

RESEARCH PAPER

The Terracotta Plaques of Pagan: Indian Influence and Burmese Innovations

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Since its inception Buddhist art aimed to make the Buddhist disciples well aware with the life and teachings of Buddha. The Buddhist followers had a belief that the attainment of Buddhahood was not an outcome of a single birth but was a successive effort and practice of ten pāramitās in his previous births. Though the origin of Jātakas was in India but its final and complete compilation was finalised in Sri Lanka by the scholars of Buddhaghōṣa School. The life scenes of Buddha in form of Jātakas depictions are ever preferred theme in Buddhist art and were carved with equal enthusiasm and potential elegance in every period irrespective to any political and social limitations. Buddhism entered Myanmar in three inflows, first in 5th Century CE through north-eastern India, secondly during 7th century CE through religious transformation from Sri Lanka and finally in 10–12 century CE through eastern India.

The period between 8th-12th centuries CE in India has been considered as a cradle of encouraging heterodox creeds and sects representing both Hinduism and Buddhism which were found to exist side by side. The art practiced during this period was flourished on well designated artistic paradigms of Gupta period but had a deep influence of Pāla art. The intense trade activities between eastern India and South East Asia and unstable political condition of India encouraged the Indian artist to look for new territories where he can easily perform his art. Pagan in central Myanmar provided suitable political and religious environment to these sculptors. As result the art and architecture performed in terracotta plaques of Pagan and its Buddhist religious monumental architecture attained deep influence of eastern India but the art of central Myanmar was not a mere repetition of its Indian neighbourhood but is evident with many local experiments and innovations.

The paper is intended intends to make present a brief analysis of the artistic style, technique of engraving legends on plaques in Pagan with its motivation from Pilak (Tripura, India), Pahārpur and Maiāmātī (Bangladesh)

Introduction

The fourth Buddhist saṃgati organised during the time of Kaniṣka ended with the division of Buddhism into two sects named hīnayāna and mahāyāna. Within mahāyāna, it became possible for anyone to become a Buddha after attaining perfection in various pāramitās. This new ideology that inducted foreign elements saw a transformation in doctrine which deeply influenced Indian society and also gave the artist new creative possibilities and artistic freedom for experimentation. The change was clearly an outcome of a series of transformation phases which took place in the structure and composition of the saṃgha. With the advent of mahāyāna the artists were no longer restricted by any socio-religious parameters and as a result carved number of images which had nothing to do with simplicity, restraint or sacrifice.

On the ruins of the Gupta Empire, Gopāla founded the dynastic rule of Pāla which lasted in the eastern region

of India from 750–1120 CE for about four centuries. During this period Bengal experienced an exuberant era of political constancy and economic prosperity. The environment suited the rise of Mahāyāna and Tantrism in eastern India which suddenly gained popularity after the decline of Theravāda and revival of Brahmanical religion. The Pāla rulers encouraged the construction of many Buddhist temples throughout the region and took significant initiative to establish mahāvihāras like Nālandā, Vikramśilā, Somapura. The newly established trade relations with various countries heartened the missionaries to propagate the teachings of Mahāyāna school to Far-East Asia. The Indian Buddhist elements not only entered the new region through the teachings and philosophy of Buddhism but also influenced the art of the region which is reflected in the Buddhist monuments of region.

It is evident from epigraphical and archaeological sources that eastern India came under Buddhist influence by the 5th CE but received the peak point of rise of Buddhism during Pāla rulers only (Mitra, 1971: 235). The period from 5th century CE to 12th century CE under the rule of Guptas, Pālas, Çandras (900–1050 CE), Varmans (end of 11th century CE) and Senas of Rāḍha witnessed

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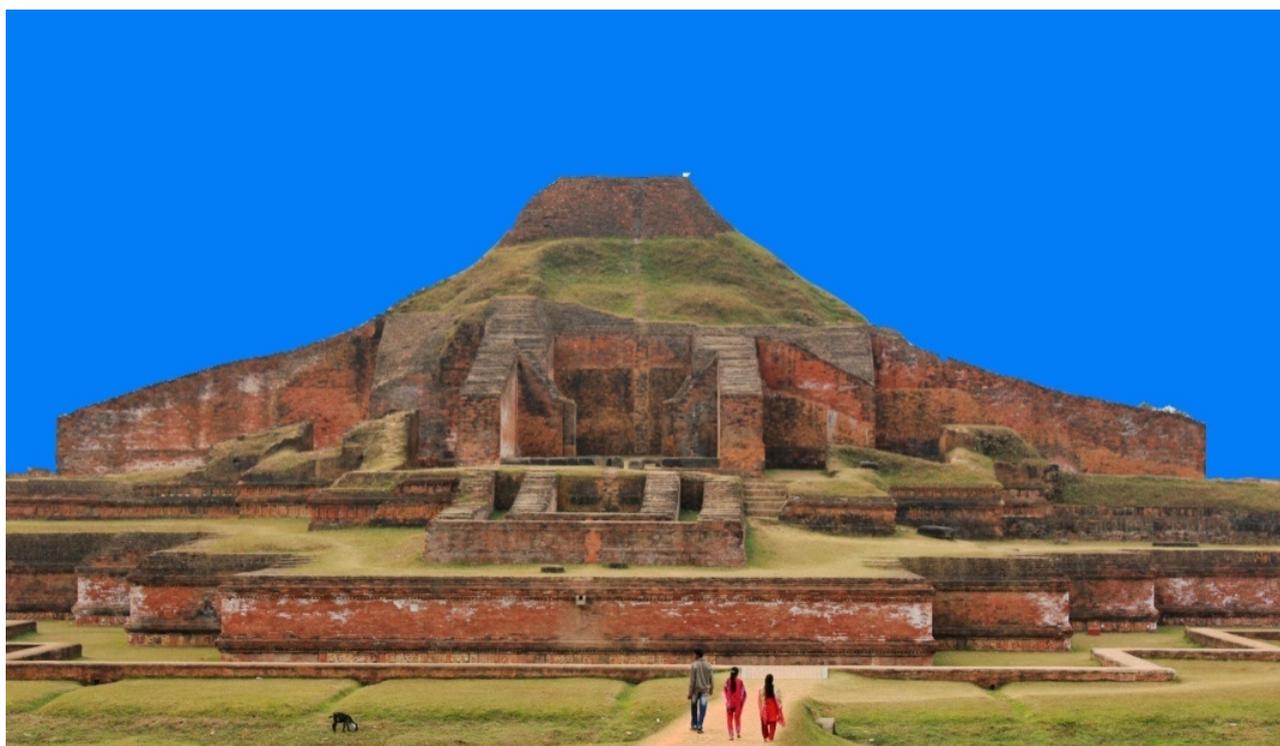


Fig. 1: Paharpur Complex

establishment of large number of Buddhist monasteries. Subsequently the region experienced carving of innumerable sculptures related to Buddhist religion. The difficulty related to transportation of sandstone from Çunāra and scarcity of stone at local level compelled the patrons to think over using local natural resources in more innovative way. The region comprised huge alluvial formation and dense vegetation providing opportunity to use clay into moulding bricks and timber in constructional activities. The extensive use of bricks in constructing vihāras and decorating the exteriors of religious establishments with terracotta plaques is a result of geographical restrictions more than artistic innovation.

Buddhist sites in Bengal

Bengal, presently divided politically into West Bengal in India and Bangladesh has a number of Buddhist sites representing ruins of Buddhist vihāras and temples. The museums situated at the respective sites have a number of images carved on stone representing Buddhist deities. The exteriors of these monuments are decorated with plenty of scenes showing episodes of Hindu and Buddhist canons and some scenes from contemporary life.

The present territory of Bangladesh is very well known for Buddhist temples and monasteries made from 7th century CE onwards. It has three prominent Buddhist archaeological sites having huge remains of Buddhist Vihāras. Pahārpur (25°1'51.83"N, 88°58'37.15"E) situated in Naogaon district was known as Somapura vihāra in earlier times. It was composed of well planned homogeneous complex comprising a monastery and a main place of worship within a single compound (Mitra, 1971: 241) (**Plate 1**). A site named Hārud Vihāra contemporary to Dharpāla vihāra of Pahārpur is situated at a distance

of 15 km in the basin of River Tulasiganga and Jamuna (Hashem and Abu, 2001: 1). Mahāsthāngadhā (24°47'N 89°21'E) in Bogarā district is another important Buddhist site of Bangladesh.

Maināmatī (23°25' N and 91°7' E), another prominent Buddhist site is situated on the south-eastern side of Bangladesh in Trans-Meghnā basin of Commillā district. Maināmatī was inhabited between 900–1050 CE and is known as Samtaṭa in inscriptional sources (Alam and Miah 1982). Ānanda Vihāra, another Buddhist site situated in Commillā district is located at Lālmāi-Maināmatī range which stretches through the middle of the Meghnā basin (Shafiqul and Hashem 1979–82). Rūpabana Murā in the same region is situated in the low flood plains as an outlier of Tippera hills and is mentioned as Rohitagiri and Lalambi Vana in copper plate of Çandra (Shafiqul and Hasehm 2000: pl 1). All the sites in Trans-Meghnā basin are comprised of old laterite alluvium soil and have very limited access to source of hard stone quarries. Recently another important Buddhist site of Pilak (23°46' N and 91°18' E) was explored in Jolaibārī area of Tripura in India. The site flourished during Pāla period, consists of mounds of bricks and brick-bats. Situated very near to Commillā district of Bangladesh, the mounds of Pilak yielded a number of images of Buddha and deities of Mahāyāna (Mitra, 1971: 238).

Location of various Buddhist sites in eastern India made it evident that all the sites are found in the region of laterite alluvium deposits and have no accessibility to supply of stone at a local level. Therefore the region adopted the alluvial soil as an improvised medium to carve religious and secular narratives. Alluvium soil is a loose, unconsolidated soil or amalgamation of sediments reshaped by water in some form. It is comprised of fine particles of silt and clay and is slick and sticky in nature. While becoming



Fig. 2: Terracotta Plaque, Paharpur Complex

wet it holds moisture nicely but resists water infiltrations. These characteristics made it very convenient and worthwhile for the artist to use it as a media to carve various religious and secular episodes. This is the reason why in almost all of Bengal, a number of Buddhist sites are recovered. The archaeological evidence of terracotta plaques can also be fitted in similar religious surroundings.

The terracotta plaques of Bengal

Close observation of terracotta plaques and ongoing pottery making tradition in the region proves that well kneaded clay was used for the purpose. Usually to give the desired form and shape, the clay was placed in shaped moulds of various sizes. The lump of clay was taken away from the mould and the motifs were carved swiftly. The terracotta plaque was dried and finally baked in fire to render durability and stiffness. Therefore the evidences of Terracotta art can be traced back to the pre-historic times at the site of Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibī and continues up to the present day.

On around 800 terracotta plaques of Pahārpur, mainly Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist motifs are depicted. Seated Buddha in bhūmi-sparśa mudrā with a halo behind the head and a vajra, Padmapāṇi Bodhisattva and Śiva in anthropomorphic form and as Śivalinga, naked ascetics, are the most significant artistic motifs carved at Pahārpur. The terracotta plaque decorating the exterior of temple and shrine illustrates various dimensions of everyday life. Carved at the basement and first floor of the temple in two to three rows, the plaques depicts almost every conceivable picturesque subject which the world of men and

beast, nature and fiction brought within the compass of his fancy and observation. The plaques fitted to base-ments are of variant sizes. The plaques in the ground floor are of 1'2" × 8" to 8 ½". The corner one is of large dimension (**Plate 2**) and plaques in the upper rows on the first terrace are of 6" square. The small plaques are of 6" × 5¼" (**Plate 3**) and the big plaques are of 16" × 12" × 2 ½" or 15 ½" × 14" × 2 ¾".⁷ The size of plaques at Ānanda vihāra in Commilla is also much similar to the plaques of Pahārpur. The size varies from 40" × 21" × 6" to 15" × 12" × 5". But most of the plaques lie around 23" × 21" × 5".

The terracotta plaques in various parts of Bengal are enjoined to Buddhist monuments. But the themes and motifs carved on terracotta reflects greater proximity to secular depictions than to Buddhist ideology. The plaques give us very eloquent information of contemporary life of the people. The plaques depict how a woman as a mother nurtures her child and look over his basic needs. A woman as a housewife is carved peeping out from a door to attend a guest, and in another case as a beloved hugging her beloved and going out with him. The plaques have carved both men and women involved in toiletries ranging from bathing to engaging themselves in make-up with the help of mirror. The terracotta plaques enjoined to basement give a good glimpse of the livelihood of people. From Nagaon to Commilla a good number of terracotta plaques are recovered depicting warriors in different postures. It is strange to see a charming woman with a good body build-up as an archer from Pahārpur. A good number of terracotta plaques from the above mentioned sites show people involved in entertainment activities.



Fig. 3: Mithuna, Paharpur Complex

The subjects carved on terracotta plaques enjoined on basement of Buddhist temples in Bengal are not restricted to human beings but also give valuable glimpse of flora and fauna of Bengal in early times. The artist while carving fauna gave much emphasis on carving animals like monkey, elephant and snakes in prominence. An eagle, a vibrant cobra, an attentive peacock, a sārās devouring fish, a pair of hamsa grabbing pearls, a fearsome crocodile, spotted deer, horse, wild boar and a camel are some faunal representations which are found in prominence in these plaques. Besides a pair of rohū fish and the fight of a vibrant cobra and a mongoose (**Plate 4**) are some of the other motifs carved on these plaques with great eloquence. The artist of Bengal gave more emphasis on depicting the faunal life in terracotta plaques and the depiction of floral life is very limited. In the name of flora, there exists only one large carving of bloomed and flourishing lotus flower. The flower is shown blooming in the plant and kept inside the decorated vase. The carving of lotus flower is not only for decorative purpose but also affirms its religious importance wherein it is symbolic of creativity and prosperity.

It is significant to notice that though the terracotta plaques of Pahārpur are enjoined with the Buddhist temples but they have significantly less number of Buddhist depictions. Expressing respect to Brahminical cult in a

plaque, Śiva is depicted in ardha-paryānkāsana with his trident. In some of the terracotta plaques the mānuṣi-buddhas are depicted. The presence of bodhisattvas in dhyāna, bhūmi-sparśa and abhaya postures is also noticeable (**Plate 5**).

The presentation of various mystic creations in terracotta plaques from Bengal is nevertheless important than the depiction of Buddhist deities. The makara is presented with addition of supernatural multi-limbs and a lion is carved with a double body (**Plate 6**). The Kinnara-Kinnari and mithuna figures (**Plate 7**) are found here to represent the serenity of love-sentiments and the depiction of Gandharvas and flying dryads are just to confirm the active presence of celestial beings at the temples of Buddhist importance.

Buddhism in Myanmar

Myanmar, also popularly known as Burma is situated in Southeast Asia. It shares border with Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in the south and with mainland Bangladesh and India in the west. The Sāsanavaṃśa of Paññāsāmī claims that it was lower Burma known as Rāmañña deśa which received the religion first during the times of Buddha. It is said that after the demise of Buddha, Sona and Uttara led a mission to Ramañña deśa known as Suvāṇṇabhūmi which was partly on the southern edge of Mount Kelāsa (Than, 1959: 47). But this claim is not sup-



Fig. 4: Snake and Mongoose, 8th Century CE, Salabana Vihara, Mainamati Museum, Bangladesh.



Fig. 5: Standing Buddha, 8th Century CE, Salabana Vihara, Mainamati Museum, Bangladesh.



Fig. 6: Double bodied lion, 8th Century CE, Salabana Vihara, Mainamati Museum, Bangladesh.



Fig. 7: Mithuna, Paharpur Complex, Bangladesh.

ported by any other Pāli text or any inscription circulated by Aśoka. Prior to the advent of Buddhism in Myanmar it adopted animism and had a great inclination towards the worship of a host of spirits known as *naṭṣ*. Before 5th century CE, mahāyāna enrooted itself deeply in northern Myanmar, while hīnayāna prevailed in the southern Myanmar. Tārānatha affirms this view and mentions the existence of mahāyāna in Kokī land including the area spread over Pagān, Arākān and Hamsavatī (Duriosselle, 1916–16: 80).

But the possibility of cultural contacts along the trade routes between India and China through northern Myanmar cannot be overruled. From Funnan to Bengal through the city of Beikthano Myo Haung, India and Myanmar had good contacts long before the CE. Northern Myanmar was in contact with eastern India through trade and cultural contacts. The region had great inclination for mahāyāna school of Buddhism, with its pantheon of various

Bodhisattvas eager to postpone their entry into nirvāna to benefit the others. But the existing nature of mahāyāna in northern Myanmar was not same as practiced earlier in India and was fallen from the actual teachings. It diverted much towards Tāntrism having deep influence of northern school of Buddhism emerged during 6th century CE and started to adopt Vāmāçāra practices. It was the time when eastern India experienced a wide practice of carving religious and secular motifs on terracotta plaques due to absence of stone media.

Pagan and its terracotta plaques

Pagan (21.10° N latitude and 94.55° E longitude), one of the most significant archaeological sites of Myanmar is situated near the modern township of Nyaung U of Mandalay division in central Myanmar. The region is served by Irrawaddy River and despite its location in a tropical zone, it experiences features of dry zone. The

foundation of Pagan was laid in 849 CE by Pyanpaya but it was king Anawratha (1044–1077 CE) who gave Pagan a new identity and glory in the second half of 11th century CE. He gained the throne by slaying a usurper in single combat and invaded Arākān Yomā in the west and forced northern part of Arākān. He sent a delegation to King Manuha of Thāton with the request to surrender the Piṭakas refusal of which provoked him to send off a mighty army against him. The expedition to Thāton succeeded in bringing the 30 Holy Scriptures along with 32 white elephants and defeated king with his artisans and craftsman. He made a separate building named Pitak Taik to store them. The conquest of Thāton in 1057 CE made direct contact of Myanmar with India and overseas through Sri Lanka (Hall 1998: 16).

The writing of Pali canons started during the first century B.C. in Sri Lanka and its excerpts reached Myanmar in several parts. It was only during 11th century CE that the complete Piṭakas reached Pagan (Strachen, 1996: 8). The people of Myanmar received direct output from Indian artistic forms from 6th -7th century CE onwards through its western part of Arākān which shares border with eastern India and was under deep influence of Animism and Mahāyān. When king Anawratha conquered Pagan and decided to construct the massive Buddhist structures, the artisans had no choice but to use locally available non stone raw materials, as the region is scarce in stone material like sandstone, laterite, and steatite or marble. This encouraged them to make excessive use of wood and brick in structures. They used bricks of large size: 28×14×3 cm to 46×23×9.5 cm but the most common size is 36×18×5 cm. They made the bricks with carefully selected clay and stripped it well and skilfully compressed it before adequate firing. Primarily the mortar is used to bind the bricks in walls which were made with simple clay mixing with vegetal glue and resins to the mud. For the purpose of external facing of brickwork, lime mortar has been used. The mortar is also used for stucco mouldings and giving final decoration to the religious building.

Interestingly, the scarcity of stone motivated them to look over its neighbourhood in west, where terracotta plaques are used in abundance in similar kind of environmental condition. But the replication was not mere copying the style and technology in Pagan, it underwent significant modifications and innovations. It was only the idea of depicting motifs on terracotta plaques which was adopted from eastern India, rest of the other elements are reciprocated according to their own requirements and faith of Theravāda.

Presently Pagan has more than 2230 monuments in the form of Pagodā, Temples (Ku), Brick monasteries, Umin (Underground cave), Kala Kyaungs (Single structure), Pitak Taiks (house to keep religious scriptures) and Simas (Ordination hall). Like the basement of Buddhist temples of Bengal, the Pagodā and Ku of Pagan are decorated with terracotta plaques in its exteriors. Besides these eastern and western Petleik are two religious indoor houses which have exhibited series of terracotta plaques arranged in vertical rows. At present

the Shwesandaw, Shwezigon (**Plate 8**), Ānanda Temple (**Plate 9**), Miṅglazeidi, Dhammarāzīkā and Western and Eastern Petleik have remains of terracotta plaques. The plaques in these religious structures are fitted into the small panels at the exterior and interiors (in case of both Petleiks) significantly made to serve similar purpose. The plaques contain the depiction of all of the Jātakas (the stories of previous life of Buddha). The writing of Jātakas was started in India and soon due to its acceptability, easiness to understand and motivating efficiency crossed the countrywide boundaries. Though the origin of Jātakas was started in India but its final and complete compilation was done in Sri Lanka by the scholars of Buddhaghōṣa School. There is no archaeological evidence which proves the prevalence of Terracotta plaques in Pagan prior to king Anawrath's initiative.

Like the neighbouring part of Bengal in eastern India, the terracotta plaques at Pagan are made with well kneaded and fired clay. But except the terracotta plaques fitted inside the galleries of Western and eastern Petleik and Shwesandaw all the plaques are glazed with green colour. The thin layer of glaze provided the plaques preservation from sun and rain. The plaques of Petleiks and Shwesandaw (**Plate 10**) no traces of surroundings in form of two bands divided by strips of bead ornaments are noticed (Duroiselle, 1912–13: 90). The legends engraved on terracotta plaques follow two set patterns of writing. Except the Petleiks (**Plate 11**), which has the legends written on the top of the scene representing Jātakas, the rest have the legends written at the bottom. The legends are written in both Burmese and Pāli at Dhammarāzīkā (**Plate 12**) and Miṅglazeidi (**Plate 13**). In these two Pagodās the name of the Jātaka is immediately followed by the number of Jātaka according to Sinhalese sequence. For example "*Baka Jāta, phurhāloṇ na phrac, 236*" means the name of Jātaka, *Baka Jātaka* in Pāli; *phurhāloṇ* (bodhisattva) *na* (was) *phrac* (fish) means in Baka Jātaka when Bodhisattva was a fish and the number 236 means the number of Jātaka (Duroiselle, 1912–13: 91). In rest of the Pagodās and temples, only the name and number of Jātaka in Pāli is written (Duroiselle 1912–13: 88). The legend Jātaka is written in abbreviated form of Jāt and the palaeographic characters of legends have great affinity with Brāhmī.

The terracotta plaques in the temples of Pagan are fitted in similar fashion as in its western counterpart of eastern India. The plaques are placed in pre-designed panels in various terraces. The thick clay used in making the terracotta plaques was mixed with river silt to give it greater consistency. Afterwards the prepared mixture was thoroughly sieved to remove granules and hard particles. The clay was further gently kneaded into a clay lump. The mud block was then put into the mould to give a specific dimension and further was partially sun-dried. After attaining some sort of stiffness an important episode of Jātaka was carved out with the help of sharpened material. Then the terracotta plaque was poured into a solution to give it protection and glaze and finally was transported to kilns. After firing it to certain specific temperature and time the terracotta plaques were taken to the Pagodās



Fig. 8: Lakṣhmana Jātaka, Shwezigon Pagoda, Pagan, Myanmar.



Fig. 9: Ānanda Pahto, Pagan, Myanmar.



Fig. 10: Remains of Terracotta Plaque, Shew San Daw, Pagan, Myanmar.



Fig. 11: Mahāpanāda Jātak, West Hpet Leik, Pagan, Myanmar

and placed inside the panels in accordance with Sinhalese Jātaka chronological order.

The size of the terracotta plaques is usually uniform in size in a particular religious structure but varies in different Pagodā. The terracotta plaques of East and West Petleik are of 40 x 38 x 13 cm, Ānanda temple 36 x 32 x 7 cm and Maṅgalazeidi are of 38 x 34 x 10 cms. The isotope determination of the terracotta plaques of Pagan reveals silicon dioxide (SiO₂), aluminium oxide (Al₂O₃), ferric oxide

(Fe₂O₃), calcium oxide (CaO), magnesium oxide (MgO), sodium oxide (Na₂O), potassium oxide (K₂O), lead oxide (PbO), copper oxide (CuO) and tin oxide (SnO₂) (www.myanmar-image.com/enchantingmyanmar/enchanting-myanmar3-3/thelastglazed.htm). The analysis suggests high proportion of silica dioxide and lead content in the clay. It is further concluded that the green colour of the terracotta plaques is of a matte opaque type and is due to copper, lead, vanadium oxide and tin (



Fig. 12: Ekrāja Jātaka, Dhammayāzīkā Pagoda, Pagan, Myanmar.



Fig. 13: Vāroṇi Jātak, Minglazeidi, Pagan, Myanmar.

heritage.org/jsspdf/1981/JSS_077_2e_KazuoMasayo_WhiteGlazedWaresExcavatedInTak.pdf.). There are two colours, green and yellow. The green colour varied from faintly green, bluish green to bright green, the different shades being obtained by varying the quantities of tin and copper oxides. All the materials for making the glaze and the colouring oxides are available locally. The temperature employed is estimated to vary from 900 to 1,050° C. It is further proved that the glazed surfaces appeared to be of strong texture and possessed a high degree of fitness with the clay body in spite of the crazing effect noticed in almost all the glazed surfaces (roadtomandalay.com/MyanmarMiscellany/History_of_Myanmar%20(Burmese)_Pottery.htm).

The provision of Jātakas scenes in various monuments of Pagan were originally made in accordance to the textual source tradition known at that time. Hence, the Mon adaptation of Sinhalese model was preferred (Strachen 1996: 42). The Burmese had shown their keen interest in carving full set of 547 Jātakas with same sequence and chronology as in Sri Lanka. But this norm seems to be slightly deviated in Petleik, where the actual number of each scene starts to differ from Jātaka No 497 from Ceylonese accession and the number engraved on plaques rise up to 550. It is significant to note that besides the minor deviation in other monuments of Myanmar the people still preferred the early Mon script to write the title and number and use Pāli language for each plaque (Strachen 1996: 42).

Going through the Jātaka illustrations on terracotta plaques we fetch important and interesting information about the contemporary environment of Pagan. The Buddhist art flourished in India during 3rd century BC and reached its peak during 10th century CE in Myanmar. The long span of more than thirteen centuries caused various changes and transformations and provided opportunities to the artist to depict the narratives in accordance to their choice. The change of space in the form of a new region other than India gives the native artist an opportunity to

depict the Jātakas in accordance with the tradition and environment of Myanmar. The huts are made in typical Myanmar pattern, the religious monuments depicted in plaques are very much similar to those found in the Pagan region and the water supply arrangement is similar to that observed in central Myanmar nowadays. The terracotta plaques of Pagan provide an impressive picture of water sources used by the people. The depictions show how the local people preferred to construct the huts beside a natural pond, river or waterfall or otherwise dug a well by themselves. The wells were usually of round shape and surrounded by an earthen embankment. The ponds had both square and round shape and an embankment made with earthen material. The depictions of hut in respect of various Jātakas, seems to be made with wooden poles dug inside the earthen surface. The importance and elegance of various houses used by rich people is easily traced by the construction of stylish roofs and entrance.

The depiction of Buddhist narratives has always scope for depiction of Buddhist religious shrines. Like the Indian counterpart, the carving of *caityas* and *stūpas* is also noticed in the terracotta plaques of Pagan. But the depiction of religious buildings in Pagan has many indigenous characteristics such as carving of square form of *vedikā*, which is usually round in India. Some of the religious buildings have great resemblance with *Pyathet*, popular in South East Asia. It follows the pattern of a pyramid descending in size as it proceeds towards top. The building is three storeyed coinciding with idea of *triratna's* viz. Buddha, Dhammā and Saṅgha, the three jewels of Buddhism.

The terracotta plaques of Pagan provide us comprehensive information about the dress, coiffure and ornaments used by people of Myanmar in those times. In this regard the depictions have hardly any similarity with India and the dresses are very much in accordance with the taste of the local people. The way of hunting as a pleasure pastime activity is carved at Dhammāzīkā, where a king is carved vibrantly stretching his both hands forward and legs

backwards with a bow to shoot an arrow to a lion roaring nearby standing courageously on a rock. With regard to leisure activities, mention may be made of the plaque at Shwezigon where an acrobat is carved presenting his skill. Besides, the ancient literature is full of instances describing women playing with birds. This pastime activity popularly known as śuka-kṛiḍā is carved at Maṅgalzedi showing a queen in her harem. In another depiction at Maṅgalzedi three persons are presented expressing their gratitude to a person represented nearby lying on a bed. The first figure resembles a male postured with spread legs and slightly bending towards the surface. He is shown playing a flute in his hands, with his neck twisted to the left. The second, the first female dancer wearing a mekhalā has one hand raised upwards and the other placed on her thigh is reflected giving good company to the flute player. The other dancer is shown raising both hands upwards to express her bliss.

Besides the architectural details, dress and ornaments, the terracotta plaques reflect various kinds of weapons in prevalence in the contemporary society. The purpose of these weapons is similar to the narrations in the Jātakas. However, the weapons depicted differ in form compared to Indian depictions. Subsequently the sculptural depictions give important information of transport, such as chariots, bullock-cart and boats practiced in Myanmar. The closeness of people of Myanmar with River Irrawaddy and concentration of trade activity within the catchments of the river encouraged the artist of Pagan to express more interest in depicting boat with reference to Jātakas. More notably, the sculptor of Pagan tried his best to carve a big ship going for a sea voyage. The ship in the shape of a big flattened wooden block is carved oared by two oarsmen sitting at both ends and rowing the big boat according to the instructions of the skipper.

It is significant to notice that in the span of time when Theravāda was dismantled in its birth place in India, Myanmar revived the original dhamma in its territory with new enthusiasm and faith. The eastern part of India and central and western part of Myanmar have great geographical and environmental affinities. It was this affinity which encouraged the trade and cultural relations between them. The places like Pahārpur, Maināmatī, Pilāk in eastern India

and Arākān, Pagan, Pyay in Myanmar are all situated on an easily accessible route which provided ample opportunity to the people of Myanmar to understand and adore Buddhism with elegance. Both the regions could be given extra credit for resolving the paucity of stone material in art by substituting it with clay. The huge religious buildings and its enjoining made for decorating the structure all adopted baked clay in the form of brick and terracotta plaques. In both the regions, it was Buddhism which motivated the mighty kings as patrons and common people to build the Buddhist temples and Pagodās. But despite many affinities, the terracotta plaques in both the regions have some peculiar characteristic features.

The temples of eastern India are committed to the mahāyāna school of Buddhism whereas the temples and Pagodās of Myanmar are devoted to the theravāda school of Buddhism (though remains of mahāyāna are traced in Arākān region of western Myanmar). The introduction of Theravāda Buddhism in Pagan compelled the artists to look towards his neighbourhood for religious motifs and narratives suiting Theravāda. Sri Lanka played an important role by providing Buddhist scriptures through Thaton. This facilitated the artists with a full set of scriptures which could be easily transformed into art, but when the question of technique and style came they had only one option to look towards its western neighbourhood in India. The terracotta plaques of eastern India though carved in Buddhist temples, had prominence of secular depictions which had nothing to do with teachings of Buddhism. But the artist of Pagan was strictly restricted to adhere with the teachings of Buddhism. Jātakas are the main source of their inspiration which was transformed into art in complete form. Unlike eastern India, the motifs in Pagan are also carved indoor in horizontal tiers in the galleries of Petleik. The narratives are carved into terracotta plaques but they improvised them with green glaze. Though they concentrated them into carving the Jātaka scenes in plaques in the wake of narratives created in the Indian environment, but this did not restrain them from making alive the local flora-fauna, architecture and mode of conveyance and Myanmar features well in physical appearance of individuals narrated in Jātakas.

How to cite this article: Rao, V 2013 The Terracotta Plaques of Pagan: Indian Influence and Burmese Innovations. *Ancient Asia*, 4: 7, pp. 1-9, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/aa.12310>

Published: 13 November 2013

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