

Tukan Bahal Stupa

- Sukra Sagar Shrestha

Tukan Bahal is one of the ancient and important Buddhist monastery of Kathmandu city. The monastic complex is located in ward no 12 of Kathmandu Municipality. The locality is called *Hyumata Tole* (lit: the ward of revolving lamp). It is about half a kilometer South of Kasthamandapa temple. When one goes from Kasthamandapa temple, (the centre of Kathmandu city), pass the Chikanmugal tole and one comes in front of Joshideval. Passing that temple on left and keep on going south, after nearly 100 mtr. from this temple on the left side of the road there is a small courtyard into which one sees a white stupa adorned with a fully gold gilded top with a pair of eyes through a small lane. This is Tukan Bahal stupa.

The courtyard is bounded by the dwelling houses on all four sides. The entrance to the courtyard is a small lane between two houses, through which the all seeing eyes of the stupa peeps out. The pilgrims are blessed by those eyes and welcomed into the courtyard.

The site, at the moment, does not look like a monastery any more. Only scientific archaeological excavation can prove the site to be a monastic complex

now. The courtyard is inhabited by the indigeneous people of Kathmandu Valley-the Newars. Thus the name of the monastery has been derived from this language, more commonly and easily. Although the Sanskrit name is also there for the monastery, the vernacular name is more pronounced. The local people call the site as Tukan Bahal (lit: mustard leaf monastery). The Sanskrit name as called by the local people are *Punya Kirti Mahavihar* and *Ratnakar Mahavihar* but under the name of *Punya Kirti Mahavihar*, there are six monasteries in Kathmandu city alone.

Sanskrit Name

Vernacular Name

Punyakirti Mahavihar

1. *Kohiti Baha*

2. *Lagan Baha*

3. *Ta Baha*

4. *Nhayekan Bahi*

5. *Chwakan Bahi*

6. *Yeta Baha*

(South Baha)

This Punyakirti Mahavihar is either duplication

of the names or the sure sign of mistake in reading the old manuscript or inscriptions.

All three inscriptions found from the courtyard does not speak about the name of Punyakirti Mahavihar as Sanskrit name of Tukan Baha rather talks about a Vajracharya Kulaharsaman from Jhwa Bahal came and renovated the stupa in 1002 N.S. Likewise Sakyavamsa Maniratna from Kirtipunya Mahavihar came and renovated the stupa in NS 734. Therefore there should be other Sanskrit name for Tukan Bahal instead of Punyakirti Mahavihar as repeated by the local people and written in some of the books.

A manuscript in collection of Royal Buddhist priest gives the Sanskrit name of Tukan Baha as Ratnakara Mahavihar. This name is further supported by the book *Nepa Deya Viharya Tacha* (Key to monasteries in Nepal) and another book written by Pandit Hem Raj Shakya. He quotes the source material as the manuscript of *Kantipur Baha Vahiya Vidhi Vidhan*. (The principals of rituals in Kantipur monasteries). Therefore, it is more authentic to accept here as the Ratnakara Mahabihar as the Sanskrit name of Tukan Baha.

The main stupa is standing at the middle of the courtyard with a plinth of executively carved panels on top of which stands the big white dome. On top of the white dome rises the spires of *Trayodasa Bhuvanawali*. *Trayodasa Bhuvanawali* are the thirteen concentric circles representing thirteen heavens of Buddhistic World. In other words, these thirteen concentric circles are also believed to be the disciplinary world that a human should pass through in order to become a Bodhisatwa. Once he passes through these all stages then he can decide whether he would like to go into Nirvana or remain as Bodhisatwa and lead others also to Nirvana.

If a Bodhisatwa wanted his Nirvana then and there, he can do so by climbing up to the pinnacle.

Pinnacle is the point where a Bodhisatwa can go and enter into Nirvana. If he wants to help others to Nirvana as well then he remains in the world as Bodhisatwa and leads other to Nirvana.

This is the main significance of those type of the stupas in Nepal. But this stupa of Tukan Bahal had only nine concentric circles before the stupa was pulled down to renovate.

Besides the main stupa, there is a well on Northeast corner of the complex showing that the site to be an old monastery. Every old monastery that time would have a well in the corner.

To the south of the stupa lies two other small chaityas erected within hundred years.

Antiquity of Stupa

How old is this stupa ? is a crucial question. Authentically we have only a record of the first renovation conducted in the year N.S. 734 (1614 AD). For the antiquity before that year we have to make the study of the art pattern and icons found from the stupa and stray references made here and there.

Evidently the stupa could be dated at least to seventh/eighth century A.D. The five pannels in the *Ayaga Patta* are the product of the art school of that century. They are comprised of deers, Vajra, Chaitya, Kalash and conchshell. The carving pattern of lions, devotees, nymphs could well be compared to the art creation of seventh/eight century stone craft. The pattern of mountains, the slenderness and flexibility of the body of the devotees, and transparency of the dress are the main features of the Lichhavi school of art which could be clearly traced in those carving. Mary Slusser and Pratapditya Pal both being the art critics have accertained them to be the work of eighth century. A.D. Profuse number of Lichhavi coins uncovered from the stupa also shows the antiquity of stupa to be at least to Lichhavi period.

The stupa was broken on the middle due to the

unwanted growth of the Pipal tree and was in dilapidated condition for nearly a century. (pl. Ia, b) It was from 1995 that the local people took interest and initiated to renovate the stupa and completed the task in three years. It was during this conservational operation that certain new evidence came out of the stupa.

When the dismantle work was started a hoard of coins, icons and small metal stupas were unearthed. It was surprising hoard to be found inside the stupa. Therefore, the author and an official chemist Griha Man Shrestha from National Archives were called on to help them record and clean the objects. But the time available for the job was too short only of two days. Any way two officials worked very hard to study them and preserve as far as possible, Griha Man cleaned all the coins, images and stupas and the author tried to read and record them. The objects were cleaned with 5% liquid detergent and brushed off the dirt. Om Kumar Shrestha photographed them. Then they were all redeposited inside the stupa immediately.

From the study it came to be known that there were nearly thousand coins from the time of Kaniska and Huviska of India to the reign of Surendra Vikram Shah of Nepal. Most of the older coins were very debased and not possible to read the letters any more. Only through the royal figures, one could guess the coins to be of Kushan Kings (Pl. III c). Some of the Lichhavi coins could be deciphered and read the letters on them but they were also in very fragile state (Pl. III d, and Pl V adef). The Lichhavi coins were of Mananka Shryamso, Vaisravana, Gunanka Pasupati and Kamadohi type. The Malla coins are very rare. Only *Chun dam* (the miniature coins) of Shiva Simha Malla were there, followed by the Surendra Vikram. (pl III ab). Surprisingly there were two coins of Chinese origine with square hole at the middle (pl. V c). In total following number of coins were unearthed

and redeposited inside the stupa.

1. Kushana Coins - 14
2. Lichhavi Coins - 820
3. Malla Coins - 6
4. Shah Coins - 4
5. Chinese Coins - 2 with holes at the middle
6. Fragmented Coins - about 80-90
7. Copper ingots - 3
8. Unidentified Coins - 65

The abundance of Lichhavi coins also shows the antiquity of the stupa. The majority of the coins in the hoard were from this period. It seems that the dome was opened only couple of times. Other renovations were of only minor type. More than eight hundred coins from Lichhavi period could well be the offerings made by the people then. It was customary practice of the people in Kathmandu Valley in olden days to offer some coins to be deposited in the stupa when being erected. The Kushana coins might have been the old collection of the contemporary people and offered them to the stupa then.

Surprisingly no other Malla coins were unearthed from the stupa except the miniature coins of Shiv Singh Malla. This is because the stupa dome was stable throughout early Malla period. The inscriptional evidence also shows the renovation of only N.S. 734. After that when the stupa was opened again during the year N.S. 1002 (1882 AD) the coins of Surendra Vikram Shah and Chinese Coins might have been inserted then.

Chaityas

Besides coins, twenty-five small Chaityas also came out of the dome. (pl. II c). They were in white metal without any incrustation except one which was of gold gilded. The Chaityas measured from seven to fifteen centimeters and have from five to nine concentric circles. The shapes and sizes also varies. No Chaityas have thirteen concentric circles evolved

yet like that in Boudhanath and Swayambhu. Neither had any representation of eyes. Instead of thirteen, only five to nine concentric circles have evolved. One of the Chaitya looked very old showing only square cube on the dome. The dome also rests on only one plinthlike base. On top of square cube single Chhatra is shown. This is the simplest form of Chaityas found from dome and shows its antiquity to be very old (pl. II. b). The chaitya could well be compared with Sanchi stupa in architectural form.

When scrapped in some Chaityas at the bottom, most of them contain some charred bone or ash and in some even small piece of *Tadapatra* written with names or a mantra (pl IX a). But when unfolded to read the inscription on *Tadapatra*, it was broken into pieces leaving only evidence of writing. Therefore further examples were not tried. The bottoms were covered either with clay or lime. All of them were reburied in the big dome.

The Chaityas have no figure of Panchadhyani Buddha evolved. A Vajra was found imbossed on one side of the square cube. Majority of Chaityas were casted in white metal without any incrustation. If it was of silver, there should have been some greenish incrustation but not at all. Therefore could not be assessed of what metal the stupas were casted. It was bright white metal. No metallic analysis could be done and we were bound to redeposit them in the dome immediately after short look. Let us hope, our future generation, one day, will be able to do the chemical analysis of the Chaityas on which we were failed (pl. II. c).

One among the twenty five stupas was of gold gilded. The dome of this example rests upon double petalled base and has only nine tires of concentric circles on top of which a square height is depicted. No *Kalasha* portion like that of Swayambhunath stupa evolved yet. (pl. II a).

Divine Images

In addition to the coins and Chaityas, fifteen small icons were also unearthened from the dome. They were probably installed in the niches of the walls inside the dome. But the roots of the Pipal tree dislocated them from their original places since the wall and even the dome was broken very badly. Some of the images were even coiled with the roots of the tree (pl. VI. c). Among the icons, one was made of stone and rest fourteen were of metal casted.

The images could be periodised from their style of carving. The newest of them all, could be five meditative Buddhas (*Pancha Dhayani Buddhas*). They are Achhyobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabh, Amoghsiddhi, and Vairochana. (pl. VII). These icons could have been deposited there when the stupa was renovated in N.S. 1002 by Kulaharsha Man Bajracharya of Jhwabahal. Their sizes are of identical with same measurements. They are all of fourteen centimetre tall. The casting of their heads are identical, with the hair styles made of ball shaped with pointed *Usnisha* on top, at last. They are seated on single petalled lotus seat except Vairochana who is shown seated on double petalled lotus seat. Perhaps Vairochana was treated more honourific nature and thus he was given two petalled lotus seat. Among the five Buddhas, the right hand and leg of Amoghsiddhi are broken due to the unskilled excavation of the stupa, (Pl VII d).

In second group of the icon, we can put six images. They are in different shape and sizes and of different names:

- i. Ghantapani (?) - 7 cms
- ii. Shivalokeswar - 21.5 cms
- iii. Dhyani Buddha - 9.5 cms
- iv. Vyakhyana mudra Buddha - 10 cms
- v. Achhyobhya - 14 cms
- vi. Padmapani 11.5 cms

This group of icons are of superior quality and

casting in the form of its antiquity. Stylistically they could be catagorised superior in comparison to the *Pancha Dhyani Buddhas* described above. The *Jwalavali* and *asan* are more simpler. The hairstyle of the Buddhas are also simply a round in shape. No evolution of pointed *usnisha* is noticed. Therefore we could surmise that this group of icons could have been installed during the renovation work done during the time of Shiva Singh (Ins...I).

Two images of Maitreya and Shakyamuni Buddha are among the best ones. Maitreya is shown seated on a *Sinhasana* in Tushita heaven. The simplicity of *Sinhasana*, aeroel and dresses are noticed and superb in a sence that they are carved on very simple manner. Similarly the image of Shakyamuni Buddha is also identical with such images on stone from Bangemudha and Chavahil. Serenity in mood, transparent dresses, flexible limbs with right hand displaying in *Abhaya Mudra* Shakyamuni Buddha is shown standing in *sama-bhanga* position holding his robe, with left hand and right hand displaying in *Abhayamudra*. From those similarities we could surmise that these two images could have been offered during the establishment of the stupa. The image of Maitreya measures 9 cms and Shakyamuni to 16.5 cms.

There were two images identically different than those icons described above. They were both Buddha figures. One is carved on stone and an another is casted on metal, measuring eight and ten centimeters respectively. Their style show the similarity with the Indian carving and casting. They could have been brought in by some pilgrims and thus deposited inside the stupa during the renovation work of the time of Shiva Singh. (pl VIII a, IX c).

Conclusion

Coin hoard was the largest amount among all the findings from this stupa. But due to very short

period of two days available, only cleaning and sorting out of the coins could be done. Within this short period detail study of the findings was impossible.

All the coins were washed with 5% liquid detergent and brushed, then again washed with the water. We tried much to convince the local people in order not to put the objects in the stupa again, but they were not convinced. All the time the answer was, we do not trust any body outsiders and we want to put them as it was done by our ancestors. It was their devotion. We can not discontinue it. We donot know what happens to those Chaityas and coins after wards when they will be opened next because temperature and the chemical stability was disturbed and it is now bound to rust further. There will not be any surprise if it becomes a junk and all the coins stick together and no possibility of further deciphering. Any way we should be satisfied on whatever objects were made available to us for study and whatever short period of time was made available to us and made a short study and photograph them.

Besides coin hoards, chaityas and icons there are some artifacts also uncovered of which the details could not be drawn and only photography was possible. Thus they are also presented here for information to the future generations. They were some metal boxes with contents and some terra-cotta pots (pl. IX b, X bc and XI abc).

Inscriptions

I Stone Inscription of Shiva Singh of the year. S 734

१. ॐ नमो वज्रघातवे ॥ नमस्तस्मै मुनिन्द्राय सर्वलोकहि
२. ताय जगदाधार भूताय नित्यं श्री वज्रघातेती त्रिभुवनगु
३. ण सिन्धु सर्व्वलोकैक वन्धु सुर नर मुनि वृन्दै (स्व) य
नामा जिने
४. न्द्र भवभय विनिहन्ता धर्ममोक्ष प्रदाता () सकल
कलुष

५. हन्ता धातु वज्रधातु ॥ काष्ठमण्डप (ति) विख्यात पुरि (चा) ति मनो (र)
६. मा विराजित धर्म ना (हं) प्रवर, यदा सम्मते ॥ धर्मात्मा स्थापितः (पूर्व)
७. चैत्ये कञ्च मनोरमं चीरन्तनन्द नामन सम्मतं चैत्यं च मनोरमं ॥ त
८. स्मिं भग्नं महाचैत्ये वृक्ष वस्त्र समुद्भवाः ततो नगराधिपति
९. रवि वंशोद्भव उ(द्भव) समतेज धर्मोवतार श्री शिवसिं
१०. ह देवै (न) (पारि) त विजय राज्ये ॥ तदा कीर्ति पुण्य विहारस्थः शाक्य
११. मुनिना मणि रत्नेन जीर्ण चैत्यं विलोक्यं तस्यात्मनितं उधार
१२. नं (गो) पारस्या... भाषित तेन मित्र पितृत्वं प्रमूख
१३. (द परं) चैत्यं उधारयिष्या... द्वौ संभाष नेन जीर्णोधारण विधि
१४. (प्र) ... बु दे (ते) नाय देशितं ॥ पदेशना दानपति कीर्तिपु
१५. ण्य विहरास्थित शाक्य वंशोद्भव.... धर्मावतार भिक्षुश्री
१६. वणिक् गोपाल नामा तौ द्वौ प्रमुखादि अष्टांजनाति
१७. मणिरत्न नामाम् शतो पुण्य श्रीगृह स्थित
१८. श्रद्धाभि (अनु) तरफल प्राप्तिका (मान) श्री वज्र धातु जिर्णो
१९. धारणं कुर्वन्ति ॥ नेपालाब्दे गुणां (न्विते) युते मासे (भ) । नि
२०. पक्षे कृष्णे (तिथि) दशम्या () भानुवासरे रवि ग
२१. ते (मेष राशे) (कुंभ राशौ) (ते) चन्द्र मसि दीप रत्नम्वासा वियव्विकां प्रतिष्ठाकां प्र (तिष्ठा)
२२. (पि) त पञ्च तथागतास्य ... उष्णीषं चक्र ... पर्यन्त उधा
२३. (र) ण सम्पूर्ण भवतु ॥ नेपालाहायने... युगाग्नि (मुनि) युते (मासे)
२४. (मा) धवे -प) क्षे शुक्ले ष्ट म्यां न (क्षत्र) योगे वारे
- जीव (न)
२५. राशौ (रवि) गते चन्द्र गते (न) ... (राशि) तद्दिने प्रधानार्य्यकृ (ति)
२६. (व) ज्ञा (चार्य) लुगुदेव भार्या धर्मा पपा ... (वज्रा) चार्य... वापदे.....तधारा..... विघ्नोष्ठा दशाधनवा (बु)
२७. न (यूता) हुति यज्ञ सुवर्णं छत्रा (दि) नं वज्र
२८. धातु... (प्रति) ष्ठापित ॥ ति रंगण -भिच्छु १ श्रीमणि
२९. (गोपार) ... वज्राचार्य ... भिच्छु श्रीदेव वशु सुन्द
३०. ... मार ... (हाकुसिं) (राम) ... गुसिं
३१. भावो से ... सिव राम भावो
३२. ... मार... याडा दिन..... ॥
३३. (सम्बत ७३४... सम्पूर्ण दिन जुरो ॥ (शुभ)
- II Chaitya Inscription located in south of main stupa of NS. 988
१. ॐ (नमः) रत्न त्रयाय ॥०॥ शुभ सम्बत् ९८८ (मिन्) माघ मास्य शुक्रपक्ष पञ्चमितीथौ उत्रभद्र नक्षत्रे शिव योगे जथाकर्ण सो (भन) बुद्ध बालसरे कुं (भ) रा
२. सि गते (वि.भु) मिन राशि... चन्द्रमसि थ्वते दिन पादष्ठापना याना जुलो ॥ शुभ सम्बत् ९८८ माघ मासे कृष्ण पक्षे पञ्चमियातिथौ हस्त नक्षत्रे शुभ योगे बुध बाल
३. सरे कुम्भ राशि गते (सवितरि) कन्या राशि गते चन्द्रमसि ॥ एतत् (दिव) से ताल मण्डल काष्ठ मण्डप महानगरे तोल तोकं बहालस श्री ३ वज्रधातु चैत्य प्रतिष्ठा या
४. ना दिन जुल दानपति जजमान तोक बहाल दक्षिन गृह वासित महर्जनी दयालक्ष्मीन थओ स्वामि दिवंगत जुओम्ह मनोरथ सि स्वपुत्र भागिवन्त सि निम्हया ना मन श्री वज्रधातु चैत्य स्थापना याना ॥ थुगु पुण्यन दिवंगत जुया ओनपिं सुखावति भुवने वास लाय मालि... अनुत्तर बोधि ज्ञान बोधि प्राप्त जुयमा ॥ शुभ

६. चैत्ययात वर्ष प्रति बुसाधन याय माल ध्वमि नामन
पिन्द्र थयमाल ध्व यायत जग्य (रा) दुन्ता दाम तका
१००८ अधलि दुंता ध्वतेया गुधिजन महर्जनि
७. चिकिथि (भावो) कुलविर भिनामुचा तुयसिं ध्वतेम्ह ४
सेन-ध्व दांया व्याज वर्ष प्रतिं बुसाधन याना
८. थयमाल पुनः भाखा दयालक्ष्मी स्वर्गजुया ओनिबेरे-
ध्वया नामन पिण्ड थय मार जुरो ॥
मनोरथ सि दयालक्ष्मी ज्ञानि भागिवन्ता

III Copper -plate inscription of the renovation in
N.S. 1002 (size 18.5 x 7.5 cms)

१. ॐ शुभ सम्बत् १००२ स ध्व सालं लोकं बाहाया चैत्य
जीर्ण उद्धार यागु साल
२. ध्वकिया मूलाचार्य भूवावहाया वज्राचार्ये श्री कूलहर्ष
मान दु न सत्व प्रानि
३. उधार कामुनान ध्व परमेश्वर जिर्ण उद्धार याका जुल
शुभं ॥०॥



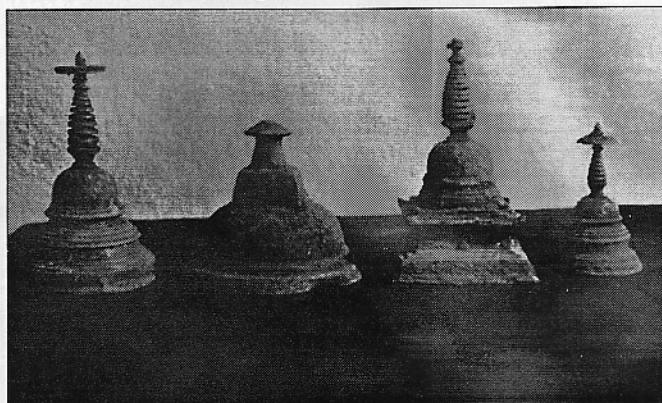
a. Stupa before renovation



b. Stupa during renovation



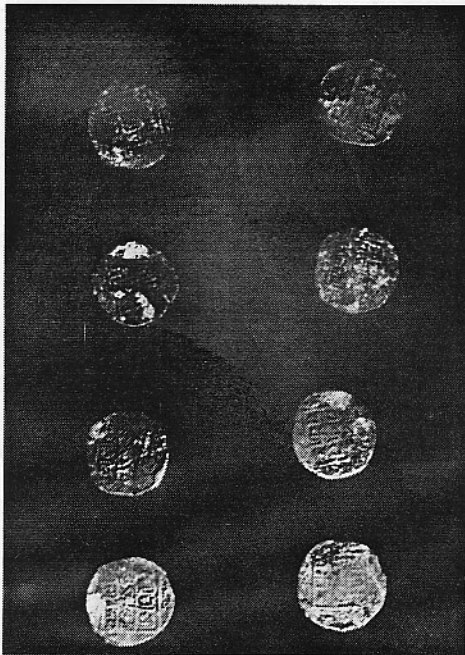
a. Golden Chaitya found from inside the dome



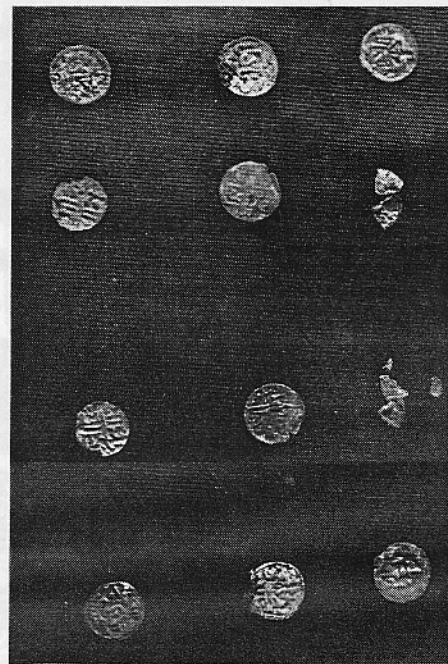
b. Four major types of Chaityas found from inside the dome



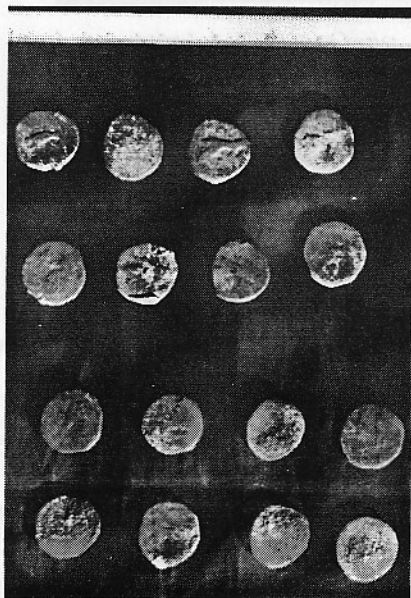
c. Chaitya-hoard found from inside the dome



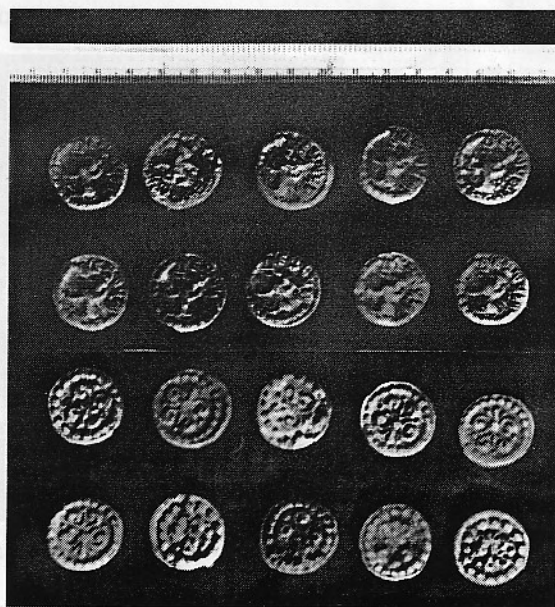
a. Coins of Surendra Vikram Shah



b. Chundam (Smallest Coins)



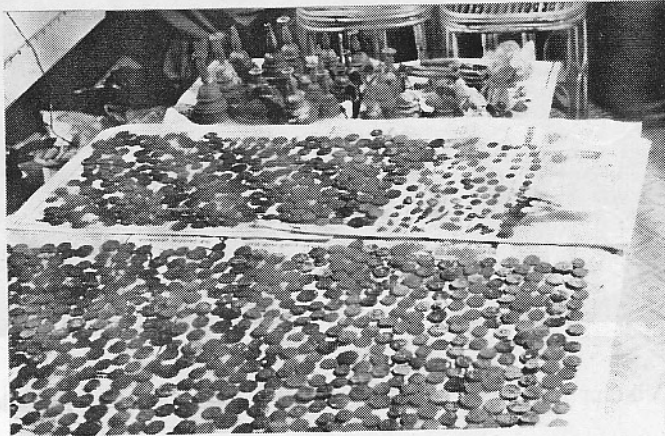
c. Sunga and Kushan Coins



d. Jishnugupta Coins



a. Coin Hoard before cleaning

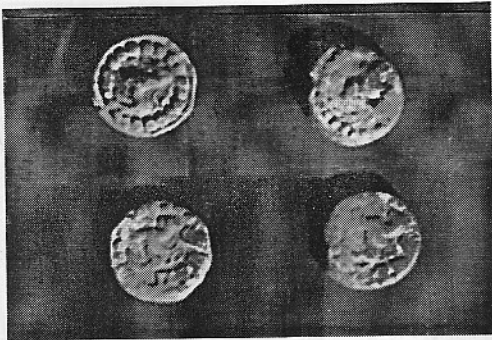


b. Coin Hoard during cleaning

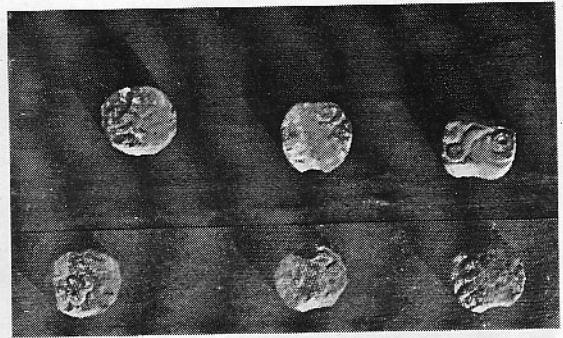


c. Coinhoard after cleaning

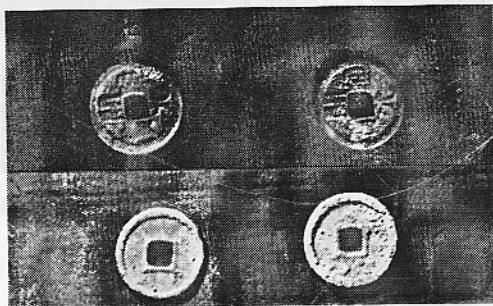
Pl. IV



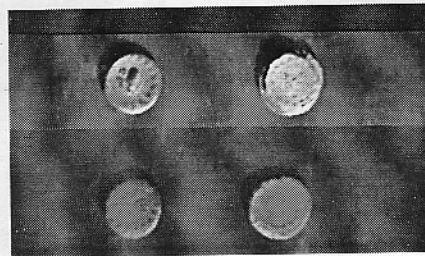
a. Lichhavi Coins



b. Copper ingots probably used as Coins



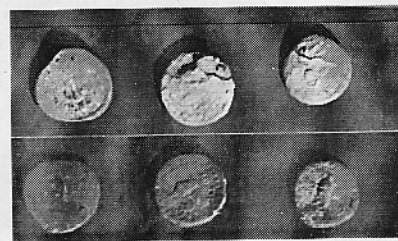
c. Chinese Coins



d. Shiva Coins



e. Pasupati Coins



f. Manank Coins

Pl. V -

IV. 11

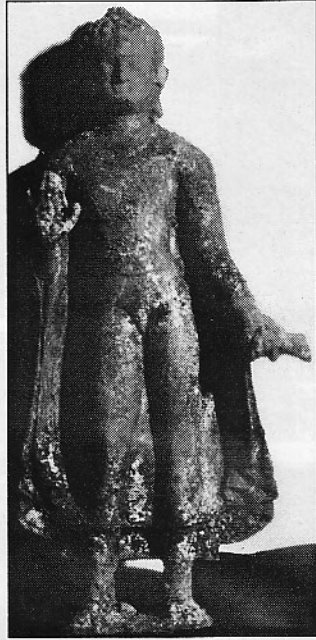
ii. Amoghisiddhi Buddha

Pl. VII -

iii. Saktyobhaya Buddha



a. Shiva Lokeswar



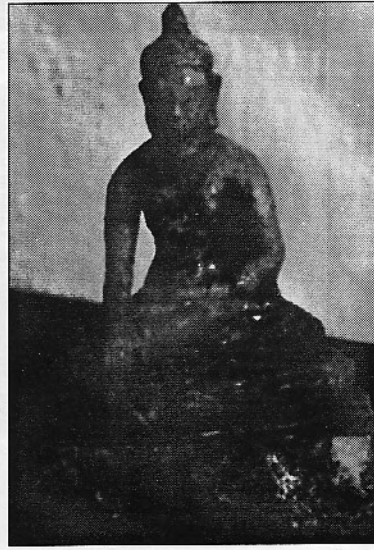
b. Shakyamuni Buddha



c. An image within tree root



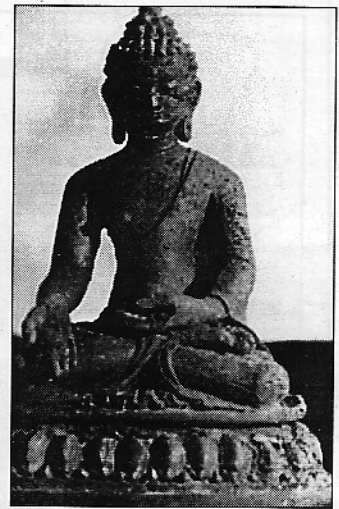
d. Maitraya Buddha



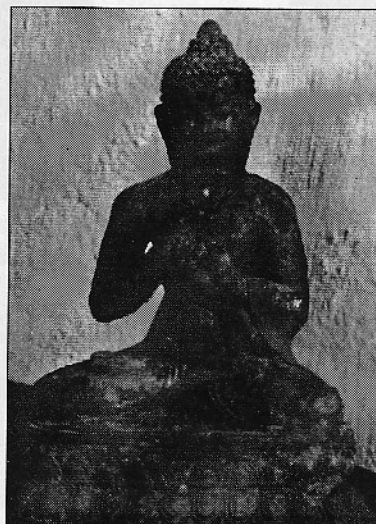
e. Akshobhya Buddha



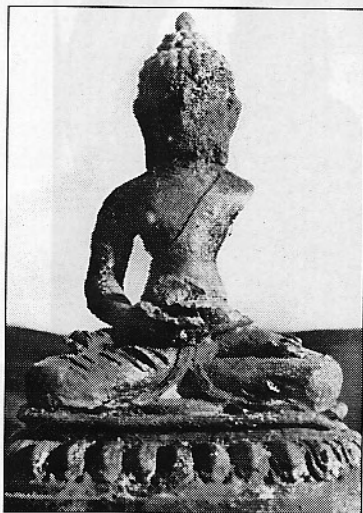
a. Amitabh Buddha



b. Ratnasambhava Buddha



c. Vairochana Buddha



d. Amoghsiddhi Buddha



e. Akshyobhya Buddha



a. Buddha Image



b. Amitabh Buddha



c. Akshobhya Buddha

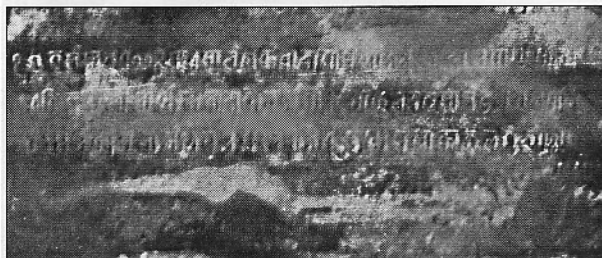


d. Tathagata Image

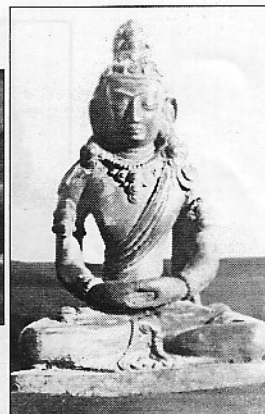
Pl. VIII



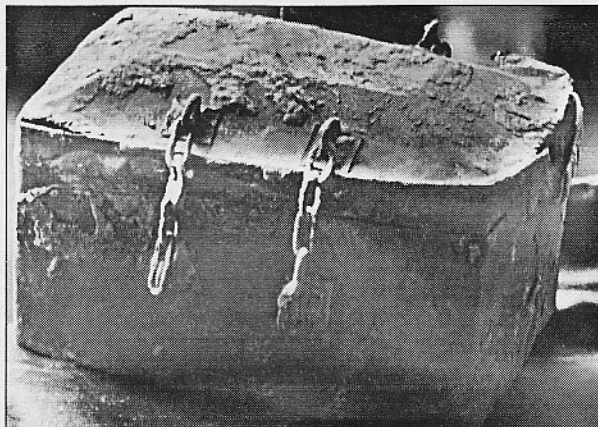
a. A piece of Tadpatra taken out from a Chaitya



b. Copper plate inscription of Stupa renovation in N.S. 1002



c. Dhyani Buddha



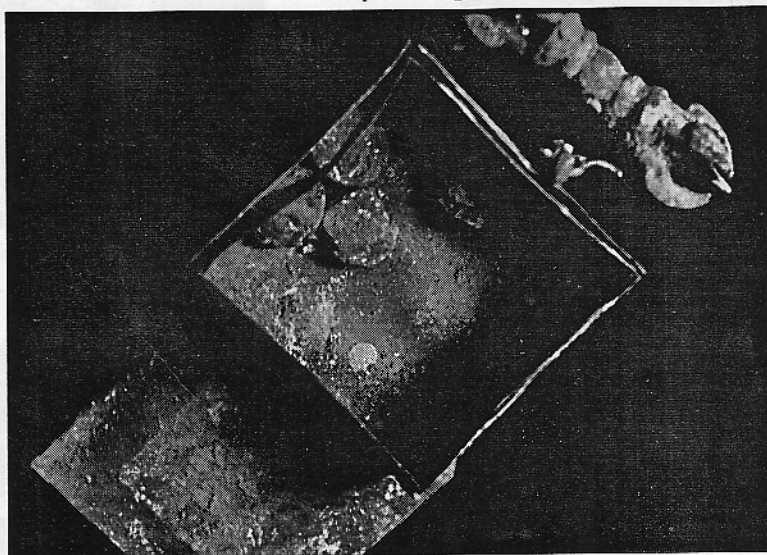
d. A metal box containing golden chaitya and artefact of worship.



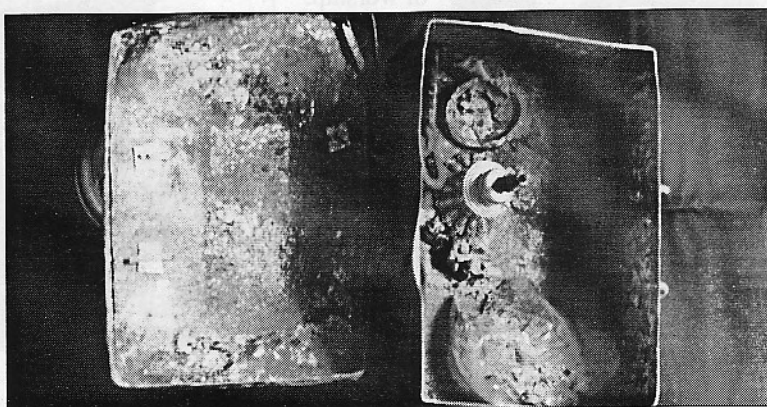
e. Chaityas and some artefacts



a. Group of Images



b. A metal box (Opened)



c. A metal box (Opened)



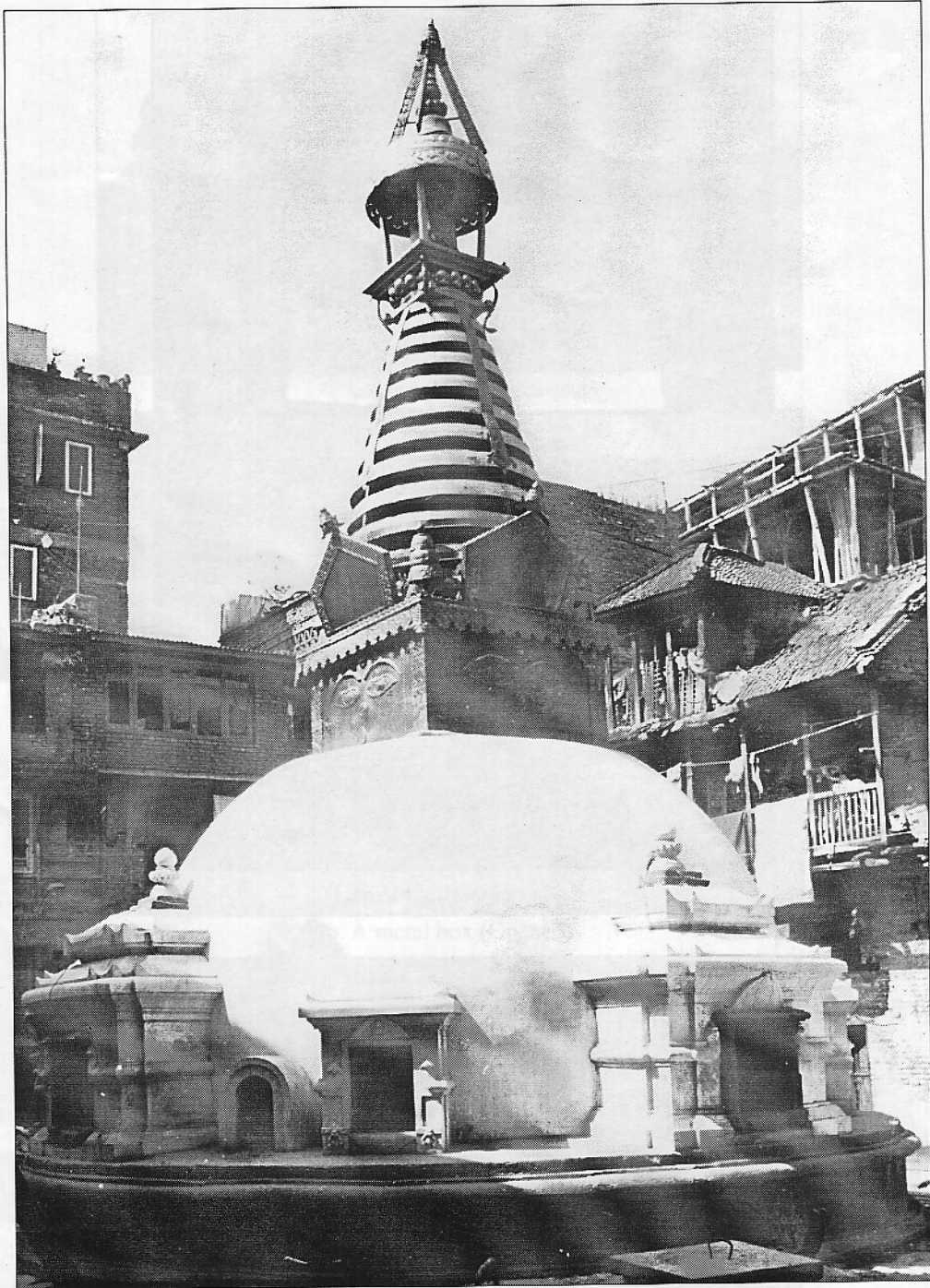
a. A Vessel



b. An unidentified Vessel



c. Some Vessels with contents



Stupa after Conservation