

# **Conservation and Management of Sacred Places**

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## **Origin of Sacred Places in Ancient India**

The tradition of Buddhists and ascetics in ancient India resulted in sacred places eg. Residence of Private Buddhas traditionally at Gandhamadana Mountain made that become sacred place, residence and austerity-practice of Samana-Brahmana at Uruvelasenigama(Bodhgaya) made that become sacred place, or residence and austerity-practice of Samana-Brahmana at Isipatanamigadayavana(Sarnath) made that become sacred place.

In the time there was no fashion of construction of buildings, or the Lord Buddha had not allowed monks to stay in buildings, all the sacred places were blank location, just surrounded by natural environment, without buildings. The birth-place, enlightening-place, place of giving the first sermon and place of passing away of the Lord Buddha were also without buildings in the beginning, lodging-places of other ascetics were also without buildings. This is the first characteristic of sacred places in ancient India.

The second characteristic is; the sacred places were equipped with following buildings: stupa(or chetiya, or pagoda), dwelling-place(vihara), pavilion(mondop), or other things. This is clear that the tradition in construction of buildings in sacred places partly belonged to Buddhists. In the period of the Lord Buddha, after cremation of senior monks' body, He always informed Buddhists

to construct stupa (pagoda) at intersection-road to house the relic (or remainings) of those so that the Buddhist devotees would have a chance to give homage to it.

In the time near to passing away, the Lord Buddha told Ananda the Elder about how to handle His cremation-ceremony like Emperor's cremation-ceremony ie. the stupa should be built at the main cross-road to house relic and other sacred things. The people who worshipped that stupa with garland of flower and other incenses or just prostrate oneself to it or appreciate it, that would be benefits and happiness for those peoples. The Lord Buddha told the story of four kinds of people for whom the stupa should be built to house their relic or remainings as well as other belongings after cremation of their bodies, those were; *the Fully Enlightened One, the Private Buddha, the Buddha's Disciples and the Emperor*. The tradition should be done like this for the purpose of later generation's worshipping or recollecting.

This tradition is popular among Buddhists, it was well known and practiced not only in the period of Siddhattha Gotama Buddha, it was well known and practiced in the period of other Buddhas as well. When Each Lord Buddha passed away, after cremation of their bodies, the big or small stupa would be built up for housing their relic and other remainings eg. The stupa of Gondanna Buddha was seven yojanas high (112 km.), stupa of Mangala Buddha was thirty yojanas high (480 km.). This tradition was carried on because of two purposes:

1. for worshipping and recollecting goodness of those Buddhas
2. for being the evident to insist the existence and prosperity of effective teachings of each Buddha.

The more the tradition in establishment of monasteries for monks was very popular, the more the sacred places were built. It seemed to be loosely criterion that in each monastery there should

be buildings as follows; lodging-place for monks and for housing sacred things, stupa, pavilion.

Not only in monastery the buildings were constructed, but also in the places related to the Lord Buddha, or Buddha's disciples, Buddhist devotees liked to construct the sacred buildings for the purpose of worshipping. This tradition has been handed over from generation to generation.

In the time of King Asoka the Great, having supported the third Buddhist Council, His Majesty traveled to important places related to the Lord Buddha or His disciples, and ordered His subordinates to construct lodging-place, stupa and pillar across the country, numbering 84,000 for each.

## **Origin of Sacred Places in Thailand**

### **1. Buddhist Sacred Places**

The tradition in construction of religious sacred places in India is very popular and has been introduced into foreign countries continuously upto the present. Thailand has inherited this tradition partly from India, partly from Sri Lanka and other neighbouring countries.

In ancient time, the main sacred places are monasteries, in each there shall be lodging-place for monks and housing sacred things such as Buddha Images, sanctuary hall(uposatha hall), stupa (or chetiya, thatu, boromthatu) pavilion, Tipitaka-building, bell-building, public hall for merit-making. Or some monasteries may be equipped with only some buildings depending upon readiness of those monasteries.

In ancient time, the way of life is very wonderful. In the time the country is peaceful, the good man who are rich, like to establish monasteries, to build lodging-place and stupa then put small Buddha images inside (that may be votive tablet). They do this because they want to collect merit, to ascend to heaven, or to

get an emancipation (Nibbana). In Ayutthaya period, this tradition is very popular so much so that sometime foreign merchants have seen this phenomena, the admiration and faith are arisen in their mind, so they beg for taking part in these meritorious deeds ie. establishment of monasteries, construction of stupa, putting small Buddha image inside for collecting merits. Through this tradition in ancient time, numerous Buddhist sacred places have been inherited from time to time, some of those are still in good state, or some are just ruins. In Thailand we are proud that we have the historical park of Sukhothai, the ancient city of Ayutthaya, stupa (Chetiya, Prang, Thatu, or Boromthatu, Rock Castle) etc. found all over the country.

In the present day, the tradition in construction of sacred places are still popular among Buddhists as previous day. Here there are about 30,000 monasteries all over the country, and when the due time comes, Thai Buddhists are ready to establish monasteries, whenever they have enough money, they have never hesitated to construct lodging-place for monks and Buddha Statues, to build stupa, sanctuary hall all the time. There is no limit of number in this matter.

## **2. Sacred Places of other religions**

Apart from Buddhist sacred places, there are Christ Church, Brahmana Temple (or Hindu Temple) Sikh Vihara, Mosque found in Thailand.

## **Necessity of Conservation and Management of Sacred Places**

### **1. Eradication of threat to Sacred Places in the present day**

There are many forms of threat to sacred places such as the public or although the authoritative person do not see values and do not appreciate, so they neglect to take care of, they do not cooperate with each other to be responsibility for anything, even though the sacred places are invaded by somebody, or some parts of sacred places are stolen.

Authoritative persons or related persons have no sufficient knowledge to take care of, to restore, to conserve and manage in appropriate way. Sometime in reality, they have good intention, but because of lacking of knowledge the architectural characteristic of sacred places are destroyed.

Wrong attitude or way of thinking can be threat also such as some people think that the sacred places are just ordinary things on earth, they are created, last for sometimes and destroyed or disappeared naturally after sometimes. Then new generation will construct the new one replacing the old one in adfinitum. So there is no necessity inevitably to maintain, some people think that some sacred places are not important in historical aspect, so it is no need to keep.

Construction of new things between or inside is another kind of threat such as;

- construction of new sacred places squeezing through antique sacred places

- construction of non-matching sacred places squeezing through such as Hinduists in Buddhists, Christians in Buddhists, (it is not mixtured art)

- construction of new non-sacred places squeezing through new or antique sacred places.

- construction of new sacred places by modern knowledge without schools of ancient art inherited from time to time

These threaten the sacred places, irrespective of antique or new one. The sacred places are specific in time, place and person,

those cannot be put between or through each other without deliberately consideration.

To eradicate these threats, we have to set up policy and project to conserve and manage sacred places.

## **2. Benefiting people in present society from sacred places in every dimension**

The sacred places are useful in many dimensions; ethical, social, aesthetical and economical. What benefits do today humanity get from sacred places located in their own country ? having seen those, can we see philosophical meanings hidden inside those ? what are concealed in the state of sacred places ? the religious doctrines concealed in those are as follows:

(1) **Faith:** The wonderful sacred places on earth are created by our ancestors through power of firm faith, when we visit the birth-place, enlightening-place, place of giving first sermon and place of passing away of the Lord Buddha, do we know that how power of faith is succeeded from time to time ? every year the flux of devotees take a visit and give homage to those. When we visit Nalanda Mahavihara and Ajanta Cave in India, Dunhuang Cave on Silk Route, Dumbulla Cave in Sri Lanka, Monastery of the Emerald Buddha in Thailand, how power of faith we can see:

Ajanta Cave, Dunhuang Cave, Dumbulla Cave are alike in terms of construction ie. digging in, or drilling inside mountain, carving and making stupa, Buddha Statue, pavilion or different sculptures by cutting rock. Having seen these wonderful things, we have at least four hard questions which are very difficult to give answers:

-from where these modern instruments the people in those days took and used in construction ?

-how much money was spent in construction ?

- how many man-powers were used in these activities ?
- how long did it take to complete construction ?

When we take a visit Monastery of the Emerald Buddha, how power of faith we can see, how complexity of thought did the people in those days have.

(2) **Effort:** These wonderful things are not completed in one or two years, the people in those days took many generations to finish, it means that how effort it is, how continuity of effort it is.

(3) **Wisdom or Intellectuals:** From where the people who constructed these wonderful things, learnt knowledge of artistry; Taxila Institute ? How was the culture of Harappa and Mohenjodaro inherited to the period of construction of these wonderful things ? How complicate and prudent were the eighteen liberal arts studied by the people in those days ? These wonderful things reflect the intellectuals of each nation and they are evident that how is the philosophical background of those nations strong ?

(4) **Unity:** Much man-power is employed in construction of these wonderful things, so the unity of people who take part in the project, is needed.

(5) **Aesthetics:** The spiritual beauty can be expressed in forms of architecture, sculpture, painting or literature in the time the nation is strong and prosperous. That is the time mental fantasy is exposed.

These virtues are hidden inside sacred places. The conservation and management are the way of encouraging the people to know and appreciate and to pick up these virtues to teach each other and new generation to absorb and follow these good models. These are the benefits that our nation should get in dimensions of ethics, society and aesthetics.

Talking about economical benefit, to buy and sell materials is to destroy resources on earth directly and indirectly. To produce one commercial thing is to destroy another thing at the same time.

We have one building, it means that mountains, trees, water in canal and many other resources are destroyed. Is it true ?

The culture in form of sacred places can be bought and sold without limit, the more we sell, the more value added arise without destroying any other thing. The merchants who buy this culture, cannot really take it with them. What they can do is only to take a photo, visit or buy some books. Wherever, therefore, these value sacred places are located, the people there including all humanity should get benefits.

### **3. Creation an opportunity to learn from the past Connecting to the present**

What do the sacred places tell us ? Having studied history of those, what model from the past do we get to be the guideline for creating different thing in the present ? What the sacred places tell us are as follows:

- (1) prosperity of nation in the past
- (2) relation between religious way of life and worldly way of life
- (3) religious way of life of people in society
- (4) relation between our own nation and foreign nation
- (5) fine and complexity of thought as well as philosophy of people in each period
- (6) status and role of some groups of elite in the past society.

### **4. Keeping sacred places last in the same type**

How many sacred places disappear from perceiving and remembrance of humanity ? How many sacred places are there hidden under the ground ? or how many sacred places are there which are restored in the wrong way so that the original type is

destroyed completely ? This is the result of lacking of right conservation and management.

The conservation and management in the right way, systematically and technically will keep sacred places in the original type forever.

## **Primary preparations for Conservation and Management**

1. Encouraging the people to appreciate sacred places by way of educating them, giving them knowledge of history in every dimension, publicizing the informations.

2. Equipping authoritative people and related people with knowledge of how to construct, to conserve and to manage. MCU in collaboration UNESCO Bangkok Office created BA. Curriculum majoring Buddhist Art, now this curriculum has been taught in MCU, Chiang Mai Campus.

In the period of the Lord Buddha, there were monks who were in charge of construction called “Navakammadhithayi”, it is name of position, meaning “monks who were in charge of construction”. There also were monks who were in charge of managing the sacred places called “Senasanapannapaka” and “Senasanakahapaka” meaning “monks who were in charge of preparing sleeping place and seat” and “monks who were in charge of giving sleeping place and seat” respectively.

In the past, if there is enough area, monasteries are divided into two zones; zone for sacred things such as Buddha statues, pagoda, sanctuary hall etc. called “Buddhavasa” and zone for monks’ residence called “Sanghavasa”. Apart from this, before construction of sacred buildings, the layout (master plan) must be prepared first, the format of layout is like that of Mandala (Gabbhadhatu-Mandala and Vajradhatu-Mandala according to Tibetan tradition), this can be found in layout of ancient monasteries in Ayutthaya.

3. Cooperation between government officials, religious persons and the public along with transferring knowledge to each other.

Between 21-23 of November 2007, UNESCO Bangkok Office in collaboration with MCU organized international workshop on topics “Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha” at MCU, Wangnoi Campus, Ayutthaya Province to evaluate the projects run in different site. There were representatives of 42 sites from 8 countries participating in this workshop. We shared knowledge and experiences with each other.

4. Clear cut rule and regulation along with abiding strictly by it

5. Master plan for conservation and management of sacred places as a whole

6. Blue print of each sacred place to be guideline for restoration in the future

7. Not paying an attention too much to economical dimension.

Above all, we cannot expect the success from this policy without appreciation and cooperation of local people. No high technology in the present can help us, even though numerous budget cannot help.