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India and Indonesia Relations: Traces of the Glory of Buddhism at Borobudur Temple in the 8th Century AD

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Abstract

The arrival of various religions, including Buddhism from India, reached distant regions, even as far as the island of Java, Indonesia. Numerous historical artifacts, such as the Borobudur Temple, serve as evidence of the flourishing of Buddhism in Java. This occurred during the era of the Ancient Mataram Kingdom, starting in the 8th century AD. The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of the arrival of Buddhism on the construction of magnificent temples, exemplified by the Borobudur Temple. Based on this, a historical approach was used in this research. The findings show similarities in artistic influences in the architecture of the Borobudur Temple, reflecting influences from India to Indonesia. The traces of Buddhist teachings in Java are also very strong, with the community practicing religious teachings in their daily lives. This complements the narrative of the journey of Buddhism in Indonesia.

***Keywords**: Borobudur Temple, Buddhism, India, Indonesia, Java*

Introduction

The influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam entered Indonesia from outside regions. Numerous historical artifacts such as temples, inscriptions, statues, and others bearing Hindu and Buddhist motifs are scattered across several islands in Indonesia, including Java. Evidence of the grandeur of the time when Buddhism was accepted by the people of Java can be seen through archaeological findings in the form of temples. One of the most famous is Borobudur Temple, which served as a place of worship for Buddhists (Eni and Tsabit 2017: 2). In this regard, the education of Buddhist teachings developed particularly from the Indian region.

Buddha philosophy based on scientific consciousness had a deep effect on the education system and style of Nalanda University. Nalanda was the first university of the world. It was established in 450 AD during the reign of Gupta rulere Kumargupta-1. Higher education in field of astronomy, astrology, science, mathemathics, philosophy, religion, economics, metaphysics and Buddhism was given here. Students from different parts of India and abroad – China, Japan, Tibet, Indonesia, Thailand, Turkey, Greek, Syria, Iran, Iraq – were coming here for higher study in mathematics, physics, and methaphysiscs. There were 10,000 students and 1400 teachers in Nalanda. Before 450 AD, recognition as university, Nalanda was an international learning centre for study of Buddha philosophy during 6th Buddha (567 - 454 BC).

Regarding cooperation in the field of education, the King of India and the King of Indonesia collaborated to provide educational opportunities across their respective regions during their time. In fact, King Pala (Devapala) of India donated five villages to King Srivijaya (Balaputradewa) of Indonesia to support the maintenance and operations of Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University). Furthermore, King Balaputradewa also sent many Indonesian students to study at Nalanda University (Singh 2015: 4-14). These Indonesian students who studied at Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University) in India had a very important influence and role in the spread of Buddhist teachings in Indonesia. In this regard, statues from Nalanda University also influenced archaeological findings at Borobudur Temple (Mullick 1990: 110-117).

The Borobudur Temple area is currently a very rare and unparalleled global heritage site. From the past to the present, Borobudur Temple has remained a popular place for worship and

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tourism. The Borobudur Temple complex was built during the period when Hindu-Buddhist teachings spread to the island of Java. Its construction began during the golden age of the Sailendra Buddhist dynasty. Its purpose was to honor the glory of Buddha and was founded through the efforts of the Bodhisattva king. The word Borobudur originates from the Sanskrit vihara Buddha uhr, meaning a Buddhist monastery on a hill. Its architecture is modeled after Javanese Buddhist architecture, combining ancestor worship with the concept of Nirvana. Borobudur's architecture has been identified as being influenced by Gupta art in India. However, it also incorporates original scenes and elements, making Borobudur unique (Nagaoka 2016: 1-2). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the significance of Borobudur Temple as evidence of the Buddhist era, and a global heritage. The arrival of Buddhism in Central Java is evident in the architecture of the temples. Therefore, this research is expected to complement the history and archaeology of the Hindu-Buddhist era in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. The Hindu-Buddhist era is rarely discussed specifically in history textbooks.

Literature Review

The source of this literature review comes from the book entitled "Connected Histories of India and Southeast Asia: Icons, Narratives, Monuments" written by Dhar. This work discusses in detail the relationship between India and Southeast Asia. The discussion also explains how Hindu-Buddhist teachings spread to Southeast Asia, particularly to Indonesia. It then interprets in detail the influence in the form of art and architecture, specifically the temples found on the islands of Java, Sumatra, and Bali. Furthermore, it examines the influence on writing systems and languages, which still show strong connections between India and Indonesia. For example, the inscriptions from the Hindu and Buddhist eras still strongly reflect the linguistic connections between these two regions.

Research Questions -Based on the existing background of the problem, to answer questions related to Borobudur Temple, there are several questions that need to be addressed in this research. There are two questions that need to be answered regarding Borobudur Temple. The first question is: a) How did Buddhism spread to Indonesia from India? b) What was the process of building Borobudur Temple and what were its impacts?

Methodology

This research uses a historical and archaeological approach (Daliman 2015: 28-29). This research is based on studies conducted in the Borobudur Temple area in Central Java, Indonesia. The steps taken include understanding archaeology and history as a scientific basis for conducting scientific research. Furthermore, we also understand and compare various depictions on the reliefs based on existing textual data, such as those found in manuscripts and inscriptions. This is to understand the spirit of the times that occurred during the Hindu and Buddhist eras that came from India to Indonesia. This research study provides new insights into the perspective of understanding the construction of Borobudur Temple, a unique place with traces of Buddhism. It also contributes to the survival of the temple throughout the ages, thanks to its extraordinary architectural beauty. This provides insight into the importance of preserving and maintaining historical building heritage. It is hoped that future generations will also understand the history of Borobudur Temple and be willing to visit this place.

Result and Discussion

The influence of Buddhist teachings from India on Indonesia

The influence of Indian culture on the Indonesian archipelago is evident in the aesthetics of the kingdoms and religious teachings, with archaeological evidence found in the art and architecture of the Hindu and Buddhist eras. Examples include Borobudur Temple and other temples on the island of Java, which contain inscriptions in scripts and languages that are still connected to India, as recorded in inscriptions and literary texts. For instance, the Tantu Panggelaran manuscript, dating back to the 15th century during the Majapahit Kingdom era, uses the Kawi language in East Java and discusses the origins of the island of Java, employing the poetic metaphor of "Javanization" to describe patterns and forms characteristic of India found in Indonesia. The text

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explains the myth of the transfer of Mount Meru from the Jambūdvīpa region (India) to the Javadvīpa region (Java), connecting it to the mountainous topography of Indonesia (Dhar 2023: 20). One example of archaeological evidence showing the influence of Indian art and architecture on Indonesia is the Borobudur Temple.

The archaeological discovery of Borobudur Temple serves as evidence that one of the most unique and beautiful Buddhist monuments remains intact in Indonesia. The meaning within Borobudur Temple contains the essence of "Ratna mutu manikam" (a precious jewel), influenced by Mahayana Buddhist art. Comparative research on the art has revealed that Gupta art, not found in India, is present in Central Java, specifically at Borobudur Temple (Munandar 2016: 151). Borobudur Temple, both enormous in size and rich in symbolism, is one of the largest Buddhist temples outside India. Archaeological findings indicate that its technical, architectural, and symbolic structure bears close ties to Buddhist temples in Cambodia and India (Wickert 1989: 7). Therefore, the Borobudur Temple complex remains a very rare and beautiful example of art and architecture in the world today. Based on archaeological findings, the total height of Borobudur Temple reaches 42 meters (Santiko 2016: 131).



Candi Borobudur (Figure 1).
Source: Indonesia Travel. (2025). The Borobudur Temple: Indonesia's Main Tourism Attraction

The structure of Borobudur Temple has meaning in each of its parts. It contains a replica of the universe consisting of four layers. These layers include the bottom layer representing the lower world, also known as Kamadhatu. The next layer represents the material world, also known as Rupadhatu. Following this is the layer representing the spiritual world, known as Arupadhatu. Finally, there is the journey to the eternal world, also known as Nirvana. Therefore, the reliefs depict a progression from the lower layers to the upper levels, serving as a spiritual path to enlightenment (Tanudirjo 2013: 67). It is understandable that the meanings embedded in each structure of Borobudur Temple are excellent sources of insight for guiding daily life, especially for people in Indonesia.

Traces of Buddhist Teachings Through the Discovery of Borobudur Temple in Java, 8th to 9th Centuries AD

The teachings of Buddhism, with its philosophical views, have been taught by Siddhartha Gautama for over 2500 years. Throughout its development, Buddhism has spread to various regions of Asia, Europe, and even to the Americas. After Buddha attained enlightenment, he continued to teach the 'dhamma' for 45 years (Gupta and Verma 2021: 228). He also visited many locations to spread his teachings to people around the world. This is evidenced by the traces of Buddhist teachings in Java, with the Borobudur Temple as a legacy of the glorious era of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms in Java.

Based on the findings of the Purnawarman inscription from the fifth century and the Cangal inscription from 732 at Mount Wukir near Borobudur Temple, the existing records are very few and not very informative, and their interpretation is uncertain. The author of the Cangal text, King Sanjaya, was likely a prince of Mataram, but little is known about him. His successor, King Panongkaran, is mentioned in the Kalasan inscription, dated 778. He was a vassal king of the Sailendra dynasty. This likely also applied to Sanjaya. De Casparis, a researcher on this subject, after examining all the information in the inscriptions of the Sailendra dynasty, concluded that during the period from the late eighth to the early ninth century, two dynasties shared power in Central Java: the Sanjaya dynasty (Hindu) and the Sailendra dynasty (Buddhist) (Dumarcay 1991: 2).

The Sailendra kings strongly patronized Buddhism, which is reflected in art and architecture. Candi Kalasan dated 778 C.E. has makara toraña arches, which are exquisite in design. Order and beauty mark the whole complex of Candi Sewu (thousand temples), consisting of one large temple and four rows of 250 small

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temples. Representing the highest genius of Sailendra period, the construction of Buddhist stupa of Borobudur was started by Visnu in 778 C.E. and completed by Samratunga in 824 C.E. Borobudur was selected as Mount Meru of the kingdom of Sailendras for construction of a miniature cosmos on the site dedicated to Buddha (Mishra 2000-2001: 1064).

Since the 8th century, the Syailendra dynasty of the Ancient Mataram Kingdom marked the beginning of the construction of Borobudur Temple. Construction of this temple was planned from 780 to 840 AD. Due to natural processes and influences such as natural disasters, Borobudur Temple was buried. Through traces of discoveries covered by layers of volcanic ash, even from Mount Merapi, only local residents understood and understood its location. Since the colonial era, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, who was sent to oversee Java, opened and expanded archaeological discoveries in the form of temples. So that it is estimated that in 1835, the temples were restored to their original function (Tunjungsari 2020: 55). Through this, in particular, the discovery of Borobudur Temple as a trace of the influence of Buddhist teachings from India to Indonesia has become a global heritage with historical, religious, and other values that can be implemented in the lives of people both in the past and in the present era.

Conclusion

Borobudur Temple stands as a testament to the influence of Buddhist teachings from India on Indonesia. The Gupta art and architecture are evident in the structure of Borobudur Temple on the island of Java. Its construction began during the era of the Ancient Mataram Kingdom under the Syailendra dynasty, around the 8th to 9th centuries AD. The beauty of the Borobudur Temple's layered structure is significant, with each layer holding its own meaning.

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