

## **Ideatic Transmission of Buddhism: A Case Study of Bihar and Myanmar (c. 250 BCE to c. 1200 CE)**

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### **Abstract**

*Transmission of any idea enriches the culture it relates to and when an idea reaches to any new place and adopted by the locals, it faces some changes according to the local needs and indigenous culture of that new place. For instance, the cultural exchange between India and Myanmar. Indo-Burmese relation was prolonged and intensified since the early historical period. Buddhism was working as a bridge to connect these two cultures. Buddhism took birth in Bihar and many places in Bihar such as Bodh Gayā, Nālandā etc. hold august position in the Buddhist world. At present Myanmar is a Buddhist country and from the ancient time it has a strong connection with Bihar. Various kings, scholars and common people visited Buddhist places of Bihar and established relation by influencing and being influenced by the local people and cults. This article is an attempt to investigate the nature of the cultural interaction between India and Myanmar in the context of transmission of ideas from one place to another place. Further, it traces the early Buddhist cultural contacts between India and Southeast Asia, with special focus on Bihar, a province in Eastern India, and Myanmar, a Mainland Southeast Asian country. Legends claim that the Buddha himself visited Myanmar several times but historically this has not been proved. This research paper will study the primary as well as secondary sources to find out the early historical relationship between these two places in connection of Buddhism.*

**Keywords:** Buddhist culture, Transmission of Ideas, Indianisation, Greater India, Southeast Asia, Bihar, Myanmar

## **Introduction**

Ideas travel beyond any physical or political boundary. There are various mediums which carry these ideas to another places. These mediums are trade, religions, literature, art, architecture etc. Spreading ideas results enriching culture.<sup>i</sup> Indian ideas travelled to Southeast Asian countries without any 'clash.' Indian ideas were adopted largely by the locals with some variations according to their indigenous culture and local needs. Ideas of Indian Buddhist culture are not exceptions. There was no political hegemony in the process of adaptation of Indian culture by the peoples of Southeast Asia. Here, in this paper, there is a case study of Bihar, birthplace of Buddhism, and Myanmar, a Theravādin country. Bihar connected with Myanmar through its culture and not by trade or military expeditions.

## **Objectives of the study**

Objectives of the present research paper are as follows:-

- To analyse the process of Ideatic transmission from one place to another place.
- To trace out the role of Buddhism in strengthening the cultural relation between India and Myanmar.
- To investigate the early Buddhist cultural contacts between Bihar and Myanmar.

The discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization and the study under the arena of 'Greater India' are two mile stones in the Indian historiography. The former takes the history of India back to more than two millennia and the later rejected the theory that the mountains and seas are the walls which made India compelled to develop a unique civilization, neither influencing nor being influenced by its neighbors. In fact, India was influenced by many civilizations i.e. Mesopotamian, Chinese etc. and on the other hand it influenced many neighbouring civilizations with great impact on Southeast Asia.<sup>ii</sup>

Southeast Asia is in the east of India and in the south of China. Hence, it is in near contact of world's two oldest and greatest civilizations. Southeast Asia is connected with India and China by both the routes, land route as well as sea route. Southeast Asian countries Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam share land boundaries with China while Myanmar is connected with land route with India. This region (Southeast Asia) is between the Bay of Bengal (from west) and the South China Sea (from east). The Bay of Bengal connects it with the Indian Ocean while the South China Sea connects Southeast Asia with the Pacific Ocean. This connectivity provides this region a significant place in the world trade which always attracted various traders and trade groups from all over the world including Arab traders, European traders etc.

Culturally, Southeast Asia is rich and very much influenced with its neighbouring Indian culture.<sup>iii</sup> India left impact on Southeast Asia at large extent and as a result, Indian influence reflected in the nouns used for Southeast Asia such as Greater India, Further India, Indianized States, Hinduized State etc. Calling Southeast Asia as the extension of India like 'Greater India' is a subject of long debate, however, scholars admit unanimously the Indian impact on Southeast Asian culture. There are three major theories for the spread of Indian culture to Southeast Asia. The first is, *Kshatriya* (warrior) theory. This theory attributes the direct Indian conquest and colonization of a major part of Southeast Asia for the transmission of Indian ideas to this land. Economic historian J. C. van Leur does not agree with this theory. He finds no evidence of such Indian conquest on the land of Southeast Asia. In fact, he believes that the Indian ideas arrived Southeast Asia by peaceful means.<sup>iv</sup> The second theory is *vaiśya* (merchant) theory. This theory emphasises the role of merchants, especially Indian merchants, engaged in the Bay of Bengal for the spread of Indian Ideas. These traders brought Indian cultural artefacts and ideas to Southeast Asia along with their goods.<sup>v</sup> Van Leur again shows his dissatisfaction with this theory too. He believes in the third theory i.e. the *Brahman* (priest or the intellectual class) theory. John Legge sees Indian influence mostly in Southeast Asian royal courts. Further, it is concerned with the royal courts and the other matters of high culture such as art, architecture, ideas of power, sovereignty and kingship.<sup>vi</sup> Thus, Van Leur believes that these transmissions must be the work of *brahmans*, who were the only group

possessing the mastery of “sacred magical power and sacred religion.” Southeast Asian rulers were keen to learn the Indian ideas of political organisation, which was relatively more organised and its emphasis on magic and mystery enhanced the ruler’s legitimacy and authority.<sup>vii</sup>

*Brahman* theory provides complement to the ‘Idea of the local initiative’ which is derived as the transmission of Indian ideas in Southeast Asia as ‘active process’ rather than mere passive adaptation. It means the people of Southeast Asia did not adopted Indian culture in toto but adopted according to their folk culture and tradition which suit their own needs and values. Amitav Acharya sees this transmission of ideas as cultural diffusion. He strongly believes that ideas can spread peacefully, all the foreign ideas are not accepted by the locale in the process of convergence and there are certain permissive conditions which facilitate this process. Basically, Acharya refutes the hypothesis of “Clash of Civilizations” established by Samuel P. Huntington,<sup>viii</sup> with the case study of India’s interactions with Southeast Asia in the classical age or before the advent of Islam and European colonialism. He demonstrated that when the process of diffusion of civilizations takes place as it was in the case of India and Southeast Asia, they (civilizations) do not necessarily clash with each other but cohabit and cooperate. They do not compete, but can learn from each other.<sup>ix</sup> He shows that how India’s soft power, rather than military expedition or political hegemony, influenced culturally the Southeast Asian region.

The present research paper works on the above theoretical framework and attempts to unearth the process of transmission of Indian ideas to Mainland Southeast Asia through Buddhism. For instance, as a case study, it talks about the transmission of Buddhist ideas from Bihar, birthplace of Buddhism, to Myanmar, a Theravādin country of Mainland Southeast Asia. Bihar is a land lock state in India (officially, the Republic of India) located in the Eastern part. Myanmar (or Burma, as previously known), a Southeast Asian country, is one of them which is culturally connected with India. Myanmar is a Mainland Southeast Asian country which is one of the eight neighboring countries of India.<sup>x</sup> Both the countries are sharing 1,468 km (912 miles) of international boundary which runs vertically from China in the north to Bangladesh in the south.

When it comes about India and Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal becomes bridge to connect both of them. The Bay of Bengal provides suitable connectivity for maritime trade between India and Southeast Asia. The coastal regions of Eastern India has easy access to the ports of Southeast Asia. Indian influence on Southeast Asian culture reflects in its arts, architecture, sculpture, language, religious practices, customs etc. Although, Bihar has no direct access to the Bay of Bengal but is has influenced Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar. Bihar was never indulged in trade as dedicated as other eastern states of India, Bengal or Odisha. The reasons are simple- it has no direct access to maritime so it was depended upon the neighbouring regions. For instance, Aśoka needed to conquer Kalinga for the same reason. Secondly, no trader group or community emerged in Bihar as it is seen as the Multanis in Gujarat and nearby regions.<sup>xi</sup> Although, Bihar is a producer of agrarian products or other goods like silk etc. this does not make it significant actor in trade in the Bay of Bengal. Then, what makes Bihar rich to share with the rest of the world? That is its cultural wealth. The same is in the case with Myanmar. Bihar could share with Myanmar its culture, especially Buddhist culture, and shared the same throughout the period.

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions of the world but the historicity of the Buddha was unknown to the western countries (Europe) till the middle of the eighteenth century CE.<sup>xii</sup> Eugène Burnouf was the very first scholar who established the Buddha as a historical figure and was of an Indian origin.<sup>xiii</sup> Before the publication of his book<sup>xiv</sup> the Buddha was considered mythical and there was a debate on his origin that whether it was Asia or Africa (Ethiopian) and sometimes of Nordic origin. He, Burnouf, admits that Buddhism is completely of an Indian origin and that the true Buddhism is of a human Buddhism.<sup>xv</sup> It was not originated in heaven but in Ancient India. These facts can be found in original Indian texts i.e. Sanskrit texts. Further, he demonstrates that the most important Buddhist texts preserved in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese languages are, in fact, translations and the original composition was in Sanskrit. He stressed that original Buddhist texts should be analysed to have an authentic picture of Indian Buddhism.

Buddhism emerged as a religious movement against the traditional beliefs and customs. Its philosophy and principles are based on the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha was born in

Kapilvastu (Pāli Kapilavatthu), a small republic of the Śākya, presently in Nepal, in c. 567 BCE. His childhood name was Siddhārtha (Pāli Siddhattha), the literal meaning of which is “wish fulfilled.” His father Suddhodana was one of the chieftains of the Śākya clan.<sup>xvi</sup> His mother, Māyā or Mahāmāyā, died in a few days after his birth. The boy Siddhārtha was brought up by his aunt and stepmother Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī (Gotamī). Siddhārtha was called Gautama (Gotama), as he was brought up by Gautamī,<sup>xvii</sup> and Śākyaśimha, as he was born in a Śākya family.<sup>xviii</sup> His attitude was more philosophical. He was spending much time in thinking and walking alone. His father Suddhodana was worried about his future, so he did all possible arrangements for Siddhārtha’s engagement in material life. At the age of sixteen he was married to Yaśodharā or Gopā, the daughter of king Daṇḍapāṇi of the Koliyan republic. They had a son whom Siddhārtha called Rāhul (literally ‘hindrance’). But this household indulgence too could not stop him and he left his home and family at the age of twenty nine in search of truth. He started to live a life of an ascetic. As an ascetic, his life was not simple, he wandered hither and thither and met with saints and other ascetics like Ālāra Kālāma, Uddaka Rāmaputta or Rudraka Rāmaputta and the Pañcavaggiyas (the five mendicants). Finally, he was enlightened or became enlightened one at Uruvelā, near Bodhgayā (in the modern Gaya district of Bihar) under a giant peepal tree (the *Bodhi* tree). After his enlightenment he was known as *Buddha* (the fully Enlightened One). He, then, started wandering in the Ganges valley of Northern India and preached ‘the truth’ he found to the people till his death in c. 487 BCE.

Buddhism was emerged in Bihar in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and soon it became popular throughout India. It was flourished under the patronage of various rulers like Aśoka, Kanishka, Harshavardhan, Pāla rulers etc. and reached outside India. Foreign invasions, revival of Hinduism, lacking in patronage to Buddhism, sacking of Nālandā (by Turks in 1197 CE) etc. attributed Buddhism to its decline not only in Bihar but also in India. At present, Buddhism is the fifth largest religion (by population) in the world after Christianity, Islam, Secular or Atheist or non-religious group and Hindu. Its total population in the world is around 506 million which is approximately 7% of the total world population. Theravāda Buddhism is the state religion of Myanmar (with around 90% of

Buddhist population).<sup>xix</sup> Earlier, Theravāda Buddhism was declared as the state religion in Myanmar in 1056 CE during the reign of king Anawrahta or Aniruddha (1044 CE -1077 CE) of Pagan Empire, known as the first empire of Myanmar. But Buddhism was introduced here, much earlier, in the third century BCE during the reign of Emperor Aśoka and it was flourishing here from the early period of the Common Era. Some legends and folk tales of Myanmar claim that the Buddha himself came to their land and visited several times.

Bihar and Myanmar both have played important role in spreading Buddhism. Although Bihar is the birthplace of Buddhism but now a few Buddhists are living in Bihar. Bihar is the place where the Buddha achieved his enlightenment (in Bodhgaya). He spreaded his teachings and got patronage of the Magadh rulers. Buddhism flourished there and soon established itself as an important religion. The first three Buddhist councils were held in Bihar. The first Buddhist council was held in Saptaparni cave, Rājgrih under the patronage of king Ajātaśatru in 483 BCE. The second council was held in Vaishālī in 383 BCE under the patronage of king Kālāśoka. While the third council was held in Pāṭliputra in 250 BCE under the patronage of Emperor Aśoka. Under his patronage Buddhism was spread at broad level and reached to Suvarṇabhūmi (Myanmar). On the other hand, Myanmar is known as one of the major countries following Theravāda Buddhism where total number of Buddhist population is 45,185,449 which is 89.8 per cent of the total population of Myanmar.<sup>xx</sup> It continued the tradition of organising Buddhist councils for the same reasons. It has hosted the fifth (1871 CE) and the Sixth (1954-56 CE) Buddhist Councils in Mandalay and Rangoon respectively.

The most popular Buddhist place in Bihar is Bodhgayā, where the Buddha attained his enlightenment on the bank of river Nirāṇjanā. It is the place where Buddhism received its first royal patronage by Magadh rulers. It is one of the four most revered pilgrimages related to the life of the Buddha. The Buddha himself tells to Ānanda, according to *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence the four places related to the life of the Tathāgata, the Buddha.<sup>xxi</sup> First place is Kapilvastu, the birthplace of the Buddha. Second is Bodhgaya, where the Buddha attained supreme enlightenment. Third is Sārnāth, the place of the



very first sermon- *dharma chakra pravartan* and the fourth is Kusinārā where the Buddha passed away into the state of *nibbāna*. The Buddha mentioned all the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, laymen and laywomen should visit these places with feelings of reverence. Further, he added that if one, who has heart full with faith, die on any of these places, will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness.<sup>xxii</sup> Thus, significance of these four places is pious and highly revered and Bodhgayā is one of those. Secondly, Bodhgayā is the place where Siddhārtha became the Buddha.

Almost ninety per cent population of Myanmar is the followers of Buddhism and as being the birthplace of Buddhism, Bihar always keeps a privileged position in the religious and cultural life of Myanmar. Bihar and Myanmar have cultural links from the early historical period and Buddhism remained always a prominent contributor for making their relationship stronger. This paper will analyze the early Buddhist contacts between Bihar and Myanmar. Further, it talks about the sharing of cultural ideas between these two distinct places. Various political delegates, religious missionaries, merchants and travelers are the witnesses of the early links between these two regions, Bihar and Myanmar. There was two way communication between these two regions.

### Lord Buddha in Myanmar

The Sāsanavaṃsa mentions several visits of the Buddha to Myanmar. Other than the Sāsanavaṃsa, Mon, Myanmar and Arakanese (present day Rakhine, lower Myanmar) oral traditions also explain the arrival of the Buddha to their land. Legend says that the Buddha with thera Ānanda and five hundred disciples visited Dhanyawadi, the then capital of Arakan. Before the departure of Lord Buddha from Dhanyawadi the king of Arakan made a request to him for his image to worship.<sup>xxiii</sup> Thus, before leaving the place the Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree for meditation for a week. Then Sakka and Vissakamma (Sanskrit Vishvakarma) moulded an image of the Buddha using gems.<sup>xxiv</sup> The image was called 'Mahāmuni Image' and after this event Arakan is known as 'the land of the great image'. Another story says that this 'Mahāmuni Image' was built during the reign of king



*Sandathuriya* (146-198 CE).<sup>xxv</sup> The mention of this event is found in *Hpayà-thamaing* (literally, 'pagoda history') too, which presents a dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda during their peregrination to Arakan.<sup>xxvi</sup> From Arakan they went to Lower Burma (Myanmar). In this dialogue the Buddha also talks about his earlier travels to Arakan. Bischoff believes that the Buddha's first arrival to Myanmar did not leave a lasting impact on the people of Myanmar.<sup>xxvii</sup> It means the Buddha left impression in his later visits. Bischoff's belief about several visits of the Buddha depends upon the *Sāsanavaṃsa* and other legends which do not prove these arrivals historically.

### Tapassu – Bhallika

Another important event popular in legends is the arrival of the hair relics in Ukkala<sup>xxviii</sup> (Yangon) soon after the Buddha's enlightenment. These hair relics were brought to Ukkala by two merchants whose name were Tapassu and Bhallika. These merchants, Tapassu and Bhallika, were travelling through the region of Uruvelā and were directed to the Buddha by their family God. The Buddha had just awakened after seven weeks of meditation and was sitting under a tree feeling the need for food. Tapassu and Bhallika made an offering of rice cake and honey to the Buddha. The Buddha accepted their offering and blessed them with the two refuges, the refuge in the Buddha and the refuge in the Dhamma (the third refuge, the Sangha, did not exist yet). They were the first lay followers of Buddhism. As they were about to depart, they asked the Buddha for an object to worship in his stead. Then the Buddha gave them his eight hairs from his head. Tapassu and Bhallika returned from his journey and reached Ukkala, they enshrined three hairs in a stupa which is now known as the great Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon. Hiuen-Tsiang writes in his travelogue the incident of two merchants who offered wheat and honey to Buddha seated beneath the Bodhi tree. Although he does not mention the names of these two merchants and places they belong to.<sup>xxix</sup>

### The Jātaka Tales

Jātaka stories are previous birth stories of the Buddha. There are 547 stories which speak about the previous lives of the Gautama Buddha. These stories portray pictures of various dimensions of

contemporary society. For instance, society, economy, religion and religious faith, nature of politics, education, superstitions, trade and trade routes etc. of the Buddha's time can be studied through these Jātaka stories. These stories or various scenes of these stories can be easily found sculptured in India as well as outside of India on various walls, caves, railings etc.<sup>xxx</sup>

These stories through light on intra and inter boundaries trade in India. Various land as well as water trade routes can be traced through these stories. According to these tales people were at hand in ship industry and sea trade. Merchants were shipping towards both the directions from the Indian peninsula. Indian merchants were active in both the seas the Bay of Bengal as well as the Arabian Sea. Although many Jātaka stories refer trade routes through the Bay of Bengal and islands were found during the journey in this gulf, but many islands are unnamed and it is difficult to trace the proper location of these islands. In *Sīlānisamsa-Jātaka*, the Bodhisattva was born as a Sea-Spirit and he saved a person from an island, which name is not mentioned in the story, by helping him to reach India.<sup>xxxii</sup> Same stories like *San̄kha* Jātaka mention a place named Gold Country.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This Gold Country is said to be the district of Burma and Siam. This place is also known as *Suvarṇabhūmi*. A clear connection between Bihar and Myanmar is found in *Mahājanaka* Jātaka.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This Jātaka story is about Prince Mahājanaka who was the son of King Ariṭṭhajanaka of Mithilā,<sup>xxxv</sup> Bihar. The King was killed by his brother Polajanaka and the pregnant queen succeeded to escape to a city Kālacampā or campā, capital of the Aṅga country.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Once, in the story, when the sixteen years old Mahājanaka was discussing to his mother about seizing his father's kingdom, he said, "Mother, give that wealth to me, but I will take only half of it, and I will go to *Suvarṇabhūmi* and get great riches there, and will then seize the kingdom."<sup>xxxvii</sup> This statement shows that how beneficiary the trade with *Suvarṇabhūmi* was. Campā was a very famous city and had trade relations with *Suvarṇabhūmi* or Gold Country or lower Burma.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Mithilā has been identified as the modern Janakpura, a small town near the India-Nepal border. In Bihar, this geographical and cultural region consists of the districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and other districts surrounded by the Mahānandā River from the East, the Gaṇḍak River from the West, the Ganga River from the South and foothills of the Himālayas from the North. This trade connection

shows that the people of Bihar and Myanmar were well known to each other and were sharing their culture with each other during the Buddha's time.

Although aforementioned events of the Jātaka Stories and arrival of the Buddha and the two merchants to Myanmar are broadly accepted by the people of this country but both these events are more legendary and less historical. Other than these events some more examples are found which show that Burmese were in contact with Bihar. For instance, according to Kalyani inscription of Dharmmaceti, Mahathera Prānadassi of Sudhammapura (Thaton, lower Burma) was visiting (through his supernatural powers) the Mahābodhi tree in Uruvelā daily in the morning and used to sweep the courtyard.<sup>xxxviii,xxxix</sup> Another instance is found in *The Glass palace chronicle*, which mentions that the king *Alaungsithu* (1112-1168 CE) as well as Shin Araham had visited Mahābodhi.<sup>xl</sup> Once Shin Araham was going to Mahābodhi for worshipping there he met, in the sky, the prince of Pateikkara, who had a gem in his mouth.

### Arrival of Sona – Uttarā to Suvarnabhūmi

The first historical contact between Bihar and Myanmar is found in the mid of 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE when Thera Sona and Thera Uttarā arrived to Suvarnabhūmi (most probably the lower Burma). The third Buddhist council was held at Pāṭliputra (Pāli Pataliputta) during the reign of Emperor Aśoka in 250 BCE. He was proved as a pioneer for the propagation and expansion of Buddhism across and abroad India. After a few years of the third Buddhist council, he sent Buddhist missionaries to various parts of Indian subcontinent along with Suvarnabhūmi. This dispersal of Buddhist missionaries has been recorded in various sources such as *Mahāvamsa*,<sup>xli</sup> *The Glass Palace Chronicle*<sup>xlii</sup> etc. Thera Sona and Thera Uttarā were sent to Suvarnabhūmi where they propagated the Theravāda form of Buddhism. There, they established a monastery at Kelasa Mountain.<sup>xliii</sup> They preached the Brahmajala Sutta which led to 60,000 conversions and 5,000 recruits.<sup>xliv</sup> Buddhism, then, reached to the Pyu and the Mon kingdoms and many Burmese cities were influenced by it.

### Nālandā Mahāvihāra

Establishment of Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the beginning of institutional education which mainly focused on the higher education like modern residential universities or research institutions. Earlier the Brāhmanical education system, the *Gurukul* system, was unorganised and not providing education to all the classes of society. Some other important *mahāvihāras* of ancient India were Vikramśilā, Odantapurī, Valabhī etc. But Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the oldest learning centre for Buddhist studies.<sup>xlv</sup> It had a big campus with thousands of teachers and students. It was the centre for study the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism. Works belonging to the eighteen sects of Buddhism and Vedas along with other subjects such as *Hetuvidyā*, *Shabdavidyā*, *Chikitsavidyā*, the works on Magic (*Atharvaveda*), *Śāmkhya* etc. were also being taught.<sup>xlvi</sup> It was providing many other facilities like free lodging, boarding and amenities.<sup>xlvii</sup>

### **Replicas of Mahābodhi temple, Bodhgayā in Burma**

The first epigraphic evidence of interactions of Burmese rulers with Mahābodhi has been found from the Kyanzittha's reign (1084-1113 CE). But it is possible that the visits of Burmese elites and ordinary pilgrims to Mahābodhi may go back to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> century CE i.e. before the reign of Kyanzittha. Mahābodhi temple of Bodhgayā has significant role in connecting the people of Bihar and Burma. For Burmese people, this temple had great importance which is reflected in the building of 'replicas',<sup>xlviii</sup> representation of the temple within Pāya complexes, and depiction on seals, plaques and sealings. We find two replicas of this temple of Bodhgayā in Burma. First is in Pagan known as Mahābodhi Paya, which was built in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. And the second replica, the Shwegugi Paya is in Bago, which was built between c. 1460-1470 CE during the reign of Dhammaceti. The Burmese were connected to this Buddhist site.

### **Burmese Repair Missions and *Buddhapādas* worship**

Burmese kings sent (probably in 1100 CE and 1296 CE) two missions to Bodhgayā for restoring the temple, the Mahābodhi temple. These missions were called 'repair missions'. Both the missions succeeded in altering the original design to the temple.<sup>xlix</sup> A Mon inscription of Kyanzittha (c. 1084

CE to c. 1111 CE) at Shwesandaw pagoda, Pyay refers to a Burmese repair mission.<sup>i</sup> This mission was asked to repair the temple and buy some land to dig a tank (for irrigation) and perform some other activities in the temple. These activities include making arrangements for singing and dancing in the temple, burning candles and presenting various musical instruments.<sup>ii</sup> This instance shows that Bodhgayā had been established as an important centre of Buddhist patronage and it was attracting the people from outside the India. An inscription of late 13<sup>th</sup> century CE in Bodhgayā also confirms this incident. It was written in Burmese on a grey basalt slab. Luce relates this incident with the 'King of Dhamma', 'Lord of the White Elephant'.<sup>iii</sup> While other scholars do not agree with this view and suggests another kings like *Tarukplyi* or his son *Klawcwā* or *Klacwā*. But the incident has been accepted by all of them.

Another important bridge to connect Bihar and Myanmar was the practice of *Buddhapādas* worship in Myanmar and its promotion in Bodhgayā by the Burmese people. Burmese pilgrims and repair missions, sent by Burmese political elites to Bodhgayā to repair the Mahābodhi temple complex, used to come Bodhgayā time to time. They introduced (probably) and were promoting the footprint worship (the *Buddhapādas*) at Mahābodhi. They did it by turning miniature *stūpas* into *Buddhapādas*.<sup>liii</sup>

The above discussion shows the transmission of ideas from one culture to another culture and the host culture (Myanmar) adopted the ideas of alien culture (India) with some changes according to their indigenous culture. Although, trade and political ambitions play significant role to interact with other regions, neighbours as well as distant nations, but Bihar became a different example to strengthen political, economic relation through cultural. Relating Burmese legends to the birthplace of Buddhism, Bihar; sending repair missions; constructing replica of the Mahābodhi temple; frequent visit of pilgrims and delegates etc. show the significance of this place for authentication of these ideas and activities. Architecture, sculpture and various art forms also witnesses the cultural exchange between these two regions. For instance, the *aṣṭamahāpratihārya*<sup>liv</sup> in Pāla sculptural style emerged in Bihar-Bengal region is found in Myanmar as *atthāthān*.<sup>lv</sup> Various Buddhist folk tales and legends of Myanmar are related to the place of its origin, Bihar.

On the whole, the above analysis shows that Bihar and Myanmar are culturally connected through Buddhism since the very early historical period. Arrival of the Buddha to Myanmar is not acceptable historically and according to literary sources Buddhism was introduced to this land during the reign of Aśoka. Holding of two Buddhist councils in Myanmar in the previous two centuries shows the status and significance of Buddhism in this country. At present, Buddhism is less popular in Bihar but flourishing proudly in Myanmar and Bihar is still recognised as a sacred place in the Buddhist world including Myanmar. Bihar is rich in Buddhist cultural heritage and till today it attracts pilgrimage in millions through various Buddhist sites and fairs and festivals like annual *International Tripiṭaka Chanting Ceremony* in Bodhgayā, *Mahayana Chanting Ceremony* in Rājgir etc. Thus, the contribution of Bihar in cultural interaction between India and Myanmar is very significant. This contribution is communicative rather than combative.

## Notes and References

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<sup>i</sup>Culture is an umbrella term which is manifested through ideas, religion, art, sculpture, architecture, literature, customs, traditions etc.

<sup>ii</sup>The term 'Southeast Asia' came into existence during the Second World War after the territories south of the tropic of Cancer were placed under Lord Louis Mountbatten's South-East Asian command. The term 'Southeast Asia' is now popular and very common among the scholars.

<sup>iii</sup>Although, Southeast Asia has been influenced by both the cultures India as well as China but it has more cultural affinities with India.

<sup>iv</sup> Van Leur, J. C. (Ed.). (1955). *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*. The Hague: W. Van Hoeve Ltd.

v Mabbett, I. W. (1977). The 'Indianization' of Southeast Asia: Reflections on the Historical Sources. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 8 (2), 143-161. Retrieved on September 22, 2018, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20070221>. P. 143-144.

vi Legge, J. (1992). The Writing of Southeast Asian History. In Tarling, N. (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 1-50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 8.

vii Van Leur, J. C. (Ed.). (1955). *Op. cit.* P. 357.

viii Huntington, Samuel P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

ix Acharya, A. (2013). *Civilizations in Embrace: The Spread of Ideas and the Transformation of Power (India and Southeast Asia in the Classical Age)*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. P. 3.

x Other seven neighbouring countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

xi Multani is a trade group migrated from Multan to Gujarat during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Begada (1458-1511CE). This group is originally related to cotton and salt trades.

xii Arnold, E. (\_\_\_\_). *Light of Asia*. Taiwan: Buddha Dharma Education Association. P. 9.

xiii Burnouf, E. (2010). *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*. (Katia Buffetrille and D. S. Lopez Jr., Trans.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

xiv His book was originally published in 1844 CE in French with the title *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*.

xv Literally "a completely Indian fact". Burnouf, 2010, *Op. cit.* P. 51.

xvi Harvey, P. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press. P. 14.

xvii V. N. Mahathera believes that *Gotama* was probably his family name. Thus his name was Siddhārtha Gautama or in Pāli Siddhattha Gotama. See Mahathera, V. N. (1998). *The Buddha and His Teachings*. Taiwan: Buddha Dharma Education Association. P. 3.

xviii Hazra, K. L. (2018). *History of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia (with special reference to India and Ceylon)*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. P. 10.



xix Buddhism is the fifth largest religion (by number of followers) after Christianity, Islam, unidentified or a group of atheist, non-religious, agnostic, secular etc. and Hinduism.

xx Census report of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Volume 2-C The Union Report: Religion. Department of Population Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population Myanmar July, 2016. P. 3. Retrieved on December 21, 2018, from [https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNION\\_2C\\_Religion\\_EN.pdf](https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNION_2C_Religion_EN.pdf)

xxi Vajirā, S. & Story, F. (Trans.). (2010). *Last Days of the Buddha: The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. P. 37.

xxii Ibid.

xxiii Simpson, A., Farrelly, N. & Holliday, I. (Eds.). (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar*. Routledge: Routledge Handbooks.

xxiv Schober, J. (2002). *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Tradition of South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. P. 267.

xxv Alam, A. (1999). *A Short Historical Background of Arakan*. Chittagong, Bangladesh: Arakan Historical Society. P. 6-7.

xxvi Leider, J. P. (2009). Relics, Statues, and Predictions: Interpreting an Apocryphal Sermon of Lord Buddha in Arakan. In *Asian Ethnology: Power, Authority and Contested Hegemony in Burmese-Myanmar Religion*, Vol. 68, no. 2, 2009, p. 335.

xxvii Bischoff, R. (1995). *Buddhism in Myanmar: A Short History*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. P. 9.

xxviii Identified as Okkalapa near Yangon. But some scholars believe it to be modern Orissa (Utkal) on the east coast of India.

xxix Beal, S. (Trans.). (1884). *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World (Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang A.D. 629)* Vol. II. London: Trubner & Co. P. 129.

xxx In India, such depictions are found in the Ajanta Caves. On the walls of cave numbers 16 and 17, some Jātakas are inscribed such as Satsuma Jātaka, Shada-Danta Jātaka, Visvantara Jātaka, Shama Jātaka, Mahājanaka Jātaka etc. On the railings round the relic shrines of Sānchi and Amravati too Jātaka scenes are sculptured. Fa-Hien mentions such depictions in Abhayagiri Monastery during his visit to Ceylon.

xxxix E. B. Cowell (Ed.). (2015). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* Vol. II, No. 190, P. 77-78. *Jāt.* 190. Vol. II. P. 77-78.

xxxix Ibid, Vol. IV No. 442, P. 9-13.

xl E. B. Cowell, op. cit. Vol. VI. No. 539, P. 19-37.

xli Mithilā was the capital of Videha. Rhys Davids traces Mithilā 35 miles northwest of Vaishālī, the capital of the Licchavis. See Davids, T. W. R. (1911). *Buddhist India*. London: T. Fisher Unwin. P. 26.

xlii Aṅga, Bhagalpur and nearby region, is one the sixteen *mahājanpadas* of the early historic period.

xliii E. B. Cowell, op. cit., Vol. VI. Book XXII. P. 22.

xliiii G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. I. John Murray: London, 1938, p. 856. E. B. Cowell, op. cit. Vol. VI, *Jāt.* 539.

xlv Ko, T. S. (Trans.). (1892). *The Kalyani Inscriptions Erected by King Dhammaceti at Pegu in 1412 A.D.: Text and Translation*. Rangoon: Government Printing, Burma. P. 4 & 50.

xlvi Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, (Trans.). (1921). *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*. London: Oxford University Press. P. 143.

xlvii Ibid, p. 105 & 117.

xlviii Wilhelm Geiger (Trans.). (1986). *The Mahāvamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services. P. 82.

xlix Pe Maung Tin, op. cit., P. 49-50.

l Subhoga, V. (2017, June). Buddhism in Myanmar (Burma): From its Inception up to Early Konbaung Dynasty", in *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture*, Vol. 3 Issue 1. P. 3.

lii Lamotte, É. (1988). *History of Indian Buddhism from the Origins to the Saka Era*. (S. W. Boin, Trans.). Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste. P. 293.

liii Although before the rise of Nālandā Mahāvihāra, Taxila was popular as the greatest center of higher study. In Jātaka stories too this place has been frequently named as one of the greatest centre. But Nālandā was emerged as the centre of Buddhist studies.

liiii Si-Yu-Ki: *Buddhist Record of Western World Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. (1969). (S. Beal, Trans.) Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd. P. 121.

<sup>xlvii</sup>Kumar, P. (2011). The Ancient Nālandā Mahāvihāra: The Beginning of Institutional Education. In *Journal of the World Universities Forum*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, P. 78-79.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Although some scholars see this as 'recreation' rather than 'replicas'.

<sup>xlix</sup> Trevithick, A. (1999). British Archaeologist, Hindu Abbots and Burmese Buddhists: The Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, 1811-1877. *Modern Asian Studies*, 33 (3). P. 636 & 649.

<sup>i</sup>Singh, U. (2016). Politics, Piety and Patronage: The Burmese Engagement with Bodhgaya. In U. Singh, *The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics and Archaeology*, 394-431. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd. P. 401.

<sup>ii</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>lii</sup>Luce, G. H. (1975). Sources of Early Burma History. In Kowan, C. D. and Wolters, O. W. (Eds.), *Southeast Asian History and Historiography: Essays Presented to D. G. E. Hall*. London: Cornell University Press. P. 40-42.

<sup>liii</sup> Singh, U. (2016). *Op. cit.* P. 412-423.

<sup>liv</sup>*Aṣṭamahāpratihārya* is the depiction of eight major incidents of the Buddha's life and this artistic trend of sculpture was originated and developed in Eastern India (Bihar-Bengal region) during Pāla period.

<sup>lv</sup>*Atthāthān* is influenced by or the extended form or Burmese version of *aṣṭamahāpratihārya*.