brought up before the breast, and other in the common earth touching attitude. It is this series of sculptures that have made the Ananda so famous as the greater store house of stone sculpture in Burma.

The next circumambulatory corridor, which separates the inner wall from the cube in the center of measures 7 ft 4" across, and the cube itself measures 82'9" on each side with an internal height of 52 ft. In each of the four faces of the latter is a deep and high races, each facing the cross passage connecting the circumambulatory corridors with the porch outside,

and each containing a colossal images on the north, east, south and west respectively, the four Buddhas of the present cycle, who have already appeared and entered Nirvana, viz Kukusandhu, Konagamana, Kassapa and Gotama.

Toa niches on each side of the figure of Gotama on the West face, contain the stone images, probably copied from the life of king Kyanzitha, the founder of the Ananda temple and of Shin Arahan, a Buddhist monks Thaton, Kyanzitha⁵ has the usual royal ornaments. Viz a necklace or breastplate and anklets. His dress consists of a close-fitting jacket and a lower garment of which the folds are clearly discernible Shin Arahan is distinguishable by his clear shaven head and the lack of ornaments.

In the porch on the west face, there are two Buddha-Padas (Buddha's foot print) placed on a pedestal. Each foot-print bears the traditional 108 marks as enumerated in some of the Pali commentaries, but owing to the gilding and wearing away due to constant washing. Some of these marks have disappeared and cannot be probably identified. They are divided into small panels, and marks on each foot print are identical with those on the other hand.

Inside the porches, there are riches containing stone image of Buddha and stone reliefs illustrating scenes from his life. Each entrance to the main building is provided with a wooden door consisting of two leaves, and is guarded by two Dvarapalas, one on each side, standing on low pedestral. Each leaf of the door swings on the lower end of the inner style, which is made in a stoke socket burtied in the flooring beneath, the upper end of the style being secured by an iron built into the jamb.

The porches, corridors, and four great recesses in the central block are covered with vaults containing pointed or semi-pointed arches, Each recess in the central block is roofed over with a pointed value with gable ends, the arches springing from a point 35 ft 5" above the floor level with a span of 18 ft.

There are two ago roofed over the two inner circumambulatory corridors, the terraces proper, four in numbers, rising above them. These two roofs and the first terrace above them. These two roofs and the first terrace above them are practically square in plan, with a miniature Sikhara or ringed Pogoda standing at each corner.

There are number plaques which illustrate the Jataka or anterior lives of the Buddha. They may be divided into two series. The first series, in which one Jataka is assigned to each plaque, illustrates the previous existences of the Buddha upto and execulsive of the Mhanipata of last ten existence of the Budhisattva before be become a Buddha, the second series illustrates, in 389, plaques the principal episodes in these last ten great Jataka.

Reference :-

1. Majumdar, R.S. Surandripe pp- 193-95
2. Abid
3. Ansari, A.Q. "Burma" The hand of unity and diversity, "University in Diversity" IBC, Bodh-Gaya P-109
4. Hall, DGE History of South East Asia PP 302-07
5. Abid