

## **PAINTINGS RELATE WITH STŪPA IN SRI LANKA: A CHRONICLE REVIEW**

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### **Introduction**

Conservation of specific physical materials which have been fulfilled as heritage according to their emotional, usage or cultural value in a chamber is an illustrated common characteristic in most of cultures in the world. When we consider about Asian context, it is a common feature which illustrates its excellence through Buddhist culture. It is tradition of constructing Stūpas for honouring prophet, memorial, gratitude, offering or various those types of objectives. This is kind of thing that influenced of pre Buddhist worships & beliefs which has been beginning since end of last millennium BC & continuing until today.

But in this case we cannot forget that, even tradition of Stūpas could not be able to develop without political, economic, social & cultural institutions. With the expansion of aims of Stūpa relative with time & space, it was developing as an architectural creativity with the main aim of offering. Chronicles & archaeological remains from Stūpa reveal about the tradition of ornamental which was built with the correlating of Stūpa. Various types of strategies like paintings, sculptures & carvings have been used to improve offering purpose & decorative perfection. This is justifiable for external & internal structure of Stūpa. Among those three art mediums it will be expected to concentrate about paintings of Stūpa which are revealed through chronicles.

### **Discussion and Results**

Classical chronicles & literature are fruitful for preparing earliest information about paintings related to Stūpas. Most of researchers mentioned that the description of Ruwanweli Stūpa relic chamber in xxxii chapter in

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*mahawamsa* might be the oldest literature source. It descriptively mentions the splendor bodhi tree & Buddhist statue in the middle of relic chamber & surrounding paintings of specific occasions of Lord Buddha, vessantara story also individuals & groups which came to see Lord Buddha. This kind of same story has been mentioned in *tupawamsa* which is believed to be written in 12-13 century AD. But some of incidents which are not in *mahawamsa* & some of summarized materials are descriptively mentioned in there. As an example, though *mahawamsa* mentioned only about vessantara story, description of incidents in an order has been mentioned in *tupawamsa*.

Because of the belief of written period of *mahawamsa* as 5-6 century AD, this has been accepted as the oldest mention about paintings in Stūpa. But ordering historical incidents according to the time, the mention of creations in Seruwila Stūpa relic chamber in *dhatuwamsa* should be older than the creations in Ruwanweliseya relic chamber. Seruwila Stūpa was built at least three decades before than Ruwanwelistūpaat the time period of king Kawantissa. But its description about creations in relic chamber is similar to the ruwanwalistūpa relic chamber description in *mahawamsa*.

Most of researchers mentioned that creations in relic chamber of *mahiyangana Stūpa* are related with paintings but reverent Miriswatte Ghanawimala mentioned an alternative idea about that. According to that statement sculptures & statues would be used to illustrate the various incidents & characters in relic chamber. It depends on the review of description in *mahawamsa*. According to *mahawamsa*, creations in relic chamber have been made from '*ghanakottimahemassa*'. The word defines in *mawamsa* annotation as 'casted hard gold'. Also *dampiyaatuwagetapadaya* mentions the word of '*ghanakottima*' & defines it as 'hard cast'.

The story called as ' tale of Sinhalese statue' in *jinakalamali* gives a details about the method of gold casting from the description of making a gold statue after 700 hundred years from Lord Buddha's pass away. According to that firstly make a statue from beeswax & outer crust (this should be a clay layer) also prepare well (heat until removing the melted beeswax) finally pour the melted bronze, lead, gold & silver to create the



statue. This is similar to recent method of metal casting. So, the mention of 'casting of thick gold' creations in *mahawamsa* can be assumed as similar as that kind of technology. If it is, the creations which were related with relic chamber in Ruwanweli Stūpa could be sculptures but not paintings.

### External paintings in Stūpas

Mahawamsa mentions not only about internal paintings but also important statement about external paintings in Ruwanweliseya. 32 chapter which is called as 'journey of tusitapura' mentions the process of showing the finale finishing of ruwanweliseya to king Dutugemunu who was about to die. There is a description about paintings also. According to that 'purnaghatapankthi' & 'pasagulpankti' were designed by painters in the white cloth covering which was attached to the upper part of Stūpa as a jacket. 'Purnaghatapankthi' means series of filled pots. 'Pasagul' otherwise 'pasagulpankti' defines five fingers. So, Kumaraswami mentions that this shape could be a similar shape of deploying five fingers of a hand. This symbol has been used as symbol which illustrated identity of Buddhism in early Buddhist era. These types of decoration groups can be recognized from Stūpa chambers in sculptures of ancient monuments in India. It is kind of circle shaped ring with five vertical creeper lines which are connected to the lower part of it & whole creation is symmetrical. Associated decorative tradition of ancient Stūpa might be substituted for mahatupa.

### Conclusion

As a whole, Stūpa associated painting expanded depending on Buddhist cultural traditions. But it does not mean that paintings did not get the influence from other cultures. According to the art theories objectives of Stūpa paintings were expanded than objectives which are expected from painting. The aim of Stūpa painting is offering perfection than generating & feeling of enjoyment. Secondly a decorative perfection for Stūpa was expected from paintings. According to the primary theories of painting, function of communicating of painting is depending on its visual. Otherwise



the size of its function of communicating decides upon the possibility of visualizing the painting for individual or community. But communication of Stūpa painting is wider than that. Paintings which are drawn in a relic chamber are visualized until the closing of chamber after the storing of offering goods. But function of communicating of paintings is not ended from that. Stūpa paintings are appreciated again & again. Sometimes literary sources mention miraculous descriptions which were not in reality through memorizing & assumptions. Also, paintings caused to improve the ritualism of Stūpas. Finally, Stūpa painting is kind of art tradition which moved people from delectation to wisdom.