



Bảo Anh Lạc Bookshelf 35

SĀRNĀTHA

THE CRADLE OF BUDDHISM

From an Archeological Perspective

(Fifth Printing)

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Words for the Fifth Edition

This is a revised and enlarged edition of *Sārnātha - The Cradle of Buddhism in an Archeological View*, which was first launched fifteen years ago, in 2005, by the publisher Delhi-7: Eastern Book Linkers. The second, third, and fourth editions were printed in 2008, 2010, and 2016, respectively, by Phương Đông Publishing, Sài Gòn, Việt Nam.

This current edition (2020) will be printed at Hồng Đức Publishing, HCM City, Việt Nam. In presenting this fifth edition, I have preserved the original version as the first edition. However, for the sake of clarity, some well-illustrated photos of the *Sārnātha* archeological site and environs have been added; a number of clarifying changes have been made; errors have been corrected for better use and service; and a summary and discussion questions have been provided at the end of each chapter. While translating the work into English, we recognized that some footnotes are not given with all details, but they will be sufficient for the reader.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge with special thanks Bhikkhuni Viên Quang, Bhikkhuni Viên Ngô, and Mark Woodworth (editors who worked as my English assistants during the translating, copyediting, proofreading, design, and publication processes).

We rejoice in introducing readers near and far to the Dharma. We invite corrections and comments from our readers, to be incorporated into future printings. We look forward to hearing from you.

Library of University of California, Riverside
May 21, 2020

Dr. Bhikkhuni Thích Nữ Giới Hương



Sārnātha (Varanasi) on a map of India

INTRODUCTION

by the Most Venerable Thích Mãn Giác

During the sixth century, China had Confucius and Lao-tzu, Iran had Zoroaster, Greece had Socrates and Plato, and India had Mahavira and Shakyamuni Buddha. That period was clearly a golden age for Asia, perhaps even the world.

The Shakyamuni Buddha was born to this world at Lumbini, attained Enlightenment at Bodhgaya, turned the Dhamma Wheel at *Sārnātha*, and entered Nibbāna at Kushinagar. In the first discourse, the Buddha proclaimed the Four Noble Truths, or the Four Arya (*Satyas cattāri ariyasaccāni*), to be: suffering (*Dukkha*), the cause of suffering (*Samudāya*), the cessation of suffering (*Nirodha*), and the ways leading to the cessation of suffering (*Magga*), which together make up the Eightfold Paths: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. This basic doctrine that the Buddha experienced and proclaimed liberated living beings from suffering and led them to conduct a peaceful and happy life. The Buddha traveled to many places to show living beings how they could realize their own suffering and find a path leading

to ending that suffering. Therefore, it can be said that *Sārnātha*, also called Deer Park, is the cradle of Buddhism, and from this place the Buddhist Sangha, or monastic community, was established. After Buddha's Nibbana, his disciples preached Buddhism throughout India and all over the world, setting up many temples, stupas, and signed stones everywhere. Buddhism is like the spiritual torch that perfectly meets the needs of humans. However, everything constantly changes day by day, and so does Buddhism. Due to circumstances of history, politics, and the fanaticism of other religions, at the joint destiny, *Sārnātha* collapsed and was burned down many times; however, luckily it was also restored many times. Today, it is safely protected by the government of India and maintained by countless archeologists, historians, scientists, and defenders of other religions throughout the land. People from abroad also go there to help continue excavating the temple to reveal the golden age of *Sārnātha* to human beings in India and all over the world.

Bhikkhunī Thích Nữ Giới Hương, having spent ten years cultivating and studying (1995-2005) in Delhi, India, visited numerous Buddhist holy places to prostrate herself, research, chronicle, and introduce the book that she titled *Sārnātha - The Cradle of Buddhism from an Archeological Perspective*. This book details the development of Buddhism, as well as covers the history, biology, politics, archeology, and sculpture of *Sārnātha* in both ancient and modern times, drawing from the material resources of Pali scriptures, books on Buddhism, archeological sites, historical archives, travel experiences, and so on. This book also features

several maps and many beautiful pictures, taken by the author in and around *Sārnātha*. I believe that this book greatly facilitates understanding the history of Buddhism in India.

I feel honored and sincerely grateful to have written this introduction for Buddhists and scholars from both near and far.

Spring, March 27, 2006

The Most Venerable Thích Mãn Giác

The Abbot of the Vietnam Temple at

Los Angeles, California, USA



A panoramic view of the sacred place *Sārnātha*, where the Buddha first gave a sermon and then established a Buddhist Sangha



The *Sārnātha* archeological excavation, present day



The Pilgrimage (Ven. Hạnh Nguyễn, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, Bhikkhunī Thanh Châu, Rev. Viên Quang, and other Buddhists) of the Hương Sen Temple to *Sārnātha* in September, 2016

PREFACE

I came to Kasi City,
Performed the immortal drum,
Gave a light for this dark world.
(*Majjhima Nikāya*)

Sārṇātha (*Deer Park*) is a Buddhist holy place, related to the Buddha's life where he converted five of his friends to practice in the right track, established the first Sangha, and delivered his initial lecture. *Sārṇātha* stands about 10 km north of *Vārānasi*. In the past, it was called *Vārānasi* Capital, and it is now in Uttar Pradesh state (the northern part of India).

At the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, *Sārṇātha* was a quiet, lushly green area that became a fine place for meditation. The place was also called Isipatana, or Migadaya. Many kalpas ago, Shakyamuni Buddha was a Boddhissatta who often rebirthed there. As a result, numerous stories about the Previous Births of Gautama Buddha (*Jātaka Nikāya*) have been linked to this place.

After the 49th day, having achieved enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, Gautama Buddha walked to *Vārānasi* with the aim of spreading his liberated message to the masses. At *Sārṇātha*, he met again his former companions who had practiced austerity and other principles with him.

The entire region of *Sārṇātha* was made brilliant by the presence of the Honorable World Lord. The fragrance of the flowers thereabouts and incense being burned

by worshippers added to the fresh atmosphere. Yellow spotted deer ran here and there. Spiders wove large webs on the green grass that sported clear dewdrops glistening under the sun.

With the tranquility of mind and body that he achieved, the Buddha declared the truth he had gained from his enlightenment to five brothers, called the Koṇḍañña group. Five of them listened to the Buddha for five days. In the Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel Suttā, or Promulgation of the Law of Suttā (*Dharma-cakra-pravartana Suttā*), the Buddha first introduced to the Middle Way the principles of avoiding two extremes: enjoying too much the world's pleasure and engaging too much in austerity. He also preached the Four Noble Truths, or the Four Arya (*Satyas cattāri ariyasaccāni*), containing the wisdom leading to enlightenment, especially the Eightfold Path, or the way of tranquility and happiness.

After hearing and admiring the Buddha's insightful words, the five brothers Koṇḍañña took refuge with him and became his first ordained disciples, thus establishing the first sangha in the world.

After learning that there was a new way leading to liberation, peace, and happiness, many people from *Vārānasi* started to search for it. The sangha of 60 monks was formed; since that time, Buddhism spread throughout the region and to distant places. The Buddha taught his disciples:

“We will go to Sena village. Those who want to go to places where you like to preach, you can go as you wish, but two people should not go in one place. Teach and explain Dharma to your best ability for the sake of many.”

The sangha of Buddha was the world's first ancient religious organization. Based on these historical events, *Sārnātha* became the first Dharma wheel transformation, the place where Buddhism was born.

Sārnātha became the most amicable and favored place for followers of Buddha, and it is now the most important center of Buddhism worldwide. Disciples have spread the teaching of the Buddha - the pleasant and tranquil path. In a short time, Buddhism was propagated all over India. From common people to high officers, kings, and others, all adherents were welcomed to the liberated and fair spirit of Buddhism.

At this historical *Sārnātha*, King *Aśoka*, who supported Buddhism, built a variety of Buddhist projects, stupas, signed stones, temples, and the like. These are represented as being among the most skillful architectural masterpieces in Buddhist art. What remains of *Sārnātha* today shows many temples that proved this place truly represented the Great Golden Age in Buddha's time. Many antiques that were found during multiple archeological explorations have been preserved and are now displayed on public view in the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum, opposite the historical site.

The stone lion pillar of King *Aśoka*, a timeless masterpiece, was made from polished chunar stone, and has been worn down by centuries of weather. Although it was carved many years ago, it looks new and pretty even today. This demonstrates the high development of Asian architecture of ancient times. Regarding that stone lion pillar, the Chinese Tripitaka Master Hsien Tsang recounted that "It is as polished as a blue gem

and bright as a beautiful mirror.” Nowadays, it is the valuable symbol of the national emblem of India. At the center of the nation’s flag is the Dharma wheel, which also came from the stone lion pillar of King *Aśoka*. Since ancient times, then, we can recognize *Sārnātha* as being a symbol of pride for the entire nation and for Buddhists throughout the world.

Failure after success.... Being down after rising up in the course of time.... Buddhism spent a hard time in this place. It remained a gloomy location for many centuries. The *Sārnātha* monument was pulled to the ground by Muhammad Gori and Sultan Mahmud Ghazani. After that, under the regime of the Mughal kings (Muslims), all monuments, temples, shrines, and sacred sites were destroyed; Buddhist scriptures were burned; and monks were forcibly caught or even killed. To save themselves, many monks fled from India to Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other places, leaving that area quiet without any Buddhist activity for several centuries.

During the dark history of *Sārnātha*, many famous and solemn monuments that had been built by King *Aśoka* lay buried for centuries. A glorious period was forgotten, and in recent decades it has emerged as still a somewhat wild and remote site.

Its historical ruins seemed lost until the fifth and seventh centuries C.E., when two individual Chinese pilgrims, Fa Hsian and Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang, visited *Sārnātha*. Separately, they narrated in detail both other historical sites and *Sārnātha*, which had more than 1,500 monastics diligently practicing there.

The period from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries stands as *Sārnātha*'s gloomy period. However, luckily, *Sārnātha* rose again by chance. A rich man named Shri Jagat Singh, living in *Vārānasi* in 1794, traveled to the *Sārnātha* ruins to take bricks from Dharmarajika Stupa for his personal buildings. Then, in 1798, a man named J. Duncon, a representative of the Indian government, declared the *Sārnātha* ruins to be important historical relics, which launched the archeological process there. In 1815 this work proceeded under the direction of General C. Mackenzie; in 1835, Alexander Cunningham took charge of the digging. His team discovered underground a great monastery base, statues, and many Buddhist items, which were sent to be displayed in a museum in Calcutta (now Kolkata, West Bengal).

After that, in 1851 a certain Major Kittoe continued this archeological work; in 1853 a Mr. E. Thomas took over; in 1856, a Mr. C. Horn took charge; and in 1905, F. O. Oertel worked as a manager directing the work. It was Oertel's team that discovered the main grand monastery background, with King *Aśoka*'s stone lion pillar. As a result of their archeological excavations over many years, the glorious history of *Sārnātha* gradually was opened. Thanks to their efforts, this book was honored with the title *Sārnātha - The Cradle of Buddhism in an Archeological View*.

In 1905, Britain's Viceroy Lord Curzon asked the chief of staff in the archeological department to build a local museum so as to preserve and display the historical masterpieces found in *Sārnātha*. Therefore, the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum

was established in 1905. In 1914-1915, a man named Hargraves continued to dig through the ruins and also discovered many valuable antiques. The archeological dig was then thought to have been completed, with many masterpieces displayed in the museum. Its holdings show the high level of ancient Indian architecture and civilization.

Besides the success of *Sārnātha* as an archeological site, it also exalts the merit of modern monks over the last century or so who built a new local temple and helped to develop Buddhism here and there. Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sri Lankan native, went to India in 1893 to help regenerate Buddhism there. When first looking at *Sārnātha*'s sad ruins, he promised to sacrifice himself to take care of the site and recover Buddhism there as it had existed in Buddha's own time. He was the first volunteer monk, and he devoted his whole life to restoring Buddhism in India, especially in *Sārnātha*, *Vārānasi*. In 1931, he passed away, but his dream was fulfilled when the *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* was constructed later that year. This solemn grand temple, built in the modern style, stands to the right side of the historical site when viewed from the entrance gate, and attracts thousands of national and international pilgrims to visit every month.

In 1956, at the *Sārnātha* historical site, the Indian government organized a Vesak to memorialize the Buddha who was born into the world 2,500 years ago. Since that time, the glorious light of Buddhism has been back in *Sārnātha*. At present, *Sārnātha* stands as one of the four most important Buddhist holy sites, where the Buddha turned the first Dharma

wheel and formed a sangha with five Bhikkhus. It is one of the most visited places in India. The fame and glory of “*Sārnātha - The Cradle of Buddhism*” has been spreading to many countries in the worlds, including Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Mongo, Europe, and the United States.

To conclude this introduction, I would particularly like to thank Dr. Kahawatte Siri Sumedha Thero, Bhikkhu-in-charge of the *Sārnātha* Centre of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra*, during 1996-2005, during which time I engaged in this research writing. Dr. Siri Sumedha and other Bhikkhus helped me to research the useful material relating to this topic at the library of *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* and at other supporting facilities, in order that this new edition of *Sārnātha - The Cradle of Buddhism in an Archeological View* can be presented and published. We would like to introduce it to all readers.

Namo Sakyamuni Buddha.

Summer 2005, at the Hostel of
Postgraduate Women University of Delhi, India

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Rev. Bửu Chánh, Rev. Đồng Mẫn, Rev. Giới Hương, Rev. Hằng Liên,
and other Buddhists at *Sārnātha* in 1998

Notes

¹ *Four Noble Truths* (Chattari-ariya-saccani), Samyutta Nikāya V, chapter 12, part II, Dharmacakrapravartana Suttā., ed. M. L. Feen and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS: 1884-1898; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1950-1956.

² *Dharma Wheel Scripture* (Dharma-cakra-pravartana Suttā). Samyutta Nikāya. V, chapter 12, part II, ed. M. L. Feen and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS: 1884-1898; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1950-1956.

³ Ibid.

⁴ From 2011 to today, Dr. Kahawatte Siri Sumedha has directed the Indo-Sri Lanka International Buddhist Association (Ashok Marg, Holy Isipatana, Sarnath, Varanasi - 221007, UP, India. Phone: 0091-542-2595003. Fax: 0091 542 2595877, 2595922. Cell: 91 9839 056 094). It is headquartered about halfway between the Mūlagandhakūṭi Vihāra and the Chaukhandī Stupa. He, along with other Bhikkhus and members of his new association, have engaged in many beneficial activities for Buddhism itself, for widespread education, and for charity both locally and throughout India.

CHAPTER 1
SĀRNĀTHA
IN BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES



The Buddha and his first five Disciples at Deer Park

1. THE REASON WHY THE BUDDHA CAME TO *SĀRNĀTHA*

On the eighth week of his enlightenment, the Buddha thought of the place where he would preach the Dhamma for living beings and realized that living beings are attached to sensual pleasures. Moreover, if he were to teach Dhamma to the masses, they would not understand him, and that would be useless. As the Buddha reflected thus, he made his mind up *not* to teach the Dhamma. Then Brahma Sahampati read his thoughts and felt that the world might be destroyed without hearing the Dhamma. He approached the Buddha and requested him to preach the Dhamma, saying:

“O Lord, may the Lord teach the Dhamma! May the Well-Farer expound the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who do not hear the Dhamma, who will fall away. But if they are learners of the Dhamma, they will understand the Dhamma.”

After having repeated this prayer thrice, the Buddha gave his assent. Then the Brahma prostrated himself before the Buddha and disappeared.

After that, the Buddha wondered: Whom could he preach the Dhamma for? Who could understand his doctrine? Then he remembered two religious teachers - Alara Kalama, who had attained the realm of nothing, and Uddaka Ramaputta, who had attained the realm of consciousness (at that time, no one had attained *dhyana* more than that level). They were worthy of hearing his doctrine, but both had passed away. Next, the Buddha thought of the five ascetics, the Panchavargiya Bhikkhus. They and he had often

practiced austerity together. With his physical power, he knew that they were in Migadaya (which now is called *Sārnātha*, in *Vārānasi*). He decided to preach the Dhamma to them and, with that decision, he traveled toward *Vārānasi*. He walked more than 250 km from Bodhigaya, crossed the Ganga River, and took ferries to Kashi (the old name of *Vārānasi*), venturing toward *Sārnātha*. He found his five ascetics, who left him alone at Veisali when they saw him abandon mortification, which according to them was the only way leading to liberation, and after they accused him of enjoying pleasure too much.

As he headed toward *Sārnātha* on a trip of many days, he stopped in villages to ask for alms every morning. After his meal, he sat meditation and contemplated the world and how to choose a living being who had affinity with him so as to transform.

One day, he met an ascetic named Upaka. At the sight of the Blessed One, Upaka uttered a cry of admiration:

“O, friend, your skin is pure and bright, what are you practicing? Who is your master?”

The Buddha answered:

“I am one who has transcended all, a knower of all,
Unsullied among all things, renouncing all,
By craving’s ceasing freed. Having known this all
For myself, to whom should I point as teacher?
I have no teacher, and one like me
Exists nowhere in all the world
With all its gods, because I have
No person for my counterpart.
I am the Accomplished One in the world,

I am the Teacher Supreme.
I alone am a Fully Enlightened One
Whose fires are quenched and extinguished.
I go to beat the drum of the Deathless.
I go now to the city of Ksi
To set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma
In a world that has become blind.”

When this was said, Upaka replied: “Brother, do you mean that you are an Arahant who cut off all defilement?”

The Buddha replied:

“The victors are those like me
Who have won to destruction of taints to rebirth.
I have vanquished all evil states,
Therefore, Upaka, I am a victor.”

Despite having heard what the Buddha said, Upaka did not trust his words, because he thought that there was no way leading to liberation without mortification. Thinking this, Upaka said: “May it be so, friend.” Shaking his head, he took a bypath and departed.

The Buddha felt enough equanimity to continue his journey. Difficulties experienced when trying to convert people on their first meeting did not make him bored. Knowing that there are many species of human beings who are easy to teach and so would understand his doctrine, while also realizing that others were hard to teach so they would not believe him and would turn their backs, the Buddha simply smiled and continued going forward peacefully.

2. THE GROUP OF FIVE ASCETICS

“Then, Bhikkhus, wandering by stages, I eventually came to Banāres, to the Deer Park at Isipatana, and I approached the Bhikkhus of the group of five.”

The group consisted of Anna Kondañña (in Sanskrit: *Ajnata Kaundinya*), Assaji (Skt: *Asvajit*), Bhaddiya (Skt: *Bhadhrika*), Dasabala Kassapa (Skt: *Dasabala Kasyapa*), and Mahanamakuliya.

They were living in *Sārnātha* and, upon seeing the Buddha in the distance, they said themselves thus:

“Friends, the recluse Gotama was coming here. He gave up his striving, and reverted to luxury. We should not pay homage to him or rise up for him. But a seat may be prepared for him. If he likes, he may sit down.”

However, the more the Buddha went toward them, the more restless they got. When he finally stood face to face with them, they could not help showing him due respect. He sat down on an available place and washed his feet. Then the Buddha talked about his destination since he comprehended the Middle Way and determined cutting off the austere way before. The Middle Way leads to calm, wisdom, and enlightenment. He said to them that he had not returned to the luxurious life; after that he meditated diligently at the foot of the Bodhi tree and finally surrendered Mara, and attained the fruit of Buddha. Then the five ascetics called his name, but the Buddha asked them not to call his name again because he had already become a Buddha who was an Accomplished One, a Fully Enlightened One. He remarked:

“Listen, Bhikkhus, thanks to regular diligence, I attained Enlightenment, I achieved Deathlessness. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as you are instructed, by realizing for yourselves here and now through direct knowledge, you will soon enter upon and abide in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness.”

They did not believe what the Buddha said, and they all said:

“Friend Gotama, by the conduct, the practice, and the performance of austerities that you undertook, you did not achieve any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Since you now live luxuriously, having given up your striving and reverted to luxury, how will you have achieved any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones?”

Again, the Buddha said that he did not live luxuriously; he cultivated diligently under the Bodhi tree and attained the Buddhahood. The Buddha repeated it three times; they didn’t believe him but, seeing his firmness, he said: “Bhikkhus, have you ever known me to speak like this before?” They all replied: “No, venerable sir.” The Buddha said, “Then please listen, my friends. I have found the Great Way, and I will show it to you.” And the first discourse was proclaimed. It was called “The Turning of the Dhamma Wheel” (*Dharma Cakra Pravartana Sūtra*).

The place where the Shakya Buddha had preached the first discourse was the place where all the Buddhas in the past also turned the Dhamma Wheel.

According to the tradition of all those Buddhas, the Shakyamuni Buddha also came to walk meditation there three times. At that time, heaven rained down small mandarava flowers and great mandarava flowers, manjushaka flowers, and great manjushaka flowers, scattering them over him. There happened thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, a cry spread as far as the Brahma-world, and this ten thousandfold world system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world, surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.



The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma Sutta, or Promulgation of the Law (*Dharma Cakra Pravartana Sūtra*) at Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra

3. THE DHAMMA WHEEL SUTTĀ

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Vārānasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

(Ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā bārāṇasiyaṃ vihārati isipatane migadāye.)

2. There the Blessed One addressed the Bhikkhus of the group of five thus: Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness.

(Tatra kho bhagavā pañcavaggiye bhikkhū āmantesi: Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitaḥ.)

3. Which two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering toward either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

(Yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo hīno gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anattasaṃhito; abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī ñāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati. Ete kho, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī ñāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati.)

4. And what, Bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision...which leads to Nibbāna? It is this noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, Bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

(Katamā ca sā, bhikkhave, majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī

ñāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati? Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ - sammādiṭṭhi sammāsaṅkappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhī. Ayaṃ kho sā, bhikkhave, majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī ñāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati.)

5. Now this, Bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

(Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dūkkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ-jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, byādhipi dukkho, maraṇampi dūkkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampiccham na labhati tampi dūkkhaṃ-samkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dūkkha.)

6. Now this, Bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to re-becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for dis-becoming.

(Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dūkkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ-yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatrataṭṭhābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ - kāmatāṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhava-taṇhā.)

7. Now this, Bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

(Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dūkkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ-yotassāyevataṇhāyaasesavirāgaṇirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo.)

8. Now this, Bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: That is the Eightfold Path; that is, right view...right concentration.

(Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dūkkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ- ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ-sammādiṭṭhi, sammāsāṅkappo, sammāvācā, sammākammanto, sammā-ājīvo, sammāvāyāmo, sammāsati, sammāsamādhi.)

9. This is the noble truth of suffering: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

(Idaṃ dūkkhaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ. udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyyan'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññātan'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.)

10. This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

(Idaṃ dūkkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccan' ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabban'ti me bhikkhave pubbe

ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahīnaṃ ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananusstesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.)

11. This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

(Idaṃ dūkkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananusstesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabban' ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananusstesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātan' ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananusstesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.)

12. This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision...and light.

This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed: thus, Bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

(Idaṃ dūkkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccan'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇam udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabban'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dūkkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvitān'ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇam udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.)

13. So long, Bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths or the four Arya (*satyas cattāri ariyasaccāni*) as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects were not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans.

(Yāvakīvañca me bhikkhave imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ Tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ na suvisuddhaṃ ahoṣi, neva tāv'āhaṃ bhikkhave sadevake loke samāraṃke

sabrahmake sassamaṇabrahmamiyā pajāya devamanussāya “anuttanaṃ sammā-sambodhi Ñabhisambuddho” ti paccaññāsim.)

14. But when my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths, the Four Noble Truths or the four Arya (*satyas cattāri ariyasaccāni*) as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects, were thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and the vision arose in me: “Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more re-becoming.”

(Yato ca kho me bhikkhave imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ Tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahoṣi, ath’āhaṃ bhikkhave sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrahmaṇiyā pajāya devamanussāya “anuttaraṃ sammā sambodhiṃ abhisambuddho” ti paccaññāsim. Ñaṇaṅca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi “akuppā me vimutti, ayam’antimā jāti, natthi’ dāni punabbhavoti.”)

15. This is what the Blessed One said. Being pleased, the Bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One’s statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondaṅga the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

(Idam'avoca Bhagavā attamanā pañcavaggiyā bhikkhūBhagavatobhāsitaṃabhinandun'ti.Imasmiñca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vītamaḷaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodhadhamman ti.)

16. When the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth devas raised a cry: “*At Vārānasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world.*”

(Pavattite ca pana Bhagavatā dhammacakke bhumma devā saddamanussāvesuṃ “etaṃ Bhagavatā Bārāṇasiyaṃ Isipatane migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appaṭivattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brahmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmuna vā kenaci vā lokasmin ti.)

17. Having heard the cry of the earth devas, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised a cry: “*At Vārānasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world.*”

(Bhummaṇaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Cātummahārājikā devā sadda-manussāvesuṃ etaṃ Bhagavatā Bārāṇasiyaṃ Isipatane migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appaṭivattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brahmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmuna vā kenaci vā lokasmin ti.)

18. Having heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Tavatimsa devas, the Yama devas, the Tusita devas, the Nimmanarati devas, and the Paranimmitavasavatti devas, the devas of Brahma's company raised a cry: “*At Vārānasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world.*”

(*Cātumhārājikānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Tāvatiṃsā devā saddamanussāvesuṃ. Tāvatiṃsānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Yāmā devā saddamanussāvesuṃ. Yāmānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Tusitā devā sadda-manussāvesuṃ. Tusitānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Nimmānaratī devā sadda-manussāvesuṃ. Paranimmitavasavattīnaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Brahmakāyikā devā saddamanussāvesuṃ...lokasmin ti.*)

19. Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma-world, and this ten thousand world-systems shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.

(*Iti ha tena khaṇena tena layena tena muhuttena yāva brahmalokā saddo abbuggacchi ayañca dasasahassī lokadhātu saṅkampi sampakampi sampavedhi. Appamāṇo ca ulāro obhāso loke Pāturahosi atikkamma devānaṃ devanubhāvan ti.*)

20. Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: “Kondañña has indeed understood! Kondañña has indeed understood!” In this way the Venerable Kondañña acquired the name “Anna Kondañña-Kondañña who has understood.”

(*Atha kho Bhagavā imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi “Aññāsi vata bho Koṇḍañño, aññāsi vata bho Koṇḍañño” ti Itihidaṃ āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa ‘Aññāsi Koṇḍañño’ tveva nāmaṃ ahoṣī ti.*)

People found the epitaph, from the Later Kushān dynasty, with the Dhammachakra-pravartana Suttā in *Sārnātha*. It said that the Buddha delivered the Four Noble Truths or the four Arya (*satyas cattāri ariyasaccāni*). The first truth talked about suffering, the second one talked about the origin of suffering, the third one talked about cessation of suffering, and the last one talked about the way leading to cessation of suffering.

The Eight Paths consist of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The Buddha said to his disciples that there were two extremes of indulgence: in sense pleasures and in self-mortification. He said that these extremes should be abandoned, and he showed the Middle Path, which led to calm, wisdom, enlightenment, and Nibbāna.

The first sermon was affirmation of the truth of the life as well as solutions to the life. It is called the quintessence of Buddhism, and *Sārnātha* became the famous symbol of Buddhism all over the world.



The Buddha with his giving lecture Mudra

4. VENERABLE KONDAÑÑA ATTAINED THE FRUIT OF ARAHANT

After the sermon had been spoken, Venerable Kondañña was freed from passions and impurity and his inner vision opened. No one here will be able to

retard its progress; he is a Braman, a Brahmaija, a god, or Mara or Brahma. Hearing the words of the gods living on Earth, the *Chaturmahārājika* gods shouted in the same manner. Hearing their words the thirty-three gods, Yama, Tusita, Nirmanarati, Paranimitta, and Brabmakarika gods, made the same speech. At that moment, the sound created by them went up to Brahmaloaka, ten thousand lokadhatus shook, trembled, and shivered. The Buddha then said delightedly, “Kondañña has known it, Kondañña has known it.” In this way Kondañña got the name of “Anna Kondañña,” and he described this moment thus: “I surpassed the circle of birth and death and have done what is needed.”

5. THE FIRST DISCIPLES AND SANGHA WERE FOUND

After enlightenment, Kondañña requested the Buddha to receive them into his Order. The Buddha said:

“Come, monk, the Dhamma has been well-proclaimed, you cut off defilement and attained purification...”

At the end of *Dhamma-chakka-pavattana Suttā*, it said that at that time “there lived only six pious men on earth, namely the Buddha and the five monks brothers of Kondañña.” Soon afterward, he taught the second sermon, “The No-Self Quality,” and through this Sūtra, five ascetics - Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Wappa, Mahanama, and Assaji - attained Dhamma vision.

6. THE BUDDHA TAUGHT YASA AND HIS FAMILY

Later on, the Buddha taught the Dhamma to Yasa, a rich young man in Banāres. He had three palaces: one for winter, one for summer, and one for the rainy season. During the four months of the rainy season, he stayed in his palace with many female musicians and never went out of his place. One night, he rose from his sleep and found his musicians fallen asleep in many postures. One was snoring with her mouth wide open; saliva was running down from the mouth, one was talking incoherently in her sleep like a crazy person, one lay with disheveled hair like a ghost. Yasa stood aghast looking at the scene before him.

Naturally, he felt tired of life and exclaimed that it was a living cemetery, an object of great trouble and annoyance. He repeated this several times. At last, all of a sudden, a spirit of renunciation came upon him. He left home. There was no one at the door of the house or at the city-gate. He went away to Isipatan-migadāya, to the north of Banāres.

Then it was dawn. All the living quarters glowed in the serene smile of the morning. The Buddha was at that time pacing up and down at the *Chahkramana* (the path). Finding Yasa at a distance, he got down from there and sat upon his seat. When Yasa saw the Buddha, he burst into tears and said emotionally, "What a great trouble, a great annoyance!" The Buddha said to him, "*There is no trouble, no annoyance at this place. Come here and sit by me. I shall give you religious instruction.*" Then Yasa saluted the Buddha and took a seat at a respectful distance from him.

Then the Buddha gave him instruction that this life was illusion, there was no happiness here, everything is permanence and dissatisfaction. Happiness does not come from property, fame, or power, though human beings chase after it nonstop. They attach to sense pleasure, which is their purpose and their selfness, but they do not know that happiness arises from detachment from the former.

He also taught Yasa about charity, conduct, heaven, renunciation, doing good to others, freedom from desires, and non-killing. When he came to know that Yasa's mind was soft and serene, he gave him the highest teaching of Buddhism: "*All objects, samudaya, which are born, are full of misery; restraint is the only right path.*" Having heard the advice of the Buddha, Yasa felt himself free from anger and other passions and looked like a piece of white cloth without stain.

At the house of Yasa, his mother found him gone and remarked to her husband about Yasa's disappearance. He sent many men in quest of his son and at last came to know that he was at Isipatana-Migadaya. Then the father came to that place in search of his son. When he came to the Buddha, he told him everything about the renunciation of the world by Yasa. The Buddha spoke this verse:

*Yellow robe is bright
Entering the saint way.*

Just as it is known that a clean cloth without a stain will take the dye well, just so to the merchant householder on that very seat, the dust-free, stainless Vision-of-the-Dhamma, arose: Whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing.

The man also received from the Buddha instructions about Margapradanaka and the Triple Gems Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In Buddhist history, he became the first Upāsaka at that time.

Seeing Yasa seated there, the father entreated him to save the life of his mother by returning home. Without making any reply, Yasa looked at Buddha's face with a steadfast gaze. Then the father understood that his son would get back home again. Then he entreated the Buddha to go to his house with Yasa. The Buddha accepted his invitation. The banker saluted him, moved around him, and went home. After this, Yasa expressed to the Buddha his intention of taking Pravrajyd and Upasampada. Hearing this, he advised Yasa to observe the noble conducts (*Brahmacharya*).

Some days after this, he went to the house of the banker and gave religious instruction to Yasa's mother and others. After receiving this visit from the Buddha, Yasa's family realized the value of his teachings.

Yasa's mother said:

“Excellent, venerable Sir! Excellent, venerable Sir! Just as, venerable Sir, one might set upright what has been overturned, or open up what has been closed, or show a path to one who is lost, or carry an oil lamp into darkness, [thinking] ‘those with vision will see forms,’ just so has the Dhamma been explained by the Gracious One in countless ways. We go, venerable Sir, to the Gracious One for refuge, and to the Dhamma, and to the Community of monks. Please bear it in mind, Gracious One, that we are female lay followers who have gone for refuge from today forward for as long as we have the breath of life.”

Then the entire family became the Buddha's disciples, and Yasa had taken Pravrajyd, having shaved his hair and beard and having worn a dyed-cloth.

7. BUDDHISM HAS BEEN PREACHED WIDELY

At that time, four of Yasa's friends - Vimala, Subāhu, Punnagi, and Gavampati - heard that Yasa had attained the fruit of saintly life and had found the Buddha to teach them as well. The Buddha gave them instructions, and their minds became free from attachment to the world and the Asavas, so that now there were 10 Arahats in the world.

In a short time, a further 50 friends of Yasa experienced exactly the same freedom as the four friends, resulting in 60 Arahats in the world.

There are a lot of Pāli sermons talking about events that happened in *Sārnātha*. The Buddha declared the first discourse there and founded the Sangha, which consisted of 60 Arahants. Yasa, the son of a banker in Banāres, with his 54 friends, realized what the Buddha taught, and all of them became Buddha disciples. The group of Yasa and the five brothers Kondañña made up 60 Bhikkhus in the sangha.

The Buddha addressed the monks:

“I am delivered from all fetters, human and divine, and so are you. Go now and wander, moved by compassion for the world, to bring welfare to gods and men. But no two of you should go the same way. Preach this doctrine, which is glorious in its beginning, middle, and end, in spirit and letter, proclaiming a consummate, perfect, and pure life of holiness.

“There are beings whose mental eyes are covered by scarcely any dust, but if the doctrine is not preached to them, they cannot attain salvation. They will understand the doctrine. And I will go also to Uruvela to preach the doctrine.”

The Buddha then traveled to Uruvela. He left the road, entered a grove, and sat at the foot of a tree. Sixty rich young men were playing with the girls in that grove, and they had also brought along a prostitute for the one unmarried man among them. While they were distracted, the prostitute gathered up all their belongings and ran off with them.

As these men went in search of this woman, they encountered the Buddha and asked him if he had seen a woman passing by.

The Buddha asked them, “What do *you* think? Which is better for you, to search for the woman or search for yourselves?”

They agreed it would be better to search for themselves. So, at the Buddha’s invitation, they sat and he taught them the Truth. Therefore, they sat and listened to Buddha’s words; they resolved their mind on Bodhi and received ordination as monks.

Thus, the first sermon was being spoken at *Sārnātha*, and the Buddha also spent the first rainy season in Isipatana, *Vārānasi*. The Buddha returned to *Sārnātha* sometime later and preached some Sūtras, too.

Several centuries after Buddha’s Nibbāna, *Sārnātha* had become a prosperous center of cultivation and of the arts of Buddhism. All told, over 2,600 years Buddhism has become a religion with its philosophy and thought, which today one fourth of

the world's population follows to cultivate. Countries in which forms of Buddhism dominate are Japan, China, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and others. In addition, people in several Western countries also study Buddhist philosophy.

8. SĀRNĀTHA IN PĀLI LITERATURE

Sārnātha was mentioned many times in Tripiṭaka Pāli literature. *Sārnātha*, located just 18 miles from Uruvela, is the site of the deer park where the Buddha transformed the five ascetics who misunderstood that Gautama had given up the austere way of life and enjoyed a luxurious life.

After enlightenment, the Buddha left Uruvela for Isipitana and there he delivered *Dhammacakkappavattana-suttā* on the full moon day in April. At that time, there were 80 kotis and countless devas that had attained Dhamma's eye. The *Lalitavistara-suttā* talked about these events in details.

The Buddha had no money to pay to the ferryman taking him across the Ganga River. After hearing of that, King Bimbisara abolished the toll for ascetics. The Buddha subsequently also spent his first rainy season at *Sārnātha*.

All the Buddhas preached the first sermon in Isipatana. That constitutes one of the four avijahitattanni (unchanging spots), the others being the bodhi-pallanka, the spot at the gate of Sankassa, where the Buddha first touched the earth on his return from Tvatimsa, and the site of the bed in the Gandhakuti in Jetavana. The Buddha mentioned that Isipatana

(*Migadāya, or Sārnātha*) was one of the sacred places for human beings to visit. This name was born because there were devas coming from the sky.

Some Pratyeka-Buddhas spent seven days there to contemplate Gandhamadana (smell) and to take a bath in the Anotatta lake, then they went to several villages to beg alms food and stayed in Isipatana. Sometimes, a few Pratyeka-Buddhas also came to Isipatana from *Nandamulaka-pabbhara*.

Several commentators said that Yasa came to the Buddha and became an Arahant. At Isipatana, Buddha pronounced the rule prohibiting the use of sandals made of talipot leaves. On another occasion, when the Buddha stayed at Isipatana, having gone there from Rjagaha, he instituted rules forbidding the use of certain kinds of flesh, including human flesh. Twice, while the Buddha resided at Isipatana, Mara visited him but had to go away discomfited.

The Buddha also delivered many Sūtras here, such as Panca Suttā, Rathakara Suttā, Two Pasa Suttā, Samaya Suttā, Katuviya Suttā, Dhammadinna Suttā, Parayana Suttā, and others. Besides the Dhammacakkappavattana Suttā mentioned above, the Buddha preached several other Suttās while staying at Isipatana, among them The Panca Suttā, The Rathakara or Pacetana Suttā, The Two Pasa Suttās, The Samaya Suttā, and The Katuviya Suttā. A discourse on the Metteyyapadha of the Paryana and The Dhammadinna Suttā was preached to the distinguished layman Dhammadinna, who came to see the Buddha.

Some eminent members of the Sangha apparently resided at Isipatana from time to time; several recorded conversations exist between Sariputta and Mahakotthita, and one between Mahkotthita and Citta-Hatthisariputta at Isipatana, as well as a discourse in which several monks tried to help Channa in his difficulties.

According to the Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle), a large community of monks lived at Isipatana in the second century B.C.E. to learn Buddhism. According to records made about the stone foundation ceremony of the Maha Thupa in Anurdhapura, some 12,000 monks had been present at Isipatana, led by the Elder Dhammasena.

Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang, author of *Journey to the West*, recounted that some 15,000 monks studied Theravāda/Hīnayāna at a monastery. In the inscriptions of the Sanghrama Vihāra, Tsang said that there was a monastery whose 200-foot-high roofs were made golden in the mango figure. In the middle of the monastery there stood a life-sized statue of the Buddha turning the wheel of Dhamma (*Dhammachakra-pravartana*).

In the southwestern area of the monastery, the remains of a stone stupa were built by King *Aśoka*. *In front of the monastery, there was a pillar that marked the spot where the Buddha declared the first sermon. Another stupa stands on the site where the group of five ascetics (panca-vaggiyas) did their meditation, and another stupa marks where 500 Prakyeka-Buddhas entered Nibbāna. Close to the latter stupa stands another building where the Buddha predicted*



The masterpiece statue of Buddha turning the wheel of Dhamma
(*Dharmachakra-pravartana*)

that Maitreya would become a Buddha in the future. Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang quoted the story of Lord Deer (Nigrodha-Miga-Jātaka) to account for the origin of the Migadya. According to him, the Deer Park was the forest gifted by the king of Banāres of the Jātaka (Nigrodha-Miga-Jātaka), where the deer might wander unmolested. The Migadya was so-called because deer were allowed to roam around there fearlessly.

In another story, that of Udapana from Jātaka, it was said that there was a well from which monks took water. In the time of Pussa Buddha, Sarnath was called variously by the names Isipatana, Dhammadassi Buddha, and Kassapa Buddha. However, under the period of Vipassa Buddha, Isipatana was known as

Khemauiyana. According to long Buddhist tradition, all Buddhas traveled to Isipatana to declare their first sermon, but only Shakyaymuni Buddha walked to Isipatana to preach his first dhamma because he knew that by doing so he would meet, teach, and transform Upaka and Ajivaka. Today, Isipatana is better known as *Sārnātha*, which lies only six miles from Banāres.



View of Dhāmekh Monument (left)
and the yellow stupa's peak of Jain (right)

9. THE STORY OF UDAPANA-DUSAKA IN JĀKATA

In Isipatana, the Buddha told a story about the past: At the time of his residence at Isipatana, the Buddha narrated the following Jātaka story about a jackal that polluted the water in the reservoir.

Once upon a time, a certain jackal was in the habit of making water in the reservoir of water meant for the Bhikkhus. One day he was near this reservoir when the Sramanas rushed upon him and began to belabor

him with their staffs. The jackal, being terribly beaten, left the place and went there no more. One day the Bhikkhus at a religious meeting told the Buddha about this issue. Hearing this, the Buddha said that in days of yore, this place was also called Isipatana and this jackal was the same polluter of the reservoir of water. At that time, Bodhisattva left home and lived with many hermits. One day, this jackal polluted the reservoir and was going away. The hermits somehow managed to catch him and brought him to Bodhisattva. While conversing with the jackal, the Bodhisattva sang a *gatha*, as follows:

“O good-looking one, why have you polluted the wooden reservoir of the hermits who live in the forest and practice life-long austerities?”

Hearing this, the jackal also sang a *gatha* in reply:

“It is a pious act of the jackals to make water wherever they drink water. This is being continued from generation to generation. You cannot make me give it up.”

Then the Bodhisatta replied: “Your pious act is impiety. I do not think that you have any distinction between piety and impiety. Be off from here, come here no more.” The jackal went away. From that time forward, he was not seen there anymore.

10. NOTES OF BUDDHAGHOSA ON ISIPATANA

In the Mahāpadāna Suttā, it is said that Isipatana was the place where the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dhamma. Buddhaghosha narrated it as follows:

“In those days Isipatana (Sanskrit: Rishipatana) was known as a blessed garden. It was at this place that the deer might live in safety; for this reason, it came to be called Mrigadaya (Skt: Mrigadaya).

“The Gautama Buddha and other Buddhas dropped here from the skies in order to give religious instruction.”

11. SĀRNĀTHA IN DHAMMAPADA SUTTĀ

Isipatana was described as the scene of Nandiyavatthu. Dhammapada Suttā said: “Nandiya was a rich man from Vārānasi. After listening to the Buddha’s discourse on the benefits of building monasteries for Bhikkhus, Nandiya thought that it was a pious thing to make a gift of houses to the Sangha. Accordingly, he built a glorious monastery at Isipatana. Thanks to this pious act, after death, he was born into the Tavatimsa deva world.”

12. THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME “SĀRNĀTHA - ISIPATANA”

Sārnātha is the Buddhists’ most sacred site because the Buddha gave his first discourse there. In Buddhist literature, this place is called Isipatana or Mrigadaya. The origin of these names is mentioned in Mahavastu. It is called Isipatana because there were 500 Pratyeka Buddhas who descended on Isipatana and lived there. Another name for it came to be Migadaya, because there were many herds of deer that lived there safely under the protection of the Banāres king. The ancient relics also indicated the relation of this place and Dharmachakra.

After 12 years, Bodhisattva came down from Tusitabhavana. The Suddhavaśa gods sent information to the Pratyeka Buddhas. Then those Pratyeka Buddhas finished their saying and attained Parinivāna. In the great forest at a distance of half a yojana from Banāres, there lived some 500 Pratyeka Buddhas who had cultivated and attained Buddhahood themselves.

According to terminology, “Rsis” means a sage, “patanti” means falling down, with a light on. “Isipātana” means coming down there through the power of descending of the seers; it is also called Risipātana or Isipātana, but Senart, a French scholar, does not believe that the name Isipātana comes from Risipātana. He says that besides this name, there are two other names for the place: Rshipattana and Rśivadana. According to him, this place was originally called Risipātana, a name that over the course of time came to be changed to Isipātana. He believes that this legend supports the latter name.

This view of Senart is reasonable. There were 500 Pratyeka Buddhas who lived at Pattana of Rsis. According to the rules of Prakṛita, “pattana” is changed into “vadana.” Hence, Rshipattana might have at one time been called Rshivadana. This word also appeared in Mahavastu, which said that before Pratyeka Buddhas lived there, they resided at Mahavana at a distance of half a yojana from Banāres. This term also appeared in the Lalitavistara Suttā.

13. ORIGINS OF THE NAME “MIGADĀYA” AND THE STORY OF THE BANIAN DEER

The relation of Migadaya and Migadāva is a story bearing on the matter of the birth story of the Banian Deer in the *Mahavastu* (a text of the Lokottaravāda school). The story goes like this:

“Once in the wide forest, a certain deer king with the name Rohaka had taken upon himself the protection of a herd consisting of a thousand deer. He had two sons, Nyagrodha and Visakha. From his herd, he gave 500 deer to one son and the remaining 500 to the other. Brahmadata, the then-king of Kāśī, frequently came to that forest on hunting excursions and killed a good many of the deer. The number of the deer that were wounded by him and met death entering the bushes, the deep parts of the forest, and the tracts covered with thorny plants and reeds, was greater than that of those that were actually killed by king Brahmadata. The dead deer in those parts became food for crows, vultures, and other birds.

“One day, the deer-king Nyagrodha said to his brother Visakha that ‘We should announce this issue to the king that more deer are being wounded and eaten up than deer that are hunted. We shall send to the king one deer daily, as food for him. In this way the herd may probably be saved from wholesale destruction.’ His brother Visakha agreed with that idea.

“Just at this time, the King Brahmadata had been out hunting. Surrounded by soldiers armed with swords, bows, and other weapons, he saw the two deer-kings advancing toward him without fear or hesitation. Seeing that, he gave this order to one of his generals:

‘You are to see to it that none may put them to death. They are not terrified at the sight of the soldiers; on the contrary, they are coming toward me; it means that they have something to say.’ In obedience to the order of the king, the general pushed away the soldiers to the right and the left and made a way for the deer. Then the two deer approached the king and bowed to him, touching his knee, saying:

“‘Your Majesty, several hundreds of us live in this forest within your kingdom. Your cities, towns, villages, and other sites of men are beautified by men, cows, bullocks, and many bipeds and quadrupeds and other animals. Moreover, forests also look beautiful on account of asylums, rivers, springs, and deer and birds. We look upon your Majesty as the very ornament of these places. All these bipeds and quadrupeds live under the sole rule of your Majesty. They have placed themselves under your Majesty’s protection; hence, it is the bounden duty of your Majesty to take care of them and to protect them, no matter whether they live in villages, forests, or hilly regions.

“‘Your Majesty is their sole Lord; they have no other King. When your Majesty is out for hunting, then a number of deer are needlessly killed at a time. Many of them, being wounded with the arrow, enter thorny woods and fields of grass where after their death they are eaten up by crows and other birds. In this way, your Majesty is being led to sin. If your Majesty is pleased to order it, we two deer-kings shall send for your kitchen one deer per day. This deer will be taken from each herd on alternate days. If this be done, there will be nothing to prevent your Majesty’s

feasting upon flesh, and still the deer will be saved from meeting simultaneous death.’

“Hearing these words, the King of Kāśi accepted their suggestion. Accordingly, he asked the ministers to take care that no one might kill any deer there. The king having left for his city, the deer-kings convened an assembly of all the deer and consoled them in many ways, informing them that the king would hunt them no more but that they should have to send him one deer each day.

“Thereafter, they counted all the deer and divided them into two principal herds. From that time forward, each began to send a deer to the King on alternate days.

“At one time it was the turn of a pregnant female deer of Visakha’s herd to go to the King’s kitchen. She said to him that she had been carrying two young ones in her womb and that it would be well if her going could be postponed till her delivery. Thereupon the head deer ordered that some other deer should go in her stead, but all the other deer declined to go till their turn was come. Then the female deer went to Nyagrodha and laid her case before him. But in that herd, too, no one agreed to go. Then their King Nyagrodha addressed his herd as follows: ‘I give female deer assurances of safety; she must not be put to death. I myself am ready to go to the king’s kitchen in her stead.’”

Then the lord deer issued out of the forest and proceeded along the path to *Vārānasi*. Whoever met him on the way was charmed at his flawless beauty and followed him. Seeing him pursuing his way surrounded by men, the citizens said to one another, “*It is the king of the deer. All the herd having been*



Deer in the *Sārṇātha* archeological excavation site

exhausted, he himself has been going to the King's Mahanasa. We shall approach the King of Kāśi and pray to him to release this deer king, who is the very ornament of his place." They also said many other things. As soon as he entered the Mahanasa, all the citizens prayed for the safety of his life on the grounds of his being good-looking, gentle, and the ornament of the gardens around the city. Then the King invited him to the hall and asked him why the king deer came there himself. After having narrated the whole thing from beginning to end, the King and all others who were present there were struck by his righteousness. Then the King said to him, "He who sacrifices his life for the sake of another is never a beast. On the other hand, we ourselves are so many beasts, because we have lost all sense of righteousness. I am glad to hear of your self-sacrifice for the sake of the doe. I also grant safety to all the deer for your sake; go to your place and live there fearlessly."

The King proclaimed this throughout the length and breadth of the city with the ringing of bells.

Gradually this incident came to the notice of the gods. The king of the gods created thousands of deer in order to test the righteousness of the king of Kāśi. The people of Kāśi were put to too much inconvenience by these deer, and lodged a complaint with the king.

Then Nyagrodha came to his own place and told the doe to go to the herd of Visakha. She declined to go, saying that she would live instead in the herd of Nyagrodha, whether she might live or die, and she sang a *gatha* to show her gratitude.

After the king's order, all deer led a happy life and produced countless babies. People of Kāśi complained: "The country is in a crisis; this prosperous kingdom will go to ruin because many other deer ate our fields of corn. Please stop them!"

The king replied: "Let the country pass through a crisis, let the prosperous kingdom go to ruin. I have given assurances of safety to the deer king. I cannot tell a falsehood now."

From that day onward, the King of Kāśi gave them to understand that he could by no means withdraw the assurance he had given to them.

According to Childer's *Pāli Dictionary*, "Daya" means both "gift" and "forest," and the use of the word in the sense of "forest" has often been given. Neither Senart nor any other foreign scholar has said anything on this point. They have simply given a detailed history of the various forms in which the story of the deer-king's son, Nyagrodha, has been given in the ancient books.

14. THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME “SĀRNĀTHA”

The ancient name of *Sārnātha* was Migadāva. According to the Jātaka stories and other works, the Buddha was its lord. Hence it seems that Hindus, following ancient tradition, have been worshipping the deer-king Nyagrodha or the Buddha as Mahādeva Sāranganātha, as they had accepted Dharma of Three Jewels as their God Dharma.

The written and spoken word *Saranganatha* (meaning “deer-lord”) over time evolved into *Sārnātha*, according to the grammar of Sanskrit.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

Based on the *Suttā* Pitaka (five Pāli canons/Nikāyas), Vinaya Pitaka, and others, *Sārnātha* is well-known as Deer Park, one of the more important places in the Buddha’s life. It marked the place where the Buddha set in motion the Dharma wheel (*Dhammachakra-pravartana*) to the five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña and established sangha as well as Buddhism. Thus, *Sārnātha* is considered to be the very cradle of Buddhism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the reason the Buddha walked to *Sārnātha* after enlightenment in Bodhgaya?
2. Who are the five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña?
3. What are the main ideas of the Dhammachakra-pravartana Suttā?
4. What are the details and meaning of the Banian Deer story?
5. Why is *Sārnātha* considered to be the cradle of Buddhism?



Huong Sen Pilgrimage prostrating at the Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra
(Fragrant Hall of the Buddha), September 23, 2019



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương meditating at Dhāmekh Stupa,
Sārnātha, in 2019

Notes

¹ According to Buddhists, “Sahampati is the one who is born by himself (Svayambhu), but the Legend of Burmese Buddha says that this Brahma had been, in the time of Buddha, Kathaba, Bahan under the name of Thabaka.” It seems that according to the peculiar pronunciation of the Burmese, “Kasyapa” become “Kathaba” and “Sarvakrit” become “Thabaka.” “Kahan” means “Arhant.” *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994, p. 54.

² In *Bigandet, The Legend of Burmese Buddha*, it is written that the Buddha cast his wise eyes on earth and saw that some men were wholly immersed in sin, some were half-immersed, and some were still in a promising condition. The Maha Bodhi Centenary volume, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta, 1991, p. 21.

³ *Vinaya Pitaka* (The Disciplines of Buddhist Store), ed. H. Oldenberg, vol. IV, part 8. London, 1879. <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka>

⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), ed. Trenckner R. Chalmers and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS 1888-1925; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Middle Length Sayings*. 1995-1994 and 1993, London: PTS. vol. I, p. 171.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Great Disciples and Lord Buddha* (Phật và Thánh Chúng), translated from the Vietnamese by Cao Hữu Đính. Translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giỏi Hương.

http://promienie.net/images/dharma/books/Sūtras_great-disciples-of-the-buddha.pdf

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), *Vinaya Pitaka*, ed. Oldenberg, vol. 1. 1.6.10.

⁹ *Bigandet, The Legend of Burmese Buddha*, p. 117.

¹⁰ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), ed. Trenckner, R. Chalmers and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS 1888-1925; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Middle Length Sayings*, 1995-1994 and 1993, London: PTS. vol. I, p. 171.

¹¹ *Samyutta Nikāya*, ed. M. L. Feen and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS: 1884-1898; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1950-1956. Vol. V, chapter 12, part II, p. 420.

¹² *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra, ed. M. L. Feen and Mrs. Rhys Davids, p. 420. London: PTS: 1884-1898; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1950-1956. Vol. V, chapter 12, part II, p. 420.

¹³ *Mahavagga*. Vol. I, 6-10, V, volume I.

¹⁴ In a temple at Amoy, Bishop Smith saw 18 images that were said to represent the original disciples of Buddha. The figures of Panchavargiva Bhikhus are found incised at the foot of the image of the Buddha dug out at Sārnātha. Hardy: *Manual of Buddhism*, pp. 25-30.

¹⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), chapter II, p. 67.

¹⁶ Bigandet, *The Legend of Burmese Buddha*, writes that Yasa is known as Ratha or Yasha. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994, p. 78.

¹⁷ Ibid. Bigandet writes that the nature and condition of the body constitute indeed a truly heavy burden and give a great deal of trouble and affliction, p. 120.

¹⁸ There is a similar story in the Parinirvuna Jātaka of the Buddha. *The Jātaka Nikāya*, ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993, p. 231.

¹⁹ According to Buddhists this means "all objects that spring into existence." *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994, p. 311.

²⁰ Bigandet, *The Legend of Burmese Buddha*, p. 121.

²¹ Ibid. It is written that the Buddha kept Yasa hidden from the sight of his father for some time, p. 122.

²² *Đức Phật và Phật Pháp*, translated into Vietnamese by Phạm Kim Khánh. Translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, p. 122.

²³ *Mahavagga* (text). I. p. 15 for the Tibetan version; see Rockhill's *Life of the Buddha*, pp. 38-39.

²⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), ed. Trenckner, R. Chalmers and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS 1888-1925; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols. 1995-1994 and 1993, London: PTS. Vol. IV, p. 20.

²⁵ *Đức Phật và Phật Pháp*, translated into Vietnamese by Phạm Kim Khánh, p. 124.

²⁶ *Anguttara Nikāya* (Increased by One Collection, Gradual Collection or Numerical Discourses), vol. I, p. 109, p. 280; vol. III, p. 399; vol. IV, p. 383. *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), vol. I, p. 105; vol. v, p. 406.

²⁷ *The Jātaka Nikāya*, ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993. vol. I, p. 68.

²⁸ *Vinaya Pitaka*, ed. Oldenberg (Williams and Norgate), I, from p. 10. London, 1879.

²⁹ Koti=10 million (see *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994, p. 322a).

³⁰ *Milindapanha*, ed. Trencker (Williams and Norgate), 30; (130 kotis, says Mil. 350).

³¹ *Lalita Vistara*, ed. S. Lefinann, 528, 3. See Dhammadoot, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Mulagandha Kutty Vihara, *Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism*, 1999, 2000 and 2001, p. 30.

³² *Buddhavamsa*, Commentary, S. H. B, p. 3.

³³ *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses), ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter. London: PTS, 1890-1911; tr. by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *The Dialogue of the Buddha*, Motilal, 2000. vol. II, p. 424.

³⁴ *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses or The Dialogue of the Buddha), ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, London: PTS, 1890-1911; tr. by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, vol. II, p. 141.

³⁵ *Papanca Sudani*, Majjhima Commentary, Aluvihara Series, I, 387, adds that the gods made Uposatha at Isipitana.

³⁶ *Papanca Sudani*, Majjhima Commentary, Aluvihara Series, II, 1019, S. H. B, 437-38.

³⁷ *Vinaya Pitaka*, ed. Oldenberg (Williams and Norgate), I, from p. 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 189.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, from p. 216

⁴⁰ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), vol. I, from p. 105.

⁴¹ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), vol. III, p. 66.

⁴² *Anguttara Nikāya* (Increased by One Collection, Gradual Collection or Numerical Discourses), ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy,

London: PTS, 1885-1900; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1955-1970. vol. I, p. 110.

⁴³ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), I, from p. 105.

⁴⁴ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Increased by One Collection, Gradual Collection or Numerical Discourses), III, from p. 320.

⁴⁵ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Increased by One Collection, Gradual Collection or Numerical Discourses), I, from p. 279.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, from p. 399.

⁴⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), V, from p. 406.

⁴⁸ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), II, from p. 112; III from p. 167; IV from p. 162.

⁴⁹ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Increased by One Collection, Gradual Collection or Numerical Discourses), III, from p. 392.

⁵⁰ *Samyutta Nikāya* (Kindred Sayings), III, from p. 132.

⁵¹ *Mahāvamsa* (Great Chronicle), ed. Geiger, vol. XXIX, p. 31.

⁵² *Dīvyavadāna*, ed. Cowell and Nell, Cambridge, mentions that *Asoka* desired to visit the sacred sites in Buddhist countries and built commemorations there; he also went to Lumbini, Isipatana, and Kushinara. This is affirmed on pillar No. VII of King *Asoka*, pp. 389-94.

⁵³ *Jātaka Nikāya* (The Previous Existences of Sakyamuni Buddha). ed. V. Fausboll. London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vol., Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993. Vol. I, from p. 145.

⁵⁴ *Jātaka Nikāya*, vol. II, from p. 354.

⁵⁵ *Buddhāvamsa Commentary* (Great Chronicle), PTS, vol. XIX, p. 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵⁸ *Sumangala Vilāsani*, PTS, p. 471.

⁵⁹ *Jātaka Nikāya* (The Previous Existences of Sakyamuni Buddha). Vol. II, p. 354.

⁶⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 14. The Great Discourse on the Lineage, Mahapadana Suttā.

⁶¹ *Buddhist Legends*. Part 3. By Buddhaghosa. <https://books.google.com/books>

⁶² *The Dhammapada Verses and Stories*, 16th Vagga, 9 Vatthu, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sārānātha, Vārānāsi. 1990, p. 373.

⁶³ *Mahavastu* (A text of the Lokottaravāda school). E. Senart, Le Mahavastu. I, Pali, 1882. From p. 357.

⁶⁴ According to certain Buddhists, “Pacceka-Buddha” (Pratyeka Buddha) does *not* mean “enlightened” (Samma-Sarabuddha), as written in the *Shakya Buddha* by Oldenberg, p. 120. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994.

⁶⁵ We learn from ancient Pāli literature that the Pratyeka Buddhas flourished at a time when the Samyaki Samluddkas had not descended on earth and no sangha had been established by them. But, according to the works of “Apadana” folke of the Phayre mss., the Pratyeka Buddha existed not only in those days but also during the time of the Buddha himself. For the Buddha said in one place that, barring himself, there were men on earth who would equal the Pratyeka Buddhas.

⁶⁶ The word “Rishivadana” occurs in the Chinese books and in *Divyavadana* (Divyav, p. 393, A-yu-wang-ching, chap. 2; *The Divyav*, p. 464). Itsing takes the name to mean “the fall of the Rishis.” But Fabian says rather confidently that a Pratyeka Buddha was the actual author of the name “Risipattana.”

⁶⁷ *Mahavastu*, pp. 43, 307, 323-24.

⁶⁸ *Jātaka Nikāya* (The Previous Existences of Sakyamuni Buddha). Vol. I, p. 149.

⁶⁹ *Mahavastu*, p. 266. Partriarch Iching and other Chinese Pilgrims often used the term “silun” or “silulin” to translate the word “Mrigadaya,” which means “the land for deers.”

⁷⁰ See Childer, *Pāli Dictionary*, p. 114.

⁷¹ Benfey, *Panchatantra*, p. 83, and the Memoirs (pp. 1136) of Hsuantzang mention that General Cunningham described the story as it was carved by Isimiga Jātaka letters on the stone inscription at Bharatpur place XIII2. But Dr. Hocnlie did not accept that explanation, as presented in the *India Antiquary*.

⁷² At many places, Śiva God is worshipped with the figure of a deer on the left. So, people called Śiva the Saranganatha God. The pond next to the shrine of Sārṇātha is called Sarangatala.

⁷³ B. C. Bhattacharya, *The History of Sārṇātha or the Cradle of Buddhism*, Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition. 1999, p. 24.

CHAPTER 2

SĀRNĀTHA

IN THE HISTORIC AGE



Hsuan Zang Chinese Pilgrim travelled to Sārnātha
in the VII century

1. SĀRNĀTHA IN HISTORY

According to archeologists and evidence from valuable antiquities, ever since the time when General Alexander (the Greek emperor) invaded India, darkness has covered this Indian country. What is reported in this chapter are several traditions and legends, although they cannot be accepted as historically authentic.

We will now discuss the relationship between the history of *Sārnātha* and that of India. It can be said that this research depends on the outcome of excavations in the present day. Therefore, it is difficult to provide absolute proof.

2. KING AŚOKA

Among the most famous kings in India's history, King *Aśoka* was the first one with a personal connection to *Sārnātha*. After the Buddha entered the nibbāna for 200 years, *Aśoka*, the very devoted Buddhist King, ruled the Maurya Dynasty and invaded Kalinga. After that, he witnessed the blood ocean of deaths and suffering, until he became conscience-stricken and decided to stop the killing. This made his mind and policy change. He approved the Buddhist motto and became dedicated to the wholehearted propagation of Buddhism among his people. The noble life of the Buddha converted the king's life, and he made a lot of progress and restored the Buddhist holy sites. In Lumbini (now called Rummidei, in Nepal), he erected a pillar in the place where the prince Siddhartha was born. In *Sārnātha*, he ordered many stupas to be built; one of them was the 30.3 meters high Dharmarajika stupa that had a freestone roof; unfortunately, it was

destroyed by Jagat Singh in 1794. King *Aśoka* also constructed a stone pillar with four lions standing back to back on the top, which was later chosen as a national symbol for India; it is conserved in the *Sārnātha* Museum that is located opposite the archeological site.

The king ordered many of his edicts to be inscribed on rocks and pillars in different places throughout his country. One such epitaph was carved on a beautiful pillar at *Sārnātha* in the year 242 B.C.E. When that epitaph was deciphered, many things of great historical value came to light. It is said that this pillar was built in the declining days of Buddhism, so the king ordered those who were not official monks in his country to wear white apparel and to be expelled from the community (*Sangha*); this edict was publicly renounced throughout the country. Similar steles were also found in *Sañchī* and *Allahabad*. Steles said that all monks had to attend Uposatha day regularly. From these things, it is clear that the king cared about all monks; he even gave appropriate solutions for monks who broke their own precepts.

Besides the epitaphs at *Sārnātha*, many historic remains have been recovered there. These indicate that King *Aśoka* cared about this place very much. Among the remains today at *Sārnātha*, there are traces of a brick stupa a little far away in the south that came from the lower portion of the pillar. In 1793-1794, Sagat Singh, a rich man at Benares, destroyed this stupa. He used bricks and other material of this site to build a palace with the name “Jagatganj.” Hence, to easily remember it, archeologists call the site the Jagat Singh Stupa, and they have ascertained that it was built in the time of King *Aśoka*.

The third remain related to the King *Aśoka* is a monolithic railing. A certain Mr. Oetel found it on the bottom of the chamber south of the main shrine. From its wonderful smoothness and the peculiarity of its shape, antiquarians have concluded that it was built after the reign of the king. According to the Ph.D. scholar Vogel, a monolithic railing was built to protect places where the Buddha would set in motion the Wheel of Law (*Dharma-chakra*), or to protect other sacred places. However, the archeologist Dayaram Sahni stated that monolithic railings were actually placed around the pillars and later on were moved to *Sārnātha*. But he is not sure that each pillar was surrounded by nearby monolithic railings. There is one witness claiming that the King *Aśoka* pillar was indeed surrounded by monolithic railings in Bharhut.

These three above-mentioned antiques prove that King *Aśoka* is connected to *Sārnātha*. But when did he actually visit *Sārnātha*? It is recorded that in 249 B.C.E., the king went to Kusinaga, Kapilavastu, Veisaly, and Bodhgaya and to other Buddhist holy sites. On the list of the king's visits, *Sārnātha* was not mentioned, but it is not true that he never visited the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon and made offerings. The king actually had constructed one pillar for each place where he visited. The epitaphs on a pillar at *Sārnātha* with a lion capital on its top, where four lions are seated back to back, have proved this. Apart from antiques related to King *Aśoka*, there are no other antiques from the Maurya Kings to be discovered.

3. THE SUNGA REIGN

After the fall of the Maurya Empire, Pusshyamitra established Sunga (Mitra) in 184 B.C.E. During that dynasty, *Sārnātha* was not much known, but over the years archaeologists have excavated more than 12 pillars that were said to have appeared near the Dharmarajika stupa since the first century B.C.E. These pillars could be part of the stone eaves of the Sunga period, like some eaves at Sañchī. Sunga was an orthodox Hindi king who used to offer horses for yajana (the act of sacrificing) with the aim of opposing Buddhism. He is also of the same period of a Buddhist king called Menander. Under these circumstances, it could not be accepted that King Sunga and his successor came to visit *Sārnātha*. In fact, there are no historic relics made by the king to be found there:

“During the palmy days of Buddhism, devoted Buddhists raised subscriptions and erected a big stupa with huge blocks of stone. They placed the Buddha relic with great reverence in the center of the monastery. They also surmounted each temple with tall monolithic railings. The railings were placed on pillars, each pair of which was held together by crossbars. These were so polished that if a human hand was applied to them, it slipped off. The names of the subscribers were inscribed in Brahmin script on each pillar, each crossbar, and each block of the railing.”

There are also such railings at Bodhgaya, and they are said to have appeared after the Sunga dynasty. Moreover, there are two antiques belonging to the reign of Sunga: a bell-shaped capital northeast of the main shrine on the list of the Archaeology Museum

of *Sārnātha*, labeled No D. (g) 1.1; and pieces of a broken stone head found at the northwestern corner during the excavation work of 1906-1907 (its number in the list of the *Sārnātha* museum is B. 1). There are no antiques from the Kanva dynasty or others from the Sunga dynasty to be found in *Sārnātha*.

4. THE DYNASTY OF SAKA SATRAP

King Saka controlled northwestern India before the ruins of the Kanva dynasty. Some governors during the reign of Saka asserted their independence since the first century and ruled at Mathurā, Taxila, and other places under the title of “satraps” or “great satraps.” The steles of a satrap with the name Sodas or Songdas or Sudasassodas was discovered on the lion-pillar at Mathurā in around the fifteenth year. An epitaph of King Asvaghosha, written in the same character as this one, is to be seen on the pillar of King *Asoka* at *Sārnātha*.

5. THE KANISHKA DYNASTY

In the middle of the first century C.E., a Kushān of the Yuchchi tribe occupied cities of the Saka dynasty and established a new capital. With the appearance of the Kushān Empire in northern India, Buddhism began to flourish again, with a great deal of outstanding artistic activities, and Matura was chosen as a major center for it. In addition, *Sārnātha* also was flourishing with many new buildings.

The first king of the Yuchchi tribe was Kaphise I, whose boundary spread far and wide to Kabul, Gandhār, and Punjab. The son of Kaphise I pushed his

own conquests further into the heart of India, up to Banāres. In light of the shapes of coins and some other antiques discovered from that era, we could guess that the king worshipped the god Śiva. Hence, this proved that he was relevant to *Sārnātha*, although no relics of his have been found there.

Succeeding this king was Kaniska I, a great emperor in the Kushān dynasty. Before being converted to Buddhism, Kaniska was a fire-worshipper and, like Akbar, worshipped a number of gods and goddesses. Later on, he grew to admire Buddhism and felt a special affinity for it, so he did all in his power to secure the improvement of this religion. He was the great patron of both the Mahāyāna School and the Theravāda School. Evidence proves that King Kanisaka visited *Sārnātha*, leaving the ancient and biggest statue of Bodhisattva and three epitaphs. According to these three steles, the statue was likely cast after the third year of the reign of Kaniska. Another theory says that this statue was probably made in Mathurā, and then two Bhikkhus, Bala and Pusyabuddhi, offered it to a temple in *Sārnātha*.

Two epitaphs of Bhikkhu Bala were found, one at Mathurā and another at Srāvastī. The stele at *Sārnātha* recounts as follows:

“Banāres was controlled by the Emperor Kaniska, but another satrap helped him to rule. It can be said that all kings later possessed his headquarters at Mathurā. Bhikkhus Bala and Pusyabuddhi were descended from the royal family. They made a pilgrimage to sacred Buddhist places to worship and offer some statues there.”

However, no antiques dating to the reigns of Vasiska, Huviska, Vāsudeva, and other descendants of Kaniska have yet been found at *Sārnātha*. Judging by the kings' coins, it must be noted they were more inclined toward Hinduism than to Buddhism. Although none of these kings' names are mentioned, Buddhist images found there do show the influence of the Kushān age.

At about the same time that the Kushān reign arose in northern India, Buddhism too started developing, along with many types of Buddhist art. Mathurā was a significant center for such art. At that time *Sārnātha* also was developing, and many constructions were built there. In the third year of the Kaniska dynasty, Bhikkhu Bala built a huge brick image of Boddhisattva at *Sārnātha*, with a big umbrella above the image. This showed the heart of Satrap Kharapallāna and Satrap Vanashpara (local governors in Benares. under the Emperor Kaniska). At that time, the Buddhist sect of Sarvāstivādin developed strongly at *Sārnātha*, and some monasteries were built there.



Walking around the Dhāmekh Stupa to remember the day when the Buddha Compassionately first gave a lecture to humankind

6. THE GUPTAS DYNASTIES

After the fall of the Kushān dynasty, the Gupta dynasties began to establish their sway in northern India, dating from the beginning of the fourth century C.E. Although Chandra Gupta, Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta Isipitana, Kumara Gupta, Skanda Gupta, and other kings of this line were Hindu, none were hostile to Buddhism. Interpreting from a number of epitaphs, we see that in fact they made many grants for the protection of the Buddhist community in several places where they dominated. These Hindu kings also never persecuted the followers of other religions. King Pusyamitra even followed orthodox Hindu rituals and performed the horse-sacrifice and other ceremonies, but he never attempted to ruin *Sārnātha* or desecrate other holy Buddhist places. The other Gupta kings, too, made grants for Buddhist *Vihāras*. The King Harsa also was tolerant of all forms of religion.

It is clear that architectural relics and sculptures at *Sārnātha* seemingly belong to the reigns of the Guptas. Archeologists believe that the stupendous *Dhāmekh* stupa and 300 images in the museum of *Sārnātha* are among these; another one is the statue showing the Buddha in the act of setting into motion the “Wheel of Law” during the Gupta period. In that age, a new style in the making of images came into being. From their epitaphs in the stone railing of the main shrine and one in the step of the Jagatsingh stupa, we can guess that there is a section of the Hīnayānist, called the Sarvāstivādin, that impacted *Sārnātha* before the Gupta dynasty. When their influence came to an end in the fourth century C.E., another sect of the Hīnayānis,

called the Sammitīya, became the most prominent religious community at *Sārnātha*. They retained Buddhism up to the seventh century.

An epitaph of theirs, inscribed in the character of the fourth century, may be seen on the *Aśoka* Pillar. Moreover, a noted Chinese traveler saw as many as 1,500 monks of this sect at *Sārnātha* in the seventh century. That traveler, named Fa-Hian, visited India at the beginning of the fourth century in the reign of Chandragupta II. He described of *Sārnātha* as follows:

“As seeing the Buddha from a distance, five austerities said among themselves: ‘When he comes here, let us be careful not to speak to him.’ However, once the Blessed One approached...five men rose and worshipped him without a word.

“At the distance of 60 paces to the north of this place, the Blessed One looked toward the west, sat down, and began to turn the wheel of the law. At the distance of 20 paces to the north is the place where He rehearsed his history. At the distance of 50 paces to the south is the place where the dragon I loopo asked the Blessed One how long the dragon had been delivered from this dragon’s body.... There are two monasteries and four big stupas and monks also studied in these places.”

In the Gupta reign (dating from the fourth through sixth centuries C.E.), *Sārnātha* rose in the “golden age of sculpture.” Many images and perfect works were born in this age, too. *Sārnātha* then became a cradle of Buddhism. Fa-hsien (also known as Fa-hien and Faxian) paid a visit there in the reign of Chandragupta II (376-414 C.E.), and recorded that four stupas and two

vihāras had also been built. The steles at the Buddha image place bear the donor's name of Kumāragupta, who had offered this image; these belonged to the Gupta period (414-455 C.E.).

Although there were no epitaphs from the Skandagupta period found at *Sārnātha*, it is possible that the site flourished during this period until the invasion of Hūnas (the Mongolian army). Mr. Cunningham found the places where images and precious items had been buried at *Sārnātha*, and from these things he concluded that *Sārnātha* was initially ruined by Hūnas' weapons. Some epitaphs of King Kumāra Gupta II and King Buddhagupta (476 C.E.) of the Gupta reign were also found.

At the end of the century, after the Hūna invasion, the Gupta period collapsed and gloom covered India. As a result, there was no further evidence showing the later history of *Sārnātha*.

7. THE LATER GUPTA PERIOD

In the sixth century, the Gupta Emperor Narasingh Deo Bālāditya defeated and drove away the Hūna invaders and restored the rule of the Gupta dynasty. For this reason, only a few relics of Kumāra Gupta II, the son of Bālāditya, the last Gupta Emperor and of Prakatāditya of this line, can be connected to *Sārnātha*. At the foot of the figure of the Buddha bearing B (b) 173 in the list of the Archaeological Museum, there is a small epitaph of this Kumāra Gupta. Dr. Konow says that it is in fact an epitaph of Kumāra Gupta I.

On the other hand, Dr. Vogel does not admit that this Kumāra Gupta was a king of the Gupta dynasty.

As a matter of fact, both these scholars are wrong on this point because the steles of the three recently discovered images of the Buddha (1915) and the actual date of the reign of Kumāra Gupta II are clear. Dr. Fleet gave further details in his *Corpus Stele Indicarum*.

Some scholars are of the opinion that King *Prakātāditya* is the same individual as King *Prakāsāditya* (with very similar spellings). Many ancient coins of the latter king have been discovered in various places in India. *Srijut Nagendra Nath Basu Prāchyavidyāmahārṇava* hold that this *Prakāsāditya* was a brother of King Kumāra Gupta with Bālāditya, and say that both had their capitals at Banāres. If that is so, no wonder that his relic should not be found at *Sārnātha*. “From the epitaph of King *Prakātāditya*, we know that he established an image of *Viśnu* called *Muradvit* and built a very big temple for the God. Seemingly there was the beginning of an attempt to convert this Buddhist holy place into a holy place of the Hindus.” There is a notice here that while the brother of King Kumāra Gupta II carved an image of Buddha, another brother established an image of the God *Viśnu*, and still there was no conflict between them. How noble was the spirit of tolerance among religions that prevailed in India in those days!

8. THE REIGN OF HARSAVARDHANA EMPEROR AND A REPORT OF HIUEN-TSANG MONK

After the downfall of the Gupta Empire in the first half of the seventh century, Harshavardhana (often shortened to Harsha), the King of Thaneshvar, became the Emperor

of northern India. Like Kaniska and Akbar, he patronized and tolerated all forms of religion and personally showed reverence to them. Meaningful evidence shows his knowledge of Buddhism, especially of Buddhist kings. One or two relics have been discovered at *Sārnātha* that show his liking of Buddhism. From an examination of the blocks of stone and bricks of the *Dhāmekh* Stupa, antiquarians have come to the conclusion that most of the stupa was built by King Harsha, and it may be said that he wanted to hide his name (or practice “giving paramita”) by not engraving his own name. That is the reason why there are no epitaphs by him at *Sārnātha*. During his reign, the Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang visited India. He has left the following account of *Sārnātha*:

“Banāres was located west of the Ganga River with a width of 4,000 miles. There were a great many rich residents and precious things. The people are gentle and learned. Most of them did not have any religion but with their hearts they revered the Buddha’s teachings. The weather at Banāres was nice so that the harvest was well on the fields, and grass and trees were greeny and sumptuous.

“...To the southern west of the Vihāra is a stone stupa built by Aśokaraja. Although the foundations are ruined, there are still more than 100 feet of wall remaining. In front of the building is a 70-foot-high stone pillar. The stone is as bright as jade. It is glistening, and sparkles like light, and all those who come to contemplate it pray and, according to their petitions, figures with good or bad signs appear. It was here that Tathāgata began to turn the wheel of the law (Dharma-chakra).

“By the side of this building and not far from it is a stupa. This is the spot where Añña Koṇḍañña and the four left to see Gautama Bodhisattva going up his austerities.

“By the side of this is a stupa where 500 Pratyeka Buddhas entered nibbāna at the same time. Moreover, there are three stupas where there are traces of the sitting and walking of the future Buddhas.

“By the side of this last place is another stupa. This is the spot where Maitreya Bodhisattva received assurance of his becoming a Buddha....

“To the west of this place there is yet another stupa. This is the spot where Śakya Bodhisattva received the assurance to be a Buddha.

“Not far to the south of this spot are traces where the four Buddhas in bygone ages walked meditation. The length of the promenade is about 50 paces and the height of the steps about 7 feet. It is composed of blue stones piled together. Above it is a figure of Tathāgata in the attitude of walking with singular dignity and beauty. From the flesh-knot on the top of the head there flows wonderfully a braid of hair....

“Within the precincts, there are many vestiges of vihāras and stupas, several hundred in number. To the west of Sārnātha is a lake about 200 paces in circuit; Tathāgata sometimes bathed there. To the west of this is a great tank about 180 paces around; there Tathāgata used to wash his begging dish. To the north of this is a lake about 150 paces around. Tathāgata used to wash his robe there.

“By the side of that lake where Tathāgata washed his robe is a great square on which traces of his Kashaya robe are to be seen. By the side of the lake, and not far off, is a stupa where Bodhisattva, during his past life, was born as a king of elephants with 6 tusks (chhadanta). Not far from this, in a great forest, is a stupa. It was there that Devadatta and Bodhisattva (previous lives of the Sakyamuni Buddha), in years gone by, were kings of the deer and settled a certain matter (the problem of birth and death of the herd of deer), and since thence it was called Deer Park.”

Under the dynasty of the Harshavardhana king, many Buddhist activities restored a number of architectures. Master Tripitaka Hsien Tsang reported seeing lively Buddhist buildings, including *Dharmarājikā* and a 21.33 meter tall pillar as bright as a mirror. He also saw a monastery with 1,500 monks there. These monks belonged to Sammīyaya of Hīnayāna Buddhism. There was a Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra* (fragrant room) in which a metal image of Buddha in the mudrā setting the Wheel of Law (*Dharma Cakra Pravartana Sūtra*) was outstanding in motion to be placed.

9. THE ACCOUNT OF THE I-CHING MONK

After the death of Harshavardhan, his vast empire fell to pieces and descended into anarchy. The rulers of the smaller states were eager to find a new emperor, and this resulted in a serious civil war. However, during these days of gloomy and degenerated politics, the stupas at *Sārnātha* remained intact, and the site still attracted pilgrims from abroad. The words of the

Chinese traveler I-ching may be quoted in support of this statement. When starting on his return to China, toward the end of the seventh century, he narrated that:

“I often think of the far-away Migadava.... Rajagrha, Bodhi-tree, the Grdhra peak, Mrgadāva, that place is as white as the wings of a crane, the sacred place is full of the shadow of Sal trees, the lonely forest with many squirrels and temples of these places, thousands of Bhikkhus used to come from different quarters to pray and meditate every day.”

I-ching also said that there were various Buddhist sects existing then in India, and it appeared that the Sarvāstivādins had again risen in power at *Sārnātha* at that time.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 discussed the relationship between the history of *Sārnātha* and history of India. The dynasties of King *Aśoka*, Sunga, Śaka Satrap, Kaniska, Gupta, Post-Gupta, and others have many connections with the history of *Sārnātha*, because of the antiques, stupas, and monuments that were found there and that travelers had described in their chronicles. Among the most famous kings in India's history, King *Aśoka* was the first one connected to *Sārnātha*, and he made the greatest contributions to Buddhism in *Sārnātha*. Thanks to them, the light of the golden history of *Sārnātha* has been opened.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Among them, many epitaphs and inscriptions on pillars and reliefs at *Sārnātha* were engraved by kings.

1. Give some details about King *Aśoka*.
2. What are the antiques related to King *Aśoka* in *Sārnātha*? Please name a few.
3. How did the kings of Gupta and Post-Gupta treat Buddhism?
4. How did the renovations in *Sārnātha* go on under the Harshavardhana dynasty?
5. What does the diary of the I-Ching monk tell about *Sārnātha*?



Memorial of the Buddha giving a lecture to the five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña (the statues of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, *Sārnātha*)



The Hương Sen Pilgrimage together with a Sri Lanka group at the *Sārnātha* holy site

Notes

¹ The historian Vincent A. Smith has taken it for granted that *Aśoka* had visited *Sārnātha*, although he gave no proof in support of his statement. Source: Dhammadoot, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Mulagandha Kutya Vihara, *Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism*, 1999, 2000, and 2001, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1845, 525; 1904, 703; 1905, p. 154.

⁴ Babu Rakhaldas Banerji finds some similarities in the character of these two epitaphs. See *Sāhitya Parisad Patikā*, B.S. 1312, Part 4. Another short epitaph of King Asvaghosha has been found at *Sārnātha*.

⁵ English rendering of an extract from *Sāhitya Parisad Patikā*, B.S. 1312. Part IV, p. 173. *Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992.

⁶ Dr. V. A. Smith also admitted this point: “the conduct of Harsha as a whole proves that like most of the Sovereigns of Ancient India, he was ordinarily tolerant of all forms of indigenous religion and willing that all should share in his bounty.” *Imperial Gazetteer*. Vol. IV, p. 298.

⁷ *The Pilgrimage of Fahien*, tr. by J. W. Laidlay (Baptist Mission Press), Calcutta; 1848, chap. XXXIV and Legge’s translation, Oxford, 1886, pp. 94-96.

⁸ *Archaeological Survey Reports*, 1906-1907, pp. 89-91 and 99, epitaph VIII. 1903-1904, 1907-1909.

⁹ *Sārnātha* Catalogue. *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum. *Archaeological Survey Report*, 1903-1904, 1907-1909. p. 15, 2.

¹⁰ The date of Kumara Gupta II given in this epitaph (vis. G. S. 154-473 C.E.) differs from that given by V. A. Smith and Dr. Fleet. This inscription has not yet been published.

¹¹ Dr. Fleet, *Corpus Stele Indicarum*, vol. IV, p. 284.

¹² Translation of an extract from Nagendranath Vasu’s p. 2. Source: *Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 74.

¹³ *The Jātaka Nikāya* (Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births), ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993. vol. I, p. 149.

¹⁴ *Travels of Hiuen-Tsang*. Translated by Beal. Vol. II, pp. 46-61; also by Waiters, vol. II, pp. 46-54, and *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, Introduction XX, IX, by I-Ching, tr. by Takakasu, p. 29.

¹⁵ I-ching-A Chinese Monk travelled to India under the Tang Dynasty. For the ancient Chinese Confucian text, see [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/I_Ching_\(monk\)](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/I_Ching_(monk)). *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Samuel Beal, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 2001.

CHAPTER 3

SĀRNĀTHA

IN MEDIEVAL TIMES



The ancient main Hall in Sarnātha

1. SĀRNĀTHA IN THE SEVENTH THROUGH TENTH CENTURIES

The period after the reign of King Harah (or Harsha) was a gloomy one in India. When there was no centralized management, the whole area of North India was in chaos in which a number of well-established states stood to authorize the throne. The competitions and wars had continued for nearly three centuries from 650 to 950 C.E. Some strong governments were formed in the midst of the tenth century. But the powerful Mahomedan Muslim invaders launched a death push through all northern India. In the medieval period, India lasted six long centuries without invasions and conquests by foreign countries, and only experienced internal civil wars.

After that period, India was sometimes influenced by Hinduism. Although Hindu kings ruled the country, still the *Sārnātha* holy sites were maintained; people were free to observe their own religion, and *Sārnātha*'s architecture was popular in the country. We know that many ancient artistic works, the steles, the records, and the stupas (*chatiyas*) were built in *Sārnātha*. The pilgrims visiting this area even today have kept up the practice as the Buddha taught, and many improvements are seen here. The remaining architecture, the Buddhist sects, and the decision-making authority of emperors and governments still demonstrate *Sārnātha*'s history even today.

2. THE CHINESE PILGRIM O-KUNG VISITS SĀRNĀTHA

In the eighth century, the Kānyakubja kingdom was the strongest in the north of India. In 731 C.E., the Kānyakubja king sent an ambassador to China. Although the king was able to recover the Veda's thoughts and turned the city of Banāres into a center of the Vedas, he did not object to the construction of Buddhist temples (vihāras) in Sārnātha.

A Chinese pilgrim named O-Kung was attracted to the famous place of *Sārnātha*, and went to visit it in 741. He confirmed that “the Buddha turned the Dhamma wheel (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*)” there. Another Chinese pilgrim, Wang Hiuentse, also traveled to India in 657, decades before O-Kung, but he did not mention either Mrgadava or Deer Park in his diary.

3. SĀRNĀTHA IN THE NINTH AND TENTH CENTURIES

After the death of King Yaśovarnā, both King Vajrāudha and King Indrāyudha continued to rule the Kānyakubja kingdom. While the kings believed in the value of the Vedas, in truth they more likely favored Buddhism, because *Sārnātha*'s temples were developed and well preserved during the time of their government. In the first quarter of the ninth century, Indrāyudha was removed from the throne by King Dharmapāla of the Pāla reign. The next ruler was a Buddhist who was a king of Chakrāyudha in Kayakubja, but that king's life was not long. In 810 C.E., Nāgabhata, the king of Pratihāra in Gurjjara,

overthrew King Chakrāyudha and established his own reign in Kānyakubja.

The Bhojadeva I or Mihirabhoja led the military match on Chitrakuai Fort in 843 C.E. and invaded the Kānyakubja. He occupied and controlled the whole of Adivarāha. Therefore, it is likely that sometimes Sārnātha was taken over by the king. While the king was a Hindu, he never went against Buddhism. Under his dynasty, Jayapāla (brother of Devapāla and father of Vīgrahapāla I) constructed 10 stupas at *Sārnātha*, which were mentioned in records of the steles of the *Sārnātha* site. Jayapāla was the right-hand man of King Devapāla in defeating his enemies and opening the remaining land. The king won over the emperors Prāgjyotisha and Utkala, and was modeled as the leader of Radka, North Nārāyana Bhatta.

On one hand, the king performed the traditional Hindu festivals, and on the other hand he showed interest in Buddhism by constructing a Chaitya (stupa) where Buddhists could worship. Many such conflicts occurred during those times. According to the history books, Jayapāla was the last king of the end of the ninth century, as proven by his own steles. The kings' inscriptions mentioned that many villagers wanted to become either ominists (wise people who know everything in the world) or Buddhas. This showed that the king appreciated Buddhism highly and considered *Sārnātha* to be a sacred place. After King Jayapāla passed away, King Vīgrahapāla of Gauda took over the Kānyakubja. Since that time, it seems that Pāla and Gurjjara competed strenuously to assume the highest ruling authority in northern India.

Therefore, both *Banāres* and *Sārnātha* were maintained well under Pāla kings, and both made special progress under King Kanaukings.

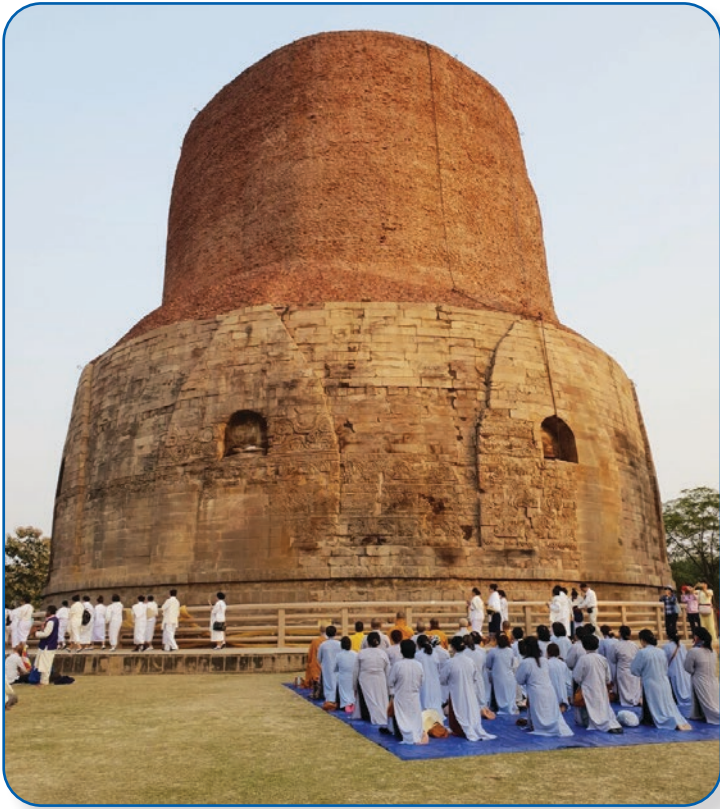
After King Bhoja's death, his son Mahendrapāla became king of Kanauj state. In Gayā and many other states in India, many artistic masterworks, such as statues or Buddhist items of King Kanauj, were offered to temples. The new king ruled throughout the whole of northern India, ranging from the Arabian Sea to Magadha. The monographs of the king and the Karpura Manjary (the royal book written by the King's Master, Rājasekhar) have provided us with this valuable information.

The Kānyakubja kingdom shrank in the tenth century, shortly after King Mahendrapāla passed away. The influence of the Gauda Palace also was weakened after the death of King Devapāla, and the northern states became less powerful. About 300 years later, little was mentioned of them except the record narrating how the states were invaded by the Mu'izuddin Mahammad Ghori (Muslims) and changed by the overall influence of Mahomedan (Muslims).

After Mahendrapāla passed away, Bhoja II, Mahipāla, Devapāla, Vijayapāla, and other kings continued to dominate the country in the tenth century. Among them, King Rāstrakutas and Chāndella at Jejābhukti stood up to assert their full governmental rights, and since then the economic wealth of the Kānyakubja kingdom was reduced. In one or two instances, Rāstrakuta invaded the temporary palace, and the Gauda kingdom encountered the same bad fate. After the death of King Devapāla, Rāstrakutas

and Kamboja took over the country, after which the political situation often became chaotic. Although *Sārnātha* suffered for a long time under the reign of Kānyakubja, many Pāla kings and their mantric followers supported efforts to build new stupas there.

Because of the deterioration of these two kingdoms in the tenth century, *Sārnātha* was greatly affected and began to fail as a power. In the eleventh century, King Mahipāla paid greater attention to the teachings of the area's monks, and so he began to restore these monuments. Not only in that century but also before the Mantric Buddhist Sect came in, many bad people took advantage of the king's favor. Some even shaved their heads so they could pretend to be monks living the spiritual monastic life in order to actually demolish Buddhism and thereby receive various benefits.



Chanting at Dhāmekh Stupa where the Buddha set in Motion the Dharma Wheel, or Promulgation of the Law Suttā (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*)

4. THE EFFECT OF MANTRAIISM AT SĀRNĀTHA

The worship of gods and goddess was progressing at Sārnātha at that time. Buddhism borrowed the Hindus' "secret god" community such as Tārā, Chāumundā, Vārāhi, and many others that previously had been rituals in Hinduism. Mantraism and Vajra might have borrowed icons from Purāna (part of the Vedas) and either changed very little or added more goddesses. Such

icons as Janglitārā, Vājravārāhi, Vājratārā, Mārichi, and many other things have been modified.

Hinduism did the same, by borrowing many icons from Mantraism. The Mahāyāna icons such as Mañjuśrī Boddhisattva, Samantabhadra Boddhisattva, and Avalokiteśvara Boddhisattva were all worshipped during the reigns of King Kushānas and Gupta. In later times, Mañjuśrī Boddhisattva was ritually worshipped as Mañjughosa of Hinduism and Akshyobhyo was worshipped as Siva or Rishi (Bartāli) of Hinduism.

In *Sārnātha*, visitors can admire many icons of Śakti, such as the Vajra god (Tārā) [B (f) 2, B (f) 7 in the museum catalog], Vājratārā [No. B (f) 6], and Mārichi [No. B (f) 23]. These similarities were attained in the IX-X registers under the influence of the kings of Pāla. Most people can say that the Pāla kings were the followers of the Mantraism (the Secret Sect). The historical scholar Tārānāth confirmed that kings built VikramaŚīla, the Mantraist center. Therefore, we know that the followers of Mantra and Vajra lived and practiced in *Sārnātha*'s monasteries (Dharmachakravahāra) during the ninth and tenth centuries. King Pāla also built Hindu shrines there for followers to worship Śiva-Śakti in the same way as Buddhism.

5. SĀRNĀTHA IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

At the end of the tenth century, the Kānyakubja economy was divided and only the name was known thereafter. Again, many invasions from Subaktagin and by Sultan Mahmud made Kānyakubja collapse. In

1018, when Sultan Mahmud took control of Kanauj, King Rājyapāl escaped from his palace, but he was killed in doing so. *Sārnātha* was also in a recessionary situation. After detecting Kanauj, Mahmud took hold of Katehar (Rohilkhand). According to a number of historical scholars, Mahmud destroyed some monuments in *Sārnātha*. *Mr. Ramāprasā reported that the Banāra region in the Gauda territory was strongly protected by Gauda military and so avoided being wiped out by Mahmud.*

The restoration of *Sārnātha* could not begin at that time or even after the conquest by Mahmud, but must have begun before 1026. The historian Mahomedan (Muslim) also suggested that *Banāres* had nothing to do with the Mahomedans before the Nialatigin massacre (before 1033).

Sārnātha was prosperous during the reign of the Pāla kings, but in 1017, when *Banāres* was trampled by the Mahmud army, *Sārnātha* was also attacked. This was made clear by a stele dating to the first Mahipāla dynasty in 1026, when the brothers Sthirapāla and Vasantapāla renovated the two great monuments Dharmarājikā and Dharmacakra as well as established a new stone stupa with a relief on which were carved eight of the most important life events of the Buddha (*ashtamahāsthānaŚaila-gandhakuti*).

We now know that in the eleventh century, the conflict between Mahipāla, the ruling king of Gauda, and Gāngeyadeva Kalachuri was brought to the forefront for a long time, and *Sārnātha* was affected by that bad circumstance. Six fractured pieces of stele were found in a monastery on the eastern side of the

Dhāmekhha monument, which recorded a Mahāyāna monk who possessed a copy of Eight Thousand Chanting Treatises (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*) in 1058 and who also offered the Suttās and other Buddhist items for sangha at Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra (that is, *Sārnātha*).

6. THE RENOVATION OF SĀRNĀTHA UNDER MAHIPĀLA

It is known that due to war and many other causes, the *Sārnātha* holy site was dilapidated for a long time. That was true during the decreased period of Buddhism at the end of the eleventh century, but sometimes the site also recovered somewhat, particularly when the Pāla reign of Mahipāla came little by little into power.

Throughout the reign of Mahipāla, many of the Buddha's scriptures were well printed and statues were cast. During that time, Tibetan Buddhism also made a recovery. It was King Mahipāla who invited the Most Venerable Dipankara Śrījnāra (Atisha) to be a professor (Āchārya) in the Vikramasilā University. It is clear that India's king had made significant contributions to the restorations of *Sārnātha* (known as the cradle of Buddhism), Lumbini, Nālanda, and other Buddhist places. Bahu Akshaya Kumar Maitreya called this time "the period of all renovation."

7. THE CHELI DYNASTY

At certain times, *Banāres* and *Sārnātha* both were under the control of King Chedi in Gāngeyadeva, but after a short time they were overthrown by Nialatigin, Governor of Lahore, under the direction of Ma'su in

Gazi. The subversion happened very quickly, and three land lots of *Banāres* were robbed. It seems, however, that the Musulman's army did not actually advance to *Sārnātha*. In 1040, Gāngeyadeva died and his son Karadadeva was promoted to assume a throne over the large territory.

There was a stele inscribed in the year 1042. *Banāres* was also included in the area that composed King Karadadeva's region. A stele [D (1) 4] in *Sārnātha* bears an inscription saying that the king held authority over the whole land. The inscription was recorded in the year 810 Kalchuri Samvat, which is equivalent to 1058 C.E. From this stele, this place is still referred to by the name "Saddharmachakra" (*Sārnātha*). Mahāyāna Buddhism had a great influence there, and the Eight Thousand Chanting Treatises (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*) became the main treatises for this sect. That monograph also noted that on the occasion of the annual death anniversary of his father Śrāddha (793 Chedi Samvat), the king supported building a province called Karnāvati and erecting a stupa called Karnameru in Kāshi (*Banāres*). King Karadadeva ruled the state for six years. Since his time it is said that *Sārnātha* was under that king's rule in the period of the eleventh century.

8. SĀRNĀTHAIN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

In the twelfth century, Govindachadra (1114-1154) of the Gāhadavāla dynasty became king of the three provinces of Kanauji, Ayodhyā, and *Banāres*. Queen Kumāradevi was the devoted female Buddhist under whose patronage a monastery called Dharmachakra-jina was built in *Sārnātha*. The place was successful

as a significant center for the monastic practice, which continued even after the area went mostly wild over the course of time.

At the end of the eleventh century, Kīrtivarmā, King Chāndella of Mahoba, had defeated Karadadeva, only to rob the kingdom and steal its masterpiece artworks. Almost all of *Sārnātha* was governed by him. Later, King Chāndella launched the new dynasty Gaharwāla at Kanauj to combat *Banāres*, Ayodhyā, and other palaces in northern India. *Banāres* and *Sārnātha* continued under the kingship for the late twelfth century. Many good changes were seen in both *Banāres* and *Sārnātha* under that king's reign. The nephew of King Chandradeva was Govinda Chandra, who became the most famous king of this lineage.

Many tombstones of King Govinda Chandra have been found in *Banāres* and other places. These let us know that the king managed very well to recover the works and fame of the previous Kanauj golden time. The role of that king was likely performed for some 40 years, from 1114 to 1154. The king had ordered a military expedition to the Magadha, where he had encountered the Lakshmana who then defeated the king and forced his return to Prayāg. Lakshmana Sena erected many stele to memorialize Lakshmana's victories as well as the sacrificial ritual place at Viśvevara and at the dividing three rivers of Gangang, Jamunā, and Srasvati. Lakshmana Sena occupied *Banāres* for only a short time. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Kumāradevi, one of the royal queens of Govinda Chandra, renovated the Dharmachakrājina monument.

Sankaradevi, a daughter of Mahana from the Rāstrakuta lineage, was married to Devarakshita, the king of Pithi. Kumāradevi was the son of Sankaradevi Govindachandra, king of Kānyakubja, who was put in a marriage knot with Kumāradevi. Through the Rāma Pāla Charita, we know that Mahana was the uncle of Rāma Pāla and served as the right hand of King Gauáa during the Kaivarta movement. Since the time Mahana won Devarakshita, King Pith stood against King Gauda. King Govinda Chandra followed Hinduism, but Kumāradevi was a very devoted Buddhist who had a monument built at *Sārnātha*, as well as a Buddha statue and several Buddhist items cast. A decree was issued that Mahādeva had declared that Govindachadra of *Banāres* had escaped a terrible attack from the Turkish military. From this evidence, it seems that immediately after the reign of King Nialatigin, Mahomedan had proceeded to continue invading *Banāres*. These movements were only within a small scope, however. Thus, it seems that Govindachadra saved *Banāres* from Mahomeda's hand up to the middle of the twelfth century.

9. THE INVASION OF THE MUSLIM MILITARY

Those reading the history of India will be familiar with the name Jayachānd, the nephew of Muhammad Ghori many times, except for the last time. Because of this, the role of Hinduism comes to play in that time. Back then, northern India's kingdom had fallen under the authority of Mahommedan. Kutbuddin was the Prime Minister of Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad Ghori,

who conquered Jayachandra in the war of 1193 and knocked down many stupas in *Banāres*. Tajul-ma-irsir, a record of Mohammedan, states that Mohammedan ordered 1,000 stupas to be pulled down and to be replaced by some Muslim mosques. Later, Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad Ghori was allowed to reopen the capital city of *Banāres*, another nearby place too, and Gazni as well.

In Kamilut-tawārikh, which was another work of Mohammedan, the king of *Banāres* was described as one of the greatest kings in India. Equipped with the strongest of weapons, the Ghori army defeated and killed the king of *Banāres* and robbed countless artworks and properties. The blood-red sea of dead Hindu followers covered the ground. Ghori himself went to *Banāres* and put all the properties and precious jewels on his 14,000 camels, taking them back to Gazni. In this situation, the Buddhist stupas in *Sārnātha* and the Hindu shrines in *Banāres* were burnt and utterly destroyed by Mohammedan.

Because of the consequences of this disaster, the stupas in *Sārnātha* are hard to revive. It seems clear that the Muslim King Mohammedan was not even aware that Hinduism was essentially different from Buddhism. That is why the term “Buddha” was never mentioned in his historical books.

10. SĀRNĀTHA COLLAPSES

To understand the secret cause of the fall of the Dharma-chakra (Dharma-wheel) monument at *Sārnātha*, one needs to understand the causes of the degeneration of Buddhism throughout India. After

King Harás passed away, northern India was divided into many states, a change in policy that greatly affected Buddhism itself. That was precisely the time when Hindu Kumāřila and Sankara were developing, causing an end to Buddhism. Not only were Buddhists being converted to Hindu followers, but they also built many Śiva shrines to revive Hinduism. Since that time, Saivism and Śaktism began to spread among the people. Even though sometimes the Hindu rulers also supported Buddhism, that was not enough to further expand Buddhism during a rapid development of Hinduism. As a result, the practice of Buddhism was greatly decreased. The emergence of the Arab peoples in the eighth century also played a part in the decline of Buddhism.

However, the moral degeneracy in sangha was the primary cause. Hindus were less respected than Buddhists. One of the last blows leading to the decline of Buddhism in the twelfth century was the Mohammedan Turkish military invading India, like crude grasshoppers swallowing tiny spiders. The Hindu kingdoms in northern India were also falling into the conquerers' hands; the monasteries, the stupas, the monuments, and the religious places were leveled down to flat ground; the country suffered the same bad fate as Buddhism itself. The collapse of Hindu palaces did not lead to the fall of Hindu civilization in India. *Banāres* was knocked down once, but it can revive again. However, the monuments of *Sārnātha* are harder to bring to life once more.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 introduces *Sārnātha* in the middle ages (seventh through twelfth centuries) and describes its civil war (the conflict between Mahipāla, Gauda, and Gāngeyadeva Kalachuri) and foreign wars (Mahmūd Ghaznī and the Muslim Mohammedan Turkish invaders). It also details the religious fights of Hinduism (Hindu Kumārila and Sankara) and Muslim (Arab peoples) against Buddhism. The *Sārnātha* Buddhist site and also many Hindu shrines in Banāres were badly damaged, or even collapsed into wildness, after fires and destruction by their enemies. The moral degeneracy in sangha and the bad effects of outsiders' violence are the primary causes that led to a decline in Buddhism in *Sārnātha*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the politics and behaviors of Hindu kings in the medieval period.
2. What did the Chinese traveler O-Kung say about his observations of *Sārnātha* during his visit in the seventh century?
3. How did *Sārnātha* look under King Pāla in the eleventh century?
4. Narrate how Kumāradevi, one of the royal queens of Govinda Chandra, renovated the Dharmachakrājina monument.
5. Discuss the reasons that led to a decline in the practice of Buddhism in *Sārnātha* in the twelfth century.



Huong Sen Pilgrimage chanting
the Promulgation of the Law Suttā (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*)



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương approaching the Great Stupa Dhāmekh,
September 2019

Notes

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, 1895. This is not mentioned by many scholars writing about *Sārnātha*. Vol. 3. Pp. 356-66.

² Lave's article "Les mission de Wang Huicatse dans lude," J.A. 1900. *The Maha Bodhi Centenary Volume*, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta, 1991. P. 54.

³ V. A. Smith, *Early History of India* (Bình Minh Lịch Sử của Ấn Độ), 2nd edition, p. 350.

⁴ Bhojadeva was one of the first members of Pratihāra in Gurjjara. Because of this, people think that he belonged to the non-Aryan people. But the master of his son, a poet called Rājākhara, described Mahendrapāla from the Raghu people. This is, however, no reason to conclude that the ideas of the poet were wrong. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994. P. 231.

⁵ *Sārnātha* Museum Catalogue No. D (f) 54 (orderly number in the list is D (f) 54). 2. *Archaeological Survey Report*, 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 34.

⁶ We know that the two main branches of Buddhism are Mahāyāna and Theravāda/Hinayāna. The latter is more ancient than the former. Most scholars have held that the latter was ascendant in the Nāgājunar time. But there also exists proof that it rose before that time. (See the details of the Asvaghosa and the Lankāvatāra, which explain in detail the Mahāyāna.) At the time of the council of Vaisali, two sects, Sthaviravāda and Mahāsānghika, were established. Mahāsānghika became Mahāyāna. Therefore, both the Mahāyāna and the Theravāda were considered to be of the same importance in the course of developing Buddhism. We can view the Hinayāna followers as Sammittiya and Sarvāstivāda with the Mahāyāna followers who have existed and progressed. In the eighth century, a great decline in Buddhism throughout India was happening; the secret Buddhism sect began to develop (see H. Kern's *Manual of Buddhism*, page 133). Buddhists borrowed many terms of Tāntrism from Hinduism.

In the seventh century, the Mahāyāna followers of Yogāchāra were interested to learn Mantrayāna (see *Modern Buddhism*, page 39). In the ninth century, Mantrayāna was approved by Vikramasīlā and grew in many other places. "Adikarmavachana" and many other Mantra scriptures were also composed in this period. In about the tenth century, one of the most powerful manifestations was the Kālachakrayāna (another branch of Mantraism), which was enlarged. Kālachakrayāna means "the way escaping the abolishing

of the word,” and Mr. Waddel has explained this method as a magic research. Following the proposal, the Buddha is described as a Pisācha (God Lord). This sect was named the Vajrayāna, which is still popular in Nepal. But the monks and sisters from the family belong to China, in accordance with this law. They believe that a person can transfer from a karma world (Kāmaloka) to the heavenly form world (Rupaloka). As a further step, they can reach to the formless world (Arupaloka) or even to the state of Nirvāna as soon as they can penetrate their bodies into Niratmā (selflessness). This practice has spread widely and is seen in Nepal, Tibet, and Thailand. (Also see Grunwedel’s *Mythologie des Buddhismus*, pp. 51, 94, 100-101.)

⁷ *Tārā Tantra* (V.R.S.), Introduction by B. Akshay Kumar Moitra C.I.E., B.L., pp. 1121.

⁸ See *Introduction to Modern Buddhism* by M. M. Hara Prasad Satstri C.I.E., p. 12, and see also N. N. Vasu, *Archaeological Survey of Mayurvanja*, Episode I, Introduction, p. XV; *Tārāntantra*, Introduction, p. 14.

⁹ Kern, *Manual of Buddhism*, p. 135, Tārānāth, 201: “Tārānāth has added that under the dynasty of Pāla, there were many Mantra-Vajrachārya masters who performed well Siddhis to play the magics to convert stubborn people.”

¹⁰ This has been confirmed. In 1026, a restoration was begun for all sites in Sārānātha; we can connect that with Mahmud (Ghazni), who arrogated *Banāres* to himself in 1077. *Sārānātha Catalogue*. Vogel’s Introduction, p. 7.

¹¹ B. C. Bhattacharya, *The History of Sārānātha, or the Cradle of Buddhism*, Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition. 1999, p. 54.

¹² *Tankhus Subaktigin*, Elliot’s History of India, vol. II, p. 123.

¹³ Both Babu Ramaprasād Chanda and Babu Nagendra Nath Basu held that Nialatigin invaded *Banāres* under the Pāla dynasty. There is no document at Sārānātha that belongs to the Karnadeva dynasty that would prove that Chedis actually controlled *Sārānātha* at that time. According to Babu Nagendra Nath Basu, *Banāres* was also included in the border area of the Gayeyadeva Kingdom. The following excerpt gives a little light on the history of the Mahomedan:

“Nialatigin i suddenly marched into a city which is called *Banāres* which is located along the Ganga River. Mahomedan has never been here before.” Elliot, Episode I, page 123. *Sārānātha*, V. S. Agrawala, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992.

¹⁴ Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, vol. II, p. 300.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 188 and 305.

¹⁶ V. A. Smith, *Early History of India* (2nd ed.), p. 362.

¹⁷ Ibid. Chandra Deva, who governs his role in Banāres, Ajodhyā, and might be including to Delhi. P. 355

¹⁸ R. D. Banerjee, *The Pālas of Bengal*, pp. 106-107.

¹⁹ King Ballava (at Pithi), Rāstrakuta, Chandra Gādwal
Devaraksita + Sankaradevi - Madanchadra
Kumāradevi + Govindachandra (1114-1154)

²⁰ Invaders were called on to register to participate in the saint campaign. If this was the case, *Banāres* was destroyed and Hinduism was, too. See Elliot, *History of India*, vol. II, pp. 223-24.

²¹ While a sample of Rajputs was used, no one was able to go past the end of the process. See Lane Poole, *Mediaeval India*, p. 61.

²² The name Mohammedan (also spelled Muhammadan, Mahommedan, Mahomedan, or Mahometan) is a term for a follower of Muhammad, the Islamic prophet.

²³ Elliot, *History of India*, vol. II, pp. 223-24.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 250-51.

²⁵ It is clear that the terrible destruction of Hinduism had been extended to the “Dharma turning wheel site” in *Sārnātha*, leaving it to become abandoned. *Sārnātha Catalogue*, Vogel’s Introduction. P. 8.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXCAVATION WORK AT SĀRNĀTHA



An Archeological Site of Sarnātha

Archeologist departments have made various excavations at the sacred site of *Sārnātha*, and a number of artistic antiques have been found there. They include a small statue, a seal, a vessel, and many other items. These antiques were buried in the ground over some 15 centuries, ranging from the third century B.C.E. to the twelfth century C.E. They are now preserved in the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum. A portion of King *Aśoka*'s lion pillar was broken when being dug out; it shows the highest level of sculpture at its time. The stone is polished like a mirror and not effaced by weather. Sculptured architecture throughout the world cannot compare with this masterpiece, and the way of creating this work is still a secret.

Those who visit there can contemplate the ancient architectures and sculptures that were buried over many centuries and are now being discovered and displayed. They remind viewers of the golden age of Buddhism. Other remains are the foundation of stupas, temples, main shrines, chambers, yards, niches, reliefs, grounds, proofs, stone railings, wells, tunnels, and so on.

Visitors and archaeologists have come to know only some of the damage that the Buddhist artistic works at *Sārnātha* have suffered. Many stupas and other artistic works have turned into heaps of bricks, and they will dissolve into the earth in future years; that will erase some evidence of the glorious golden age of *Sārnātha*. The unique architectural sculptures around the site, regardless of the effects of excavation, still remain, as shown by the massive stupa *Dhāmekh*. Its existence reminds us that it is possible that there are still other relics under the ground.

1. THE REASON WHY SĀRNĀTHA IS KNOWN

In 1978, King *Asoka*'s stupa, called *Dharmarājikā*, was destroyed by the merchant Jagat Singh, from *Banāres*. He stole some of its materials and built a residence for himself. Jagat Singh knew that plenty of brick and stone could be dug out at *Sārnātha*. Therefore, he employed some men to dig into the earth at this place. This sad event coincidentally brought *Sārnātha* to the view of the world and exposed to all the golden age of *Sārnātha*. They began to dig out at a distance of 520 feet to the west of the *Dhāmekh* Stupa and took a heap of bricks and one stone vessel. Inside this vessel, there was a marble vessel in which some bones, pearls, gold pots, and corals were found. The contents of this vessel were thrown into the river Ganges. There were two other vessels to be found. It is not clear whether the bones inside the marble vessel were of the Buddha or of any of his disciples.

Besides these two vessels, an image of the Buddha was also found there. At the foot of this image, there is an inscription by the famous *Pāla* King Mahipal. This image is now kept in a museum at Lucknow. A portion of it was found at Jagatganj. The site at *Sārnātha* dug by Jagat Sinha is now called Jagat Singh Stupa. This ditch is very large and circular in shape.

Jonathan Duncan, the Commissioner of *Banāres*, wrote down extensive details of this excavation work. They mention an excavation in 1798 that has altered the popular view about the remains at *Sārnātha*. Duncan also sent information to the Asiatic Society of Bengal about two vessels. He also noticed the common views

about some bones to be found inside the flower stone vessel. According to the view of one group, a certain queen died on the funeral pyre of her husband, and the surviving members in the royal family carefully preserved her bones in the vessel. Another view was that after the cremation of the dead body of a certain person, his bones were kept there, to later be thrown into the Ganges. However, Mr. Duncan tried to prove that both these views were wrong and insisted that those bones were actually of a disciple of the Buddha.

In support of his own views, he mentioned the image of the Buddha that was dug out along with the stone vessel. There is no doubt that the stupa was connected importantly with Buddhists. This makes subsequent excavation work easier. As soon as it was known that antiques being dug up at *Sārnātha* have great historical value, various researches systematically done by archeologists, historians, and architects took place as follows.

2. THE FIRST EXCAVATION OF MACKENZIE AND CUNNINGHAM

After the discovery of the Jagat Singh Stupa, many research scholars felt the necessity of doing excavation work at *Sārnātha*. Colonel C. Mackenzie was the first man to begin this work, in 1815. Miss Emma Roberts, an English lady, mentioned that certain English men of Sikrol, out of curiosity, had dug into the earth at *Sārnātha* and found some images of the Buddha there. The colonel took action to make several more excavations and found some of the ancient relics that are now kept and displayed at a museum in Calcutta.

The second person to undertake excavation work at *Sārnātha* was Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the Archaeological Department. He carried out similar excavations in almost all places of ancient vestiges in India, and from his findings many subsequent scholars have been able to make comparisons to other finds and to do their research more easily.

In the years 1835-36, Cunningham began examining the three principal halls of this site. While engaging in excavating the *Dhāmekh* Stupa, he found an inscription that is now kept at the Calcutta museum. The most noteworthy portions of his report on *Dhāmekh* Stupa have been quoted in a book on *Banāres* by a Mr. Sherring, cited below.

Next, Cunningham examined the Jagat Singh Stupa and ascertained the real site of the ancient Buddhistic antiques. His research work in connection with the Chaukhandi Stupa (from the intersection at Ashapur, go straight to the Archaeological *Sārnātha* site, located on the right and 200 meters from the Thailand Temple) brought much success. He found 50 or 60 stone figures in the heap of remains of a temple near the village of Varahipur next to *Sārnātha*. He believed that these figures had been kept in a neighboring temple. It can reasonably be said that once the persecution of people with different faiths began, some monks came to this site and brought certain images with them. Dr. Vogel considered this view to be possible. Noticing that some of these figures bear a Gupta inscription, he came to the conclusion that they had been concealed at the time of the Huna invasion. These images, too,

are now being kept in a museum at Calcutta and were presented by Cunningham to the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Sights describing the life of the Buddha, his figure seated on the lotus-seat in the posture known as *Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*, and the figures of Avalokitesvara and Tara are engraved on these stones. The remaining figures were thrown into the river Varunā.

On another occasion, blocks of stone were taken from *Sārṇātha* for building the foundation of a bridge over the river Varunā. Mr. Sherring narrated a detailed account of these things in his book *The Sacred City of the Hindus*, and suggested that there was a great deal of precious wood available in Deer Park, growing only a half-mile from the stupa up to the peak of Chukundi in the south.

It is clear that Sārṇātha was gravely ruined once Mahmud Ghazni attacked *Vārānasi* in 1017. Although it was repaired many times so as to continue its role in later centuries, *Sārṇātha* became just a remnant of its historical flame. Mr. Cunningham described it this way:

“After each excavation, *Sārṇātha* suffered from repeated fires and became a ruin. I saw the built wood burned to coal and wood fibres burned by half. Mr. Kittoe also saw these; besides, there are traces of flame on pillars, umbrella, and images.... Through these discoveries, the impression of great disasters of flame impacted on the mind of Mr. Major Kittoe. As he concluded in similar words: this site is leveled; monks, stupas, images and everything is burnt. Bones, iron, built wood and images are scattered everywhere.... It has been burned several times and much destroyed.”



A well-engraved eave at *Sārṇātha* Archaeological Museum

3. THE EXCAVATION WORK OF ENGINEER KITTOE

Twelve years after Cunningham's time, the engineer and archaeologist Mr. Kittoe discovered a number of stupas and foundations of temples in the place around the Dhāmekh Stupa and the Jagat Singh Stupa. Regretfully, he died before the results of his research could be published. The letter he wrote to Mr. Cunningham is the only source of his research work. In this letter, he remarked that his excavation work and researches at *Sārṇātha* had convinced him that the Migadava *Vihāra* (temple or building) had been destroyed by fire.

While carrying on his research work at *Sārṇātha*, Kittoe, being an engineer, was also engaged in supervising the construction of the building of Government Queens Inter College at *Banāres*. During the construction of this structure, he used the blocks of stone he had found at *Sārṇātha*. Two ancient letters from the Gupta period were found to be engraved on a block of stone at the southeastern corner of the Queens

College buildings. Mr. Kittoe discovered many other figures, which now are kept and displayed at the Lucknow museum.

In 1851-1852, Mr. Kittoe, who was also the province's official Inspector of Archeology, discovered numerous works around the *Dhāmekh* Stupa. He also found a quadrilateral structure to the north of the naked shrine, like a charity house, which is now marked as the sixth monument in the list of monasteries in the *Sārnātha* archaeological site.

4. THOMAS, HALL, AND HORNE

Also in the 19th century, after Mr. Kittoe, Mr. Thomas, Professor Fitz Edward Hall of the Queens College, and later Mr. Horne and Rivett Carnack took up the work of excavation at *Sārnātha*, but there was nothing of great note that they found. The ancient relics discovered by them were, however, kept for a long time in a secret compound area in Queens College. They were later moved to the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum. Thereafter, Mr. E. Thomas, then Professor Fitz Edward Hall and Mr. Horne, continued their excavation work in *Sārnātha* in 1865.

5. EXCAVATION WORK OF OERTEL

For a long time, it seemed that people did not pay attention to *Sārnātha* anymore. The ancient relics mentioned above were usually moved to museums at Calcutta or Lucknow. The ones that remained were gradually decaying under the ruins of *Sārnātha*. Hence, in 1904 there was a suggestion made of fully excavating *Sārnātha*. At that time, a certain event led

to the restoration of excavation work there. When a road connecting that place with Ghazipur Road was being constructed, a Buddha image was found deep in the earth.

This discovery inspired archeologists with the hope that the ancient relics of *Sārnātha* had not all been found. With a decree from the local government, the enthusiastic antiquarian Mr. F. O. Oertel began his excavation work in the winter of 1904-1905, with the help of the Archaeological Department. This department proposed to the government that the relics dug out should be preserved in the local museum. At first, the government granted 500 Rs for the cost of the excavation work. But as its results proved highly satisfactory, the authority provided a further 1,000 Rs.

The excavation of Oertel marked a new era in the annals of the research work of *Sārnātha*. The world is indebted to him for the wonderful discoveries he systematically made and documented scientifically. As the result of his work, no fewer than 476 architectural and sculptural relics and 41 inscriptions were discovered in one season alone. His findings included:

1. The main shrine
2. A Boddhisattva statue from the Kūshan dynasty of King Kaniska, a stone umbrella, and an inscription on the lion-pillar
3. King *Aśoka*'s lion pillar bearing his inscriptions, plus a capital and a portion of a pillar
4. The foundations of a large vihāra and an inscription of King *Aśvaghosha*
5. The figures of many Buddhistic and Hindu deities

An area of about 200 square feet north of Jagat Singh's stupa was excavated under Mr. Oertel's supervision. That stupa's foundation has the equivalent size as the stupa discovered by Mr. Cunningham (95 feet in both length and width).



A statue at *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum

The main door faces to the east and a stair of three steps leads to the door. In this place, there are some quadrangular stone tablets on which are engraved the figure of the Buddha, the Wheel of Law (*Dharma-chakra*), monks, stupas, deer, and other things. The principal door leading to the yard measures 39 x 23 feet. On the side of this yard is a chamber. To the west of the yard, there is an elevated ground on which stand two stone pillars about 7 feet high and a foundation of the shrine's inner rooms. In the middle of the foundation between two stone pillars are some idols inside the shrine; it looks like an altar niche. On all sides are narrow spaces only about 1.5 feet wide. To the west of these two pillars there are a chamber 4 feet wide and a smaller chamber that cannot be reached through the principal door. The pillars inside the shrine are 17 feet high.

The chamber to the west is 28 feet long and the chamber to the north is 7 feet long. The western and southern chambers are 10.5 feet and 8.5 feet long, respectively. A space is about 50 feet long but the east of the shrine has been cleared. In this place, a yard was made of small pieces of stone that may still be seen. A portion of the eastern wall of the shrine as well as its foundation are made of stone. Beside this portion and the four pillars mentioned above, the shrine was built of long-shaped brick; an examination of these blocks of stone shows that they did not originate from this shrine.

In some chambers the blocks show engraved figures of Buddha. On several, swans have been engraved, arranged in a line, along with lotuses. Besides these, the remainder of the stupa consists of small blocks

of stone. East of the shrine is a Buddha statue in the posture known as *Bhumi-Śparsa-mudra*; it is about 4 feet in height but headless. Behind it are engraved six Chaityas in three lines. There are also figures of a woman and a child, both represented with folded hands and in a kneeling posture next to the window.

On the other side of the window is the figure of a woman in a dancing posture. The inscription says that this figure was offered by Sthavira Bandhugupta. There is nothing special in the east of the shrine. In the southern chamber in the yard, a headless figure of the Buddha may still be seen. The southern wall still stands 12 feet high.

Under the western wall of the room is an ancient stupa yet to be discovered. Its foundation has four sides made of brick. Along its side is a stone railing like those at Sañchī and Bharhut. This railing is square-shaped and each side of it is 8.5 feet in length. It also bears two or three illegible letters inscribed on it.

The northern part of this stupa is round. It features a massive wall 10 feet high and 21 feet broad. It has been known since its excavation that when this wall was built, the stupa and the railing were very carefully covered with brick. The builder might easily have broken them but in fact took care to preserve them. Some mounds of brick built on the other sides of this plot were preserved at the time of excavation.

There is a foundation 45 feet long southeast of the shrine. It forms the eastern boundary of the excavated area. In the west of this place are four brick stupas constructed one upon the other. West of these stupas is the foundation of two other small shrines. One of them

has a stone tablet bearing an inscription in Kutila script, but they are effaced and are impossible to decipher. From the space to the west of this up to the western boundary of the area excavated, many stupas and their foundations can be seen. To the south is a foundation of four stupas, as well as a Boddhisattva statue, a stone umbrella, and a stone pillar, all belonging to the time of King Kaniska. The umbrella had broken into pieces while the stone statue and the stone pillar were each divided into three parts.

The inscription of two lines at the foot of the Boddhisattva statue and four lines in the fifth part are similar to the first four lines inscribed on the pillar. From the extant inscriptions on the back of the statue, Dr. Vogel infers that the idols in those days were not placed close to the walls of the shrines, as they are at present. During the excavation, a brick-built path surrounding the Jagat Singh Stupa was discovered. On the map, Cunningham showed the position of four mounds of earth around Jagat Singh Stupa. Of these, only the southern one still stands today, as the others were removed at the time of excavation. On this western mound, Mr. Oertel built a new stupa like the ancient ones, on an old foundation; on its side is a block of stone on which he inscribed "1904."

From this spot, the southern boundary of the excavated area was formed. A number of ancient relics have been dug out from the ground.

In front of the western door and at a distance of 10 cubits to the west of it, a stone pillar bearing the inscription of *Aśoka* was discovered. Beside King *Aśoka*'s stone pillar are two other inscriptions. One of

them writes the equivalent of “the 10th day of the first fifty days in the spring of the 34th year of the King Asvaghosha.” Another inscription relates to a grant. The script of these inscriptions is of a comparatively later date. The pillar was found in a ditch 10 cubits deep. Under the lion capital there was a Wheel of Law (*Dhamma-chakra*).

A number of yards around this pillar were discovered. A portion of the pillar below this level no longer appears polished, but the portion above it is nicely polished as smoothly as a mirror. There is a stone railing around the King *Asoka* pillar for one meter. Above 5 feet there is one path paved with red blocks of stone resembling those used at Muttra. Three feet above that are stone tiles of unequal size, the highest portion of which is made of small pieces of stone.

In 1904-1905, the engineer F. O. Oertel undertook the work of excavation on behalf of the Archaeological Department and his work, called the Annual Report, was born. He discovered the main stupa, *Asoka*'s pillar, and a lion capital, as well as excavated Chaukhandhi and found many inscriptions as well as stone tablets. One highlight was uncovering a famous image of the Buddha in a beautiful position of turning the Dhamma Wheel - the most ancient art in Indian Buddhism found since the reign of Gupta. The excavation work at *Sārnātha* was stopped for some days because Oertel moved to Agra.



A well-engraved piece in the corridor of the *Sārṇātha* Archaeological Museum

6. THE FIRST EXCAVATION WORK OF J. MARSHALL

In 1907, Dr. John Marshall, the Director General of the Archaeological Department, personally took over the work of excavation, with the help of a Norwegian Indologist named Dr. Sten Konow, along with Nicholas, Rai Bahadur Dayaram Sahni, and Bipin Chakravarti.

From that time on, the work of excavation was carried out over a greater area than in previous periods and concentrated on areas to the north, since the southern portion had been dug out long ago. The number of images found in the north was less than those found in the south, and the former relics are more valuable for many reasons. As a result of the excavation in 1907, there were 244 statues and 25 inscriptions on stone tablets that were discovered. Of these relics, a Buddha image [B (6) 173 in the catalog], the gift of Kumar Gupta II, was found to the south of the Jagat Singh Stupa. Another figure of the Buddha, made in the Gandhar style of sculpture [B (6) 179], and the gift of Dhanadeva, was found northeast of the main shrine; and an inscription dating to the second century C.E. was also seen. All the ancient relics discovered at *Sārnātha* after Oertel's time are the result of the research work done alone by Dr. Marshall.

In 1907, Marshall began an archaeological excavation in the open area under which he discovered the large area to the south and north of these remains. There he found two shrines belonging to the Kūshan age as well as a shrine made by Queen *Kumāradevi*, set beneath these former ones in the 12th century, and

he discovered many other inscriptions not like the Queen's ones.

7. THE SECOND EXVACATION WORK OF J. MARSHALL

In 1908, with the help of Dr. Konow, Dr. Marshall again undertook work that involved excavating the land lying to the north. He discovered certain rooms north of the Dhāmekh Stupa. According to him, the date of these rooms was between the fifth and eighth centuries C.E. He also excavated the land around the Jagat Singh Stupa and found evidence that the stupa had been repaired no fewer than seven times.

During his excavations, a number of Buddhist and Hindu deities as well as 23 inscriptions were discovered. Besides these, plenty of bricks, earthen seals, garlands made of earth, and parts of doors were dug out. Among the ancient relics found were a 12-foot high figure of the Mahadeva with 10 hands [B.N.(I)], an earthen head dating to the first century B.C.E., and a tablet of stone on which the life of Kshamtivadi jataka was inscribed. The outcome of this excavation work was successful beyond all expectation.

8. THE EXCAVATION WORK OF HARGREAVE AND SAHNI

In 1915, Mr. Hargreaves from the Archaeological Department carried out excavation work at *Sārnātha* for a short time and discovered three valuable statues. At the foot of these statues were inscriptions relating to grants dating from the time of Kumargupta II; he also found other important relics.

In 1921 and 1922 Kai Dayaram Sahni was busy with the excavation in the eastern grounds of the main shrine. Luckily, he brought to light three beautiful chaityas near the Dhāmekhh and also a dark brown stupa with ornamental sides, along with several Buddhist and Hindu statues. Earlier, in 1914-1915, he had undertaken work to the east and west of the main shrine and discovered an inscription from King Kumaragupta II and Buddhagupta. His excavation also brought up inscriptions from the Maurya's age to the middle ages.

Lastly, he continued to carry on the excavation work over some five periods and finished them from the Dhāmekh stupa, the main shrine, and stupa II.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 recounts that antiquities that had lain buried for more than 15 centuries (from approximately the second century B.C.E. to the twelfth century C.E.) had been discovered at *Sārnātha* by various archeological excavations. First of all, coincidentally, a certain merchant named Jagat Singh came to the *Sārnātha* site to dig soil to make bricks, and made many discoveries. In 1815, Colonel C. Mackenzie was the first person in charge to start excavations. Following him came the experts Alexander Cunningham (1835-1836), Kittoe (1851-1852), Thomas (1860), Hall (1863), Horne (1865 on), Oertel (1904-1905), J. Marshall (1907), Hargreave (1915), Sahni (1920), and others,. These historical archeologists played significant roles in bringing the ancient artworks of *Sārnātha* to light so as to glorify Buddha and

Buddhism. Today, these ancient relics are displayed in the *Sārnātha* Museum opposite the archeological site.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Recount the occasions when the relics under the ground at *Sārnātha* were brought to light by the merchant Jagat Singh.

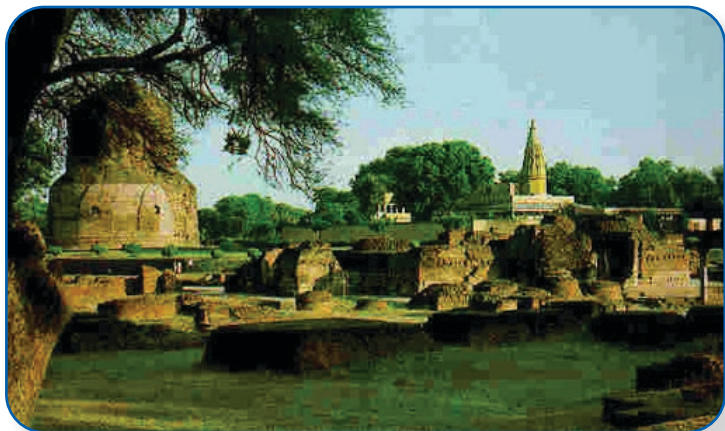
2. Describe the contributions made by the archeological excavations of Colonel C. Mackenzie.

3. What are the antiquities that Alexander Cunningham found during his archeological excavation?

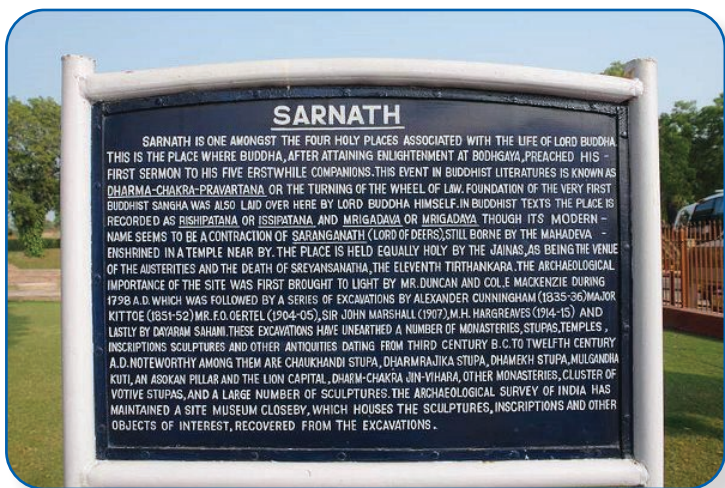
4. Briefly describe the process that these archeologist-historians used in their work.

5. In your view, what are the masterpieces discovered at *Sārnātha*?





Whole elegant view of Sārṇātha



Notes

¹ *Asiatic Researches, Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. Vol. V, p. 131.

² It seems consistent with this view that the bones were in fact thrown into the Ganges. *Asiatic Researches, Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. Vol. V, p. 131.

³ *Asiatic Researches*, vol. IX, p. 203.

⁴ *Archaeological Survey Reports*, 1903-1904, p. 212.

⁵ R. Elliot, *Views in India*, vol. II, p. 7.

⁶ *Archeological Survey Report*, vol. I, p. 129.

⁷ *Sārnātha Catalogue*, Sārnātha Archaeological Museum, p. 112.

⁸ *The Sacred City of the Hindus. Archeological Survey Report*, I, p. 107.

⁹ *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, G. P. Malalasekara, vol. I, p. 323.

¹⁰ *Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism*, Raghunath Prasad, Vārānasi -221009. 1999, p. 42.

¹¹ *Archaeological Survey Report*. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. Pp. 23-25.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ *Archeological Survey Report*, vol. I, p. 125.

¹⁴ Annual Progress Report of the Superintendent of the Archeological Survey of the United Provinces and the Punjab, 1905, p. 57.

¹⁵ 1 cubit = 45.72 cm; cubits were the standard of measure in ancient times. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994. P. 65.

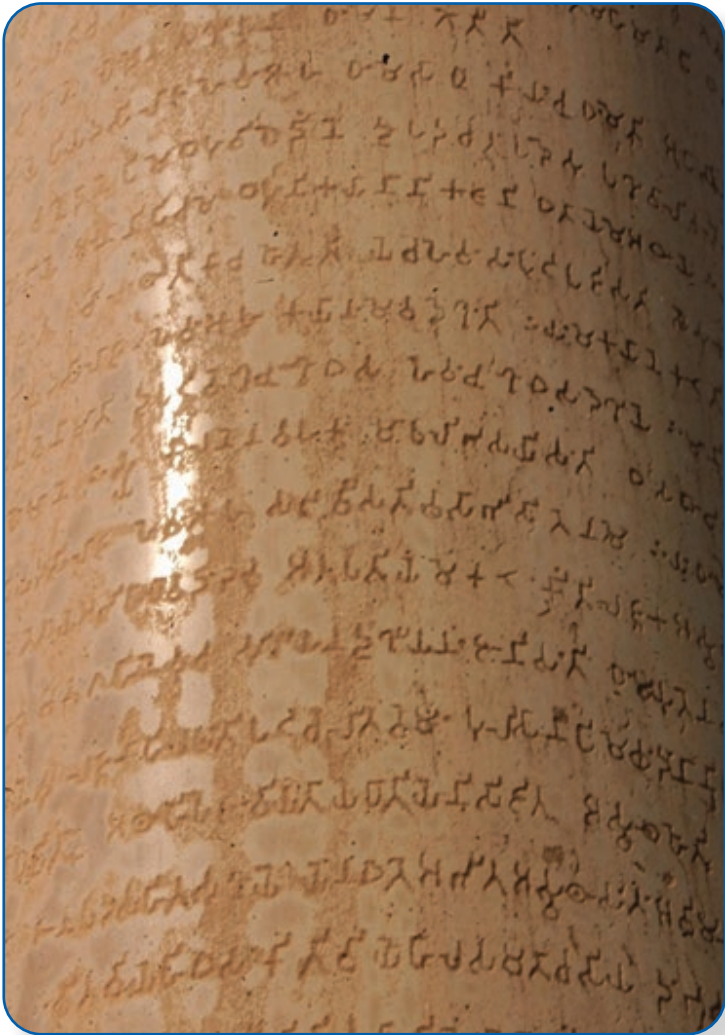
¹⁶ 1 yard = 1 meter in England = 0.914 meter. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, 1994. P. 90.

¹⁷ Translating from the article "Bauddha Varanasi," published in the *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, 1313, B.S., p. 168.

¹⁸ Annual Report, 1907-1908, picture 8.b. 2. *Archaeological Survey Report*, 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 54.

CHAPTER 5

THE INSCRIPTIONS



The Asoka King's the Inscripture in Sārṇāthā

Excavation work at *Sārnātha* shows not only skillfully engraved relics but also many stone inscriptions that add even more light on the history of this site. These inscriptions were installed in many different places by various individuals. In general, they can be grouped into the following four kinds: (1) the decrees, (2) the promotion of certain individuals, (3) offerings to the temples, and (4) Sangha. Some of them are carved on stones, reliefs, umbrellas, statue bases, bricks, stamps, stucco, markers, earthenware pots, and so forth. With regard to the historical perspective, all these antiquities are of high value. From the shapes of inscriptions, historians thought they could guess at their sources. Fortunately, many of the engraved relics throughout *Sārnātha* have been extensively written about and commented on by many foreign and Indian newspapers.

1. THE INSCRIPTION OF KING *ĀŚOKA*

Among the ancient relics found at *Sārnātha*, the lion pillar of King *Āśoka* is perhaps the most remarkable and the most historically valuable. Its workmanship has attracted the admiration of viewers worldwide. Mr. F. O. Oertel, who discovered it, deserves great gratitude from all students researching Indian antiquaries. Thanks to him, the lion capital was raised carefully and preserved intact, and it is now kept in the museum at *Sārnātha*.

Its lower portion today lies buried under a stone shade in front of the western door of the main shrine. The inscription on this pillar is of King *Āśoka*. Next to

this pillar, there are two smaller inscriptions. One of them records the 10th day of the first half of the month in Spring of the 40th year of King Avaghosh (*Aśoka*). This inscription was discussed in the *Royal Asiatic Society's Journal* of London. The other inscription is a grant. Both are written in the *Kushān* script. The first three lines of the inscription of *Aśoka* have been broken off but the main portion remains intact.

Messrs. Boyer, Senart, Thomas, and Vogel, as well as Dr. Venis and other archeological experts, have researched the inscription minutely. Though they differ in some minor details, there is general unanimity among them as to their interpretations. On the inscription is carved the king's decree to officers in the capital city as well as in the provinces. Its initial three lines are so effaced that the first sentence cannot be seen and understood. The first item in this inscription is the schism in the Sangha because of non-harmony therein. The second item is a decree of punishment by the court to those who intend to create such schisms.

Those who commit schisms were ordered to be expelled from the Sangha. The Venerable Master *Buddhaghosha* also noted such punishment by promulgating laws to the community, like King *Aśoka*'s decree. Similar inscriptions are seen on the pillars at Sañchī and Allahabad. Another part of this inscription mentions the procedure to be adopted for the king's promulgation; it has to be announced to Bhikkhus and *Bhikkhunī* as well as stated in public places. The officers also have to copy and take the inscriptions to all provinces. This inscription has proven to be highly valuable to Buddhist research scholars.

It also proves King *Aśoka*'s severity toward the authors of religious quarrels. It does write its date, but according to some authorities, it was actually inscribed during King *Aśoka*'s pilgrimage. If this view is correct, this inscription is of the same date as the Tarai's pillar inscription. However, we notice that the Prayag inscription of King *Aśoka* seems to bear a later date than the Tarai inscription. That means that its date is after the 27th year of King *Aśoka*'s dynasty, or 243 B.C.E.

Therefore, we can hold that the *Sārnātha* inscription bears the same date as the inscription in Allahabad. The emperor made this proclamation in accordance with Buddhist law that was made at Pataliputra. The *Pāli* literature also furnishes direct proof on this point.

Another inscription of *Aśoka* is written from the ancient *Maurya*'s age, in Brāhmī's script. The peculiarities of the language of this inscription are similar to those of the inscriptions at Khalsī, Dhaulī, Jaugada, Radhiā, Mathia, Rūpnāth, Bairāt, Sāsārām, and Barāhar.



The 1st line: In his inscriptions, King *Aśoka* invariably used the epithet *Piyadassana*, or “god,” to imply himself. Yet in the Puranas, King *Aśoka* was called *Aśokavardhana*, as follows:

“Majesty (the admirer of the Gods) enforced the edict.... Sangha should not split; anyone who commits will wear white dress and be compelled out of the community. This command is to be reported to the Sangha. The emperor said that: Let this be copied and handed to the Sanghe and the laity. Buddhists coming to join Uposatha Day should know and practice it, and the Mahamatras will come to check on that day.

“It is possible that officers should send this command to all monasteries and districts.”

This inscription deals with three things, and so it is divided into three parts. The first part records the imperial behest: If any Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni attempts to create schism in the Sangha, he or she should be made to wear white garments and be expelled from the Sangha. There are similar inscriptions at Sañchī and Allahabad. The first portion of these three inscriptions is badly effaced. This inscription proves both that King *Aśoka* was very strict in observing the Sangha and that he was the royal leader on the Buddhist Sangha.

The second part of the inscription records that the king’s command should be handed to all officers in the empire. They were informed that the command must be copied and announced to everyone. This inscription was kept in *Sārnātha* because the officials as well as the general public often assembled there on the Uposatha Day.

The inscription also proves that the matter of Buddhist practice in *Aśoka's* age was somewhat slackened in the Sangha. The king was eager to enforce the Sangha to conform to the Buddhist Vinaya and to discharge those who commit the vinaya. Ceylonese Buddhist history also mentions this order. The work *Saddharma Sagraha*, written by *Dharmakīrti*, said that after year 228 of the *Parinirvāna* Era, Indian Sangha did not observe the Uposatha Day around year six. Therefore, the emperor *Aśoka* assembled all monks at *Aśokārāma*. The son of Maudgali, Sthavira Tishya, presided over that assembly.

The inquiry took place to show that most of the monks were not real Bhikkhus. Hence, they were forced to wear white garments and to go out of the Sangha. Thereafter, those monks who left, real Buddhist practitioners, observed the Uposatha Day.

In the eighth line of the inscription, the Sangha's supervisors appointed the *Aśoka's* command in the 13th year of his reign. It is therefore clear that his pillar was not built before the appointment of these overseers, which occurred in 255 B.C.E. Four of the railing posts found at *Sārnātha* bear inscriptions on them in the Brahma script, and their language is Prākṛita. Their date seems to be before the second century B.C.E.

D (a) No. 13: Each of the railing posts was the gift of either male or female Buddhist followers. The whole railing was made by raising subscriptions.

D (a) No. 14: It seems that the giver was a Persian woman. Pt. Dayaram Sahni translates it as: "*This pillar is the gift of Sīhā and Ganteyikā.*" However, we do not know which translation is correct.

D (a) No. 16: This is a small inscription in the *Kushān* script, and there is the signature of King *Aśoka* below it. It says as follows: “*The 40th year of King Aśvaghosa, Spring, the 10th day.*”

Dr. Vogel was the first person bringing the inscription out of the earth and also translated it. Then Dr. Venis deciphered some letters that had not been deciphered before and discussed it in a scholarly manner. This inscription was written in the *Kushān* script, belonging to a kind of *Prākṛita*. According to Dr. Vogel, the date given in this inscription is from the Kaniska age. But we hold that *Aśvaghosa* lived before the time of Kaniska, because the letters in this inscription resemble those of the *Mutra* inscription of the Saka Satraps. Another inscription of *Aśvaghosa*’s was found at *Sārnātha*. It is written in the same characters, and in it he was described as a king.



A flowering sculpture pattern

2. THE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE KANISKA DYNASTY

The inscriptions of the *Kushān* age may be seen at the pedestal's back and on the umbrella post of the Bodhisattva statue, which was made of red stone and is now kept in the museum at *Sārnātha*. Their dates belong to the third year in the King Kaniska dynasty. Dr. Vogel described and explained them in detail. In 1862, Director-General Cunningham discovered a similar statue to one found at Srāvāstī. Its pedestal bears an inscription with three lines, which were discussed in several journals by Rajendralal Mitra, Prof. Dowson, and Dr. Bloch.

The inscription at Srāvāstī mentions Puspa Buddhi and Bhikkhu Bala. The latter offered the Bodhisattva statue, an umbrella, and a pair of scissors. The two other inscriptions came from *Sārnātha*. The inscription at Srāvāstī was the oldest one associated with the name of King Kaniska. Several historic events about Kharapallāna and Vanaspara are given in this inscription. According to the contents of the inscription on the umbrella, Vanaspara is also called Kshatrapa, and Kharapallāna is described as being the great officer Mahākshatrapa. Dr. Vogel thinks that these two persons mention the cost and that the actual gift was offered by a Bhikkhu. Therefore, it is not implausible to think that the gift was offered by Bala. Although opinions differ as to whether the two images at *Srāvāstī* and *Sārnātha* were made by the same sculptor, no doubt remains that Bhikkhu Bala was the donor of both statues. Most probably, the two Kshatrapas mentioned above were Buddhists and also were governors under King

Kaniska. Their connection with the Saka empire was historically established during the first century C.E. It may not be wrong to suppose that the Mahākshatrapa and Kshatrapa were placed in charge of the government of the eastern Kaniska.

Another inscription of the Kushān age is incised on a stone umbrella. This inscription reported the discourse spoken by the Buddha in *Banāres*. *There is also another similar inscription to be found at Sārnātha* that has a special section written in Pāli. That language was at one time the means through which the Hīnayāna school preached its religion. Moreover, we see that there is no inscription written in Pāli at any subsequent date that has been discovered throughout northern India. Hence it appears that Pāli was the principal language used for preaching in *Banāres*. This inscription is one of the 25 inscriptions dug out during the excavation work of 1906-1907.

3. THE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE GUPTA DYNASTY

It is said that the Gupta kings were Hindu, though they often supported Buddhism. Therefore, different Buddhist sects exerted an influence on *Sārnātha*. A description of these sects was gathered from rock inscriptions found and also in other accounts. There are two inscriptions of two separate sects to be found at *Sārnātha*. One of them can be seen on the *Aśoka's* pillar, and another is on the railing in the southern chamber of the main shrine.

From an examination of the letters on two inscriptions, it appears that they belong to the Gupta

period. Dr. Vogel says that the first inscription dates to the fourth century C.E. It belonged to the Varvāstivāda Buddhist sect. This may also be known from the Tibetan accounts. The second inscription indicates the influence of the *Sarvāstivāda*. The former seems to have a late date and appears to be effaced; there are many Sanskrit scripts incised on it. *Sarvāstivāda*, like Sammitīya, formed another branch, Sthaviravada of *Hīnayāna*. From various sources it appears that they rose in power at *Sārnātha* beginning in the first century C.E. Moreover, from the accounts of I-Ching, the Sarvastivadins grew powerful toward the middle of the seventh century C.E.

Another noteworthy stele from that age was discovered in an excavation done around 1904-1906. It was incised on a lightpost; judging by the shape of its letters, it seems to date to the fourth or fifth century C.E..

Many such lightposts were discovered at *Sārnātha*, but most of their letters were effaced over time and by weather. The inscriptions on the earthen seals discovered at *Sārnātha* helped Mr. Vogel understand the effaced letters. Such seals bear the symbols of the wheel, the deer, and other objects.

The alphabetical symbols used in this inscription that Dr. Vogel discovered seem to belong to the sixth or seventh centuries C.E. It is clear that that at one time *Sārnātha* was called *Saddharama Chakra Vihāra*. This name continued down to the Govinda Chandra period, just as the inscription wrote. There is no doubt that this name is a commemorative place where the Wheel of Law was set in motion.

Antiquarians do not agree that there ever was a *Malagandhakuti Vihāra* (Fragrant Chamber). Instead, they hold that it was the chamber's name with the Buddha statue and that Hiuen Tsang simply forgot to depict it. As a matter of fact, "Gandhakuti" means "chamber full of fragrance." From the adjunct "mula" (original) it means a place where the Buddha took rest. That is the reason why the name "Mula Gandhakuti" appears.

Besides these, many inscriptions of the Gupta period that were incised on pedestals can be seen there, such as the Kumāragupta inscription and the broken inscription of King Prakatāditya from the Gupta dynasty.

4. THE INSCRIPTIONS OF KING PĀLA AND KING KARNADEVA

Following the Gupta period, several Pāla kings held sway over *Sārnātha*. This fact is proved by two inscriptions discovered at *Sārnātha*.

According to a volume in the Archeological Survey Museum at *Sārnātha*, the first inscription, bearing catalog No. D (F) 59, records that Jayapāla seems to have been the father of the famous King Vighrapāla I. Jayapāla's father, Vākपाला, was the youngest brother of King Dharmapāla. His date was 89 C.E. The letters of the inscription seem to be from the ninth century.

The second inscription bears the No. B (c): Chronologically, after Mahipāla's time, the inscription of King Karnadeva in the Chedi age can be seen in the museum at *Sārnātha*. It bears the No. D (1) 8 but it is now in pieces. Mr. Hultsch stuck the inscription's

text onto the broken parts. This transcription has great value. Its script is old Nāgari and Sanskrit, but without using the rules of grammar. This inscription was likely issued by descendants of Tripuri, in the Chedi age, in the year 810 of Kalachuri Samvat. This showed that Karnadev, in the year 1058 C.E. Sthaviras, appeared in Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra (*Sārnātha*). From this inscription, we can know that Dhanegavara's wife, Māmakā, who was a Mahāyāna follower, prepared a copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and offered it to Bhikkhus.



Fine patterns of well-engraved circles on the Dhāmekh stupa's wall

5. THE INSCRIPTIONS OF QUEEN KUMĀRADEVI

A large inscription with 26 lines was discovered in 1908 by Dr. Marshall near the Dhāmekh stupa. Its script is that of the ancient Nāgari. It describes that Govinda Chandra's queen *Kumāradevi* in Kanauj built a vihāra at *Sārnātha*. Comparing it with Govinda Chandra's other inscriptions, it seems to date back to the early twelfth century. The inscription gives a

genealogy of the clan of *Kumāradevi* and of Govinda Chandra. Govinda Chandra was described as an incarnation of the god Vishnu, sent to protect *Banāres* from the inroads of Mahomedans' army. *Kumāradevi* and Sankaradevi were Devarakshita's daughters. Sankaradevi's father's name was Mahana (Mathana), and he was Ramapala, of the Gouda dynasty. Hence, we see that *Kumāradevi* was the daughter's daughter of Mathanadeva. The 21st line of the inscription says that *Kumāradevi* actually constructed a Dhamma Chakra vihāra at *Sārnātha*.

In the 22nd and 23rd lines, she offered a copper plate on which were inscribed the teachings of Śrīdharmachakrājina to Jambuki, the brilliant person in Pattalikas. She also repaired the Sradharmachakrajira statue in the time of *Dharmāśoka* (the *Aśoka*). In short, this inscription focused on these matters:

1. The genealogy of the clans of *Kumāradevi* and Govinda Chandra.

2. An ancient statue of the Buddha in a Dharmachakrajina shape in the Archaeological Site Museum.

3. Dharmachakrajina Vihāra was the name of the shrine where this statue was kept. It might be a Gandhakuti.

4. On the copper plate was incised a discourse that the Buddha preached at Banāres. (This copper plate has not yet been discovered.)

King Moghul Badshah Humayun once paid a visit to *Sārnātha*. His son, Akbar, incised a stone inscription there in the year 1858 in order to commemorate the occasion. It reads:

“The late Humayun, the king of seven kingdoms, one day visited here and thereby increased the sun’s luster. His son Akbar projected building a lofty edifice here. Thus, this stupa was built in the Hijiri period in 996.”

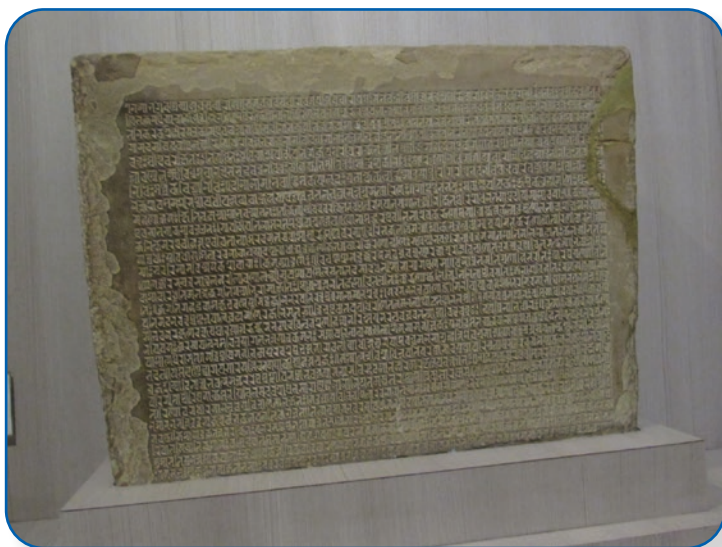
The structure actually made by Akbar was the Chaukhandi stupa, which stands alone, approximately 200 meters from the Ashapur straight to the holy site of *Sārnātha*. The above inscription was discovered inside this stupa.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

Many steles engraved with remarkable skill have been dug out at *Sārnātha* over the years. Their inscriptions inform us of the past history of the site, especially those that are related to the dynasties of King *Aśoka*, King Kaniska, Emperor Gupta, Post-Gupta, Pāla, Karnadeva, Queen Kumāradevi, and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are the inscriptions on the lion pillars of King *Aśoka* considered the site’s masterpieces?
2. How do the stele contents of King *Aśoka* relate to the purpose of the Sangha?
3. Was *Pāli* used as a means of language for preaching in *Banāres*?
4. Which inscriptions mention the Buddhist sects (such as *Sarvāstivāda*, *Sammitīya*, *Sthaviravada*... of *Hīnayāna*) that developed at *Sārnātha* dating from the first century C.E.?
5. How is Queen Kumāradevi better understood through her epitaph?



An ancient inscription

Notes

¹ Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala. *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 33.

² Ibid.

³ The most Venerable Thích Minh Châu, in his book *Đường về Xứ Phật* (Way of the Buddha's Land) (Đại Nam Publishing, 1994, p. 62), states the following: "The Emperor (Lord of human and god) had declared that Sangha must be harmony. If there is any monk or nun to break the rule, that person must wear formally the great robe, go to the assembly, and sincerely make the penance ceremony. This principle must be approved which all the monks and nuns must take action. The decree is engraved at the meeting hall in order that sangha must strictly obey...."

⁴ Buhler's Paper, *Indian Archeology*, XIX. Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, pp. 366-67.

⁵ Dharmakarti, *Saddharma Sagraha*, edited in the J.P.T.S., 1890, pp. 21-89.

⁶ B. C. Bhattaharya, *The History of Sārnātha* (Cradle of Buddhism), Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition, 2d printing: 1999, p. 128.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, VIII, 1905-1906, p. 171.

⁹ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Royal Asiatic Society, 1912. Pp. 701-707.

¹⁰ Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, VII, pp. 173-81.

¹¹ *Archaeological Survey of India*, p. 339, V, VII, p. 86; Dr. Anderson, Catalogue of Calcutta Museum, I, Calcutta, p. 194.

¹² Dr. R. L. Mitra, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, vol. XXXIX, p. 192; Dr. T. Bloch, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 189, p. 274; R. D. Banerjee, *Sahitya Parisad Patrika*, 1812, B.S., p. 170-72.

¹³ This content is similar to one in Mahavagga.

¹⁴ *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey for 1906-1907*, Plate XXX.

¹⁵ *Annual Report 1904-1905*, p. 68; 1907-1908, p. 73.

¹⁶ Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, vol. VII, no. 17, p. 192.

¹⁷ Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, vol. VI, p. 172. One of the inscriptions, dug out near the Jagat Singh stupa in 1907-1908, mentions Varvāstivādins. Its date is in the second century B.C.E. *Archaeological Survey Report*, 1907-1908, XXI.

¹⁸ The main shrine was built on the foundation of Mula Gandhakuti of the Pāla period. *Archaeological Survey Report*. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 25.

¹⁹ See *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents*, compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, Taiwan, p. 166.

²⁰ *Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism*, Mulagandha Kuty Vihara, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Sārnātha Center, 2001. P. 27.

²¹ *The Maha Bodhi Centenary*. Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta, 1991. Vol. VI. P. 40.

²² *Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*. New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 78.

CHAPTER 6
THE PRESENT
RUINS OF SĀRNĀTHA



Whole view of the Sarnath's remain

A. ANTIQUITIES RELATING TO THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

There are six constructions at *Sārnātha* that relate to the Buddha's life; those are the *Dhāmekh* stupa, the *Dharmarājīkā* stupa, the main shrine, the *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* (Fragrant Chamber or Hut), a Chamkama path where the Buddha used to walk meditation, and King *Asoka's* lion pillar. Most views hold that King *Asoka's* stone pillar is the place where the Buddha preached his first discourse at *Sārnātha*, but not enough evidence has been found to prove those views, apart from details in Master Tripitaka Hsien Tsang's report.

1. THE DHĀMEKH STUPA

This stupa's name has a connection with the Buddha's dhamma. Cunningham regards the word "*Dhāmekh*" as an incorrect form of the word "Dhamopadeśaka." Most probably, this view is not widely accepted, yet Cunningham believed strongly that this site marks the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. It should be researched further.

Mr. Daya Ram Sahni said that *Dhāmekh* is the same word as "Dharmekshā" in Sanskrit, and it means that the stupa marked the place where Buddha received the considered thought of Dhamma. So the matter of whether it is in fact the original name of the stupa will probably continue to be argued. There were some proofs found of the carved scripts that clarify this matter. An earthen seal from the twelfth century seen at *Sārnātha* reads: "surpassed place *Dhamāka Jayatu*." Hence, it is said that this stupa is also called *Dhamāka stupa*, and it may bear traces of the original name *Dhammachakra* stupa. It is supposed that the inscription of King *Mahīpāla*, dated 1026, borrowed the name during the

period of restoration of both the *Dharmarājikā* stupa and the Dhamma-chakra stupa. It is no wonder, then, that these names would be of these two stupas.

Another point of connection with the ancient relic of the *Dhāmekh* stupa is a stone incised with decorative patterns dating to the Gupta period, though the original stupa is made of mud and bricks. There is a pillar drilled in the center of the *Dhāmekh* stupa that was used to find other relics under the ground.

Cunningham found that the previous stupa's foundation was made of bricks in the Maurya time. It was possible that the stupa was built on the spot where the Buddha preached *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana* to his five disciples. There is no relic inside the stupa, but there is a stone tablet with the Buddha's teachings "ye dhammā hetu prabhavā..."; its lettering, dating to the sixth or seventh century C.E., was found under the peak around 91 centimeters deep. This is also associated with *Dhamma-chakra*.

Another point clarifies this conclusion that the position of the stupa is connected with other commemorated stupas linked together away from the Dhāmekh stupa some 105 meters to the west. These four antiquities have a strong connection with the Buddha's life at Sārnātha.

From *Banāres*, going along a road that connected this ancient city with Deer Park (*Mrigadava*, *Migadāya*, *Rishipattana*), the Buddha saw his five ascetics. They saw the Buddha approaching without their either caring or bowing, but once they took in the Buddha's serene and dignified figure, all of them accommodated automatically. The Buddha's first discourse is called *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*. If it is accepted that the five ascetics' residence was this

place, then the place the Buddha chose for himself is a little further to the west. The site surrounding the *Dharmarājikā* stupa and the main shrine seem to be places where the Buddha dwelt during his long time of residency at *Sārnātha*. It is, however, certain that there is a place for doing meditation. This is ascertained by a historic event at *Sārnātha*. The main shrine is known, along with a landmark *Mūlagandhakutī*, as the first spot where the Buddha sat meditation.

Next to the main shrine is a place thought to be where the Buddha liked to walk meditation. Fortunately, the massive statue of Bodhisattva offered by Bhikkhu Bala near the west of the main shrine between the *Mūlagandhakutī* and the *Dhamrājikā* stupa contains an intact inscription; on the statue it is written that its origin dates to the third century in the Kanishaka period and it was made on the very spot where the Buddha walked meditation (*chankama*). Thus, the spot where the Buddha both used to sit meditation and to walk meditation were located in that same site.



The “nice-gratitude” stupas in an archeological excavation area

2. THE DHARMARĀJIKĀ STUPA

The *Dharmarājikā* stupa, which was pulled down by Shri Jagat Singh in 1794, was rebuilt by King *Aśoka* to enshrine the Buddha's relics, which the king redistributed at several locations. As a matter of fact, a stone box found inside the stupa contained a casket holding some relics and ashes. However, the relics were unfortunately thrown into Ganga River by the order of Jagat Singh. This casket was lost but the stone box still exists and is on display in the Indian Museum in New Delhi. Considering that *Sārnātha* is one of the most sacred places of Buddhism, King *Aśoka* certainly selected the proper site to enshrine the Buddha's relics!

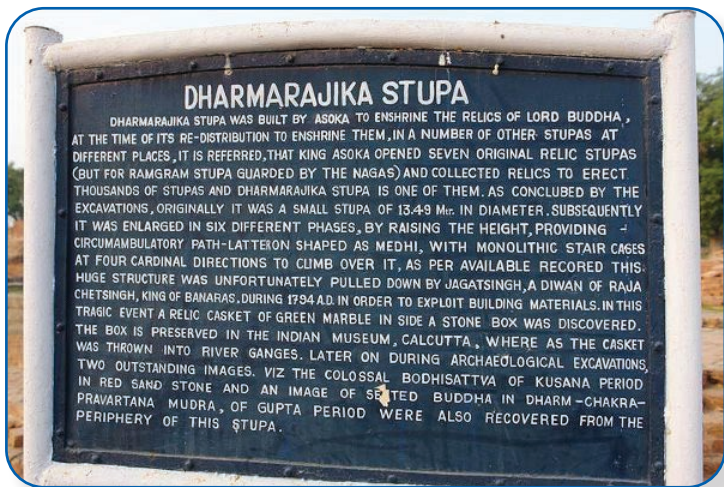
3. THE MAIN SHRINE

To the west of King *Aśoka*'s pillar lies the foundation of the main shrine in the Maurya period. In the early days, this main shrine actually stood in front of the *Aśoka* pillar, so it was therefore thought to have been constructed by *Aśoka*. On the railing of Bodhgaya, a ruined stupa had been used as the main shrine for worship. It has a long hall around to the end as well as a circular hall. It is correct that the stupa stands in the end of the hall like in the Maharashtra main hall; there are a stone pillar and a Dhamma wheel to be worshiped inside it.

During the time of excavation in 1904, an interesting collection of carved patterns was discovered. They were all made of marble chunar and polished to great smoothness. Some people thought capital statues looked kingly because there were crowns on their heads, so they could have belonged to royal clients. Several of these patterns can be seen

in the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum today, while others can be viewed in the Indian Museum in New Delhi. The main shrine was burned at one time during the Gupta period, and another person's sculpture was built on top of it.

Located south of the main road leading to *Mūlagandhakutī* is an ancient main hall with a concrete railing. The main shrine was paved with earthen bricks and drew visitors' attention particularly because its sculpture was the same as that of a stupa among four-sided stupas (*pañcāyatana*) dating to the Gupta age. There is nothing left of it, however, so people can only see remains belonging to other sculptures like it. There are two foundations and two stupas at each corner, decorated with designs of window drapes and with marble pillars at the corner of the door. The early main shrine once featured a Buddha statue.



4. THE MŪLAGANDHAKUTĪ VIHĀRA (FRAGRANT CHAMBER)

Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang recounted in his diary that “Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra” is the full original name of *Sārnātha* and marked the place where the Buddha first gave a sermon. *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* was renovated later over the previous original grounds. It was known as the personal place of the Buddha, who resided a long time there while he stayed in *Sārnātha*. “Mūlagandhakutī” means fragrance. It is said that the good smell was emitted from Buddha’s body (kaya), so that it has the title *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* (Hall of Fragrance).

5. THE CHAMKAMA PATH

Next to the *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra*, there is a stone promenade called the Chamkama path (built by King *Aśoka* in the second century B.C.E.). It marks the road where the Buddha used to walk mindfulness and meditation. Nowadays, visitors who are followers of Buddha also practice their silent walking with formal mindfulness down this holy path.

6. THE LION PILLAR

A stone pillar with four lions on the pillar’s capital was built to the west of main shrine. King *Aśoka* erected this pillar at *Sārnātha*, like he did at other places where he wanted to commemorate his own visits. The pillars in fact mark the exact place where the Buddha established the Sangha with the first five brothers *Añña Koṇḍañña*, (*pañchāvargīya*), *Yasa*, and his 54 friends in *Banāres*. In Buddhist history, this important event took place after the event of the

Dhamma wheel. In that case, inscribing the decree on a pillar might have prevented the Sangha-split; this seems quite possible.



Four broken portions of King *Aśoka*'s pillars

B. WHOLE PLAN OF THE SĀRNĀTHA HOLY SITE

Today, pilgrims visiting *Sārnātha* can enjoy its airy gardens as well as its cool Deer Park, which is one of the most peaceful places that Buddhists come to visit. To first-time visitors, various sanctuaries and shrines dotted around the sacred site look chaotic, while fragmented stupas seem orderly. However, things are best seen clearly when viewed in the right order, below:

Monuments can be divided into three groups. The first group is the Chaukhandī stupa standing alone to the left of the road of Ashapur leading to *Sārnātha*, about 200 meters distant from the Thai temple. The second group includes all monuments located in *Sārnātha*; they stand in four parallel lines separately, and visitors can see them from the north (from outside to inside). The last group is in Deer Park.

The 1st group: *Chaukhandī* stupa

The 2nd group: There are 4 lines

The 1st line:

1. *Vihāra* VII: It was built in the middle ages on an early foundation.

2. *Vihāra* V: It belongs to the Gupta period.

3. Storehouse of Brahman: It was used to keep inscriptions of Jain and Brahma.

4. Shreyanahnath shrine of Jain.

Items 3 and 4 do not belong to ancient sculptures, but they are still mentioned here for easier recognition by visitors.

The 2nd line:

• *Dharmarājikā* stupa: It was destroyed by Jagat Singh. Now it is only a massive, round foundation.

• *Vihāra* VI: It was once a home for orphans. It was built on a previous foundation in the Gupta period (the eighth or ninth century).

• *Dhāmekh* stupa: It came from the Maurya period and was repaired in the Gupta time. It remains intact with exquisitely carved figures on stones (*āchchādaka-pattā*).

The 3rd line:

• The main shrine

• The *Aśoka* pillar

• The Buddha chamber (*Mūlagandhakutī*)

• The yard of *Mūlagandhakutī* with many rooms and countless “gratitude” stupas leading right up to the *Dhāmekh* stupa. *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* features the most complicated sculpture present throughout *Sārnātha*.

The 4th line:

Vihāra II (Kushān and Gupta periods)

Vihāra I (Dhamma-chakra stupa- Jina built by *Kumāradevī* in the twelfth century)

Vihāra III (Gupta period)

Vihāra IV (Gupta period)

The 3rd group: Deer Park

C. THE PRESENT REMAINS

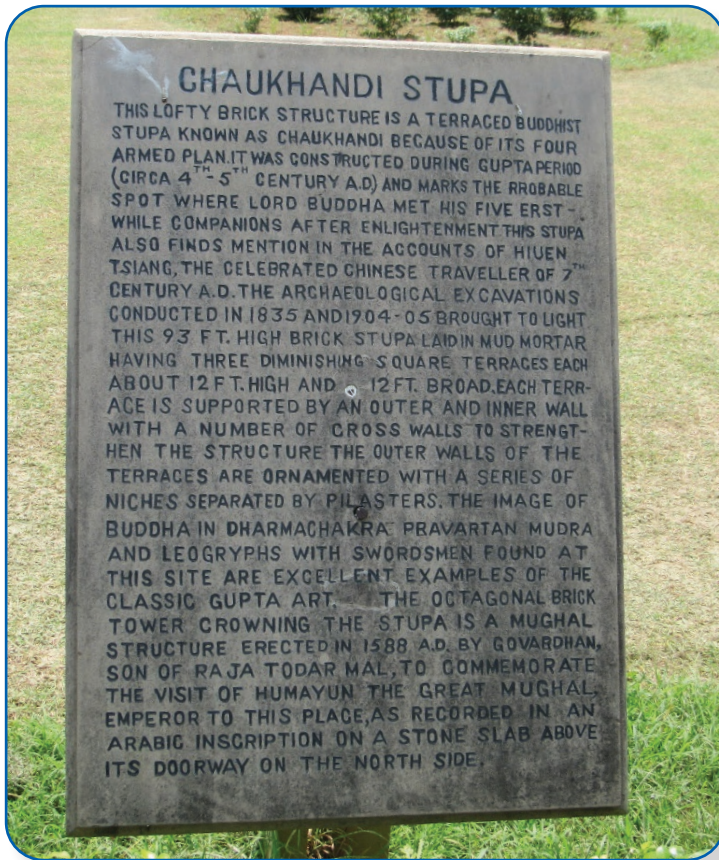
THE 1ST GROUP

Chaukhadī stupa: It stands alone in the left road connecting the intersection of Ashapur with *Sārnātha* and about 200 meters from the Thai temple.

Chaukhadī stupa was erected on a massive mound of brick, whose square edifice is surrounded by an octagonal tower. It was built by King Akbar in 1588 to commemorate the place where his father visited. There is an inscription written in the Persian script. The low portion of this stupa is today nothing more than a mere heap of earth. An octagonal structure made of brick stands on top of it. It is not understood now it got the name Chaukhadī. In 1835, Mr. Cunningham sank a well below the octagonal structure but found nothing of importance there. He therefore came to the conclusion that it was merely a stupa, as recounted by Master Tripitāka Hsien Tsang. Sir John Marshall also was of the opinion that it was near this place that the Buddha met his five disciples. In 1905, Mr. Oertel carried out excavation work in the ground to the north of this stupa and discovered a host of ancient relics. On the outside of the boundary wall of the stupa, there are some niches designed for keeping images. Mr. Oertel held that this stupa was 200 feet in height.

However, its present height with the inclusion of the brick-built steeple is only 82 feet. The top of the steeple commands a wide view of the surrounding

landscape. From there, one may clearly see the Dhāmekh Stupa in the north and the Dhawja temple of Benimādhava (*Aurangzeb minar*) in the south.



During excavation work, a background of a large monument was discovered with three square halls. There are many niches in the outside wall. The Sakya image bears the Dhamma wheel shape (Dharmachakra-mudrā) (catalog number B (b) 182), and two reliefs were skillfully incised (C (b0 1 and 2). The image describes a lion and prizefighters belonging to Gupta art, so it may be said that this stupa

called *Chaukhandī* existed from the Gupta period with the stupa attaching the cover frame. Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang narrated as follow:

“From this site about 2 or 3 miles to the south, there is a 300 foot high monument. A large background and a tall monument [exist] which is equipped effectively with many types of artist sculptures and rare quality material. At every level, there are various niches. Although there is a great octagonal pillar on the surface peak, there are no surrounding bell towers. First, a little outside, there is a small shrine where is marked Añña Koṇḍañña and other four hermits standing naturally to pay homage to the Buddha who walked to approach them from far distance.”



Bhikkhunī Giói Huong observed the Chaukhandī stupa at noon on a day in 2019

THE 2ND GROUP

From the *Chaukhadī* stupa, advancing for about ten minutes, visitors will reach the wide excavation site of *Sārnātha*, which lies at the turn of Dhammapala Street; archeologists have identified four lines that belong to the second group.

Entering the gate, then going straight instead, visitors will follow the guided path to the Archeological Department. On the main path, there is a big board built on the marble foundation with the red letters “Archaeological Survey of India.” Below is chronicled each relic of four rows in turn, as follows:

THE 1ST ROWS

-MONASTERY VII: The right side of the main stage is the monastery dating to the middle ages; it can be found on the surface of the previous ground.

This architecture has a normal shape, including the 9.15-meter large yard, surrounded by a series of rooms and corridors on the sides. There is a small dry well with an iron net cover at the top. The diameter of the well is 1 m x 1 m, the depth is about 15 m, and the bottom is completely dark. The height of the well from the soil on up is about 0.5 m. Next are the wall and four cylindrical cylinders. Each cylinder body’s diameter is 0.5 m x 0.5 m, whose peak is broken (only about 0.5 m high for the body, so the exact height is not known). These rooms have collapsed. The corridor’s ground bears traces of the fire that burned down the monastery.

-MONASTERY V: From the VII monastery past the small path, there is the monastery that was excavated by Major Kittoe. So, from the entrance gate, the VII monastery is on the left, the middle is the path,

and the V monastery is on the right. Monastery V has a 15.25 meter-square large yard, a row of rooms is 2.60 m long, and the horizontal measurement is 2.45 m on four sides. There is a well in the center whose size is similar to that of the seven monasteries. Outside the rooms, many eaves are supported by the pillars. Inside the main hall is the visitors room (*Pratyupasthānaśālā*); in front of it, there is a gate with a roof and two watchtowers. North of the monastery is the main chanting hall. This structure is known as a typical sculpture dating to the Gupta period and following times. On an earthen stamp is engraved the Buddha's teaching in the form of inscriptions dating from the ninth century that are found in one of the rooms.

Mr. Thomas explained Major Kittoe's note: "There are the traces of powder of bread at the hollows at the room in the northeast of the quadrilateral." Thomas also sought out traces of wheat and other white rice powders in a room. These procedures are proven by the fact that the original users noticed a very large fire suddenly breaking out, at which the monks quickly left the food behind to escape burning. Thomas narrated it vividly as following: "The chambers on the east side have the un-cooked foods scattering. Hurri[ed]ly run away..., the potteries in pieces, the copper pots on the kitchen being shriveled from being burned terribly. Above the roof, there are also signs of rusting, sketched coal wood roof with nails, mixed with brown broken brick and dirty garbage that rises some 6 feet to the top of the present wall. Each thing bears the bad consequence of intense flame. The wall is still standing but the earth turned out to be lime. The brick monuments are baked to a highest temperature as firm as a baked-brick work. Overall,

the traces let us know that there was some intention to destroy the monastery totally except that the careless fire accidentally happened.”



A ruined foundation

-THE BRĀHMAᅇA STOREY: The brāhmaᅇa warehouse is located on a green hill between the monastery V and the Shreyanahnath Jain shrine. During his time at the site, by implementing the archeological excavation process, Mr. Oertel concluded that this warehouse was built without a door so as to contain the broken statues and reliefs. The rectangular storey has a fence surrounded by a shadow of green trees. It has a pink color, with 32 round pillars; each has a size of 0.2 m diameter, is 3 m high, and is decorated by nice, flowering engravings. Jain and brāhmaᅇa previously used the warehouse to keep artistic works that came there from *Banāres*, but they have been moved for display in the Sārnātha Archaeological Museum. Among them, there are some important antiques, such as:

G.1: a whole stone on which is carved three statues of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Śiva*, respectively

G.3: a statue of *Śiva-Pārvatī*

G.18: a full four-hand Ganeśa

G.29: a full four-hand Vishu

G.37: a post middle-aged statue of Sūrya.



The Hương Sen pilgrimage listening to the lecture from Ven Hạnh Nguyễn at the rest hall in Sārṇātha

- **THE SHREYĀMŚANĀTHA SHRINE OF JAIN:** located a little south of Dhāmekh, the Shreyāmsānātha shrine was constructed in the year 1824 to correlate with the ascetic conduct of the 11st Jain patriarch, Tirthankara Shreyāmsānātha. In the nice paintings are recounted the life of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, who was older than the Buddha by 10 years. Mahavira was born in Singhpur in the Bharat village, Krishana Akadashi district, Visnu Yog province. His father was King Kashatriya Singhpur Visnu and his mother was Queen Sunand.



The way to the Dhāmekh monument

THE 2ND ROW

- **DHAMMARĀJIKĀ STUPA:** Following the path to the north side a little bit, on the left side of the VII monastery visitors will see the 1-meter-high stupa, known as the Dhammarājikā stupa, which was built by King *Aśoka* in 1794. It was a large brick stupa that Dewan Jagat Singh collapsed to steal its bricks. A very beautiful vase has been found here. The vase is displayed in the museum in Calcutta. In 1918, John Marshall was chosen to excavate the site, and he discovered that the original stupas belonged to King *Aśoka*'s dynasty, and concluded that many kings built on top of them at least seven times over some 25 centuries.

The Dhammarājikā was built under King *Aśoka*. The last construction was carried out in the eleventh century in parallel with the main monument. In different stages and on various occasions, many pilgrimages built the small “gratitude stupas” around the Jagat Singh stupa. A statue base B (c) bears inscriptions of Mahīpāla in 1026 that was found in Jagat Singh's house and were not from this area.

Excavations have proved that the stupa had been reconstructed at least six times on the original foundation over the years. King *Aśoka*'s foundation is 13.49 m with a diameter of 49.5 x 36.8 x 6.4 cm, and the shaped brick lines (letter V) are small sized, around 41.9 x 31.7 x 8.8 cm. In the Kushān reign, the bricks were added up to the size 38.1 x 26.2 x 7 cm. The second construction was done in the fifth or sixth century, and there is a new meditative pathway (*pradakshināpatha*) about 4.88 meters wide around the stupa. Surrounding the outskirts, there is a 1.35-meter-high wall with four gates at the four directions. The third construction took place in the seventh century; the meditative pathway (*pradakshināpatha*) was largely well-established and stands next to the stupa, with four stairs made of marble. The fourth and fifth constructions were executed during the ninth through eleventh centuries. The sixth and seventh (last) constructions were done in the twelfth century, which was the same period when Queen *Kumāradevī* built a stupa offering for *Sārnātha*.

Two outstanding statues are the red marble Boddhisattva (carved in the third year of King Kanishka's reign) and a giving-lecture-mudrā (*Dhamma-cakra-pravartana*) Buddha statue. They were found at Dhammarājīkā.

The near distance between King *Aśoka*'s stone pillars and main hall indicates that Dhammarājīkā marks the place where the Buddha turned the first Dhamma wheel (*Dhamma-cakra-pravartana*). When Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang visited this site, he estimated the Dhammarājīkā to be 30 meters high, but unfortunately it is now only about 1 meter tall, with a red brick cylinder base. The upper base surface

is covered by cement. Pilgrims today often sit there facing the *Dhāmekh* monument to do chanting and meditation.

John Marshall investigated sufficiently to conclude that this Dharmarājikā belonged to King *Aśoka*'s dynasty.

Coming back to the Mahīpāla stele, visitors may note that centuries after Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang visited *Sārnātha*, an inscription dating to 1026 has been handed down to Mahīpāla. It recounts that many renovations have been implemented in the area of *Sārnātha*.



- THE CHARITY HOUSE: West of the *Dhāmekh* monument is a single room. It was possibly used for charity, judging by a number of mortar pestles on the table. It may have been built in the eighth through ninth centuries of the Gupta period, but it was constructed to overlap old rooms.

- **THE DHĀMEKH MONUMENT:** The 34-meter-high monument is now an outstanding sight in the whole *Sārnātha* area. It was built in the fifth century to memorialize the place where the Buddha first turned the Dhamma wheel (*Dhamma-cakra-pravartana*). In fact, it has been renovated many times. According to Dr. Venis, the term “*Dhāmekh*” (also known in Sanskrit as “Dharmachakra”) means “thinking on Dhamma” (Pondering of the Law).

The monument was made of a single huge stone that was taken by King *Aśoka*. Reaching an astonishing height of 33.53 meters (104 feet), it is made of brick, with a diameter of 28.50 meters long, 33.53 meters tall (42.06 meters tall including the base). This strategy makes for a full, round image like a 11.20-meter drum shape. Every brick layer was put together with a series of iron pegs and then was very skillfully engraved.

The low part consists of large bricks with a number of iron corbels; some of the corbels can be found in the northern foundation while the upper part of the body is made of bricks. The original stones were lost, having been robbed by Jagat Singh from the factory. This octagonal monument grows gradually smaller to the peak. Each side of the octagon has a niche yet to be finished, which means there might have once been a statue inside. The height of the monument is divided into three phases; the middle stage is a series of artistic patterns circling the monument. The upper and lower parts feature many elaborate decorative figures, such as human beings, animals (birds, an elephant), flower styles (chrysanthemum, lotuses with branches), all of which are carved beautifully.

In ancient times, during the local festivals, embroidered cloth was generally set around the stupa. Their flowers and patterns are more likely the design of these embroidered cloths. These patterns belonged to the Gupta period, but through the excavation of Cunningham, the red brick monument was dated to the Maurya reign (that of King *Aśoka*) in the second century B.C.E.

The colorful flowers, human pictures, birds, and other carvings are very beautiful. The image on the west of the monument is unique and cannot even be compared with other masterpieces throughout today's India. This richly colored decorative complex pattern is the same as the sample of the devadūshya's ones, which have proved to be of the highest quality from the Gupta artists of long ago. Today's European and Indian scholars greatly appreciate these artistic sculptures. Some resemble the work of the handmade-art architects from Sri Lanka.

From that period on, Mr. V.A. Smith has concluded that the Indian artists followed Sri Lanka's. But indeed, the similarities between the two groups have never definitively proven which one follows the other, but rather just suggest a connection between the two communities. Evaluation of this pattern is similar to those of the VII period.

Cunningham spent three years, starting in 1834, to make an archeological excavation inside the Dhāmekh. In 1835, he started drilling at one point from the top to the foundation. Then the hole was connected and followed by a manmade tunnel where he found a thin (91.4 cm) flat slab stone. On it was engraved the Buddha's teachings with inscriptions from the sixth and seventh centuries that suggest that people attached

it later to the monument. From its great size, the artistic form, and the sculpted decoration, this Dhāmekh is considered the most important and sacred one in the entire *Sārnātha* archeological site.

A bit further down the southern end of Dhāmekh, there are ranges of small “nice-gratitude” stupas.



The great Dhāmekh stupa can be seen from afar

THE 3RD ROW:

- MAIN HALL:

The main hall was a popular place where the Buddha practiced meditation. The base is a series of multiple layers of concrete. The bottom line also contains a gratitude-stone slab (*āyāgapatta*) dating to the first century B.C.E. There are two different inscriptions on the eave; the first one belongs to the second century B.C.E., while the latter belongs to the fifth century C.E. The eave was used as a light pillar for *Mūlagandhakuṭī* (Fragrant Hut) in the next space.

On the east side of the main hall is a path through a large rectangular yard showing broken shrines of various sizes. The inside main hall is 64 feet square. Surrounding it are traces of the rooms' foundations. The south has a fence of King *Asoka*'s.

Careful observers will conclude that the last renovation was done more recently than the original

one. However, the previous main hall was bigger than the present one because the new path goes to the east, that is, toward the main gate to *Sārnātha*.

- KING AŚOKA'S PILLARS:

This eastern side of the main hall has a four-foot part of King *Aśoka*'s pillars, which stand inside the 2.03 meter-high fence surrounding it. The pillar is made of chunar polished marble stone and was originally 15.25 m tall, with four impressive lions on the peak. On the low part of this are four Dhamma wheels and four standing animals (horse, bull, and other animals) in alternating order. The next lower part is the line patterns of flowers on the round base, with the size 20.3 x 15.2 x 45.7 cm. The pedestal is completely tapered, with a diameter at the foot of 71.1 cm and a diameter at the peak of 55.9 cm.



Four remnants of the pillars of King *Aśoka*

There are three epitaphs inscribed. The first stele on the decree of King *Aśoka* was written with the Sanskrit words saying that King *Aśoka* prohibited breaking the harmony in Sangha (as indicated in

the chapter 5 inscriptions in this volume). King *Aśoka*'s order was given just after the third council in Pataliputra. Another decree also says the same thing in Sangha but was found in Sañchī and Allahabad. When the pillars were dug out in 1904 in *Sārnātha*, they still remained standing in their original places, so they may have been broken when the peak of the main hall *Mūlagandhakuṭī* (Fragrant Hut) collapsed on it.

The second epitaph belongs to the Kushān period and mentions the 40th anniversary on the throne of King Aśokaghosha. This king ruled the Kauśāmbi and also governed both Banāres and Sārnātha.

The third epitaph was engraved in the beginning of the Gupta period. It mentions the partriarchs of *Sammitīya* and *Vātsīputraka*.



The polished pillar of King *Aśoka*

The management and administration policy of King *Aśoka* were considered ideal, so after India won its independence in 1947, the symbol of the four-lion stone pillar that King *Aśoka* had erected in *Sārnātha* was chosen as the national emblem of India. It honors the contributions of the nation's ancestors over past centuries and encourages those now living.

- **THE MŪLAGANDHAKUTĪ VIHĀRA**

Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra (Fragrant Hut) was created on the grounds of the tent where the Buddha used to stay during the time he was in *Sārnātha*, thus it bears the name "Fragrant Hut." Over the years following, it was enlarged to be a temple, which Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang described as follows:

"The 200-meter-tall fence, the roof is shaped like the golden mango (*Āmra*). The basement and ladders are made of stone but roof and niches are bricks. There is the copper statue of the Buddha with the mudrā *Dharmachakra-pravartana* ('turn the Dhamma wheel') in the center of the temple. The statue is as tall as a real person. On the south side is a stone stupa constructed by King *Aśoka*. Even though basement has subsided, the 100-meter (or more) wall remains. The exterior front is a 700-foot-high pillar that is a nicely polished blue gem like a bright light."

About the thickness of the wall, it has been pointed that Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra is indeed as high as Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang guessed. The old stone patterns engraved on the wall informed visitors that the *Vihāra* was rebuilt at least one time and used the parts of previous architecture. The present form indicates that the temple has been chronicled since the Gupta period.

Among the small “gratitude stupas” near the west of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, a piece of stone umbrella bears this inscription, carved as a part of *Dhammachakra-pravartana Suttā*:

“Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. Which two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering toward either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

“And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision?... Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering..., the noble truth of the origin of suffering..., the noble truth of the cessation of suffering..., the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.”

This stele has been dated to the third century C.E., with inscriptions written in the Pāli script. It is interesting to note that the ancient language of Pāli was popular in *Sārnātha*. This stele is now displayed in the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum.

At present, Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra has a base with a height of 1 meter; at the end of the wall, there are four square columns, 0.5 m x 0.5 m. Two front ones are 1.2 m high, while the other two are 2 m high. Maybe they used to support the altar. The rectangular temple has a brick wall extending in three directions, doors facing the Dhāmekh monument, and a 2-meter wide cement path 50 meters long leading to the Dhāmekh.

On both sides of the path many small gratitude stupas are located.

At this time, we compared the following sculpture descriptions that Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang recounted with the present antiques, as follows:

a. 200-feet-high temple = Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra* (Fragrant Hut)

b. The stone stupa = Dhamarājikā connected with Jagat Singh

c. Stone columns = the pillars of King *Aśoka*



Bhikkhuni Giōi Hương at the archeological excavation in 2019

-THE EAVES OF KING AŚOKA: South of the Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra* are the eaves that formerly were at the site of Dhamarājikā. These eaves are outstandingly carved in a whole chunar stone piece with the highest level of fitness and polish.

Again, we research the symbolism of the Dhammacakra, which was engraved on the antiques in Sārnātha, especially on the pillars of King Aśoka. “Dhammacakras” has been carved in the Mahīpālalipi epitaph as “Sāngam Dhammacakram.”

Dr. Vogel has translated the word “Sāngam” to mean “complete,” and Dr. Venis seemed to accept it. “Sānga Veda” means Sadanga Veda. In the same way, the word *Sāngam Dhamma-cakra* means Dhammacakra, a term that came from the event when the Buddha stayed at *Sārnātha* to turn the Dhamma wheel (*Dhamma-cakra*). The Dhammacakra-mudrā well expresses this ideal, and this term also has the meaning to point to the Dhammacakra vihāras (temples) in *Sārnātha* as being engraved, as in the stamp that was dug out on the excavation there. *Thus, we can conclude that all the architectures with the name Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra include the small temple (Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra) in that area.* From this point on, we can infer that, in general, the Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra is considered to bear the honorific title of Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra.

Mr. A.K. Maitra, the founder of the Vārendra Research Society, has suggested that the Dhammacakra’s symbol on King *Aśoka*’s pillars, along with the broken pillars displayed in the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum, are the exact objects that Mahīpāla indicated. The decoration of King *Aśoka*’s pillars with the symbol of Dhammachakra-pravartana is a unique element that was very popular in ancient times, as the inscriptions of King *Aśoka* in Sañchī pointed out.

- DHĀMEKH MONUMENT:

A few meters away from King *Aśoka*’s pillars (near the Myanmar Temple), there is an ancient Apsidal (chaitya) stupa. This stupa is 25 meters high and 11.58 meters in diameter, with a crescent-shaped frame in the end. Many antiques are arranged in the following chronicles from the Maurya to the Gupta dynasties

that have been found here. After the Gupta period, this stupa was badly damaged, apparently in terrible flames. On the foundation, there are traces of a new construction that was going up over the previous one.



The *Dhāmekh* monument is an outstanding sight among the ruins

THE 4TH ROW (next to the Deer Park's fence)

At this location, visitors can see a range of rooms for resident monks. Excavations have been carried out here, and two samples of rooms indicate a connection to the Kushān period. Using the same master plans, there is a path leading to the big main hall and many rooms at four directions that are connected by the small side corridors.

It is now possible for visitors to approach the northeast side at the turn of the path and to follow the way to the main hall at the north. Both sides have basements of rooms, halls, and stupas. Many of the statues and pillars have been dug from there.

On the northern ground, there are decayed traces of four famous temples. Most of the monks were apparently living there. The first temple has many resident chambers, with surprising evidence of a well along with water pipes and drains. It is similar to those in Bhitā. These pipes take the water to the water pond at the east. The second temple is located in the west. The third is on the east side of the first temple, situated in rather low land where traces of wooden doors can be seen. A little farther to the east side, along the high land, the fourth temple can be viewed. A bit further away to the south is the majestic *Dhāmekh* monument.



Basement of an ancient temple

- **THE FIRST MONASTERY:** The first monastery is called the Dhammachakra-Jina Monastery, which was constructed by *Kumāradevī*, the female Buddhist-cum-Queen of King Govindachandra's. The king of Govindachadra of Kanauj (1114-1154) was a follower of Hinduism, though *Kumāradevī* was a devout Buddhist. The king was considered an embodiment of God Vishnu with the mission to "Protect Vārānasi

from the evil Turkish military,” and the king did not object to her favoring Buddhism.

This area has been dug out thus far to a range of 232 meters from east to west, and there is a range of rooms in the center. The temple has a large main hall at the west while the chambers are located at the east, north, and south. The 2.44-meter-high foundation was built by the flowering carving bricks. It looks very gentle and pretty both inside and out. All these chambers are no longer available to visitors. This temple has two doors with a gap of 88.45 meters, facing east. The temple was constructed right over the previous ones. It has a tunnel with a width of 1.83 m and a length of 58.78 m.

The epitaphs found there describe the nobility and dignity of Queen *Kumāradevī* as follows:

“Her mind is always toward goodness, merit, and morality. She is happy at the charity and offering. Her walking shape is as the movement of a powerful elephant. Her gentle beauty is meant to soften people’s mind. Her kneeling at the feet of the Buddha is so devoted. People sing songs to appreciate her characteristics, compassion, and conduct. Her spiritual fragrance is perceived far and near.”

Queen *Kumāradevī* seems to have built this temple to worship an ancient statue called Sri Dharmachakra-Jina, which was known to have been chronicled since King *Aśoka*. Because the Dharmachakra-Jina temple was established on the ground of two previous monasteries, it is hard to recognize the great master plan of this temple. The monastery includes many ranges of rooms and has a wall fence facing south and more than 230 meters long. The main gate is located on the eastern side; at the southwest corner there is a tunnel. Around the monastery, pilgrimages pay

attention to the two highly detailed, engraved artist pillars and brick patterns at the foot of the wall.

The campus of the Dhammachakra-Jina-vihāra in the previous period belonged to other temples. One of them is the second monastery at the border of the west, and another is the third monastery at the eastern gate of the second monastery. West of this place is the special feature of eaves with roofs progressing to an ancient altar. The entire 54.78-meter-long corridor with the 1.83-meter-high wall was constructed half of brick and half of stone. There is a water well near the Deer Park. The diameter of the well is 1.50 meters (wider than the wells in monasteries numbers seven and eight). Most of the sculpture areas found in this area belong to the middle ages.

- **THE SECOND MONASTERY:** Judging by the size of the bricks, archeologists guess that the second monastery can be dated to the Gupta period. It has a large, 27.69 meter-square yard, including the 99.1-meter-high wall surrounding it, which is very thick but holds the eaves' pillars in front of the resident rooms. There are approximately nine rooms.

- **THE THIRD MONASTERY:** The master plan of the second monastery is the same as that of the second one, but it extends 4 meters deep underground. The surface of the yard is made of brick. There are pipes to convey rainwater under the soil. The chambers are located on the south side. The current style of the inscriptions may be that of the post-traditional Kushān period. The average height of each wall is 3.05 meters, and the thickness of the walls suggests that this monastery had two floors with a ladder going up. On the ground, there are 2-meter-tall round pillars with peaks broken, making it impossible to guess their original height.

- **THE FOURTH MONASTERY:** Like the other three monasteries, this one is 4 meters deep and the back yard is about 4.42 cm deep from the basement. There are some rooms at the north and eaves at the eastern side.

There are eight pillars, each 1 m wide and 1 m high. There are many shapes: the 2 cm bottom has a square figure; the 2 cm frame is octagonal; the next frame of 1 cm is round; the next of 2 cm has wavy lines; and the last is square. There is a big 3.70-meters-high statue of the God Śiva [catalog B (b) 1] holding a fork to cut a ghost. It has been dated to the twelfth century and was found at the wall on the eastern side.

THE THIRD GROUP is Deer Park.

DEER PARK:

In the past, *Sārnātha* was a perfect, tranquil place to meditate and also a place for spotted deer to live in peace and safety. This entire area served as a resident shelter for the deer; no one had the right to hunt, shoot, harm, or kill them. Therefore, the deer there were free to run hither and thither without fear. Since its early days, it has become even more protected year by year, so the park is often crowded with spotted deer.

In keeping with the spirit of the past, the Board of Management and Development of *Sārnātha* also established a special area for deer, which is called the Deer Park. Today, visitors can see hundreds of the beautiful, yellow, spotted deer of various ages and sizes. They seem to be enjoying their life here among the pilgrimages.

Visitors are happy and interested to see deer jumping and running about innocently. When we gave them vegetables (available on site for sale, costing only Rs 5 or Rs 10 for a dish of carrots or white beans), they

clearly enjoyed eating them, then licking our hands and letting us take their photos. The natural lives of the deer here help us to imagine the atmosphere of the old Deer Park in the Buddha's time.



Spotted deer enjoy their life as they did in the Buddha's time

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 describes the ruins remaining throughout *Sārnātha*. There are six structures dating from antiquity that relate to the Buddha's life: the *Dhāmekh* monument, the *Dharmarājikā* stupa, the main shrine, the *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* (the fragrant chamber), a Chamkama path, and the pillars of King *Aśoka*. In addition to these sites, there are other architectural wonders to be found: the Chaukhadī stupa, the *Dhāmekh* monument, the eaves of King *Aśoka*, the *Dhammarājikā* stupa, remains of seven monasteries, the Brāhmaṇa Warehouse, the shreyāmsānātha shrine of the Jains, the charity house, the Deer Park, and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the six ancient constructions at *Sārnātha* that relate to the life of Buddha?
2. Summarize the ground plans of the *Sārnātha* site.
3. Describe the Chaukhadī stupa.
4. Narrate the story of Dewan Jagat Singh regarding the *Dharmarājikā* stupa.
5. Define the term “*Sārnātha*” as it relates to the Deer Park.

Notes

¹ *Archaeological Survey Report. Sārnātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 43.*

² *Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 34.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Dhammadoot, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Mulagandha Kuty Vihara, Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism. 1999, 2000, and 2001. P. 16.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 11.*

⁷ Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels (629-645 A.D.) in India. Vol. II. P. 191 on.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, Archaeological Survey of India. New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 50.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Buddhist Records of Western World. Samuel Beal, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1994. P. 72.*

¹² *Archaeological Survey Report. Sārnātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 31.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Dhammadoot, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Mulagandha Kuty Vihara, Sārnātha - The Birth Place of Buddhism. 1999, 2000, and 2001. P. 29.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ PT. D. R. Sāhni, *Guide to the Buddhist Ruins of Sārnātha (The Sārnātha Sanctuary), p. 9.*

¹⁷ *Indian Antiquary*, vol. XIV, from p. 139 on. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (N.S.), volume II, 1906, p. 445-47; Vogel, *Epigraphia India*, volume IX, 1907-1908, p. 291-93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Master Tripiṭaka Hsien Tsang recounted that on the *Sārnātha* side, “there are a lot of doors facing on the side of the east.” *Beal’s Buddhist Record of the Western World* (popular edition), p. 74.

²¹ *Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*. New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P.77 on.

²² Beal, *Buddhist Record of the Western World*, VII, p. 45-46; Watter’s *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels*, Episode I, p. 50. *Beal’s Life of Hiuen Tsang*, p. 99. The height of the temple (Vihāra) is now 100 feet instead of 200 feet.

²³ *Samyata Nikaya*. 56.11. *Setting in Motion of the Dhamma Wheel* (Dharma-chakra-pravartana Suttā). Ed. M. L. Feen and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS: 1884-1898; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F.L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1950-1956. P. 420.

²⁴ Beal, *Buddhist Record of the Western World*, VII, p. 50; Watter’s *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels*, Episode I, p. 55. *Beal’s Life of Hiuen Tsang*, p. 99.

²⁵ *Archaeological Survey Report*. *Sārnātha*. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 55 on.

²⁶ In the epitaphs of Kumāradevi, we will see *Sārnātha* called Saddharmachakra-pravartana-mahāvihāra.

²⁷ *Annual Progress Report for 1915* (Annual Report 1915), Hargreve, p.4.

²⁸ Sir John Marshall, *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey*, 1904-1905, p. 36.

²⁹ In the epitaphs of Kumāradevi. *Annual Progress Report for 1915* (Annual Report 1915). Hargreve, P. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 7
THE SĀRNĀTHA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM



1. THE INDIAN MUSEUM

The *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum is the place in which cultural artifacts from the *Sārnātha* site are being preserved. This is a source of boundless knowledge about the rise of Buddhism from the past to the present and even to the future. The museum was built to preserve and display the antiquities found in and around the site, dating from the third century B.C.E. to the twelfth century C.E. Lord Curzon proclaimed in India's Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904 that: *"The remarkable objects of the archeology are able to be researched the best in closer relation with the same objects and styles of the sculpture where they were found."*

There are 32 museums controlled by Indian Archeology Research and maintained in various places throughout India as well as near excavation sites and monuments.



From left: Tịnh Bình, Rev. Diệu Hòa, Ven. Giới Hương, Rev. Diệu Nga, and Quảng Trí visited the museum on September 24, 2019

2. THE REASON THE SĀRNĀTHA MUSEUM WAS ESTABLISHED

In 1905, Mr. Oertal built a warehouse adjacent to the excavated site to maintain and preserve artistic works, inscriptions, and other antiques. But because the number of relics increased year after year, the storehouse soon lacked enough space to conserve these relics. So Mr. Marshal, the General Manager of the Archeology Department, offered to construct another museum at *Sārnātha*. The master plan of this museum was constructed by architect James Ramson, with the aid of government grants, and completed in 1910. The plan is still used for preserving, exhibiting, and researching the ancient finds. The *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum is one of the most ancient museums in India, and Buddhist sculptures almost without number are today displayed there.

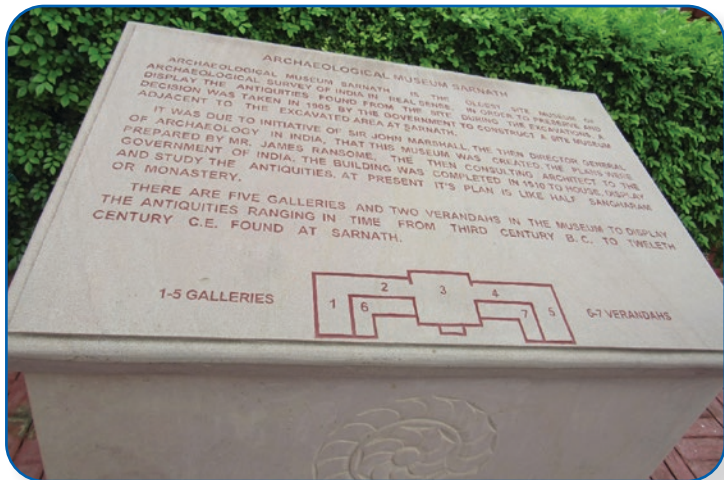
3. THE ARCHITECT OF THE SĀRNĀTHA ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM

From the Chaukhadī stupa, going straight to the south for 10 minutes, opposite the excavation site, you will see the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum in the right side on the road. It is one of the most perfect museums in all the world for preserving antiquities.

The museum contains five galleries and two verandas. In the front, there are flower gardens and faucets spraying water to make the over scene even more beautiful. In the main gallery, there is the Lion Capital of King *Aśoka* made of smooth, polished, gray chunar sandstone. It has not been changed by

centuries of weather and is one of the world's most beautiful sculptures from an ancient period.

In other galleries, many antiques with high artistic value are also exhibited. The galleries have been named on the basis of their contents: The main hall is known as the *Shakyasimha* (“the roar of a lion” means the Dhamma voice of the Buddha) gallery. Adjacent to it is *Trimurti*, the northernmost gallery, also called *Tathāgata*, while the next one is named *Triratna* (Three Secrets). The southernmost gallery is called the *Ashutosh* (“name of the God Śiva”) gallery. The verandas on the northern and southern sides are named *Vastumandana* and *Shilparatna*. There are some antiquities such as rudimentary huge images mounted in two lobbies. They are fenced with patterned barbed wires, for protection, but visitors can observe from outside or they can enter from the gate at the corner of the room.



Epitaph at the Archaeological Museum at *Sārṇātha*



The *Shakyasimha* (the roar of a lion) gallery in the museum

1. THE EXHIBITED WORKS

A. THE SHAKYASIMHA GALLERY

The *Shakyasimha* (the roar of a lion) gallery displays one of the most-prized items in the museum: the Lion Capital, which became the national symbol of India. The Lion Capital is the manifest sculpture in the Mauryan period, dating to the third century B.C.E. It was mounted on top of King *Aśoka*'s pillar. It is 2.31 meters tall and has four portions extending from its foot:

1. A bell mount, formed of lotus petals
2. A round pillar
3. Four lions standing back to back, each facing in one of the four cardinal directions
4. A wheel with 32 spokes (which was later adopted for the Indian flag)

The group of four lions was engraved skillfully and naturally. Many valuable gems formerly decorated their foreheads. Under the lions at the top portion of the pillar are figures of an elephant, a bull, a horse,

and a lion. Each is separated by a smaller wheel, or *dharmachakra*. The lion capital is truly a masterpiece for the ages. There are many ways to explain its meaning. First, the Dhamma Wheel (*Dhammachakrapravartana*) presents the Laws; four lions delivering the voice of the Buddha preaching the Dhamma, four animals running as a symbol of four directions, four Dhamma Wheels are intermediary, and a lotus as a symbol of creativity. The elephant is the vehicle of the god Indra, the bull of Śiva, the horse of the Sun God, and the lion of the goddess Durga. Here, it is to be noticed that each of these has been represented as moving. All these figures symbolize that Buddhism will last so long as these animals continue to live on this planet.

Below these figures there is a portion of the pillar shaped like a bell. The portion below this is all of one piece with the pillar. This entire capital is displayed in the main hall of the museum. The pillar stands at the very place where it was dug out. The pillar as well as its capital are made of sandstone. A wonderfully shining polish called “Vajralepa” is found on the surface of the pillar. The gloss, smoothness, and color of the Vajralepa are admirable. Pride can be felt in India’s development in material sciences at such an early date as its making.

It is wrong, however, to describe the lotus as having concave petals like an inverted lotus; in fact, it is not a kind of lotus. Irwin asked: “*Is it possible that ancient Indian artists engraved the lotus sacredly without thinking of how the features of a true lotus look?*”



The world-famous pillar of King *Aśoka* in the *Shakyasimha* (the roar of a lion) gallery

Four animals - a bull, a horse, a lion, and an elephant - were engraved skillfully and naturally in a clockwise direction. They are believed to symbolize the Buddha, the Enlightenment, or God. Next to each animal is a Dhamma Wheel, each one of which has a golden crown. At each wheel, there are four lions standing back to back, which is representative of “the roar of a lion” (*Shakyasimha*) - meaning the Dhamma voice of the Buddha. The top of a bell vessel shows four lions standing back to back on the wheels. These animals symbolize the spread of the Dhamma,

powerfully and perfectly for ages. The sculpture is lively and the surface is highly polished. This lion capital has become the National Emblem of India and even appears on the nation's banknotes.

The next sculpture is the inscribed colossal standing image of a Bodhisattva in red sandstone, which is representative of the *Mathurā* school of art. It was dedicated by a monk named Bala in the third regional year of the Kushāna ruler Kanishka. The pillar behind the statue lifting the umbrella is presented in the southern room. There is a Sanskrit tablet on which are written details about the making of this statue.

To the left of the lion is the red sandstone Prince Siddhārtha statue, made in the Kusana period. The clothes on the statue are engraved skillfully and in a lifelike manner, suggesting the prosperity of that time. Between the feet of the statue is a lion, and next to its left leg are flowers and leaves. Behind the statue is an umbrella with a tablet bearing the chronicle of its engraving in 123 C.E.:

“On March 22, third century of Kanishka, Bhikkhu Bala (Master Tripiṭaka), Pushyavuddhi friend, with his parents, teachers, disciplines, Bhikkhunī Buddhāmitra, governor Vanaspara and Kharapallana, for the sakes of human beings, they were making a Bodhisattva with an umbrella at Banāres marking the place [of] the Buddha walking meditation.”

It is interesting to know that Bhikkhu Bala also made offerings of many statues in other places in Madhura and Savatthi. The name “Bhikkhunī Buddhāmitra” is even memorialized in Kosambi on

the inscription. There are other two inscriptions on the statue, one between the legs and one on the back of the statue. There are fewer words on the two tablets than on a tablet on the body of the statue.

At the far corner of the *Sakyasimha* chamber, visitors will see an umbrella that used to cover the statue in the past. Its 3-meter-diameter area is equipped with a wide, round array that is finely carved. The center circle shows buds and lotus flowers, among them some fully and others only partly blooming. The next circle shows rare animals in the square frames that are surrounded by pink lotus flowers and by wild fields. All these animals have wings and heads, such as lions, elephants, goats, camels, geese, and crocodiles. The next circles have 12 symbols of goodness. At the peak of the rotating clock there is a pretty conch with a decorative pattern of palm leaves, a lead pedestal, a bowl of fruit, and a cross sign. The outside circle has a lotus flower on display. Viewers will notice that on the outside edge of the umbrella are small holes, each spaced 0.5 meter apart. The previous umbrella had holes from which pilgrims could hang flowers and banners.

On the entrance wall opposite the *Shakyasimha* room is a lifesized statue of the Buddha with *Dhammachakra-pravartana mudrā*. With the cross-legged posture, the partly closed and compassionate eyes, both hands resting on the chest, one turning down and the other turning up with the *mudrā* as if giving a sermon, the Buddha appears dignified, genteel, and tranquil. This is the masterpiece that the world knows as the most famous representative symbol of the art of sculpture in *Sārnātha*.

This masterwork was found in the archeological excavation process of early 1904-1905 to the south of the DharMārā jika. The statue could originally be worshipped in one of the niches that surrounded the stupa. It was cast in the last half of the fifth century C.E. with both hands in *Dharmachakra-pravartana mudrā*. Next to the wheel are two deer and five Bhikkhus (Añña Koṇḍañña, Bhardrika-Bhaddiya, Vaspa-Vappa, Mahanama, and Asvajit-Assaji) sitting on cushions. Two different people, a lady and a child, may have been the donors. In ancient times, the wheel was the symbol of law. This is a unique feature in *Sārṇātha*.

The deer image is an ideal field for the deer park, where its first sermon was preached, but can also be similar to those people to whom the Buddha explained that their minds were like deer when moving - docile, gentle, and fast (with a quick warning of danger).

On the northwestern side, there are three columns dating to the first century B.C.E. It features many sacred items, like the Bodhi tree, the Dhamma Wheel, Triple Gems, stupas, and so on.

The item numbered D (g) 4 in the museum catalog (such numbers are used throughout this chapter) is one of the most attractive pillar heads dating from the first century B.C. It has many spiral decorative pictures, an energetic gladiator riding a horse, and on the other side of the pillar a trainer atop an elephant. On the relief is engraved the story of Boddhisatta practicing patience (*Kshanti-pāramitā*) in the Previous lives of the Buddha (Jātaka Stories).

B. THE TRIRATNA GALLERY

The Triratna (Triple Gems) gallery exhibits the images of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. On a relief is represented Shunga art (from the first century B.C.E.). Several images of Buddhisattvas and various sacred symbols are also displayed, such as an embodied form of *Mañjuśrī* Boddhisattva, the standing *Tārā* with a pearl on the left hand, and the Bodhisattva Padmapani (i.e., *Avalokiteśvara*) seated on the bloomed lotus.

Inscriptions tell the miracle of the Buddha in Śravastī, paying homage at the Ramgrama stupa, and an inscription is shown by Queen *Kumāradevī* of King Govindchandra in Kanauj. A small tablet telling of eight important events in Buddha's life is the most important antiquity in this gallery. There are many statues in various sitting or standing postures. These figures mark the special quality of art dating to the Gupta period. Examples are a halo behind lotuses, the spiral short hair, the calm face, the fold of a robe on the shoulder, and the overall tidy and dignified appearance of the Buddha.

No. E (22): The Buddha image belongs to Kumāra Gupta II, chronicled in 154 C.E. of the Gupta dynasty (473 B.C.E.). It is offered by Bhikkhu Abhayamitra.

B (b) 181: The image of the Buddha seated cross-legged in Bhumispara Mudrā of *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana* (where the Buddha set the Wheel of Law in motion) is said to be the best of all the images from the Gupta age in *Sārnātha*. The halo is engraved with sacred and skillful patterns.

Other ancient antiquities are presented here, such as reliefs and sculptures also from the Gupta period.



A relief depicting the four important events in the Buddha life

C (b) and C (b) are reliefs depicting two heroes riding horses and wielding swords.

C (a) 1 is a slab describing the four *essential* stages of the Buddha's life: birth (*Jāti*), enlightenment (*sambodhi*), delivery of his sermon (*Dhammachakrapravartana*), and passing away (*Nirvāna*).

C (a) 3 is an engraved slab narrating the eight important events of the Buddha's life. The first four events are carved in four corners; the later four events are engraved in the center, such as the figures of a monkey offering honesty to the Buddha, the Buddha converting the drunk elephant Nalagiri, the Buddha's descent to Sakya from Tusita (heaven), and the Buddha using superpowers to manifest a thousand shapes in Śravastī.

One of the most notable sculptures in the gallery is the Maitreya image, from the Gupta period, and other statues like that of Siddhaikavara holding a lotus.

B (d) 6: Mañjuśrī Boddhisattva standing between the images of *Tārā* and Lokanatha.

B (d) 1: The statues of Nalkantha, *Avalokiteśvara*, and Vajraśattva. There is also an attractive box believed to have contained earthen slabs and carved bricks that date to the Gupta period.

C. THE TATHĀGATA GALLERY

Tathāgata, one of the titles for Buddha, is named for the gallery in the northernmost area of the museum. It displays 22 statues of Buddha and Boddhisattvas, such as *Avalokiteśvara*, Vajraśattva, Padmapani, Nilakantha, Lokeshvara, Maitreya, and others, all captured in many different postures (*mudrās*).



The *Tathāgata* Gallery in the museum

The most notable sculpture in this chamber is that of the Buddha preaching (*Dharmachakra-pravartana mudrā*). It is another masterpiece of *Sārnātha* and belongs to the art school from the Gupta period. In earlier years, this statue was displayed in the main hall near the lion pillar. To make it more visible and prominent, it has been enhanced with a high base and placed in the center of the hall. It originally faced south, but it is now shown facing east, the same direction in which it was found. Two deer are representative of the name of this local area as Mrigadava (Deer Park) given during the sixth century C.E. The Buddha delivering a sermon to five Bhikkhus is engraved on a column; the wheel symbolizes the event of the Buddha raising his voice in a “lion roar” to give Dhamma for the sake of many.



Shakyamuni Buddha with the gesture of turning the Dharma wheel
(*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana Mudrā*)

Thanks to the skill of great sculptural artists, this statue shows the strong will and strength of a great master. It is linked with ten perfections (*pāramitā*) with the appearance of morbidity, compassion, and fineness. The sculptor of this masterwork has caught the very minute when the Buddha, who just reached enlightenment after six years of doing ascetic practice, felt compassion toward all suffering beings and decided to preach the Four Noble Truths (*Chatur- Aryasatyani*) (the Buddha discovered the inherent truth) to the five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña.

The essential points of the sculpture are that it shows the Buddha's first sermon, after which the establishment of sangha became deathless in the form of unique sculptural art showing the serenity of the Sākyamuni Buddha sitting on a diamond pedestal

(*Vajraparyankasana*) to give the sermon to five former colleagues. The five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña are carved on the base, with the Dhamma Wheel lying between two deer. This well-known statue is worthy to be called yet another a masterpiece, not only for India but also for the world at large. It is truly sculptural art worthy of all humanity.

D. THE TRIMURTI GALLERY

The Trimurti (Triple Secrets) gallery contains several Brahmin images, such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva, along with crockery and stucco pots. The goddess Mārīchī's horse rider is drawn as the seven boars with the statues of Uchchhusma Jambhale, Prajñā-Vasudhārā, Agni, Karttikeya, and Brahma Chaturmukha, as well as pottery vessels, inscriptions, antiquities, and ancient house utilities that are presented there.

E. THE ASHUTOSH GALLERY

In the southernmost reaches of the museum, the Ashutosh gallery exhibits Brahmanical deities like Shiva in different forms, as well as Vishnu, Ganesh, Kartikeya, Agni, Parvati, Navagrahas, and Bhairava, plus a colossal statue of Andhakasuravadha (killing the demon Andhaka) by Shiva.

F & G: THE VASTUMANDANA AND SHILPARATNA GALLERY

Situated on two verandas, the Vastumandana and Shilparatna gallery exhibits mostly a variety of architectural antiques that have been excavated at

Sārnātha. There is a large, beautiful lintel depicting the story of the Patience Boddhisattva (*Kshantivadi*) in the Jātaka Nikaya.

5. THE VALUE OF ANTIQUITIES AT SĀRNĀTHA

In addition to their artistry and beauty, many finds at *Sārnātha* are also valuable from an iconographic point of view. Given the images and other sculptural relics at this place, we may come to know which idols were worshipped by the different sects of India in various ages, as well as the changes made in this respect by one sect under the influence of another sect. Buddhistic, Hindu, and Jain idols, by their strange association with one another, have given rise to a number of new theories. These await the final verdict at the hands of experts.

From the relics of sculpture found at *Sārnātha*, many new things about Indian mythology have come to light. Scenes from the Buddhistic Jātaka stories are engraved on many of the stone tablets. These finds are also highly valuable from a historical as well as an antiquarian point of view. Judging by the peculiarity of some of the figures, the dates of the inscriptions attached to them have been ascertained. From the nature of the stone used in some of the statues, it has been ascertained that artists living in various parts of ancient India largely borrowed ideas and techniques from one another. One particular inscription found at this place has demolished the erroneous idea that before the time of King *Aśoka* no images at all were made in India. Judging by the style of some of the

stupas, it has been ascertained that the architects who worked here had a connection with the architects of Ceylon. Hence, the museum and the relics of *Sārnātha* are all extremely valuable to historians as well as to antiquarians. Indeed, the museum is as essential to them as a laboratory is to a student of science. A chronological account of the articles discovered at *Sārnātha* and the relics collected in its museum is thus given below.



An ornamental umbrella

6. THE ANTIQUITIES IN MAURYA

The lion-pillar of King *Aśoka* is the best and most ancient of all the relics that have been discovered at *Sārnātha* to date. Nine monolithic pillars of that king were previously found in various places in India. Native as well as foreign art-critics have been vociferous in praising their beauty and workmanship. At the top of the pillar, there stand the figures of four full-grown lions. Their eyeballs were originally made of precious stones; although they were taken away later, there is enough evidence to show that they existed at one time.

These figures look so real and so natural that whoever sees them cannot but praise their makers. Under the feet of the lions are four wheels. Between each pair of wheels are the figures of an elephant, a bull, a horse, and a lion. The wheels seem to symbolize Buddhism.

This pillar bears three inscriptions. Besides this pillar, other relics of the Maurya age have been discovered at *Sārnātha*. From the inscription of *Kumāradevī*, we know that she repaired the *Dharmarājikā* stupa, meaning the image of the Buddha made at the time of King *Aśoka*.

Another relic of the Maurya age is a stone railing, mentioned in earlier chapters. It was discovered in a brick-built chamber. Its outstanding feature is that it was made of a single piece of sandstone. Its polish and make are as perfect as the railings at Sañchī and Bharhut. It also has crossbars like those at the above places. Thereon are small inscriptions giving the names of the subscribers. From an inscription incised in the Brahmi script, we know that it was in large part the gift of a nun named Sabahikā.

Interestingly, the railing and crossbars do not appear new to those who often view the old Buddhist relics at Muttra and other places. However, this railing is in fact the oldest of all the railings throughout India. It was made during the reign of King *Aśoka* for the protection of his pillar. No other railing has been proved to have been made during that king's time.

7. ANCIENT RELICS BELONGING TO THE SUNGA PERIOD

An ornamental stone pillar belonging to the Sunga age, which followed the Maurya age, has attracted special attention from foreign visitors. This capital (catalog No. D.9. 4.) was found in the northwestern corner of the main shrine. It is flat and is engraved on both sides. On one side, a horse rider is driving his horse very fast. The gesture of the horse, the inclination of the rider, and the expression on his face are special, showing lofty and flexible features. The figures are incised according to the style of art prevailing in ancient India, and still the whole thing looks as natural as possible. On the other side of the flat pillar, two men are represented as riding an elephant. The elephant driver holds the bridle slightly in front of the elephant. Behind him, a man sits holding a flag.

How the elephant walks slowly, raises his head, and lifts its trunk to touch the bridle; how the rider's gestures seem true to life; and how the flag streams in the air all the while - all these are very skillfully represented.

Besides the capital, some railing posts in this age also deserve mention. The railings (No. D. 1-12) were found by Sir John Marshall northeast of the main

shrine. Buddhist symbols in a variety of artistic designs are also incised on almost all of them. Several bear an image of the Bodhi tree decorated with garlands and of the Triple Gems symbol, the Dhamma Wheel, and the umbrella. The representation on the pillar (No. D. (a) 6) has many interesting points. Figures of half-men and half-demons, the ear of the elephant, the tail of the fish, flowers, a lion's head all are the special features on these pillars. On the whole, the engravings on all the pillars are precise, natural-looking, and most attractive to the gaze of visitors.

Another relic of the Sunga age is a man's head made of stone [B 1]. It is broken into two parts. The right ear on this head is also broken, as is the left ear. According to the local style, there is a tuft of hair made into a braid on the crown of the head. The remaining portion of the head has no hair. It was found by Mr. Oertel near the main shrine.

8. ANCIENT RELICS BELONGING TO THE KUSHĀN PERIOD

The Sunga age was followed by the Kushān age. Some relics in this latter age were also discovered at *Sārnātha*. All of them are Buddhist images. There was a red brick statue of Boddhisattva, made in Mathurā; there was also a similar image that was an offering by Bhikkhu Bala.

The image of Boddhisattva stands about 9 feet 5 inches in height. One of its hands is broken. It seems that it was raised according to the posture (*mudrā*) of fearlessness (*Abhaya Mudrā*). On the raised palm, a wheel was engraved along with marks of svastika on

the fingers. These are the signs of a saint. They indicated that Boddhisattva was the way of Enlightenment. Its left hand is slightly curved and placed on the middle of the body. The Boddhisattva's body was covered by a garment engraved in stone, although it looks like silky and soft cloths.



Shakyamuni Buddha meditating (*Dhyāna Mudrā*)

The folds of this garment show how careful the sculptor must have been to keep the naturalism of the image. Europeans often believed that only Greeks could construct such images. However, ancient Indians also accomplished this. On the waist of the image is a wire that holds the under-robe. Between its two legs, there is a lion image. Dr. Vogel is of the opinion that it is a symbol of *Sākyasimha* (the roar of a lion): one of the titles of the Buddha. There was a very large umbrella over this image, which is now broken. Its fragments, ten in number, were collected together and kept in the museum. In the middle of the umbrella, a lotus was incised. Around this lotus, there are some circles. In each circle are incised figures of animals, Triple Gems, several fish, a conch, a svastika, and many other related things.

Another image from the Kushān age should also be mentioned here. It is an image (No. B (a) 3) of Bodhisattva in a standing posture and wearing a simple robe. Along with its pedestal, it is about 10.5 feet in height. Its head is broken. Its left hand does not rest on the waist but hangs along the thigh. In this image, we notice that makers gradually mislaid the minutely sculpturing dresses. Because of this, ever since the Gupta period this type of sculpturing was rejected.

Besides this image, there is another relic, a broken part of a halo (No B (a) 4) that is held to belong to the Kushān age. A Bodhi tree is carved on it. It seems that it is a portion of the Gautama Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree after his enlightenment. Judging by the red of the stone halo, Mr. Sahani believes that it was made by sculptors in Mathurā.

Many other relics of the Kushān age can be seen in the museum at *Sārnātha*.

9. ANCIENT RELICS BELONGING TO THE GUPTA PERIOD

The Gupta period was the golden one in the iconography. Many images created in that era have been excavated at *Sārnātha*. Their numbers, sizes, and figures show endless variety and exquisite workmanship. The images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva of this age exhibit the difference between postures (*Mudrās*) and white halos (*Asanas*). Various signs of the Bodhisattva were also shown in these images. Some cognate images were presented at the museum. Below are introduced several particular statues:

According to artistic points of view, the Buddha statue in the Gupta period has great value. Dr. Vogel said that its wonderful expression, calm repose, and mild serenity show a beautiful rendering of Buddhist spirituality. Although in these images we notice complexity of sculpture in place of the simplicity of the Kushān age, the artifacts still have artistic value. For example, the representation of leaves and creepers and other ornamental articles of living decoration never gives proof of rusticity. On the contrary, these things show refinement of taste. The images of this age are smaller than those of the Kushān age, and are also more natural and expressive of loftier ideas. Their faces never seem to be the Mongolian type, unlike those of the Kushān age. Buddhism also flourished in the Gupta period. The images dating to this age bear traces of this fact. In that age, the worship of the Bodhisattva attained

its highest development. This is likely why there are various images of *Avalokiteśvara* at *Sārnātha*.

Below are accounts of the most important images at *Sārnātha*:

B (b) 1: This shows an image of the Buddha in standing posture. Its legs and left hand are broken. Of the three *Chiraras*, meaning the peculiar robes of a *Bhikshu*, there is *AnTārā vataka* in the lower part and *saṃghati* in the upper part. The lower garment is held fast by means of a belt. Its right hand is uplifted, which shows that it stands in the posture of fearlessness (*Abhaya Mudrā*). Its wavy hair is turned toward the right. There is no sign of *Urnā* on its head. A halo behind its head indicates that it belongs to the Gupta period. At the end of its halo, there are crescent-shaped sculptural designs. There is a similar image of the Buddha in the museum in Calcutta. In describing it, Mr. Anderson has written that it shows detachment (*Āshiva Mudrā*) instead of fearlessness (*Abhaya Mudrā*).

B (b) 23: This is a standing image of the Buddha without the head or the right hand. Its left hand is placed in the *Varada-mudrā*. There is a small figure at the foot of this that may be the figure of the donor of the image.

B (b) 172: The Buddha image seated in *Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*. In Buddhist sculpture, this *Mudrā* symbolizes the Buddha's conquest over *Mārā* and his enlightenment at *Gaya*. As it is mostly broken, it may be assessed only for its sculptural beauty. Judging by its photo, by Major Kittoe, it seems to have been intact when found. Its pedestal is like the *Bodhimanda* (*Bodhgaya*). On the Buddha robe, both the above robe (*AnTārā vātaka*) and the below cloth (*Samghāji*) were

incised skillfully and naturally. There is also a round halo on the head of the image. Leaves of the Bodhi tree were incised in a lively style. On the right side of the Buddha statue, there stood *Mārā* handing the bow and the arrow. A daughter of hers stood on the left side, and from all sides of the image there were figures of the followers of *Mārā* represented as being ready to kill the Buddha. Below the right hand of the Buddha statue, there was the bust of a woman. It was the image of the Earth God (*Vasundharā*) who appeared before the Buddha to admire the Buddha's superhuman power. In the middle of the pedestal, there was the figure of a female *Mārā* with disheveled hair, representing her running away after the Buddha victory.

B (b) 173: This is almost similar to the image described above. It differs from it only in minor details. On its pedestal, there is a lion figure that symbolizes the Uruvelva forest, the place of the attainment of *Sambodhi*. On the left side, there are the figures of *Mārā* and his daughter. On the foot of the Buddha, there are two chakras, which are signs of Dhamma. On the pedestal, there is the inscription of Kumāra Gupta II.

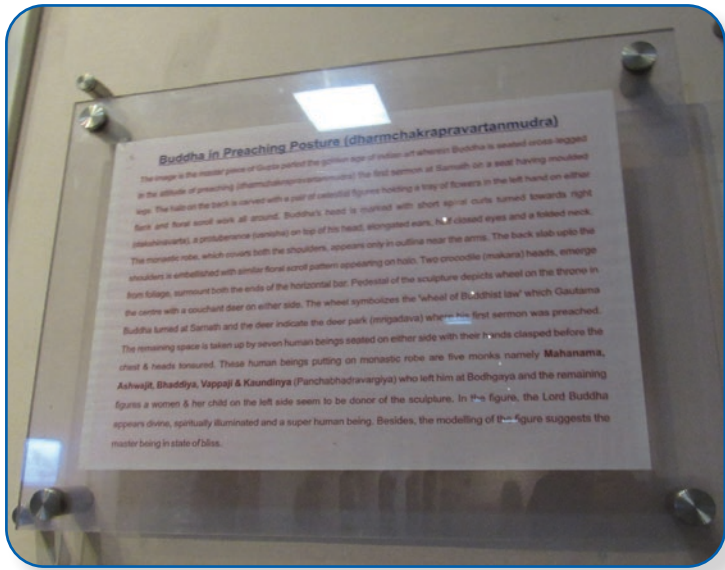
B (b) 181: The figure of the Buddha sitting in the *Dharma Cakra Mudrā* posture. This is probably the best of all the images of the Gupta age displayed in *Sārnātha*. It was found and excavated by Mr. Oertel. The representations of deer and the five brothers *Añña Koṇḍañña* symbolize *Sārnātha*, the place where the Buddha turned the Dhamma Wheel. The wheel image means, of course, the Dhamma Wheel. The symbol of *Dharma-chakra-pravartana* is held to be appreciated and admired by sculptors, and it is often presented in

artistic works. The Mudrā was not unknown even in far-off Gandhāra.

Dr. Vogel is of the opinion that the Mudrā of Gandhāra had no similarity with that of *Sārnātha* but instead was like that of *Śravastī*. Actually, in Gandhāra there are a number of Buddha images to be found turning the Wheel of Law. No authority has yet proven that the image at *Sārnātha* was made at a later date than the model of those images found in Gandhāra.



Shakyamuni Buddha with the gesture of turning the Dharma Wheel
(*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana Mudrā*) in the museum



By contrast, Dr. Spooner showed that the statues of the deer and other objects or persons were more peculiar than the statues at *Sārnātha*. *There was evidence to show that such images were also made in Bengal. This image was and still is typical of its kind. It is 5 feet 3 inches in height, and all parts are intact. Both its hands are placed near the chest. Its legs are placed in Yogasana. It is represented as wearing a very fine cloth. The hair on the head is turned brushed the right side. The eyes are fixed on the ground, as if in meditation. The entire image sits over a beautifully sculptured lotus. In the middle of the pedestal, there is the wheel in motion.*

On both sides there are two recumbent deer and seven human figures kneeling down side by side. Among these are the Panchavargiya Rishis, with shaven heads. The remaining two may be the figures of the donors of the image; note the aureole behind its

head. Above the halo and on both sides are two divine figures flying on wings.

Below it on both sides of the Buddha are two dragons shaped like lions. Those who say that dragons were unknown in ancient India should carefully note these two figures. This statue is very nice-looking and natural, and it is said that it is the model artistic product of Sārnātha. On the head, the halo is devoid of a multiplicity of lines like in sculptures from Vietnam, but it is still very artistic. The figures of the dragons are indicative of heroism. No figure of the dragon throughout Europe is better fashioned than this. The posture of the image of the Buddha is so natural that anyone viewing it can believe that nowhere is there a more wonderful manifestation of a living Buddha. Even the cords of the throat are beautifully shown. The expression of the face is so calm and so profound that it is beyond the power of language to describe it. Mr. Havell was charmed at the sight of this image and spoke highly of it.

B (b) 186: The two face-statue: the Buddha is seated in *Dharma-chakra Mudrā* while on either side there is an image of Bodhisattva. Both its legs are broken. On the side of the halo, there are two divine figures represented as flying on the wing with garlands in their hands. This image seems to be older than the previous one, as it shows fewer details and is less skillful. Most of the images from the Gupta age were made of red sandstone.

B (d) 1: The image of Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara* standing on a lotus has no right hand. The broken parts have been restored. The image of the left hand

holds a lotus. The right hand is placed in *Varada Mudrā*, which is very characteristic of *Avalokiteśvara*. The upper part of the image is uncovered. The lower garment is fastened to the waist by means of an ornamented belt. A sacred thread is shown, like the kind that Hindus used to hang on their breasts. Its hair is tied like the matted locks of a yogi (“the practitioner exercises *yoya*”). In front of this braid of hair, there is the figure of the *Dhyani Amitābha* Buddha, which is the characteristic feature of *Avalokiteśvara*. At the feet of *Avalokiteśvara* and below the right hands are two figures of spirits who received the blessing of sweet water from benevolent *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva.

B (d) 2: The figure of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva with a small *Shakyamuni* Buddha image on the head. The iconography holds a lotus unsevered from its stalk in its left hand. Its right hand is also placed in the pose of *giving conduct (Varada) Mudrā*.

B (d) 6: The statue of *Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī*, the god of wisdom. The head of the statue was found separated from the body. It has no right hand; perhaps it was placed in the pose of *giving conduct (Varada) Mudrā*. The left hand holds a lotus with a stalk. On the head of the image is seen the figure of the *Dhyani Akshyobhya Buddha*, a peculiar feature of *Mañjuśrī*. According to the dhyana of *Mañjuśrī*, there have been the attendant iconographies of *Sudhanakumāra* and *Jamāri*, respectively, seen on the right and left sides of the image. But on the right side of it there is the image of *Bhrikuti Tārā* and on the left that of *Mrityuvanchana Tārā*. Behind this image, there is incised the Buddhist mantra.

Following the Gupta period, Buddhism in India underwent a rapid decline. The Buddhists in that time started to also worship many Hindu gods and goddesses. From that era began what is technically called Guhya (secret sect) dharma terms of *Mantrayāna*, *Kālachakra-yāna*, *Vajrayāna*, and others that were specially mentioned. Since then, besides the Buddhist iconographies - for example, the Buddhas with various gestures such as preaching (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana Mudrā*), meditation (*Dhyāna Mudrā*), giving conduct (*Varada Mudrā*), touching earth (*Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*), the fearless (*Abhaya Mudrā*), as well as two Bodhisattvas, *Avalokiteśvara* and *Maitreya*, and so on - the Buddhist followers also started to worship a number of new gods and goddesses, some of them having truly hideous looks. Several such images may be seen at *Sārṇātha*.

There are also a large number of Buddha images represented as turning the wheel of Law in motion (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana Mudrā*) with the series number as No [B (c) 1, B (c) 35, 38, 40, 42, 46, 57, 59, 61].

B (c) 1: The lower portion of an image of the Buddha seated in *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana Mudrā*. In the cross-legged posture of the image, only the two feet and the pedestal may be seen. The other parts of it have been broken. Still, the pedestal is very beautiful to look at. No other image at *Sārṇātha* has such a pedestal. At the head of the pedestal, there is the famous inscription of King Mahīpāla. In the lower part of it is the Buddhistic mantra.

The middle portion is divided into seven parts, each with a figure in it. In the center, there is the *Dharma-chakra* with two deer lying on either side of it. On each side of the deer, there is a lion. By the side of the lions are two short human figures holding the Buddha's seat. These figures seem to be those of *Mārā* and his daughter.



A standing Bodhisattva

B (c) 2: The image of the Buddha seated in *Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*. This image is like the kind described before. It is most beautiful to look at and it could possibly be the best of its kind. The upper part of the lion seat of the image is decorated with ornamental work. On each side of the shoulders of the image is a divine figure sitting with a garland in its hand. Its halo is not semicircular but of a somewhat segmented shape.

B (c) 43: The image of the Buddha seated in European fashion. The image has no head. Its hands and legs are broken. On the right side of it, the Bodhisattva Maitreya stands holding a chowri and a pot of nectar in the hand; and on its left side, there is the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara* holding in its hand a lotus and a chowri. At the foot of the image, there are the figures of the *Pancha Añña Koṇḍañña* and the donor.

B (d) 8: The image of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara* sitting in the giving gesture (*Padma asana, lalitasana or Vajra asana*). Its right hand is placed on the left knee in *Varada Mudrā*. In the left hand, there is a lotus and it is also placed on the knee. It wears a number of ornaments such as a necklace, a thin necklace resembling the holy thread, and another ornament below the navel. There is also the figure of *Amitābha* Buddha on its forehead. The halo of this image is made in *Māgadhi* style like that of image No. B (c) 2. On the right side of the halo is a small image of the Buddha represented in *Varada Mudrā*. The detail in the image is admirable. On its pedestal the Buddhist formula is inscribed in a script of the ninth century.

B (b) 17: The image of *Avalokiteśvara* sitting on a lotus with its hand placed in *Varada Mudrā*. Above it, there are the five Dhyāni Buddhas, the center being occupied by *Amitābha* Buddha. *Tārā* stands on the right side of the image. Below it, there is the attendant Sudhana Kumār with its hands folded. On its left side, there is the divine Bhrikuti, below which the heavenly Hayagriva may be seen. On the pointed ends of the pedestal are images of men and women kneeling next to Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara*. This image can be regarded as a supplement of image No. B (1) 1.

B (d) 20: The image of Bodhisattva. On its head is an ancient turban in a cone shape. It holds a Vajra *trident* in the right hand and a Vajra ghantā item in the left hand. The halo of this image resembles that of the Magadhi style. On its forehead, the Dhyāni Akshyobhya Buddha is placed in the touching-earth pose (*Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*). In Tibet such images are called Bodhisattva Vajra-sattva.

B (f) 2: The image of the female *Tārā* in a standing posture. This image has no forearm. Its nose and ears are broken. The right hand seems to have been raised in the giving-conduct pose (*Varada Mudrā*). There was once a blue lotus in her left hand. The greater part of the stalk may still be seen. The upper part of the image is without any cover, while its lower part is covered with a garment. An idea of the ornaments used in those days may be had from the ornaments in this image. It has a girdle around the waist. On its head, there is a crown bedecked with gems and jewels in which there is an image of the *Amoghasiddhi Dhyani Buddha*.



A well-engraved slab

On its right side, there is the image of the divine *Mārīchī* with *Vajra trident* on the breast and the pretty “undefilement flower” on the left hand. On its left side is the figure of *Ekajatā*, but with mutilated hands and a large belly. The figures of two attendants on both sides of the principal image are peculiar features of the images of *Mañjuśrī* and other Bodhisattvas of the Gupta age. This peculiarity may also be noticed in the *Viśhnu* images. Hence, it is clear that there was a gradual development of this subject in iconography. The features of this image are strictly in accordance with the practices (*Sādhanā*) of Buddhists.

B (f) 7: The image of *Tārā* sitting in *Lalitasana*. *Tārā* is a goddess of the *Mahayāna* sect and is the sole energy of the Bodhisattva *Padmapāni*. This image has some peculiar features. The background contains figures of men, creepers, and leaves. It has very few ornaments. Below the principal image there is an image of a votary in a kneeling posture.

B (f) 8: The image of Vajra *Tārā* has eight hands and four heads. All the left hands are broken. Only parts of the right hands still exist. It has three eyes. On its clotted hair there are two figures of *Akshyobhya Buddha* - one of *Amitābha* and another of *Amogha Siddhi Buddha* sitting in the fearless gesture (*Abhaya Mudrā*). Beautiful ornaments decorate its neck and hand.

B (f) 19: The image of Vasundharā without a head is broken in various places. Its right hand is placed in the giving-conduct gesture (*Varada Mudrā*), while its left hand holds jars of threshed unmilled rice (called “paddy”). Another feature of this image is that there are two gem-pots beneath its feet. According to the artistic rule (*Sādhanā*) for this image, the pot should be in its left hand. On either side of the principal image, there are two images of diminutive deities. There are both jars of rice and pots in the hands of these images. It somewhat resembles the image of *Tārā* (No. B (f) 2).

B (f) 23: The image of the goddess *Mārīchī* (who protects passengers with safety from accidents) has three heads and six hands. The central head is bigger than the others. The head on the felt side resembles that of a dog. There are signs of Vajra on the uplifted hand on the right side. The second hand on this side holds an arrow, and the third a hook. It seems that the first hand on the left side once held a pretty “undefilement flower”; the second hand holds a bow; and the third hand is placed on the breast in *Tarjanīdhara Mudrā*. Images of *Mārīchī* discovered elsewhere have eight hands, but this image has only six. It is thought, however, that originally this deity in fact had intentionally only six hands and was given

two additional hands afterward. Hence it may be said that this image is the most ancient of its kind. On its head is the image of the Buddha Vairochana, which is one of its features according to the practice (*Sādhanā*) of Buddhism. On its pedestal, seven small hogs stand side by side. These are the carriers of the chariot of *Mārīchī*. In the middle, there is a female figure that seems to be the image of the charioteer. The pedestal also bears a small inscription, too indistinct to be deciphered.

In addition to this image, a number of images of the goddess *Mārīchī* were discovered elsewhere, in Bengal and in Magadha. Many such images of different sizes may be seen in the museums of Calcutta and Lucknow as well as at the Vārendra Research Society at Rājshāh. The photo of the image in the Calcutta Museum may be seen in M. Foucher's book on iconography. This image and the others found in Mayurbhanja are finer than those of *Sārnātha* and are the oldest of their kind. Many scholars have attempted to show a relation between the *Mārīchī* image and that of the Sun God, with seven horses driven below the image of the sun by the divine Aruna. Below the figures, seven hogs are represented as being driven by a female charioteer.

Dr. Vogel wrongly supposed the seven horses to be the allegorical representation of seven days, so he gave to *Mārīchī* the name of Ushā. According to Bhattacharya, the seven horses actually symbolize the seven colors of the rays of the Sun God. The name *Mārīchī* is evidently derived from the term "Marichi." Hence it seems only natural that this image is the symbol of the energy of the Sun God.

Moreover, the seven hogs of *Mārīchī* pierce the darkness of night with their teeth and thus pave the way for the rise of the sun. *Mārīchī* is considered divine *Vārāhī* in Hinduism. *Vārāha* is the name of a god *avatāra* or the incarnation of Viśhnu. His energy is called *Vārāhī*. There is ample testimony in the Vedic literature to show that the Sun God is under a form of Viśhnu. Hence it seems that the nature of *Mārīchī* or *Vārāhī* is rather complex and mysterious. Mr. Vasu saw *Mārīchī* worshipped under the name of *Chandī* in some places in Mayurbhanja. Everyone knows that Chandāmsu is one name of the Sun God. The two images of *Vārāhī* discovered by him in Mayurbhaja are fully in accordance with the *Dyāna* of Mantra-mabodadhi. In Tibet, *Vajravārāhī* is still worshipped under the name “Radorje phagmo.”

The Tibetan image resembles the image of the Hindu goddess *Tārā*, or *Kālī*. A garland of heads hangs around its neck. The human figure of *Mahādeva* lies beneath its feet. On both sides, there are *Dākinis* and *Yoginis*. The mouth resembles that of a hog. Moreover, the deity *Mārīchī* is worshipped in Tibet under the name of *Odser-chonmo*. This figure is seated on a chariot. It has six hands and three heads and it has hogs for its vehicles.

B (h) 1: The image of Śiva with ten hands is the tallest one at *Sārṇātha*, its height being 12 feet. It is represented as piercing an Asura with the trident, which it holds using two of its right hands. The four other hands on the right side hold, respectively, a sword, an arrow, a drum, and some unknown thing. Its left hands hold a mace, a shield, a pot, and a bow (*pināka*). The right hand of the Asura holds a sword, while the left hand is broken.

On display are many Asura statues and a bull. At first sight the image appears to be that of *Hanumā* or *Mahāvīra*. Such an image can be seen in the *Mahāvīra of Hanumā-nadharā* in *Chitrakūta*. The *Mahāvīra* or *Hanumā* is under the form of Śiva. Hence there is some similarity between the two figures. Besides the statues described above, another kind of ancient sculptural relic was found at *Sārnātha*. Each was sculpted on a single stone slab and designed to describe the life of the Buddha. Some reliefs represent the particular stories of the Buddha's Former Births (Jātaka Nikāya). According to Dr. Vogel, they originated in Gandhāra. The quantity of them was reduced following the decline of Buddhism. This is the reason that few reliefs were seen in *Mathurā* and *Sārnātha*. There is a series number marked on each kind. For example, the well-carved sculptures with nos. 127, 369, 1241, and 1242 all represent the birth of the Buddha. The slabs with nos. 138, 251, 350, and 147 depict the dream of *Māyā*. Other slabs describe the great renunciation (*Mahā-niskramana*) of the prince Siddhārtha. A close examination of these fine slabs indicates that they all bear testimony to an advanced stage of sculptural art.

Therefore, it could be concluded that they were created at a later date than those of *Mathurā* and *Sārnātha*. Dr. Vogel asserted, without advancing any proof, that all these slabs found at *Sārnātha* actually belonged to the Gupta period. We, however, cannot accept his views on this point. In the slabs of *Mathurā*, we notice the so-called Greek influence, whereas those at *Sārnātha* bear no trace of such influence. In the slabs found at Sañchī, we notice the representation on the Buddhist stone reliefs of

an important period of Buddhist life. They could in fact have been incised before the beginning of the Christian era, and their style seems to be the oldest in point of time. Their peculiar feature is that there is no division of scenes in the reliefs of Gandhāra. By contrast, both these features are noticeable in the *Sārnātha* slabs.

We now proceed to give a brief account of the important slabs found at *Sārnātha*.

C (a) 1: This slab is long in shape with a stupa on its head. It is divided into four parts, which were well-engraved to illustrate the four essential parts in the life of the Buddha.

In the lowest part, the important scene of the Buddha's birthday (*Lumbini*) has been sculptured. In the Lumbini garden near *Kapilāvastu*, *Māyā Devi*, the mother of the Buddha, plucks sala flowers with her right hand while Gautama himself issues from her right side. The divine *Brahmā* then bathes the child. The image of *Brahmā* is rather indistinct. On the left side of *Māyā Devi* stands her sister *Prajāpatī*. The *Nāga* kings Nanda and Upananda hold a water jar above the child's head. This slab is not so valuable in terms of its sculptural design. Various slabs of this kind have been found at Gandhāra, Mathurā, and other places. When all these slabs are compared, two important things become quite clear, the first being that slabs at Mathurā and Gandhāra indicate a more advanced stage in the development of sculpture, and the second that the representations in the *Gandhāra* slabs are more elaborate than those found at *Sārnātha*. For instance, in the *Gandhāra* sculpture, there are two figures of the newly born Gautama and of his supreme position in the world.

From these two facts, it may be clearly conjectured that the *Sārnātha* representation is comparatively early in the evolution of such sculptures. This slab is described as belonging to the Gupta age.

Three other important scenes were also engraved on the slab, showing Gautama Boddhisatta enlightening sambodhi under the Bodhi tree (*Bodhgaya*), Turning of the wheel of the Law (*Sārnātha*), and entering the *Pari-nibbāna* (*Kusinagar*).



On this Gupta-age slab are depicted the eight essential parts in the life of the Buddha

The Enlightenment scene is described vividly, as follows: The Buddha is sitting in the touching-earth posture of (*Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*) at the Bodhi tree. On his right hand is Lord *Mārā* holding a bow and an arrow, followed by a number of the *Mārā*'s citizens. Furthermore, we see a figure of *Mārā* as vanquished by the Buddha. On the left of the main figure, two daughters of *Mārā* are standing to tempt the Buddha.

In the Dharma Chakra scene, the Buddha is preaching in the middle, seated in the *Dharma Chakra* posture. On his right is the Bodhisattva Maitreya holding a rosary and a fly-whisk. On the left stands the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the posture of giving conduct (*Varada Mudrā*). At the corners of this slab, one notices two flying deities with garlands. It is remarkable, in this connection, that both figures are endowed with two wings. This act of giving deities wings was never used in any Indian artistic school except in that of *Gandhāra*.

This also points to a familiar close relationship between the artists of Sārnātha and Gandhāra. At both these art schools, the fine feet of the slabs, the iconographies of deer, the Dhamma wheels, the five brothers of Añña Koṇḍañña, and the donors are typically illustrated. In the uppermost panel of the slab, we find the view of the Pari-nibbāna, or the Great Decease of the Buddha. The Buddha is lying on a long couch with swollen feet, in front of which the mourning five ascetics may be seen. With the Kamandalu placed on a trident by his side, Subhadra, the last layman disciple of the Buddha and a native of Kusinagar, sits with his back turned in the posture of Padmāsana. At the feet

of the Buddha is the figure of the leading Bhikkhus *Mahākāśyapa* and *Upavāna* with a fan near the Buddha. Behind the golden Dharma body (*dharma-kāyā*) of the Buddha, five more Bhikkhus in mourning may be seen.

C (a) 3: This engraved slab is divided into eight panels. In the lowest line on the left is the scene of Buddha's birth; on the right is his enlightenment. At the uppermost line, the left corner shows the *Dharma-chakra* scene; the right one is the *Pari-nibbāna* scene. Now, the middle two lines require some research. Of these, the upper line at the left corner depicts Buddha's descent to the saha world (*Samkasya*) from *Trayastrimśa* heaven, showing the Buddha standing in the giving-conduct gesture (*Varada Mudrā*), between *Indra* holding an umbrella and *Brahmā* keeping a pedestal.

At the right is a scene of the Buddha manifesting the superpower at *Śravastī*. To convert the Brahmins, the Buddha manifested many bodies preaching simultaneously at different places. At the feet of the main figure, a devout follower is kneeling; at the other side is King *Prasenajit* of *Śravastī*, admiring without blinking at the miracle of the Great Teacher. Just below this line at the left corner, a monkey is offering honey to *Bodhisatta* (a former life of the Buddha) in the forest *Pārileyakavana*. The monkey with honey in hand is approaching the Buddha. The seated Buddha has also a pot ready to receive the honey. Just at the left, we find the two feet and the tail of the monkey. After making its offering, the monkey drops into a well, and because of its meritorious act, is blessedly received in its next birth as a human being.

The figure of a man with a sword at the left of Buddha is actually the figure of that very monkey in the next life. The right corner of this line shows us the miraculous incident of *Rājgriha*.

The story has it that a Brahmin once invited Buddha and his five hundred disciples to attend a rice offering. While he was walking there, Devadatta, the persecutor of Buddha, sent a drunk elephant called *Nālāgiri* to kill the Buddha. However, with Buddha-compassion, instead of killing him the elephant kneels down before him. At the left of the slab is the figure of Ānanda, his attendant.

C (a) 2: In this inscribed slab, four principal incidents of Buddha's life are depicted in three separate parts. The upper part is broken, but it certainly depicted another portion of the subject. In the lowest panel, the Queen-mother *Māyā* sees a dream in which the Buddha is descending from the Tusita in the shape of a white elephant. This is, in reality, *Māyā*'s conception. At the right corner of this portion, the scene of Buddha's birth is shown. This was described above. Just above this part, at the left is the scene of Buddha's Great Renunciation and at the right is that of his Enlightenment. In the Renunciation scene, he is leaving home on his horse named *Kanthaka*. In front of the horse is the figure of his groom *Chhandaka* shown shedding tears, who is taking the royal robe from his master. Behind the horse, the Bodhisattva is cutting his own hair with his sword. Moreover, we find a village girl, *Sujātā*, giving rice-pudding to Buddha, who looks like a walking skeleton because he had endured long

fasting. Next to it is a scene where Buddha is talking with *Kālika*, Lord of serpents. To the right of this is shown the Buddha in a state of meditation under the shade of an umbrella. In the uppermost line, at the left corner, the Buddha is attaining Enlightenment in the posture of touching earth (*Bhūmiśpara Mudrā*), and at the right there is the scene of *Dharma-chakra* at *Sārnātha*.

D (d): An engraved lintel measures 16 feet by 1 foot 10 inches. The door is made in the stone arch shape of the Gupta period. The design and the workmanship of the piece are exceptionally fine. The art exhibited here must attract great admiration from viewers. The lintel is divided into six parts. Starting from the left, the first part shows the Kuvera, the God of Wealth, who is holding in his right hand a Vijora and in his left hand a Balabhadra. In the sixth part, a similar figure of Kubera is noticeable. The second part shows an ornamental bell tower of a temple and a window pane into which three people are carved. From the second part to the fifth part, the story of the perfection of patience (*Kśhantivādi-pāramitā*) in Jātaka Nikāya (Stories of the Buddha's Previous Life) is narrated as follows:

At one time, there was a Bodhisattva forbearing physical afflictions who received the name *Kśhantivādi*. This hermit used to live alone in a beautiful forest, and pious people from all parts of the kingdom liked to come to him for his teaching. One day, the king of Banāres, named Kalāvu, traveled there for a pleasure party and asked some pretty female dancers to sing

and dance. While listening to the sweet music of the dancers, the king fell into a sleep. Meanwhile, the dancers were roaming the forest and came near the ascetic Bodhisattva. Being moved by his meditation, they prayed to receive his teachings. When the king awakened and found nobody by his side, he became terribly angry and began scolding *Kṣhantivādi* in all possible ways. The hermit *Kṣhantivādi* was unmoved.

Then the king, without listening to the pleas of his companions, mercilessly cut off one hand of *Kṣhantivādi* with his sword. Still, the Bodhisattva was unmoved. This wonderful fortitude of the Bodhisattva made the king's heart tremble, and he felt fear and remorse. But there was no time for either. The whole forest was suddenly ablaze, the earth trembled, and quickly enough the king was burned to ash.

On the second part of the slab, the dancing girls are depicted preventing the king from cutting off both of *Kṣhantivādi*'s hands. In the third part as well as in the fourth part, the musical girls are playing on Vina, a drum, and other instruments. In the fifth part, the Bodhisattva is shown preaching to the king and his dancing girls. The sixth part, as mentioned above, shows the figure of the precious divines (*Jambhala*).



The Buddha in the posture of meditation (*Dhyāna Mudrā*)

10. THE ANTIQUES IN THE ART OF THE MIDDLE AGES

At two Vastumandana and Shilpratna lobbies, there is an old sculpture shed enshrining a number of Jain and Hindu statues. None such building has been discovered in *Sārnātha*. They had originally been all preserved in Queens College and, according to the desires of Lord Curzon, they were brought to the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum. Among these sculptures now at *Sārnātha* are Hindu and Jain images dating to the medieval and Gupta periods. The Hindu statues comprise the figures of Śiva, Atamātrika, and Ganeśa. The Jain sculptures include the prominent figures of Ādinath, Shāntināth, Ajitanāth, Śreyāmsanath, and Mahāvīra, as well as many Hindu god images such as Saraswati, Ganesh, and Viśhu. In addition, there are many engraved slabs, broken capitals, small steeples, chaityas, and

inscribed stones heaped all around. There are earthen pots, jars, household utensils, and other objects that may be viewed with interest. Inscribed earthen seals and bricks of great antiquity are also displayed.

In short, the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum comprises a great many precious sculpture works, each with different and sometimes unique features, that were dug out from the earth where they had rested for about 1,500 years, since the third century B.C.E. and up to the twelfth century in the medieval period.

The relic that attracts most visitors' attention in this precious museum is King *Aśoka*'s pillar, with its four lions standing back to back: the national symbol of India today. The Buddha statue in *Dhamma-chakapa Mudrā*, along with other sculptures in the museum, recalls the vivid ancient images and the perfection of engraved sculpture seen throughout the museum's galleries. Dr. V. A. Smith concluded that:

“The history of Indian sculpture from King *Aśoka* to the dynasty of Mahommeda was able to prove exactly that it reached artistic perfection with the well-illustrated ancient antiques that can be seen only in *Sārnātha*.”

Indeed, the collected set of early relics on display throughout the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum continues to attract visitors, historians, and art scholars from around the world. Thanks to the museum's efforts, they can continue to admire the many types of wonderful ancient art displayed there.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7 describes and analyzes antiquities discovered over decades at the *Sārnātha* site that have since been preserved for researchers and the visiting public at the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum. Seven galleries may be visited: *Shakyasimha* (the roar of a lion), Triratna (Triple Gems), Tathāgata (a title of the Buddha), Trimurti (Triple Secrets), Ashutosh, Vastumandana, and Shilparatna. The history of Indian sculpture, dating from the age of King *Aśoka* to the Mahommeda dynasty, reached artistic perfection with the numerous, well-illustrated, and handsomely displayed antiques that can be seen only in the *Sārnātha* museum.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When and how was the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum established?
2. What are the most prized collections displayed in the *Shakyasimha* (the roar of a lion) gallery?
3. Explain the meaning of these postures: *Dhyāna*, *Varada*, *Bhūmiśpara*, and *Abhaya Mudrās*.
4. What are the eight important events in the Buddha's life, as depicted in the museum's many fine slabs?
5. Was it the Gupta period or another one that made the greatest artistic contribution to Buddhist art in *Sārnātha*? Why?



Ancient figurines of meditating

Notes

¹ *Archaeological Survey Report. Sārnātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 3.*

² B.C. Bhattacharya. *The History of Sārnātha or Cradle of Buddhism*, Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition, 1999, p. 81.

³ Akshaya Kumar Maitreya, C.I.E., says that Tantras keep the rule of building this Lepa. This issue is mentioned for a long time in Bengali. Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 15 on.

⁴ Bhattacharya. *The History of Sārnātha or Cradle of Buddhism*, Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition-1999, p. 85.

⁵ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS 1888-1925; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F.L. Woodward, *The Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols. 1995-1994 and 1993, London: PTS., vol. I, p. 226.

Āṅguta Tārā Nikāya, ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols., London: PTS, 1885-1900; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F.L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, London: PTS, rpt. 1955-1970. Vol. V, p. 323; A, vol. V, p. 33; A, vol. III, p. 345.

⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses), ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, London: PTS, 1890-1911; Tr. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *The Dialogue of the Buddha*, Motilal, 2000. Vol. III, p. 58; A, vol. III, p. 417.

⁷ *Archaeological Survey Report. Sāmātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 189.*

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS 1888--1925; ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, tr. by F.L. Woodward, *The Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols. 1995-1994 and 1993, London: PTS. Vol. I. P. 450.

⁹ *The Previous Lives of the Buddha. The Jātaka Nikāya*, ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993. P. 327.

¹⁰ The history is related to the Indian art school that began in the period of Maurya under the auspices of King *Aśoka*. The dynasty of Sunga-Satavahana continued to prove the higher development of the Buddhist art school on the large scope of the whole nation, which was well illustrated with great stupas at Harnut, Savehi, Pauni, *AMārā vati*, and Cognate in Vengi region. The Kushava Art in Mathurā and the Ikshvaku Art was created in the same time of Nāgārjuna Konda as well as the Gandhāra Art, which was mixed with the northern art. The statues of Buddha nad Boddhisattvas are expressed following the Buddhist ideas of Savastivandana, Mahasangika, and Mahāyāna.

The Gupta period has been called the perfect climax of previous trends in Indian art. Under the smart leaders of Gupta, the art reached a high level and efficiency, was natural to the fullest extent possible, and looked best of all. The gentle statues typically came from Mathurā, while the elegant ones were made in Amarvati; these two characteristics are thought to be unique in how they achieved the highest aesthetic level. That trend of combination has been successfully achieved between art and thought, between the objective forms (*sabda*) and the content (*artha*) and the outstanding accomplishment plays a role as encouraging the abstractive mind to be actual.

A comprehensive description of the angels or the Buddhas made to real human sizes has been established and distributed. The shape of these images connects with the fitness of human artists to display and develop the high-quality, supernatural enlightenment in which are depicted elements such as fullness of figures (Mahapurushlaakshanas), spiral hairs, long ears, slender hands, long arms to the knees, and so on. To the Lord turns the wheel in motion (Cakravarti), the great master and hermit (Mahasramana), the shape of the Buddha in Gupta has been established as a well-being of the vivid, elegant, and serenity manners. Unlike previous art, it was approached to outward relative to worldly objects; the Gupta art school was introverted, and the Buddhist icons had the aim of expressing the supernatural and the ultimate wisdom (Anut *Tārājīnana*) as being the highest purpose in life.

The Gupta art spread across northern India from the fourth to the sixth centuries C.E., with many well-known centers being established in both Mathurā and Sārnātha. While these two centers share common characteristics of Gupta art, each of them also has its own particular style. Sārnātha, for example, contains a lot of exposure works that are feature slender, skillful lines inspired by the gentle “Zen” taste of hundreds of statues. The most common statue is that of the Buddha preaching his first sermon (*Dharmachakra-pravartana*) in Sārnātha.

¹¹ “The detached monolithic pillars erected by *Aśoka* bear testimony to the perfection attained by the early stone cutters of India in the exercise of their craft.” V. A. Smith, in *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. II, p. 109.

¹² Anderson, *Archaeological Catalogue*, part I, Indian Museum, p. 9.

¹³ Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 198.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ *Middle Land, Middle Way: A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Buddha’s India*, Ven. S. Dhammajika, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, First edition 1992, second edition 1999. P.112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Sārnātha*, Catalogue, *Archaeological Survey Report*. Sārnātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 19.

¹⁸ The tachis originally came from Mongolia. The Kushāns were a branch of the Ynehchi.

¹⁹ According to Vinaya pitaka, the Bhikshus had to wear three chibaras, viz: Samghāti (a below cloth), Uttarāsanga (the ninth and the seventh robes), and AnTārārusaka (an above cloth). In Northern India, this yellow robe is called Kāshāya on account of its color. The word Chivaras is not a technical word of Vinaya pitaka. *Vinaya Pitaka* (The disciplines of Buddhist Store), ed. H. Oldenberg, vol. I, London, 1879. *Sārnātha-The Birth Place of Buddhism*, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Sārnātha Center, 2001. P. 54.

²⁰ Anderson, *Catalogue and bud-book of Archeological Collections in the Indian Museum*, Part II, p. VI, No. 8. P. 14.

²¹ Bhūmīśpara Mudrā (aurora): When the Buddha was about to reach enlightenment (Samyaka Sambodhi), *Mārā* said to him: “Who witnesses your enlightenment?” The Earth told the Buddha to touch hands to earth; at that immediate moment, he would appear ready to testify for the Buddha. Therefore, the Buddha touched the earth with his hands and since then, there has been the Bhūmīśpara Mudrā. Mudrā is also known as Vajrāsana and later in Buddhist literature it was called Sākshīmudrā. In the Bodhgaya, there are examples of the mudrā Buddha statue.

²² Dharma Cakra Mudrā: This is a posture that holds both hands in front of the chest, with a finger next to the thumb and the left thumb touching the left middle finger. Such mudrā is always seen in a sitting statue. This is an emblem of the Buddha setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel for the first time in Sārnātha. See fig. B (6) 181 in the chart. At the Śrāvastī City, the Buddha used his supernatural power to convert people; he also appeared in the same mudrā.

²³ *Sārnātha*, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 28.

²⁴ *Sārnātha Catalogue. Archaeological Survey Report. Sārnātha. 1903-1904, 1907-1909. P. 20.*

²⁵ *Handbook to the Sculpture in the Peshawar Museum*, by D. B. Spooner, 1910.

²⁶ Indian Sculpture and Painting, page 39 in *The Eternal City-Vārānasi*, Government of India Tourist Offices, Thomson Press, Faridabad. 2002.

²⁷ Varada Mudrā means the posture where the Buddha is standing, left hand on thigh and palm upside down

²⁸ There is a similar image of Padmapani found at *Sārnātha* and now in the Calcutta Museum. It also bears a belt on its waist, Fig. S. 37. Anderson, *Catalogue. Part II*

²⁹ Bhattacharya. *The History of Sārnātha or Cradle of Buddhism* (Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition-1999, p. 97) holds that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva gave the spirits Ghost the heavenly wine or nectar.

³⁰ Sahitya Parisad Museum displayed the image of Mañjuśrī with a sword and a lotus in its hand. No second image of this kind has as yet been found. See Banerjee, *Parisad Catalogue*, page 4, Image No. 16.

³¹ Dhyāna Mudrā means the meditation posture with both hands overturned and overlapped.

³² Abhaya Mudrā, or Gesture of Fearlessness: In this figure, the right hand is held upright, and the palm is facing outward. This mudrā is usually found in Kushān statues.

³³ Vajra asana or Lalitasana gesture: The legs are crossed at the ankles and the soles of the feet are showing.

³⁴ Rai Dayaram Sahni has referred to the “No. 19 image from Magadba,” which is displayed in the Calcutta Museum. No such image is known from that museum’s catalog.

³⁵ Mayurbhaja, *Archeological Survey*, p. xvii. Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 45.

³⁶ Bhattacharya. *The History of Sārnātha or Cradle of Buddhism*. Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition-1999, p. 181.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Abb. 131 and abb. 118. *Die Göttin Mārīchī. Grunwedel's Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet unter Mongolei*, pp. 145, 157. *Maha Bodhi Journal*, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta, 1922, 1926, 1929, 1933, and 1934. P. 241.

³⁹ See, for instance, Sculpture No. 787, Hand-book to the Peshwar Museum, by Dr. D. B. Spooner. *Catalogue of Sārnātha Archaeological Museum*. Tourist Department in Sārnātha. 1990. Many revised editions, 1995, 1999, and 2002. P. 44 on.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See Slab Nos. H. I and II. Mathurā Catalogue by Vogel. *Catalogue of Sārnātha Archaeological Museum*. Tourist Department in Sārnātha. 1990. Many revised editions, 1995, 1999, and 2002. P. 44 on.

⁴² See the picture of the relief from the east gateway at Sañchī.

⁴³ A. Granwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, p. 628.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-13. Compare Fids., Nos. 64, 65, 66. Vogel, Mathurā Catalogue, p. 30, vol. VI, No. H.1. 11. Sārnātha, V. S. Agrawala, *Archaeological Survey of India*, New Delhi, fifth edition, 1992. P. 39 on.

⁴⁵ *Sārnātha Catalogue*, pp. 184-85.

⁴⁶ Bhattacharaya, *The History of Sārnātha or Cradle of Buddhism*, Delhi: Pilgrims Revised Edition-1999, p. 111) says that they invited the Buddha to a dinner. This is not true, because he and his disciples never took dinner, since they always kept the precepts of the Bhikkhus.

⁴⁷ For the story of a hermit practicing the Kśhantivādi-pāramitā, see *The Jātaka Nikāya*, ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vols., Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993. Vol. III, pp. 39-44.

⁴⁸ V. A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, p. 148.

CHAPTER 8

MŪLAGANDHAKUTĪ VIHĀRA



The front side of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra

The Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, which belongs to the Maha Bodhi Society, was established by the Most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala. It was the first monastery among the many Buddhist temples at *Sārnātha*.



The beautiful architecture of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra

1. THE MOST VENERABLE ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA

As it is presented throughout this book, *Sārnātha* is the most sacred place in Buddhism because it is the place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon, *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana* (the Setting in Motion of the Dharma Wheel Suttā, or Promulgation of the Law Suttā), which began Buddhism's golden time.

The Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala decided to restore this sacred site on a visit during which he was shocked to find it in ruins. Therefore, he established the Maha Bodhi Society and, with its assistance, revived *Sārnātha*. He also persuaded the British authorities (who controlled India at that time) to help preserve and restore this

sacred Buddhist site. He decided to first set up the Mūlagandhakutī monastery, using the same name of Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra* (meaning Chamber of Fragrance of the Buddha). He also constructed some schools for local poor pupils, a library for Buddhist materials, rooms for pilgrims, and so on. He was every bit as successful in these constructions as he wished.

After Anagarika Dharmapala attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, in the United States, in 1893, he began preaching the Buddha-Dhamma. This helped spread his own name around the world, bringing support to help him conserve sacred Buddhist holy places throughout India. He also traveled to Europe to advance his purposes, and then spent the rest of his life sharing the Buddha-Dhamma with the world. He was a Buddhist pioneer who helped to revive Buddhism in India, and further he stimulated the patriotic ideology of Sri Lanka citizens whom the British also controlled.

One of his closest consultants, Manmatha Nath Chatterjee, praised Anagarika Dharmapala, stating that he was honest to work with, devoted half of one entire century to his work, and ultimately was successful in reviving Buddhism in India. His main objective was preserving, reviving, and developing the compassionate teachings of the Buddha in the land of its origin, India, in general and to bring back the glorious culture of *Sārnātha* in particular.

In his last days, he was ordained with the Dhamma title of Sri Devapriya Valisinha; he passed away in *Sārnātha* on April, 29, 1933. However, his great contributions to Buddhism are still alive even today and have enriched the history of Buddhism in India and throughout the world.

2. THE MAHA BODHI SOCIETY

The organization known as the Maha Bodhi Society is the first Buddhist institution founded by the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala, in 1891. The first aim of this society was to restore the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya (also called Buddha Gaya) after 800 forgotten years of its history. Its second aim was to keep both renunciates and Buddhist laypersons around the world in touch, so as to conserve the benefits all sects of Buddhism as well as to ensure their rights to religious freedom.

Based on the teachings of the Shakyamuni Buddha, therefore, Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society to establish a variety of programs serving educational, religious, and charity purposes on a large scale.

The Society has also continued to publish the oldest magazine in the Buddhist world, since 1892. Thanks to its success, today followers around the globe can learn about Buddhist activities and developments in India.

Many branches of the Maha Bodhi Society have been established in several countries. The headquarters is in Calcutta, while branches operate in Bodhgaya, *Sārnātha*, New Delhi, Lucknow, Śravastī, Buhaneswar, and Nowgar. Several foreign centers have been set up in Nepal, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong. The aim of these branches is to share the Buddha teachings as well as to bring convenience and accommodation for pilgrimages visiting the holy places in India. It also strives to deliver other humanitarian services for the sake of many people.



Entrance to the compound of the Maha Bodhi Society at *Sārṇātha*

3. MŪLAGANDHAKUTĪ MONASTERY

a. The Process of Building the Monastery

The Mūlagandhakutī monastery at *Sārṇātha* marks the glorious days of *Sārṇātha* and stands as the outstanding achievement of Anagarika Dhamapala, who ran this temple until his last days.

In 1922 the Maha Bodhi Society purchased 13 bighas at *Sārṇātha*. The Indian government agreed to offer a portion of the Buddha relics found there to the organization, provided that it built a spacious temple for worship. Before this event occurred, according to the devoted request of Anagarika Dhamapala himself, a Mrs. Foster offered 17,000 Rs for this monastery project. The money was deposited in a bank, but later the donation was increased to 30,000 Rs, which was eventually withdrawn to use for this cause. While the construction was proceeding, the Indian Archaeological Department requested authority

to extend its field at *Sārnātha*. After a good deal of trouble, the Maha Bodhi Society agreed to give it a small bit of land at the *Sārnātha* site. The governor of Uttar Pradesh, H. E. Sir Harcourt Butler, laid the foundation stone of this Mūlagandhakutī monastery on November 3, 1922.

Soon after, *Sārnātha* was indeed being revived. His Reverence K. Sirinivasa was the first chairman of the Maha Bodhi Society. He often traveled to Calcutta, headquarters of the Society, where he worked for 10 days, and on the remaining 20 days of the month he was back in *Sārnātha*. The master plan of Mūlagandhakutī was designed by the engineer Sir Khanna, who lived in *Banāres*, and by the chief engineer, Lala Hari Chand, who supervised construction until it was completely built.

While the project was going on, the Archeology Department forced it to stop. Dr. Rajah Hewavitarne went to Taxila to meet Sir John Marshall. The dispute between the Archeological Department and the Maha Bodhi Society was finally settled in 1926, and the Government of India agreed to bear the cost of construction as well as offering a suitable plot of land for the *Vihāra*. *The department also set apart nearly 20 acres of land, which would become an annex to the Vihāra, with suitable trees planted.*

On behalf of the Maha Bodhi Society, Dr. Hewavitarne and Shri D. Valisingha negotiated the terms. However, in the absence of Anagarika Dharmapala, the burden of getting the work done well fell on the shoulders of Sri D. Valsingha. It was he who decided that the building should be constructed of red brick, although the original provision was only for plain brick. In 1928, Valsingha left for England as

manager of the London Buddhist Mission, and a Mr. P. P. Siriwaederns painstakingly carried on his work at *Sārnātha*. When Valsingha returned to India in 1930 and saw the completion of the *Vihāra* in 1931, he learned that the final cost had come to about Rs. 120,000.

The *Vihāra* turned out to be a magnificent structure, with ancient Buddhist architectural decorations carved on Indian red brick and with blue frescoes painted by a famous Japanese artist. Through the ceaseless effort of Anagarika Dharmapala along with support from many devoted Buddhists throughout Asia, the Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra* was opened as a Buddhist monastery offering various dynamic Buddhist activities very much like those performed in the Buddha's own time, of more than 2,563 years earlier. It is still worthy of its name, "Hall of Fragrance," and its fame has come into being. In 1931, the Most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala invited ten Sri Lanka monks to Mūlagandhakutī at *Sārnātha* to start a mission of preaching Buddhism there.

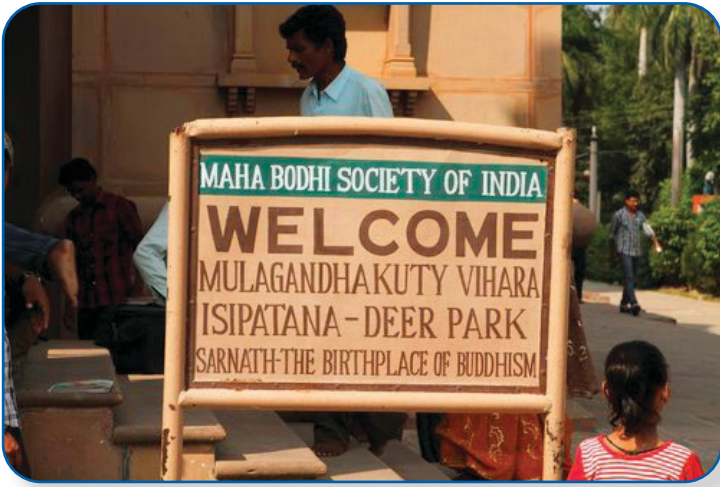
The period 1931-1940

The inaugural ceremony was held in 1931 at the monastery, and special thanks were given then to the Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala, who had devoted his life for this holy cause. After that special day, he himself started to restore the temple at Buddha Gaya; however, he had not finished it because of subtle obstacles raised by the British authorities. The most Venerable Mahant, who was the highest monk in the Indian Buddhist sangha, and who had taken charge of the Mahabodhi Temple in Buddha Gaya, played the role of figurehead to try to break the longstanding patriotic ideology established by the British.

The Mūlagandhakutī at *Sārnātha* was not fully completed in Dharmapala's lifetime. He had to overcome many difficulties, although he had help from several British authorities, such as H. E. Sir Harcourt Butler and Sir John Marshall, who wished to see the development of Buddhism in certain perspectives. Also, he credited the Venerable Sri D. Valisinha, P. P. Siriwardene, K. Sirinivasa Nayaka, and Dr. Siriwardene, without whose valuable help he felt the project could not be finished. Moreover, as one excellent thing that today we could not imagine the Britain authorities doing, not only did they compensate the project for their own workers' mistakes, but they also volunteered to landscape the sacred site of Mūlagandhakutī.

In the Buddha's own time, *Sārnātha* was apparently a site where recluses and pilgrims did meditation. It became famous ever since the Buddha walked from Gaya to *Banāres* for about 250 km, and it maintained its fame to the period of King Harsavardhana.

However, that ancient site eventually became deserted and stood in ruins for several centuries. Many years later, this hidden treasure was discovered by the Indian Archeology Department. Numerous discoveries were made, relative to various aspects of science and antiquities, without making any effort for Buddhism to prevail. It was the Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala who spent his last cent on restoring *Sārnātha*, intended to wake up the Buddhists throughout Asia and to inspire them with the Buddha teachings as well as to support his other mission. Because of his financial prosperity and managerial success, many people throughout Asia have developed a fondness for India and are willing to leave other responsibilities behind to go on a pilgrimage to several of its sacred places.



Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra

The inauguration of Mūlagandhakutī occurred on November 11, 1913. At 2:15 p.m. that day, the Director of the Indian Archeology Department, Rai Bahadur Dayaram Sahni, at the invitation of General H. E. Lord Willingdon, declared that the partly restored Buddha relic in Taxila and the hill of Nāgārjuna-konda were being offered to the Maha Bodhi Society. His formal letter reads, in part:

“It is with great honor that I made an offering of the Shakyamuni Buddha relic to the Maha Bodhi Society. I am delighted to see this relic being enshrined in the site where the Buddha delivered the first sermon (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*). I congratulate the Society on finishing the majestic Mūlagandhakutī and on deserving to worship this sacred relic.”

During the ceremony, illustrious guests included not only Sir Ashutosh but also Justice Manmatha Nath Mookerji, who was then the president of the Maha Bodhi Society. Mookerji handed the relic to Sir Rajah Hewavitarne, who reverently placed it in the gem box

that had been brought by an elephant of King H. H. from *Banāres*. After that, Anagarika Dharmapala received it and submitted it to the Venerable Aggasara Nahasthavira in the city of Chittagong. (Later, the relic box would be placed with high honors under the pedestal of the *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana* Buddha statue in the very center of *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra*.)



The *Dhamma-chakra-pravartana* Buddha statue in the main hall of *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra*

At 3:45 p.m. that same day, the Venerable Sri Ralanasara Mahanayaka of Sri Lanka presided over the delivery of a Dharma lecture to the assembled audience.

Sir Raja Moti Chand, the chief of the reception section, also made a speech to welcome the guests. One after another, several other members of the Society also gave speeches; the vivid lecture of Anagarika Dharmapala especially captured the audience's interest. India's former prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his wife, together with distinguished women from the nation's Labor Committee, attended the ceremony, as well. A group presented the Indian flag to the Society as a sign of goodwill. The final speech was a lecture by the president of the Maha Bodhi Society, given in the Pāli language.

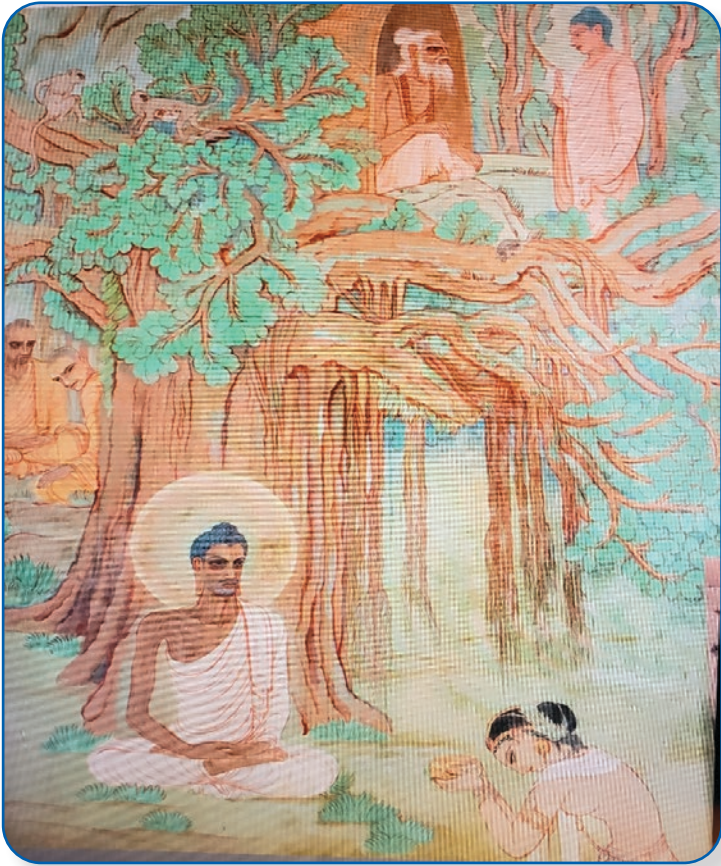
On the very next day, November 12, three living branches of the Buddha's actual Bodhi tree, having been brought with reverence from the capital Anurapura in Sri Lanka, were planted. A conference was also held, led by the principal of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. On the third day of the inauguration, November 13, a ceremony was held to install the Buddha statue in its rightful position. Following that, a seminar was held by Mr. B. L. Broughton, who had come from the Maha Bodhi Society in Britain.

Although that Venerable Aragarika Dharmapala was not good in health, he tried his best to get back to work within one month after the inauguration. He also received assistance from his seminary disciples and the Buddhists Susil Guha Khasnabis and Rash Behari Roy. More than a thousand guests had attended, among them some 500 from Tibet, Myanmar (the former Burma), Thailand, and Sri Lanka, as well as other Buddhist countries.

Before the ceremony, according to a request by Anagarika Dharmapala, Sir Broughton offered Rs 10,000 to commission frescoes, which were later executed by the Japanese painter Kosetsu Nesu and his coworker, Kawai. They did their work for the favor of art and the respect of the Buddha-Dharma-Sangha. It took about three and a half years to finish their projects.

It is certain that Sir Broughton will receive infinite merit, because he dedicated his mind and some of his fortune to reaping a good cause for Buddhism. The special ceremony of presenting the frescoes was organized on May 18, 1936, under the guidance of Madan Mohan Malaviya, the Professor Deputy Director and the founder of *Banāres* Hindu University. The Japanese artists harmonized the spirit of Japanese and Indian art. The fresco depicting the scene of the Siddhartha renunciation greatly touched the heart of visitors. That of the Buddha seated in meditation under the shadow of the Bodhi tree, in the ceremony of reaping its seeds, is also excellent.

On September 13, 1936, the Maha Bodhi Society and the International Buddhist Institute held a farewell ceremony to honor the fresco artists Kosetsu and Kawai before their return to Japan. Their frescoes of life of Buddha that they created at *Sārnātha* greatly enhanced the close relationship between Indian and Japanese cultures.



Fresco painting of the Buddha receiving the milled rice from Ms. Sujata while his five former friends look on, by the painters Kosetsu Nesu and Kawai

The 20-year anniversary of Mūlagandhakutī was held on November 11, 1933, at which India's former prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, not only paid a visit but also delivered a very touching speech. Two months later, on January 16, 1934, Lord and Mrs. Willingdon and H. H. King of *Banāres* also visited the temple and praised the architecture and its excellent frescoes.

b. The Architectural Process of Building the Monastery

As stated above, Mūlagandhakutī *vihāra* was built in 1913 in the modern architecture style at the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon (*Dhammachakra-pravartana*). Over the centuries this *vihāra* has fascinated visitors without number. Once pilgrims and travelers enter the main shrine, they see the golden statue of the Buddha turning the Wheel of the Dharma and being worshipped on the altar. The feeling of peace that it conveys makes many visitors feel quite tranquil.

The statue gives human beings a feeling of connection, like that at the Buddha time when people came face to face with the actual Buddha. How felicitous it must have been for those who saw and admired him in life! On the wall, pilgrims can observe the wonderful frescoes. These frescoes depict well the scenes ranging from the Buddha's Birthday (*Lumbini*) to the scene of the Buddha's Nibbāna (*Kushinagar*), and they touch visitors' hearts. We can only use mundane words here to describe their many artistic elements, although we feel them deeply in our own hearts.

There are numerous beautiful frescoes to be viewed:

On the southern wall, there are the frescoes as follows:

1. In the Tusita heaven, the Devas request Bodhisatva to be born among men.

2. Queen Māyā, the mother of the Prince Siddhartha, dreams on the reception.

3. The birth of Prince Siddhartha at Lumbini, combined with his first steps.

4. Prince Siddhartha meditates while his father performs a ritual at the Ploughing Festival.

5. Prince Siddhartha makes up his mind to renounce the world after observing four scenes of birth, age, sickness, and death.

6. Prince Siddhartha leaves the palace after having a last look his wife and son.

On the western wall, there are the following frescoes:

1. Prince Siddhartha departs on his horse, Kantaka.

2. Prince Siddhartha meets the hermits (Alara Kalama).

3. Sujāta offers milk-rice to the Gautama mendicant (who is as thin as a skeleton) while his five ascetic friends feel disappointed at his receiving it.

4. Buddha's victory over the Lord Mara and Mara citizens at Bodhgaya.

5. Five of his former friends pay homage to the Buddha when they see him arriving at *Sārṇātha* from a distance.

6. The Buddha is teaching the Dhamma to King Bimbisāra.

7. Anathapindika purchases the royal park from Prince Jeta and offers it as a gift to the sangha.

On the eastern wall, the scenes are as follows:

1. Buddha and Ānanda are caring for a sick monk who was shunned and refused care by others.

2. The Buddha prevents war by mediating between the Sakyas and the Koliyas.

3. Buddha meets his father at the Kapilavastu kingdom after seven years.

4. The Buddha enters the Pari-nibbāna. Next is the scene of Bhikkhu Anuruddha advising the assembly to try not to cry; Mr. Subhadda, the last layman disciple of the Buddha, is drawn at the right.

5. The Buddha preaches the Abhidhamma Treatise to Māyā Queen from the Trāyastriṃśa heaven realm.

6. The Buddha converts the murderer Aṅgulimāla.

7. Devadatta and King Ajātasattu conspire together to kill King Bimbisāra.

8. Ānanda accepts water from a girl who belongs to the lowest class in society.

The relic of the Buddha was found in Taxila. The hill of Nāgārjuna-konda was offered to the Maha Bodhi Society and now it is worshipped at the main hall of Mūlagandhakutī vihāra, in the main shrine. Behind the main shrine is a park serving as a small zoo; the ticket for children costs Rs 1, for adults Rs 2. Many different kinds of animal species dwell there, such as yellow and white deer with white spots, along with female and male peacocks with various sorts of feathers. Inside many big iron cages are numerous varieties of animals and birds: white and black rabbits (*oryctolagus cuniculus*), doves, green parrots, red parrots, peacocks (pale-headed rosella), zebras, sparrows (gray partridge, *fya ncolinus pondiceyia nus*), and wild geese (thriving in big lakes surrounded by fences). There are other strange species of birds, such as *grus antigone sarus* cranes, *grus leucogeranus*, *xenorhyachus asiaticus* black-necked storks, *pelecanus philippenss*, gray eliean, *Ciconia episcopus* whitenecked storks, *threskiorinis melanocephala* white ibis, *tadorna ferruginea (sarus)*, *grus antigone*, and many other species also to be seen there. Visitors can buy carrots or cucumbers there to feed the animals and birds; when the sellers utter the cry “huo... huo... huo,” from all corners, the friendly deer run to gather in front of visitors and enjoy the delicious food they are being tossed. Next to the zoo is a high strip of land

on which stands the stupa of Venerable Aragarika Dharmapala, where his body was burned. His ashes are worshipped there still today.

At the right front yard from the outside looking in, a memorial to Venerable Aragarika Dharmapala is located under a shading tree surrounded by a rectangle of iron fencing. The beautiful statue shows him as larger than life size, performing the gesture of folded hands with eyes solemnly looking downward. There is a stele engraved that gives his brief biography and memorializes his contributions to *Sārnātha*, in both the English and Sri Lankan languages.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương visited
the Venerable Aragarika Dharmapala monument in 2019

At all four corners of the Mūlagandhakutī vihāra, four of the Dhammapada's verses are engraved in multiple languages, including Hindi, English, Japanese, and Sri Lankan. The content is the teachings of the Buddha, as follows:

In the left corner of the front yard:

“He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me. He robbed me. Those who harbor me or harbor such thoughts do not quiet their hatred.”

In the right corner of the front yard:

“Do not give way to heedlessness, do not indulge in sexual pleasures. Only the heedful and meditative attain happiness.”

In the left corner of the back yard:

“Those who know the essential to be essential, those who know the unessential to be unessential, dwelling in right thoughts, do arrive at the essential.”

In the right corner of the back yard:

“Whatever harm an enemy may do to an enemy, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind inflicts on oneself a greater harm.”

At the right yard (parallel with the main shrine) there is the green, great Bodhi tree, which is surrounded by 28, 3-inch-high bright Buddha statues sitting in glass boxes. Next to them are lifesized statues of Shakyamuni Buddha with the group of five ascetics kneeling. Next to the Bodhi tree are inscriptions from the Dhammapada’s Verse:

“Forbearing patience is the highest moral practice. ‘Nibbana is supreme,’ say the Buddhas. A bhikkhu does no harm to others; one who harms others is not a bhikkhu.”

“Not to do evil, to cultivate merit, to purify one’s mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha.”

“Not to revile, not to do any harm, to practice restraint in the fundamental precepts, to be moderate in taking food, to dwell in a secluded place, intent on higher thoughts. This is the teaching of the Buddhas.”

A Bodhi tree (its scientific names are *pipal*, *pippali*, and *asvatthi*) at Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra is considered “the enlightened tree” because it has the longest connection with the Buddha. According to the Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa, under the dynasty of King Sri Lankan Devanampiyatissa, Bhikkhu Thera Mahinda, the son of King *Aśoka*, led a Buddhist mission to Sri Lanka with the goal of sharing Buddhism. He converted many of the noble royal officers there, as well as common people, who realized the happy message contained in Dharma. During his time in Sri Lanka, Bhikkhu Mahinda begged his father, the king, to give him a branch of the Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya to be planted at Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka. King *Aśoka* accepted the request and ordered his daughter, Bhikkhu Mahinda’s young sister, Bhikkhunī Sanghamitta, to take a piece of the tree with her to Sri Lanka; this sacred tree was planted by King Devanampiyatissa. So now “the enlightened tree” has been planted at Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, India, descended directly from the historical tree of Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

Bhikkhunī Sanghamitta traveled to Sri Lanka with her main mission as being the founder who would establish the nun sangha and would transmit the Bhikkhunī’s precepts to Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka. According to the *Maha Bodhi Journal* issue of July 1903, the Bodhi tree is described as follows:

“The sacred Bodhi tree marks the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment; it had been lost since 1874. Bhikkhunī Sangamitta, the daughter of King *Aśoka*, brought a branch of the Bodhi tree to plant in the capital Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. This tree has the most ancient history in all the world. In Bodhgaya, the original Bodhi tree died in 1874, but a small bud grew there and it is verdant now.”



In the Mūlagandhakutī yard, figures depict the Buddha giving a sermon to his five disciples Añña Koṇḍañña under the Bodhi tree, a branch of which came from the Anuradhapura capital, Si Lanka

When Anagarika Dharmapala visited Bodhigaya for the first time, on January, 22, 1891, his heart swelled with emotion and he respectfully admired that holy place without blinking; he sat near the Vajra throne under the Bodhi tree and made a vow that he would excavate this sacred spot. During his visit, he often would prostrate himself before the tree in morning and evening.

When he stayed at Sri Lanka, he took care of the sacred tree with his whole heart and mind, although he entrusted the principal tasks to his disciples, Brahmachari Valisinghe Harischandra, and monks there, along with the Archeology Department. As a result, the Anuradhapura capital became famous throughout Asia because of its sacred Bodhi tree.

After he conceived the idea of building the Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra at Sārnātha, Anagarika Dharmapala intended to bring some branches of the

Bodhi tree to plant in some other places at *Sārnātha*. He thought that the ideal time for doing this job would be the inauguration ceremony of Mūlagandhakutī.

He started sending many letters to Brahmachari Valisinghe Harischandra, who was staying Anuradhapura. With the agreement of Reverence Head of the Atamasthana Temple and while being hearing the sounds of monk reciting the Sūtras, Brahmachari Valisinghe Harischandra cut some branches of the original Bodhi tree and placed them into secure boxes that were sent safely *Sārnātha*.

At the inauguration ceremony of Mulangandhakutti, on November, 11, 1931, all Venerable Bhikkhus in the Maha Bodhi Society as well as a delegation led by K. D. David, from Maradana, Colombo, Ceylon, participated. Reverence Sri Devamitta Dhammapala brought the box to the right corner of the yard paralleling the main shrine to plant the tree there.

Three other branches were planted on the next day. Like children from one mother, they eventually grew and turned green and were protected by a wall. After almost 90 years, they continue to grow more and more green and shaded, like three branches on the same tree. During the time Dr. Dodamgoda Rewatha was in charge of Mūlagandhakutī, he constructed a wall fence to protect the Bodhi tree and placed a Buddha image under the tree. A group of Myanmar Buddhists donated the statues of the Buddha with the five brothers Añña Koṇḍañña. Dr. Rewatha also placed a small Myanmar bell at the gate.

During the time when Dr. Kahawatte Siri Sumedha Thero was Bhikkhu-in-charge of the *Sārnātha* Centre of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, based on many Buddhists' wishes to have an ideal to meditate, he made some great contributions:

1. Expanding the perimeter area of the Bodhi tree and building a large, tall railing to protect it

2. Paving with red sand bricks the ground surface under statues of the Buddha and the group of five ascetics

3. Having the Dhammachakka Pavattana Sūtra, the first sermon that the Buddha delivered to the group of five brothers, engraved on red marble tablets. On each tablet is carved the Sūtra, in the language chosen by each of the donors.

There are some inscriptions in Tibetan, English, Pāli, Hindi, Sinhalese, Bhutanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Laos. In particular, the Vietnamese inscription was offered by a congregation of Buddhists from Vietnam, along with Vietnamese Buddhists living in Germany.

4. Rebuilding the new gate of the meditation spot at the Bodhi tree

5. Reconstructing the big pot surrounding the Bodhi tree root; putting 28 Buddhas statues in a square arrangement at the sacred tree root, including the ornaments of 28 alm bowls, flower vases, and bright colorful electric lights. This donation was made by Lao monks and Buddhist laypeople.

On December, 17, 1999, based on an invitation from Venerable Siri Sumedha, the Dalai Lama XIV paid a visit to attend the inauguration ceremony of the new sites. He also delivered a lecture for the sake of many listeners.

The titles or Pāli names of the 28 Buddha statues are as following:

**THE TITLES (OR NAMES IN PĀLI)
OF THE 28 BUDDHA STATUES**

1. Tanhanka Buddhavamso	2. Midhanka Buddhavamso
3. Sarananka Buddhavamso	4. Dīpankara Buddhavamso
5. Koṇḍañña Buddhavamso	6. Mangala Buddhavamso
7. Sumana Buddhavamso	8. Revata Buddhavamso
9. Sobhita Buddhavamso	10. Anomadassī Buddhavamso
11. Paduma Buddhavamso	12. Nārada Buddhavamso
13. Padumuttara Buddhavamso	14. Sumedha Buddhavamso
15. Sujāta Buddhavamso	16. Piyadassī Buddhavamso
17. Atthadassī Buddhavamso	18. Dhamma-dassī Buddhavamso
19. Siddhattha Buddhavamso	20. Tissa Buddhavamso
21. Pussa Buddhavamso	22. Vipassī Buddhavamso
23. Sikhī Buddhavamso	24. Vessabhū Buddhavamso
25. Kakusandha Buddhavamso	26. Konāgamana Buddhavamso
27. Kassapa Buddhavamso	28. Gautama Buddhavamso

This is merely a brief introduction of the Bodhi tree, with the 28 Buddhas' names, the statues, as well as the steles. This section is at the right and far around 4 to 5 meters distant from the main shrine.

Several other things should be recorded, as follows:

1. In December 2004, the Mungala Temple in Singapore made an offer of a coach (bus) with 34 seats, costing 16,000 USD, to transport pupils to and from the schools in Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*.

2. The Tibetan Nyingma Mediation Center in California had a great bell cast as a symbol of *Buddhavacana* (Dhamma Sermons from the Buddha) to offer the Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*. The bell stands 15 meters high, weighs 5,060 pounds, and cost 150,000 USD.

Several important of the Buddha teachings are inscribed on the surface of the bell in Tibetan and English, as follows:

“Pay homage to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

“Prostrating the Bhagavā (Tathāgata), Bodhisattvas, Arahants, and Eighty-four Siddhas, the beholders of enlightened lineage who kindly approve our sincere prayers each time the bell’s sound is heard at Deer Park, the place where the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths. We wish the peaceful sound of the bell to bring the Buddha’s compassion over the space and time up to this dark, declining time (kaliyuga) in the world. May the Tripiṭaka be preserved until the Maitreya Buddha will appear to turn the Dharma wheel.

“Sarvam Mangalam. Jayantu Ho.””

“Pay homage to Triple Gems.

“Om Swa-stam. This bell was cast to pray for the Dhamma being existent forever. May the Sangha fulfill the mission at all places. May we always follow the noble steps of the Bhagavā (Tathāgata) to help other beings to be awakened. May the Tarthang Ringpoche Kun-dga’dGe-legs Ye-shes rDo-rje (69 years), the

founder of the Buddhadharma Light Association (TNMC) and the leader of the ceremony praying (Monlam Chenmo) for Peace, live long.

“Buddhist Calendar 2547. Christian Calendar 2004. Tibetan Calendar 2130.”

It is said that this TNMC association also offered the same size of great bell at Bodhgaya (*the holy place where the Buddha got enlightenment*). In 2005, it also donated another three bells at several holy places, such as Lumbini (*the birthplace of the Buddha*), Sārnātha (*the place where the Buddha gave the first sermon*), and Kusinagar (*where he passed away*).

In the left area of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, there is a large area of grass, looked after by gardeners. Next to it are the building used as the Maha Bodhi Society office and a small, pretty Matri Buddha Temple (with a red bridge in front), which was built in 1993 by a Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhist, Queen Smt. Asha Okada. In the main hall are two huge Buddha images: the Shakyamuni Buddha image at the right, and at the left the Prabhūtaratna Buddha, who is mentioned in the Lotus Sūtra in chapter XI: “The Emergence of The Multi-Treasure Stupa.” The scripture describes how the Prabhūtaratna Buddha invited and offered Shakyamuni Buddha to take half of his throne seat in the multitreasures Tower by formally saying: “Shakyamuni Buddha, please take a seat here. I have divided the throne in two. You can share it with me.” Two beautiful silk clothes are embroidered with Chinese letters on the two titles of Shakyamuni Buddha and Prabhūtaratna Buddha.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương with Indian girl students

C. The Activities at Mūlagandhakuṭī Vihāra

At present, the schedule is as follows:

The site opens from 4:00 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Every evening at 6:30 p.m.: Pāli Sūtra chanting of The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma Suttā, or Promulgation of the Law Suttā (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*)

Library and book reading of Maha Bodhi Mūlagandhakuṭī: offered free to anyone (pupil, student, or other) who is interested in the Buddha-dhamma and the common knowledge. There are a large number of books with many titles and subjects, especially Buddhism, of course.

Open in the morning: 8:30 to 11:00 a.m.

Open in the afternoon: 1:30 to 5:00 p.m.

-International Maha Bodhi Monastery: Will provide free room, meals, and other facilities for Indian and international monks or nuns

- Maha Bodhi Birla Dharmasala Guest House: There are 72 rooms available for about 300 guests inside and outside the country. It will receive optional donations.

- Maha Bodhi's religious centers for Bhikkhus and Samaneras: The Primary, Middle, and High Institutes of Buddhist Studies will eventually be established. Currently, there are about 20 Samaneras learning here.

- Maha Bodhi College: A college with full, modern facilities, under the support system of the state government. There are currently about 2,000 students.

- The Maha Bodhi High School for Female students: With a number of experienced teachers and approximately 400 students.

-The Maha Bodhi Primary School: This is a prestigious school in this region, with about 400 male and female pupils.

- The Dharmapala Vidyalaya Nursery School: A center that is nurturing some 300 local kids.

- The Maha Bodhi Publishing Center: Prints and distributes, for free, many books on Buddhism, history, philosophy, and other subjects, as well as a lot of relevant information. It has many other affiliate branches around the world.

- Informational Services: Free printing and distribution of services and trading, as well as providing information and advice on business activities and pilgrimages.

- *Dharmadoot* Magazine: *Dharmadoot*, the newspaper of the Maha Bodhi Society in *Sārnātha*, is published twice a year; the Sambodhi of Maha Bodhi Society in *Bodhgaya* also is issued twice a year.

- Anagarika Dharmapala Museum and the one-year anniversary Monument of Maha Bodhi: The museum preserves and displays all things of the

most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala, such as his personal items, his handwritten letters, photos, and documents, especially relating to his conferences and talks with important politicians, sangha leaders, the museum's Board of Directors, and famous persons in India and around the world.

- The contact address:

Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*

Sarnath Centre, Maha Bodhi Society of India

Sarnath, Varanasi (U.P.), INDIA

Tel. & Fax: 0091-542-585595

0091-542-585380

The Annual Schedule

Many important ceremonies are conducted every year in the Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*. Some are as follows:

- **Buddha Purnima:** On the full moon of the fifth month are held the ceremonies of the Buddha's Birthday, Enlightenment, and Entering Pari-nibbāna.

- **Ashadhi Purnima:** On the full moon of the seventh month are held the rite of the Buddha's giving his first sermon (Dhamma-chakra-pravartana).

- **Independence Date:** On August 15, the event is celebrated by the local officers, teachers, parents, students, and pupils of the Maha Bodhi Schools.

- **Birthday of Anagarika Dharmapala:** September 17 is the birthday of the person who made the greatest contribution to revive Buddhist movements in India after 800 years of mostly being forgotten. He was also the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society in India and an International branch in 1891.

- **Kartik Purnima:** In this ceremony, Kasa robes are offered to Mūlagandhakutī Venerable monks. It is

conducted every year on the full moon of the eleventh month (following a retreat held at the end of the year).

In the Kartik Purnima, the relic of the Buddha is publicly shown so that pilgrims from many countries can pay homage. In addition, there are a number of Dharma lectures and cultural events organized by the Maha Bodhi High Schools. An award program for local students is also an important part of this ceremony.

- **The Republic Day:** This meeting is held on January 26, with the participation of teachers, parents, students, and visitors to the Maha Bodhi Schools.

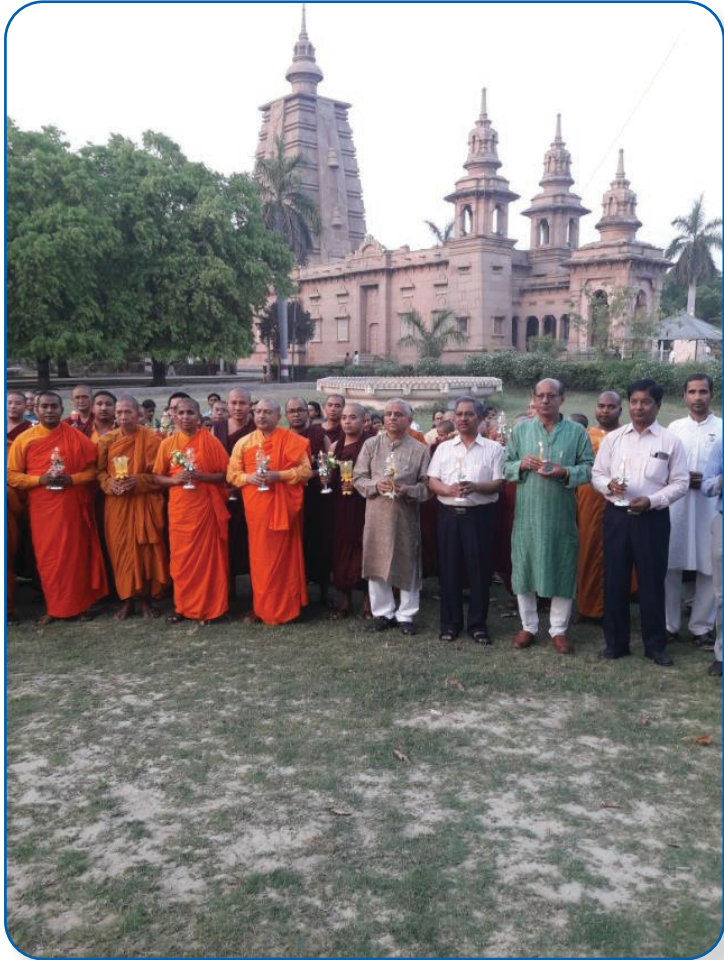
Taken together, these activities and ceremonies indicate that the Maha Bodhi Society at *Sārnātha*, through its activities at Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*, is one of the most successful centers of Maha Bodhi throughout Asia.

Since the time that Anagarika Dharmapala came to *Sārnātha*, this center has offered many programs of education, charity, and Buddhism, not only for local people but also for the entire world. Anagarika Dharmapala started his Buddhist career in Calcutta; he later transferred his activities to *Sārnātha* and he stayed there for the rest of his life.

Finally, Shri Devapriya Valisinghe and several monks were continuously integrated into the maintenance and development of the center.

The most venerable Dr. Dodamgoda Rewatha has served as General Secretary, while the Venerable Dr. Kahawatte Siri Sumedha has served as the Assistant Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society at *Sārnātha* through three terms (1999 through 2006). During this period, the two Venerables, along with other monks and Buddhist laymen as well as laywomen, have brought a new face to the center with their fresh activities

and plans. They have continually made significant efforts to fulfill the purpose and mission that they they inherited from the founder, Anagarika Dharmapala.



Dr. Bhikkhu Surumeda and Dr. Bhikkhu Tường Quang with other VIP guests at the front of the Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra in Sārnātha

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 8

Chapter 8 introduces many facts and details about the most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala, the first volunteer in the mission to revive Buddhism after 800 years of having been all but forgotten. He brought a revival of Buddhism to India and expanded it around the world. Since his time, pilgrimages from many countries have been able to visit Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra in Sārnātha, helping to preserve and develop the heritage of Buddhism. He also the father of the Maha Bodhi Society global movement and also the founder of the Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra in Sārnātha.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala?

2. What were the circumstances of Buddhism in Sārnātha and throughout India in the 1880s?

3. Did the Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala have a master vision in mind when he established the Maha Bodhi Society around the world and the Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra in Sārnātha? What were the benefits of both?

4. Describe the activities of the Maha Bodhi Society specifically in Sārnātha.

What can we learn from the role model of the most Venerable Anagarika Dharmapala?

Notes

¹ *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1922. P. 455-62.

² *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1926. Pp. 318, 410-11, 451.

³ *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1922. P. 448.

⁴ Maha Bodhi Society of India, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, Maha Bodhi Society of India. Calcutta. 1952. P. 98.

⁵ Mulagandhakuti means “Hall of Fragrance.”

⁶ *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1931. P. 527.

⁷ *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1933. P. 513.

⁸ *Journal of Maha Bodhi Society of India*. Calcutta. 1934. P. 82.

⁹ The Divyāvādāna, or Divine narratives, is a Sanskrit anthology of Buddhist avadana tales, many originating in Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya texts. The story recounts that the Venerable Ananda wanted to receive some water from a villager girl. According to the ancient Indian people or the judicial review of the Law on Hinduism, people who live in rural areas and belong to the lowest class in society are not allowed to make physical contact with either monks or nuns (who belong to the high Bramin class in society). Due to that law, the girl did not dare to offer water to the Venerable Ananda. Ven Ananda explained to her that Buddhism believed in the principle of equality among human beings, and emphasized that “I didn’t ask you about your class in society; I just asked for water.”

¹⁰<http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Divyavadana>

¹¹ *The Dhammapada Verses and Stories*, Verse 3. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. *Sārṇātha*. Vārānasi. 1990. P. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, Verse 27. P. 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Verse 12. P. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Verse 42. P. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Verse 184. P. 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Verse 134. P. 65.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, Maha Bodhi Society of India. Calcutta. July, 1903. P. 65.

¹⁹ *The Lotus Sūtra*. The White Lotus Sūtra of the True Dharma. English translation by Hendrik Kern and Nicolas Soames; <https://www.audible.com/pd/The-Lotus-Sūtra-Audiobook>.

CHAPTER 9
VISITING SĀRNĀTHA TODAY



Sārnātha in 2020

In addition to the educational, social, and religious activities of the Maha Bodhi Society in *Sārnātha* through *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra*, over the decades many people from around the world have come to settle in India, especially near *Sārnātha*, so that they can contribute their part in the flourishing of Deer Park-the cradle of Buddhism.

To create facilities for Buddhists who come from afar to make a pilgrimage at *Sārnātha*, most of the temples there offer guest rooms, which are relatively cheap to rent compared to rooms in hotels. Some temples even let their customers stay for only an optional donation (no fixed price). In addition, Buddhist temples throughout India-such as at Bodhgaya, *Sārnātha*, Kushinagar, and other places-often conduct classes for monks and especially for poor children.

The existing temples at Deer Park (*Sārnātha*) are as follows:

1. Chinese Temple: On the east side of *Sārnātha*, from *Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra* go straight through the intersection about 100 m and on the left is the Chinese Temple. The pagoda was built in 1939 by a Singaporean banker, Lee Choong Seng. The main gate opens to the south. Presided over by Venerable Wichen, the temple currently has seven monks studying there. The “pagoda” (also known as a temple) has 35 rooms for pilgrims.

Contact information:

Chinese Temple

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 280



Huong Sen pilgrimage with local Sikh Indians
at Chinese Temple, in 2016

2. Gelugpa Tibetan Temple: Going from the Chinese temple toward the Ashapur roundabout, the temple is on the right. Gelugpa was founded by the late Venerable Thupten Jugney (Goshe Lama) in 1955. The main gate faces east. In the yard is a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha meditating under a lush Bodhi tree. The walls of the main hall are decorated with attractive frescoes featuring countless images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The pagoda has 18 rooms for pilgrims.

Contact information:

Tibetan Temple

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 532 / 990

3. Nicchigatsuzan Horinji Japanese Temple:

Before reaching the Gelugpa Tibetan Temple, travelers will see the junction road. Along the left road about 500 m is the temple, standing on the right side. The main gate of the temple is at the north. The temple was founded by Venerable Hojo Sasaki. He purchased the land on September 30, 1986, and construction began the next year; the temple was inaugurated on November 21, 1992. Its Japanese architectural style is very elegant and even luxurious. Presently Venerable Myojo Sasaki and Khemura San play the roles of managers, although the temple's headquarters are in Japan. Currently, the temple is occupied by three Japanese monks and several male Indian novices who are in apprenticeship. The temple has 16 spacious rooms for pilgrims. It also organizes compassionate classes for poor children in the nearby village.

Contact information:

Nichigatsuzan Horinji Japanese Temple

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 021

4. Burmese Temple: Heading back to the *Sārnātha* archaeological site, the Burmese Temple is located northwest of and adjacent to the fence of the archeological relic site of *Sārnātha*. It was established by the Most Venerable U Chandramani Mahathero in a large area. The temple faces north while its statues face west. The very large Buddha statue, sitting in meditation, was cast in 1994 and placed in front of the main hall. The corners of the temple roof are very sharp, and the temple contains much fine art, mostly in the architectural styles of the Theravada sect. Currently, Venerable U. Wannadhwaj is the abbot, and 15 monks

are studying there. The temple has 40 rooms for pilgrims. It also operates the Chetan Balika Vidyalaya Primary School for poor students in the village.

Contact information:

Burmese Buddhist Vihāra

Ven. Chandramani Road

Sārṇātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 199

5. Nyampa Tibetan Nun Temple: A short distance from the Burmese Pagoda there is an alleyway on the right. About 600 m down that alley and behind the deer garden stands the Nyampa Tibetan Nun Temple on the left. The temple was founded by Venerable Khempo Palden Serab Rinpoche in 2004 with the purpose of giving nuns a separate place to live and worship. There are 12 nuns currently studying there and the pagoda is under construction.

Contact information:

Nyampa Nunnery

Village Khanjuhi

Sārṇātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 296

6. Tibetan Buddhist Institute Vajra Vidya: Go a little further and to the left you will see the Tibetan Buddhist Institute Vajra Vidya. This monastery was founded by Venerable Khenchen Tharangu Rinpoche in 1993, and he remains the abbot still today. This is a magnificent structure in a modern architectural style, located in a large area surrounded by many ornamental plants. There are some hundred Tibetan monks who are studying there, led by eight renowned Lama teachers.

The institute also holds a charity clinic, which is led by Dr. M. M. Lal. The institute is currently building more rooms for students.

Contact information:

Vajra Vidya Institute

Village Khanjuhi

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 746 / 747

7. Thailand Temple: From the *Sārnātha* archeological area view, on the main road to the Ashapur roundabout, on the left is the *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum while on the right is the Thai Temple. The late Venerable Phrakru Prakash Samadhikun bought the land from Shri Brijjal Das in 1970 and built the temple, which was inaugurated in 1993. The temple is located on an enormous campus. The main hall is decorated quite simply (different from typical Tibetan pagodas) but it does not lose its meditative appearance. The main hall features only one statue of the Buddha sitting on the throne, but it is notable that his feet are dropped to the ground (most statues show the Buddha either sitting cross-legged or standing). The basement below the main hall contains the meditative chamber. The temple also has a P.P.S. Elementary School for poor pupils in the village. Currently, Venerable Shasan Rashmi is the abbot; six monks and two Thai nuns also live there. The temple has 48 rooms for pilgrims; guests can have breakfast and lunch at the temple, with an optional extra donation (but no fixed price) The temple is open from 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. An enormous Buddha image stands in the middle of the yard.

Contact information:
Thai Temple
Mrigdayavan Mahavihāra Foundation
Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007
Tel: 0091-542-2585 744/001



From left: Tịnh Bình, Rev. Diệu Hòa, Ven. Giới Hương, Rev. Diệu Nga, and Quảng Trí at the Buddha yard of Thai Temple, September 24, 2019

8. Nyampa Tibet: Going from the Thai Pagoda to the Ashpur roundabout for a distance of about 50 meters, on the left is an alleyway. Go about 200 meters toward the Tibetan Nyampa pagoda, on the left. The temple was founded by Venerable Khenpo Palden Serab Rinpoche in 1998. Its purpose is to serve as a meditation center for monks and Buddhists from around the world to practice. Currently Venerable Nyima is the abbot; more than 30 monks from Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan are in retreat. The temple also

has a Padma Samayeechokh Ling library with many valuable Tibetan books, and it offers a compassionate class for poor children in the area.

Contact information:

Nyampa Monastery

Village Gunj

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2595 132

9. Dhamma Chakra Pagoda: Go back to the main road in the direction of the Ashpur roundabout, with the junction road and Mawaiya road on the right. About one kilometer along the Mawaiya Road stands the Dharma Chakra Pagoda (or Temple) on the left, founded by the Venerable Japanese-Indian Esho Goto (Pragya Rashmi). In 1979, he bought 7 viza (150 square meters) for Rs 15,000 per 1 viza, making the temple larger than 1 acre. The resident monk was once a professor of the Japanese language at Sampuranand Sanskrit University, Varanasi. At the temple, five samanera students are studying under the guidance of the monk.

Contact information:

Dharma Chakra Vihāra Mawaiya,

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2588 835/2581 540

10. Dharma Chakra Vihar-International Academy of Buddhist Studies: (located in the alleyway and also on Mawaiya road). The academy was founded by the Venerable Pragya Rashmi and the philosophy professor Subhash Barua, as governor. In 1992, Venerable Pragya Rashmi bought 16 viza of land (at Rs 80,000 per viza) to build 16 classrooms. Currently, there are 600 students studying at the academy's secondary and high

schools. In 2001, the Venerable officially opened the International Buddhist Studies Institute-Dharma Chakra Vihāra, known as the branch of Sampuranand Sanskrit University, Varanasi. It offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral courses in many subjects, including history, philosophy, sociology, language, geography, science, and especially Buddhism as practiced both in India and in other Southeast Asian countries. In addition, it offers annual certification for courses in Pali, Sanskrit, or modern foreign languages like Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, and English. There are 60 international and Indian students studying there. Every Sunday, the school offers free lessons (ancient and modern) in the Japanese and Chinese languages.

Contact information:

Dharma Chakra Vihar-International Academy of
Buddhist Studies

Mawaiya Street,

Sārnātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2588 835/2581 540

11. The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies:

This institute is located close to the wall of the Dharma Chakra Vihar and about one kilometer from the *Sārnātha* archeological site. The university occupies very spacious grounds, with colorful flowers in the front yard. It has many modern facilities for graduate students. Its large library holds valuable books seemingly without number, especially in the Tibetan language and in Buddhism. In 1964, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, along with the late Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, started setting up the university, with financial support from the culture and education departments of the Indian government; in 1976, it was happily inaugurated.

This Tibetan institute was recognized as a private university by the Ministry of Human Resource Development of India in 1988. The purposes of the university are as follows:

1. Preserving the Tibetan traditional culture
2. Restoring Tibet's ancient knowledge and supplementing Tibetological research in a variety of areas
3. Training students in the border areas of Tibet to gather here to gain knowledge of their cultures and to practice Buddhism
4. Reviving the Tripitaka in a modern education system

Contact information:

The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies
Mawaiya

Sārṇātha, Varanasi - 221 007

Tel: 0091-542-2587 085/2586 337



From left: Chánh Hào, Ven. Giới Hương, Rev. Diệu Nga, Rev. Diệu Hòa, Quảng Trí, Tịnh Bình, and two Tibetan nuns at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, September 24, 2019

12. Đại Lộc Temple: The temple was founded in 2008 by the Venerable Dr. Tường Quang. It is located in the direction of the railway station and the Chinese Temple, but it is some 1 km from Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra and visitors must go through many messy alleyways to get deep inside the village containing the temple. *If there is no guide, it is difficult to find this temple.* It has two buildings of two storeys with 50 rooms for pilgrims, as well as many classrooms for poor local children. In the front yard, there is a 24-m-high Buddha statue in the gesture of (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*), which today is considered to be the largest Buddha statue in this *mudrā* anywhere in the world. It weighs approximately 1,200 tons and is made of 660 stone blocks; the heaviest one weighs 5 tons while the lightest one weighs 1.5 tons. In the front yard stand a Khuê Văn Các Stupa (on the left) and the One Pillar Pagoda (on the right), next to which is a relief gate depicting the eight important events in the Sakyamuni Buddha.

Bhikkhu Dr. Tường Quang holds two Ph.D. degrees (one in Buddhist studies and the other in the Chinese language). As a former student at Delhi University, he well understands the hard situation of students, so he has helped many young Vietnamese students who have stayed in the Đại Lộc Temple to go on to pursue studies at Vārānasi University or other institutes.

Contact information:

Đại Lộc Temple (Sivali Vietnamese Therevada Trust)
13/46 m-5, Khajuhī, Sarnath, Varanasi 221007,
UP, India
0091-9936630292
lamtandoan69@gmail.com



Hương Sen pilgrims with Dr. Bhikkhu Tường Quan
at Đại Lộc Temple, in 2016



Bhikkhuni Giới Hương and Venerable Dr. Tường Quang
with Indian children, in 2016

14. Jambudvipa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple
(Indo-Sri Lanka International Buddhist Association):
From Mūlagandhakutī *Vihāra*, turn left to the junction road (near Chinese Temple), approaching on the Ashok Road to the Ashpur roundabout. There is a small road at the left; proceed for about 100 meters. The Jambudvipa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple is located at the right. It was established by Ven. Dr. K. Siri Sumedha in 2011. Now it has two storeys, with 10 rooms for 30 visitors, as well as 5 resident monks and 10 working daily members. Every day, it holds two courses of Pali chanting. It often receives pilgrims from many countries who come to visit *Sārnātha*. It also offers charity for poor villagers.

As the higher monk in Sangha, Dr. K. Siri Sumedha is rather popular in the *Sārnātha* area and often delivers the principal speech at ceremonies of temples, schools, and universities in India and abroad.

Contact information:

Jambudvipa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple

Ven. Dr. K. Siri Sumedha

Ashok Marg, Holy Isipatana,

Sarnath, Varanasi - 221007, UP, INDIA

Phone: 0091-542-2595003

Fax: 0091 542 2595877, 2595922

Cell: 91 9839 056 094

Email: indosrilankaiba@gmail.com

jambudvipatemple@yahoo.com



Ven. Dr. Siri Sumedha, Ven. Hạnh Nguyễn, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, and Hương Sen Pilgrim and other visitors at Jambudvīpa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, in 2016

THE NECESSARY INFORMATION AT SĀRNĀTHA

1. Airport: Babatpur Airport (at *Vārānasi*): 24 km from *Sārnātha*.
2. Train stations: 8 km from *Vārānasi* Cantt (or train station); 16 km from Mughalsarai.
3. Bus stations: 8 km from *Vārānasi* Cantt.
4. Banks: State Bank of India, Canara Friend, Central Bank of India, and Kashi Grashi Bank.
5. Post office: opposite the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Hotel.
6. STD / ISD / PSO: opposite Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra.
7. Places for money exchange: The Craft Store Uttar Pradesh and many others...

8. Hotels: Hotel Mrigadava, Uttar Pradesh Tourism Development Company, the Golden Buddha Hotel...

9. Restaurants: Rangori Garden, Holiday Inn, Anand, Highway Inn...

10. Buddhist shops: a counter at the main hall of Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra, Mahabodhi Book, Jain Book Center and Gyan Jyoti...

11. Touristservices: Siddharth Travels & Information Service, Kamla Travels (near Thai Temple), Vishuddha Travels (near Gelugpa Tibetan Temple), Bodhik Travel Company (opposite Burmese Temple).

12. Photography shops: Shyam Studio (near Tibet University), Shivam Studio...

13. *Sārnātha* Archaeological Museum: open 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (closed Friday). Entrance fee: 2 Rs per person, free for children under 15. Cameras or videos may *not* be taken in the museum, except for good reason and after specific application to the museum management and written permission.

14. *Sārnātha* archeological sites: open 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. (closed Friday). Admission fee for Indians is 5 Rs, for foreign visitors \$2 US (or 100 Rs); however, if a foreign student currently studying in India shows a student ID, she or he can buy a ticket like a native person for only Rs 5. *Cellphone photos are not allowed*; cameras are free to bring in, but video cameras are charged 20 Rs for each one.



Bhikkhunī Giới Hương and Hương Sen Pilgrimage made a charity visit at the Jambudvipa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, September 24, 2019

Notes

¹ Information about the Đại Lộc Temple was updated as of March 2020 for this book. Bhikkhu Tường Quang was a classmate of the book's author, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, at Delhi University during 1995-2005. After graduation, the author relocated to the United States to establish the Hương Sen Temple in California, while Bhikkhu Tường Quang remained in India and later founded this Đại Lộc Temple.

² Information about the Jambudvipa Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple was updated as of March 2020.

CHAPTER 10

THE CITY OF BANĀRES



City of Banares

Vārānasi is one of the world's most ancient cities that symbolizes Indian education, art, religion, and culture. Because of its location at the crossroads between the towns of Varuna and Assi, the city is called *Vārānasi* (Varuna + Assi). However, local people today simply call it *Banāres* or Benares.



Road to *Vārānasi*

Banāres is a lovely and ancient center of Hinduism. It has numerous attractions appealing to visitors and pilgrims alike, and it is a highly spiritual place. Thousands of travelers from every area of India and other countries come to see it. One unique feature of the city is its combination of a historic past and a vibrant present.

The city lies on the northern banks of the river Ganges, the most sacred river of India, forming a splendid perspective with varied Indian architectures. The connection of the sacred river and the city is the very quintessence of *Banāres*, a name that means “*The*

land of sacred light.” The people of India believe that the Ganga River issues from heaven itself and therefore can clean human beings’ guilt. Therefore, *Banāres* represents the world of experiences and discovery, and even one’s destination through both past and present to seek immortality and thence to achieve liberation.

According to historians, this city was formed some 10 centuries before Jesus was born. It is located between two small rivers that flow into the Ganga—the Varuna and the Assi. One forms the northern boundary of the city and the other the southern boundary. It is also mentioned in the sacred scriptures of Vamana Purana, Buddhism, Jain, and the Mahabharata epic. These few details are merely a portion of the ancient historical importance of *Banāres*.

After enlightenment, the Gotama Buddha delivered the first sermon, called The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma Suttā, or Promulgation of the Law Suttā (*Dhamma-chakra-pravartana*) at *Sārṇātha, Vārānasi*. The Fa-Hsien Chinese pilgrim recounted his experiences in *Vārānasi* in great detail in his diary. *Vārānasi* has long been a significant cultural center of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and even adherents of other religions. Going to the city for devotion has been a matter of prestige for people of many religious sects. City residents are particularly proud of their city’s being the religious capital of India.

The life and activities in the city are relevant to the holy Ganga River. For centuries, and still today, before sunrise, thousands of pilgrims—men, women, and children too—go down to the river to wait for the sun to rise. Sometimes they gather in groups or sometimes one sits alone, but all of them are posed at “the stream of liberation,” waiting for the right moment to immerse

themselves in the sacred Ganga, to wash away their worldly sufferings and dissolve their sins.

When the sun rises, the morning fog slowly dissipates and the ancient city's sanctuaries and shrines emerge gradually and majestically into the light, revealing an ancient beauty that is unlike that of any other city in the world.

Alongside the river, Brahmins chant continuously under palm-shaped large umbrellas made by pilgrims to shelter them from the sun. Monks are present, too, handing ashes to relatives of the dead and marking colored spots on the relatives' foreheads as a divine blessing. Boaters paddle or motor past, while sellers of flowers, lights, donuts, ornaments, even fish (for setting free) sing and call out to others on the river in gentle voices. Sacred cows often roam in the midst of the crowd, while flocks of vultures hover in the sky and make the sound "*oak oak oak*," occasionally wading down to the Ganga River to nibble on dead bodies.

Vārānasi evokes the belief in life, the contemplation of creation, and the meaninglessness of frivolous riches in the ultimate face of one's future death. Along the banks of the river many dead bodies are found, deliberately left out in the elements. The most sacred place here is the Manikarnika Temple, associated with the goddess Parvati (wife of the God Śiva).

Vishwanath, the city's main temple, is dedicated to worship both of Lord Śiva and of Hinduism's three most important gods-Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara-as well as other gods in this world. This temple connects the spiritual unity of *Vārānasi* with the inner-city Kashi (the ancient name of Banāres).

I. VĀRĀNASI IN THE PAST

In the old days, *Vārānasi* was known as Kashi, meaning “city of luminous light.” Each dawn there is a miracle where the sky is bright and quiet. The first rays of light are shattered into thousands of slivers of golden light on the silent ripples of water. The crowd of Hindus gathered along the shore welcomes the universe and its creator in the growing light. As the dim light begins to brighten, they gather up the Ganga’s golden water in their cupped hands, lift them to their heads, then tilt their hands to that water as an offering to the gods, while they mutter prayers from the *Gayatri Mantra*:

Om Bhur Bhuvasva

Tat savitur Varenium

Bharyo Devasya Dhimahi

Dhiyo Yo Nab Prachodayat.

(“*God, we observe your lights invading in the three realms and pray for your wisdom to shine through our minds.*”)

Gayatri Mantra is the hymn of the Rig Veda, one of the four Vedas of the Hindus and the earliest prayer in the world. It was compiled sometime around 1500 to 1000 B.C.E. by Aryan migrants living along the Indus River is what is now India’s Punjab region.

Before about 1000 B.C.E., they began migrating south to the Indo-Gangetic plain, and if historians’ theories are correct, the first person to chant the Gayatri Mantra on the banks of the Ganga in Kashi stood there in about 800-900 B.C.E., uttering the then-new sacred verses and doing a sacred dance. After that time, for about 3,000 years thereafter, the lyrics and the same dance appeared, glorifying the sunrise every morning in *Banāres*. Empires emerged and collapsed over the

centuries, and the bourgeoisie and the working classes were first dismissed and then replaced the Brahmins and nobles.

Amid these ups and downs, one thing still holds true: that the sun rises every day in *Banāres* so that the city's people may bless themselves with the golden dew of the Ganga. There are many outstanding things in this city, but nothing is more prominent than continuity and development of the religious traditions of Hinduism as it grows and flourishes.

Even before the Aryan people (800-900 B.C.E.) lived there, *Banāres* was likely very lively and prosperous. Archaeologists who excavated the Raj Temple on a plateau in the northeastern suburb of modern *Banāres* found evidence of Aryan settlements in olden days. Sanskrit scriptures, like the Atharva Veda (1100-900 B.C.E.) also mention this fact. Ironically, the chosen city of Hinduism is actually more ancient than Hinduism itself.

Who were the first inhabitants of *Banāres*? What happened to them after the Aryan tribe came there? According to the literature of the period, Aryan tribes were victorious and so they established hegemony on that site. Having contempt for the folk they had defeated, the conquerors divided the classes and regarded the local people as a slave class (*dasas*).

Historians of that time affirmed that these slavers were actually members of a Dravidian tribe, descended from survivors in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. In that situation, “*dasas*” are not meant in the normal sense, for although they were of a lower class than their invaders, they could be higher in their cultural activities. Excavations carried out in Harappa and Mohenjodaro proved that the Dravidian tribe had

developed a kind of urban life based on agricultural surplus for about a thousand years before the Aryan tribe arrived. They also had established a true religion for themselves, worshipping the goddesses and the god Pashupati, who is the god of all kinds of animals respected as Śiva god, and the god of *Banāres* now. They also worshipped plants and animals, such as the *peepul* tree (*ficus religiosa*, or sacred fig) and bulls. After the nomadic Aryan tribes arrived in the Ganga delta, for just over a century they also developed their own organized religion and urban civilization.

However, the establishment of power there did not completely put an end to the Dravidian culture and civilization. It survived and mingled with the superior faith of the Aryans, and over time a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan practices started to emerge. That developed into the religious system known as Hinduism.

Banāres is one of the main world centers where this synthesis has evolved. Both the worship practices of the Aryans and the former Aryan culture can be clearly seen throughout the city, so it marks the union of the *Vara* and *Assi* rivers. It also reminds us that the city then named *Vārānasi* is where Aryan descendants now live.

The city's nearly 3,000-year history and oral histories throughout the centuries confirm that it is one of the oldest cities in the world. Mr. Sherring, a Briton living in the mid-19th century, wrote:

“At least 25 centuries ago, *Banāres* was famous when Babylon city was struggling with Nineveh for supremacy, when Tyre was setting up its colonies, while Athen was growing in strength, before Rome had become known, or Greece had

contended with Persia or Cyprus had added lustre to the Persian monarchy, or Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem, and the Jewish inhabitants of Judaea had been carried into captivity...*Banāres* had risen to greatness, if not to glory.”

In the true sense, the modern *Banāres* is indeed a city—a museum of life. Time passes, the long past itself contains modern time, and one can still today find gods and goddesses throughout *Banāres*, in its sacred temples, in lakes and wells, in towers, festivals, narrow alleyways, crowds, and among pilgrims, hermitages, monks, and philosophers—they are all elements in the evolution of Indian civilization.

II. THE PARTICULAR LIFE OF HINDUISM

It is unfortunate that if one tried to learn everything about *Banāres*, one still would not know about many specific images and characters that have made *Banāres* a city for a particular Hindu lifestyle. That is one reason why visitors should learn a little about the Brahmin in the temple, the wandering monks, the devout pilgrims, and the bearers of death walking every day down the alleyways. These are images that can reveal themselves as charismatic associations with history and creators of the tales of mundane and supreme-mundane, of both a present world and an imaginary realm. Then visitors will see what lies behind some of the most familiar scenes in Benares.

1. BRAHMIN

On corridors of the shrines near the river Ganga, the Brahmins (usually attired with a bald head, three long white stripes painted in the middle of the forehead, and wearing a white dress) who manage the shrines sit on square wooden chairs on which are carved

pictures of pilgrims. They serve as religious officials and helpers for believers, in such matters as bathing rituals, chanting at *tilak*, keeping visitors' clothes and luggage, and so on, while they soak in the Ganga water, receiving *daan* or other offerings. These Brahmins are called *pandas* (meaning “renunciating wanderers” in Hinduism). Some *pandas* also have the responsibility of meeting pilgrims at the train station and arranging accommodations for them; sometimes this relationship is maintained in families for generations.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương visiting the Ganga River
on a sunny morning in 2019

2. SADHU AND SANYASI

The individuals known as *Sadhu* or *Sanyasi* are Hindu practitioners who forsake their family life to become lifelong wanderers and to seek the truth. They can be recognized by their light-yellow (saffron) robes, a lock of long tangled hair, a hard stick for support and protection, and a water jug in their hands. They mumble “*Ma, anna do*” (“please donate food to us”) as they ask for alms, begging in the streets of *Banāres*.

There are many kinds of such wanderers. For instance, the first kind are people leaving home to live in an *ashram* or a *math* (a college) to cultivate meditation; the second kind are *aughur*, who not only are leaving mundane life but also contesting the actual value of life. They often go to cremation sites, sleeping there and drinking water out of human skulls as well as cooking meals on the various funeral pyres.

All wanderers who belong to *Sanyasi*, such as the *Shankaracharya*, *Ramanujan*, *Vallabha*, and *Gorakhnath* of esoteric Hindu sects, are attached to shrines throughout *Banāres* where they can dwell in rainy seasons when travel becomes difficult. They came from many parts of India and gather to practice their belief at Banāres or other central shrines. This is similar to the way that Buddhist monks and nuns typically settle for three months in a place of summer retreat.

These *Sadhu* or *Sanyasi* wanderers also make pilgrimages in many places primarily to chant. Those who don't like to travel will stay in one place to recite *Sūtra* or do meditation. Others who prefer to travel like to deliver some sermons to various religious followers, since by doing so they too gain peace. There are some extreme ascetics who stand on one leg all day long. Their calves gradually become dry and stiff, and many birds even come to their heads to nest but the ascetics still don't move.

Brahmins and wanderers play vital roles in the performing of rituals for pilgrims (*panchtirthi*), which is the only true feature of Hinduism. On some occasions there are thousands of believers gathered in *Banāres*. The *panchtirthi* provides a means of praying to the gods for worldly purposes. These rituals are also often

celebrated for birthdays, funerals, and even weddings. It is believed that frequent chanting of the title of a deity or of an effective mantra can be absorbed and reconciled with gods in their breath, so that the sound of prayer continues existing until one's death.

The wanderers are only one part of the Brahmin larger community. Some, in turn, become a famous *pandit* (master), or a *pujari* (like the shrine manager), a *Mahant* (like the abbot and other dignitaries in religious institutions), or a *Vyasa* (lecturer). According to tradition, *Banāres* is the Brahmins' true citadel, and there Brahmins have long preserved the ancient Sanskrit literature and the Hindu ritual traditions.

Why do wanderers give up the world? What makes them go forth? The answers to these two questions can be, in a word, *moksha* (liberation). To understand this word and the way of life of the *Sanyasi*, one has to figure out the core teachings in Hinduism. If the Brahmins are people performing the Hindu sacrifice ritual, then the *Sanyasi* will be the keepers of the sacred and mysterious lineage of Hinduism.

The essence of Hinduism is the view of the deep realization of the whole of life and of an absolute universe. That is, having a God-view in all things and all things in God. According to Hindus, there is only one cosmic spirit—the endless, immortal, creative, and benevolent spirit.

Hindus believe that this spirit is *brahma* (the great self) and that *brahma* exists in two forms. The first is the cosmic spirit that lies outside oneself as a permanent truth of the Universe, while the second is human beings like *Atman* (the small self). *Atman* is the inner truth within us.

The entire Hindu philosophical mansion is built around the *Brahma* and *Atman* ideal. The constant transformation of *Atman* from one to the other is often compared to an unmoved-wheel. In Hindu thought, this process lasts endlessly and is often compared to an unstopped but moving wheel. Desires to get rid of this endless cycle are called *moksha* (liberation).

Moksha is the highest purpose of existence. In *Banāres*, long-haired wanderers going down the steps of the temple toward the Ganga (where people get water), holding a cane with one hand and a bottle of water with the other, really *can* reach their goal of liberation. In any case, if one is a true *Sanyasi* or *panda* wanderer, he or she will practice toward liberation.

3. THE FAITHFUL AND PILGRIMS

All throughout *Banāres*, travelers can see the religious faithful mixing with visitors from all around the globe, bathing in the Ganga, going around to the temples, bowing to the gods and offering them flowers and fruitcakes, as well as chanting songs of praise. Many Hindu festivals are held with great happiness, and they gather *lakh* (hundreds of thousands) of people to *melas* (the big areas) in the city.

Such passion and enthusiasm often make the entire city seem like an enormous arena for religious purposes. In this way, this is in accordance with the ancient Sanskrit *Sūtras*, which decreed that *Banāres* was clearly not a city, but rather a country of people of faith. This city is said by some to actually exist in a sacred space, with a physical radius of five *kroscha* (a *kroscha* equals 9,000 yards), in which the sacred Hindu places were built. Devotees are ready and willing to spend five days of pilgrimage (*panchkroschi*), walking

distances of some 50 km throughout the city along the Panchkroshi road.



The tuktuk vehicle for ordinary residents

The importance of *Banāres* as a religious center emphasizes the fact that this is Hinduism's largest *tirtha*. The word *tirtha* means "passing place," or the spiritual practicing ability of human beings who are passing from the material realm to the spiritual world. There are thousands of *tirthas* throughout India, but for centuries *Sapta puri* (seven cities) and *Char dham* (four largest resident cities) have been considered to be the most prominent. The seven sacred cities are:

1. Ayodhya: lies on the north where the god Rama governs
2. Mathurā: is where the god Krishna was born
3. Haridwar: is a place where the Ganga River flows out to the plains
4. Kashi: is a city of the god Śiva
5. Ujjain: lies in the middle of India and belongs to the god Śiva

6. Dwaraka: is the Krishna center in the west of India

7. Kanchi: lies in the south and belongs to the god Śiva and Vishnu

Four large settlement cities mark the sacred spiritual lands of India. These are *Banāres* to the north, *Puri* to the east, *Rameshwaram* to the south, and *Dwaraka* to the west. Among all these holy places, *Banāres* is considered the most sacred site, since it consists of all other *tirthas* in both their literal and figurative meanings. A pilgrimage to *Banāres* is thus considered to be of more worth than other *tirthas*, because while visiting there pilgrims will be imparted all the merit of other *tirthas*.

Therefore, visitors from all over the world have flocked into *Banāres* for centuries. The continuous activities of the city's devotees and visitors mainly originated in the history of Hinduism in approximately the second to first centuries B.C.E., with the introduction of worshipping gods. At first, the Aryan peoples did believe in gods, but they only connected with them through ritual sacrifices.

Mahāyāna Buddhism was influenced by Hindu divine worship around the first century B.C.E. Hindus believed that the Buddha was actually the ninth god in the Hindu polytheistic list. However, once that belief became accepted, the worship of gods was completely transformed into a religion.

That worship has evolved into a *Bhakti* movement. The primacy of *Bhakti* veneration in Hinduism was established by Ramanujan, a Dravidian scholar living in the 11th century C.E. The divine worship, in combination with his efforts, has had a major influence on modern Hinduism and has resulted in more than 1.25 billion Hindus living throughout the world today.



Rev. Diệu Hoa, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, Tỉnh Bình, Chánh Hào,
and local Indian children

However, over time two Hindu divinities, Vishnu and Siddhartha, became well known. They also dwell in other gods either as incarnations or as their companions or spouses. In the north of India, *Ayodhya* and *Mathurā* are prominent centers of worship of Vishnu, while above all *Banāres* is still Śiva's city.

The superiority of Śiva illustrates the synthesis of forms of both Aryan and non-Aryan worship. He could not be a non-Aryan god, but later he merged into the Aryan tradition, because that god was so famous and powerful that people forgot his origin. The god Śiva, usually depicted with a serpent around his body, is easily accepted as one of the great deities of Hinduism. He is believed to visit cremation grounds along with very vicious followers, called *gana* and *bhairava*.

The god Śiva disobeys all sorts of Aryans, because he is not subject to Aryan orders. He is not described in the Vedas because he actually appeared before they did. However, for about a thousand years, the god Śiva was accepted as a god of the Aryans. The Aryans

practiced a civilization of fertility, and worshipped goddesses and the penis. Today, Śiva is worshipped commonly in the form of a linga (symbol of the penis). At Benares, Śiva's linga can be seen at virtually every corner under the *peepul* trees. It is a cylindrical black stone placed on a circular base. Some people believe that the linga is bisexual rather than of a male nature. The god Śiva is considered half male and half female, with the upright linga indicating male and the circular one indicating female. There are many myths related to the origin of linga. The story of *linga jyoti*, in which Śiva appears out of a linga of light, is the first time that the linga was presented in Kashi.

Countless stories associate this god with Kashi city. In some stories, the city is located on a background created by the god Śiva on the god's trident. Kashi is placed on the ground and is not subjected to karmic law. In another traditional story, Śiva is described as a hermit sitting in meditation on the top of Mount Kedar, in the Himalayas. It is said that the power of his meditation made the world begin to move. It was at that mountain that he fell in love with Princess Parvati and married her, being the daughter of the mighty Himalayas. After observing the whole universe to find a suitable place for the bride and groom, the god Śiva chose the beautiful city of Kashi as his residence. He promised that he would never leave that city, which is why Kashi is also known as *Avimukteshwara* ("never abandoned").

Although *Banāres* is a famous city of Śiva, other Hindu deities are also worshipped there. One folktale explains the presence of these other gods. It relates that there was once a great drought on Earth that destroyed the social order and caused misery everywhere. Brahma

knew that only one person could re-create the order and harmony, and that was a king among philosophers named *Divodasa*, who led a secluded life in *Banāres*. So Brahma asked the king to govern the entire world. King Divodasa agreed to do so, on condition that all the gods had to leave Earth to live only in the heavens. Even Śiva had to go away from Kashi.

However, one day, Śiva began to miss his beloved city, Kashi. At first he sent 64 female followers, *yogis* as well as *gana*, to Kashi, to try to deceive the Divodasan king into leaving the city. But when they came to Kashi, they fell in love with it. Not only did they fail in their mission, but they also left everything behind and stayed in Kashi. The god Śiva then sent other deities down to Earth to see what had happened to his disciples and tried to cast Divodasa out. Yet the followers could not resist the beauty of the city and insisted on staying in Kashi.

Śiva then sent the Brahma away, but he too failed and was hooked by Kashi's charm. Finally, in despair, he sent Vishnu to Kashi, and that god convinced King Divodasa to set up a shrine to worship Śiva's *linga* in Kashi and also to build a path for Śiva's destination. Divodasa then went to heaven and Śiva returned to his beloved city, feeling great joy and promising never to leave again. Since then, this city has been inhabited not only by Śiva, but also by the 330 million gods in Hindu polytheism.

4. FUNERALS

Visitors to *Banāres* who go down to the Ganga River will see many funerals taking place. The funerals there are different from the custom in Vietnam, for example. In *Vārānasi* as well as generally in India,

the dead are placed on a bamboo stretcher (carried by four carriers); are covered with yellow, red, or white cloth; and are honored with fresh flowers on the cloth. Relatives of the dead walk in front of the procession, chanting “*Ram Nam Satya Hai*” (truth is God, God is truth). People are never seen crying. Nor are trumpets, motorcycles, video cameras, or smartphone cameras ever seen in a funeral procession. The group stops at either the Manikarnika shrine or the Harishchandra shrine, where the corpse is placed on a platform. It is said that at the moment of death, the god Śiva appears and blows into the ear of the dead person the word “*Taraka*” (the mantra of the great transgression), telling her that she is now free from the cycle of Samsāra and can return to mingle in the greater universe, and that bad karma and a punishment in hell will no longer exist for her. This mantra is a Hindu tradition established by the god Guru (a Hindu god, Śiva) who gave it to his disciple to open the door of immortality.

Therefore, thousands of older or ill people from all over India come to *Banāres* to wait for death, so that they can die and attain liberation (*moksha*) and will receive Śiva blessings to turn disasters to permanent deliverance. Behind Śiva’s statue, sprinkled with flowers at the corner of Dashachivamedha, visitors notice old monks dressed in yellow robes who came to *Banāres* strictly for the purpose of liberation, waiting to die under the eaves of the Śiva shrine.

5. A SIN-CLEANSING RIVER

In ancient days, there was a king called Bhagirath, whose grandparents tried to disturb the hermit named Kapila, who was practicing meditation. Kapila angrily

burned them to ashes, so their souls were released and so they were unable to be born in heaven. King Bhagirath then prayed to Brahma for their release. Brahma told the king that the souls of his own grandfathers would be saved only when their ashes were dissolved in the stream of the sacred Ganga, whose water falls from the sky. King Bhagirath then prayed to the goddess of the Ganga River to appear on Earth. Although the goddess was ready to help him, there was also the hindrance that if the river fell directly onto the Earth, its mighty power would destroy all places it fell on.

King Bhagirath solved this problem by asking for help from both Śiva and the god of the Himalayas, who agreed to let the Ganga fall on his head through his tangled hair so that its strength would only gradually descend to Earth. It would thus be flowing behind Bhagirath from the Himalayas to Ganga Sagar at Bengal, before merging into the vast ocean. During that long journey, the Ganga flowed smoothly and nothing happened, but when he came to *Banāres*, seeing this lovely city, he did not want to continue going far as well as to return. It was with great difficulty that King Bhagirath had to persuade Ganga to continue flowing. If we look at the Ganga in *Banāres* today, we will see that it bends in the north corner, as if flowing back to its origin, in accordance with this legend. The bend itself is shaped like a crescent moon, and there are cement steps sticking out. After Ganga continued to flow, King Bhagirath threw his own grandparents' ashes into the Ganga, thus freeing them from their earthly existence.

The Ganga is a sacred river in India. Hindus believe that it will wash away believers' sins and that if they throw the ashes of their dead down there, the

dead souls will be saved. It is one of the sacred features of *Banāres* that the Ganga has attracted literally millions of devotees from the past and continues to do so today-not just ordinary devotees but also celebrities throughout India and even the world. They know that many gods have bathed in the sacred river, so they too wish to bathe in it. Stepping down to its water is like stepping down into the flow of Indian culture itself.



Saris drying in the sun after visitors bathe in the Ganga River

III. THE CEREMONIES IN ALLEYS

Away from the shrines of *Banāres* exists a strange world of intricate alleyways in a chessboard pattern that makes up the main points of this ancient city. *Banāres* was named for these streets' *galis*, meaning galleries that can be defined as “*the crooked alleys*,” ranging from some 1 to 4 meters long to infinitely longer. Beginning at the Assi Shrine, they extend to the Raj Shrine in the densely populated area called Pucca Mahal. In the past, the alleys of traffic were the physical elements that eventually formed the city of

Vārānasi, since the main roads connecting to its Raj, Maidagin, Chowk, and Gadowlia districts were built during the later British administration.

Galīs are extremely narrow and so thickly peopled with shoppers and merchants that sunlight cannot reach them in places. The only way to proceed is to walk forcefully onward. If a cow comes from the opposite direction, which often happens, a walker must backtrack. It is said that the god Śiva often rides a cow, and because *Vārānasi* is his city, therefore the cow became a sacred animal, which it remains even today. This is a particularly Indian religious feature that exists nowhere else in the world.



Eating after a ritual of *Puja* (a Hindu form of worship)

A long time ago, the British authorities tried to change that tradition of animals walking down the city's *galīs*, but they had to give up that idea because of the locals' strong objections. Over the years, *galīs* have grown more and more crowded, and now are sometimes full to bursting in the narrow streets of *Banāres*, especially when animals are also parading.

People believe that if two bulls happen to butt into each other, a scene right out of hell will be presented. So men, women, and children hide in safe corners or just avoid these areas entirely. Sometimes two bulls push past other, then walk straight into the shops or brush against people in the streets. Some *galis* are so narrow that even bicycles cannot pass through. Some of the streets' attractions, though, are shops vending cakes, *rabri* (sweet cakes covered by milk and ice cream), *lassi* glasses (like yogurt, but in liquid form), and *thandai* (milk cake with frozen almonds). There are also small shops selling *paan* (tràu cau), *Paan* (cai beet groats), *paan* with *masala* (brown salt with some flavor), and cigarettes. The tortuous alleys link to shops selling brass items, inexpensive jewelry, silk things, flowers, and many other items.

Visitors can choose to walk down the narrow alleys of Vishwanath to get to the temples. The Śiva shrine has been located there for more than 1,500 years, but the temple is now not the original construction because it was destroyed by Islamic invaders centuries ago. King Akbar supported rebuilding the shrine, yet his Muslim grandson Aurangzeb destroyed it and built a mosque there. However, Hindu traditions in this city were so deeply rooted that even the Muslim Aurangzeb could not turn the root out. Historically, Hindu people endure even when they are weak, so when conditions were ripe they simply began to reconstruct the shrine.

Traffic and people on the roads throughout *Banāres* indicate that India is indeed an enormously crowded world. Many people come to India from far places and end up staying, residing in its streets and alleyways. Those who come from Bengal typically live in the Bangali Tola district; people who come from

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka live behind the Hanuman Temple; migrants from Punjab live in Lahori Tola; those who come from Gajaratis reside in Suth Tola and Chaukhamba; the Nepalese like to live in Doodh Vinayak; those who come from Maharashtra stay by the Durga Temple and Brahma Temple; those who come from Marwari reside in alleys running from Mandan Sahu to Ram; the Sindhi have their own area in Soniya; followers of Islam (Muslims) often live in Madan Pura and Revadi Talab; while Afghanis tend to live in and around Deniya Bagh.

The infinite diversity of human daily life in *Banāres* creates major problems in these alleys, such as health and illness concerns, work and leisure pursuits, philosophical concerns, music, poetry, business, psychology, empathy, aversion, and so on.

For centuries, the city's *galis* have come alive with sounds and music. In any alleyway behind Iswar Gangi, or in the alleyways leading straight to Dufferin Hospital or to the Nagri Natak Mandala, strollers can hear the sound of many instruments like the tabla, the *sarangi*, or just the melody of the city itself. This tradition of classical music became famous around the 16th century. Musicians and dancers in *Banāres* continue to play played important roles in the city's artistic development.

Vārānasi is a pleasure-enjoying city, and most visitors will desire to come back. Many artists of dance and music have become legendary, such as Pandit Ravi Shankar (*sitar*), Ustad Bishmillah Khan (*shehnai*), Shambhu Nath Mishra and Sumernath (*sarangi*), Gharanas or Pandit Ram Sahay and Pandit Biru Mishra (tabla), and others. *Banāres* has also produced talented dancers and singers like Gopi

Krishna, Prasad, Manohar, Jagdeepji, and Majnuddun Khan, and a multitude of others. The list of names is long and cannot be written here.

Nowhere else but in *Banāres* have the foundations of Indian music been as well-researched as well as richly performed. *Banāres* itself is proud to be called the cultural capital of India. No famous scholar remains unconnected with this sacred city. In religious pursuits, people such as Shankaracharya, Rama Nand, Kabeer das, Tulsi das, Chaitanya Mohaprabhu, Raidas, Ramanuj, Ballabhachary, Parshaw Nath, and numerous others have studied and written on many aspects of religion and have even proposed ethical laws for the locals.

Great scholars of Hindi literature include Bhartendu Harish chandra, Jagamath das Ratanaker, Munshi Prem Chanda, Jaisharker Prasad, Acharya Ramchander shukla, Dr. Hajari Prasad Diwedi, and Shyam Sunder Das. Many of them were born in *Vārānasi* and went on to create leading positions for themselves in the field of literature.

Popular fine artists like Bismillah Khan, Pt. Ravi Shanker, Kishan Moharaj, Siddhesawaridevi, Giraja Devi, Shamta Prasad Misra (Godie Moharaj), and others were fortunate enough to have been born in *Vārānasi* and have become celebrities because of their valuable contributions. The great artist Sri Krishan Das founded Bharat Kala Bhawan, while Pt. Gopinath Kavi Raj is one of the leaders in the Vidya Tantra; both are loved and respected nationally.

However, besides all the city's cultural riches, the first importance of the alleys is still to conduct the city's overall economy. All commercial activities of the city connect closely with these small alleys.

Banāres was known as a major trading center in ancient times. The Ganga River has eternally been a major means of transportation for everyone. Local excavations have proved that *Banāres* had managed a vivid trade with Ujjain and Ghandhar, and it is clear that *Banāres* even did business with far-away Rome. That might have happened because good-quality muslin cloth, called *kasikavastra*, was able to be exported from *Banāres*. The word *shrethis* means traders who do business in the streets. According to ancient Jakata tales, history shows a living picture of many economic activities occurring in *Banāres* in olden times, when the elite often accumulated a lot of properties.

For centuries, the best goods all around the world consisted primarily of cotton, wool, and silk. Since antiquity, various kinds of cloth in Benares, called *kasikuttam*, *kaseyka*, or simply *kasiya*, have been among the softest-woven fabrics in the world. Weavers (*kasiva*) often used gold thread and inlaid their garments with gemstones, which kings requested both for their royal costumes as well as capital that could be traded. For centuries, *Vārānasi* weavers' creations of beautiful silk and gold lame brocade were considered valuable goods to export via the famous Silk Road to China and even to faraway Europe.

These days, Indian brides often wear sarees woven in *Vārānasi* at their weddings. People believe that this kind of silk was used for shrouding the Buddha's body after he entered Nirvana, because it was so beautifully woven and smooth that even body oil could not be absorbed. Traditional crafts continue to flourish in *Banāres* to this day, such as gold and silver jewelry, many items for use in water, furniture, interior decorations, toys, tools and utensils in wood, metal,

and terracotta. New crafts such as woven carpets come into the city from Balaclava village.

During the Muslim war in Mudhal Aurangzeb, the city of *Banāres* was devastated and its people were cruelly treated. Residents today believe that it returned to normal conditions only under the protection of the god Śiva. Many local people are on a daily diet (from dawn to 8:00 p.m. they eat nothing and only drink water) so they can pray for happiness and peace. They believe that bathing in the sacred Ganges would weave a thread that links them to the heaven so they would not be reborn. They also believe that with the blessings of the Ganga River, they will be long-lived. This is the principal reason that they often perform ceremonies at the river, pouring its water on their bodies and even bathing in it. Not only Indians but thousands of people from all over the world have come to live in *Vārānasi*, hoping to exist in fearlessness and an atmosphere of peace.

IV. VISHWANATH DOWNTOWN

In *Banāres*, Vishwanath Street, the most famous area, is situated on the east side of the road that runs from Raj to Assi. From north to south the street is about 500 m long. It starts at Devdasi-ka-pul and is connected with the Bans Fatak's alleys, and continues to the Annapurna and Kashi Vishwanath shrines. The road is too narrow for sunlight to enter the three-to-four-storey buildings on both sides. The Vishwanath Street downtown is full of temples, shrines, stupas, dharamshala (guest houses for pilgrims), linga (penises), and other features and idols.

Many shops are so crowded that they even extend out into the shrines dotted through the alleyways. Even

the famous Vishwanath Temple's front cannot be seen except through shops selling items of worship. There are plenty of religious shops that sell fresh flowers, candles, paintings of various gods, colored powders, and other items such as furniture, toys, jewelry, and decorative household products. All owners of large shops are willing to pay a commission to people who will act as intermediaries in attracting buyers.



Making the holy color

The economic, cultural, and religious life of *Banāres* has long since merged into these alleys. Everything is a lively hustle and bustle before sunrise. The daily chanting cries of “*Har, Har Mahadeve!*” (*Oh, my brahma*) or “*Śiva! Śiva!*” rise in the air as people head to the Ganges for a bath and return to the Vishwanath Shrines. After about 10:00 a.m., the crowd of devotees begins to diminish and the alleys start to change into other styles: merchants, workers,

and employees begin their work; students go to their schools; shops are opened around 11:00 a.m., but their business only gets really busy in the afternoon. From 3:00 p.m. onward, a mundane background of noise takes over the alleys; most sellers are male.

Later in the evening, people in the city, whether writers, students, poets, government officials, or politicians, seem to move toward Vishwanath Lane and to gather in paan or coffee shops. Some even pay a visit to the Vishwanath Temple to see the *aarti* rite.

Thanks to economic development in *Banāres*, the locals have many opportunities to give their attention and time to perfection of the art of life. Over the years, the city has come to experience values such as *masti* and *mauj*, which mean pleasure, normal work, non-greed, but an overall enjoyment of life. They contradict values such as cynicism, disappointment, and pursuing hasty enrichment at the speed of the modern world.

The local folk really try to live in the present, not thinking about the past and not worrying about the future. They enjoy their lives and, by this way, it is believed that persons will be born into heaven just as the god Śiva has affirmed, so life is a smile, not a hesitation.

The simple joy that Indians feel in life increases enthusiasms in their lives, such as bathing in the Ganges, prostrating before a shrine, playing music with friends, dancing and eating *mithai* (sweets) or *thandai* (milk cake with beans) or *paan* (petel). It is said that the practice of eating *paan* gives one a blessing like the state of liberation (*moksha*).



A street market at *Banāres*

V. THE SHRINES AT BANĀRES

Vārānasi is famous as a city of shrines. Below are descriptions of some of the countless temples located along the Ganga River bank. Most of the conspicuous temples are dedicated to the god Śiva and bear many different names.

1. Kashi Vishwanath Temple: This temple become popular as a golden temple enshrining the god Śiva. It is located on the narrow alleyway, neither large nor wide, and is not a visually impressive temple. Yet crowds of thousands of devotees come here to pray for the benefit of the world and also for personal salvation.

The temple has a somewhat vague history. It was destroyed a number of times by the Muslim army, and later returned to life like a phoenix. In 1669 C.E., Emperor Muslim Aurangzeb destroyed the temple and built the Gyanvapi Mosque in its place. Later, Marathas reconstructed it and Maharaja Ranjeet Singh donated 875 seers (one seer=0.9 kg) of gold for plating the temple's dome. Today it is governed by the Uttar Pradesh State. Inside the temple, there is a *linga* (penis) that is believed to be the very first *linga* that

started being worshipped some thousands of years ago. Around the temple are situated images of innumerable gods and goddesses, especially the goddess *Annapurna* (the good fertility) beloved in *Banāres*. She is known as a mother providing food and caring for all forms of life. It is said that she and Śiva made an agreement at *Banāres* by which she takes care of the lives of human beings and guards the non-starving before their death. The god Śiva cares for the life after death, ensuring that everyone in *Banāres* will receive salvation.

Giving and receiving food are important elements of Hinduism. Annapurna is considered the god of giving. She is a good example of giving food, as practiced by many locals. There is a great festival called *Annakuta* in which Annapurna is honored as a great benefactor. Mountains of food and cakes are distributed to the poor and others attending on those days.

2. Annapurna Temple: This temple stands next to Vishwanath Temple. Annapurna Temple has two great statues, one made of gold (visitors are allowed to visit it only once a year) and another made of silver. There are also numerous other deities such Kuber, Śiva, Vishnu, Gonesh, Hamunan, and the Yantreshawar Linga. In a chamber next to the main shrine, a number of statues of gods are honored, like Mahakali, Śiva Poriwar, Gangavataran, Luxmi Naranyan, Shri Ramdarbar, Radha Krishna Uma Maheshwari, and Nar Singh.

3. Kashi Karwat Temple: This temple is also dedicated to Śiva. It stands near the Gyanwapi Muslim Mosque. Inside, there is a linga of Śiva. Whenever the road to this place is blocked, people still stand outside to bow and offer flowers. It is said that an ax is placed next to the linga because people used to chop off their own heads in an act of religious fanaticism to seek liberation.

4. Tilbhandeshwar Temple: This is another temple dedicated to Sihan Hsana. It displays a 5 feet tall linga, which grows a bit every day due to a pile of sesame seeds (*til*) that worshippers pour on the linga top. Over time they become solid and add to its height.

5. Gyanwapi Temple: Next to Vishwanath Temple is the Gyanwapi Temple. This temple was built on the primitive foundations of the Vishwanath temple occupied by the Muslims. According to some historians, in order to prevent invaders from smashing the statues, the faithful here threw the linga in the well but later took it out and enshrined it at the temple where it is seen today. Here can also be seen the *Nandi* statue (the elephant god) with a height of 7 feet.

6. Swami Narayan Shrine: This is a popular temple of the Swami Narayan people, located in front of Machhodari Park. The shrine has interesting architecture and attracts many tourists.

7. Harihs Chandra Cremation: This is a place for burning corpses (Smashan Ghat).

8. Dashashawmegh Temple: At one time this temple was called Rudra Sarovar.



Shops on the way to the temples

9. Manikarinka Temple: This temple, likely the oldest temple in *Vārānasi*, was built on a very charming landscape along the banks of the Ganga. People often come here to ring the bell. Legend has it that Śiva's wife once fell down from the height of its shrine. The front area of the temple is also used as a crematorium.

10. Panch Ganga Temple: This temple is made of stone. Above it there is the Madhava ka Dharhara Mosque.

11. Jangambari Math Temple: This temple is situated in Jangam Bari Mahalla.

12. Gauriya Math: This temple sits on Sonerpura Mohalla, Kashi. In the month of Shrawan, there is a ceremony called Krishana Lila, which attracts masses of devotees.

13. Bharat Mata (Mandir): This temple, located near Kashi Vidyapith, lies on the road that runs from the rail station *Vārānasi* Cantt to Lanka (in West Bengal), and its main gate faces west. It was inaugurated in 1936 with the participation of *Mahatma Gandhi*, the great leader struggling for India's independence from British rule. The temple architecture is one of the greatest examples of marble architecture in India; it even has an Indian map engraved on it. It opens from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. A huge number of domestic and foreign visitors as well as local people, irrespective of religion, pay a visit, because many Hindu temples do not allow unbelievers to enter and only permit them to stand outside.

14. Durga Temple: This temple with its important history lies along the road from the rail station *Vārānasi* Cantt to Lanka. It is dedicated to the goddess Durga (wife of Śiva). It has many floors made of red brick and a number of green trees, as well as countless

monkeys that reside in and climb through the nearby trees. On festival days, goats are offered as sacrifices to the goddess Durga. Near the shrine are several small temples, such as Chandbhairva, Kumkteshwar, and Durgavinayak. The temple opens from 5:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. The sight of the temple is very beautiful.

15. Tulsi Manas Temple (Mandir): This modern temple was built in 1970 by the industrialist Shree Ratan Lal Sureka, who lived in Calcutta. The temple was constructed in black and white marble and features frescoes of Ram Charit Manas painted on several walls. The story of Ram Charit Manas (Ramayana God) was compiled by Tulsidas and carved on a wall to increase the solemn aesthetics of the temple and make it even more magnificent.

16. Sankat Mochan: This temple opens for an unusually extended period, from 5:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

17. Birla Temple (Bhu): This large temple is also known by other names, such as New Vishwanath Mandir. It is located in the area of the famous Banāres Hindu University. The temple, made entirely of marble, was built by an industrialist Birla family and worships the linga of Śiva at *Garbh Grih*.

18. Vishwanath Temple: The original temple was destroyed by a powerful army of Muslims and only the foundation remained. However, it was restored by Rani Ahilyabai in the 18th century. The golden background of the dome was added as an offering by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, from Punjab, in the 19th century. The temple permits only Muslims to visit, so other religious people cannot know what things are worshipped inside it.

19. Gopal Temple: This main temple of Ballabh is located in Chaukhambha muhalla, but people worship

this Gopal Temple according to Ballabh tradition. In front of this temple there are also other temples like Ranhodji, Bare Maha Raj, Baldeo Ji, and Dawoo Ji, each of which symbolizes Ballabh traditional beliefs.

20. Jala Ram: This temple, built by a Gujrati person, is located on the road from Ashapur to *Sārṇātha* and it is still under construction.

21. Ram Nagar Fortress and Museum: These lie about 16 km from *Vārānasi*, located near the Ganga River's eastern bank. A pontoon bridge connects the Ganga with the city of Ramnagar. During the rainy season, there is ferry service to take guests back and forth. Ramnagar is a small town in *Vārānasi*. The *fortress* is the castle of the late Emperor Kashi Naresh. The *museum* is inside Kashi Naresh City, displaying rare collections of the royal family such as palanquins, royal dress, swords, and matchlocks from the medieval period. It is open mornings from 9:00 a.m. to noon and afternoons from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., except Sunday.

22. Akhara Tulsi Temple: The temple lies on the two-way crossroad between Assi and the Ganga River, next to the Assi Shrine. It is the meditation center of Tulsi Das. It was named Ram Charitra Manas in the 16th century. On the top of this stands a Ram Tower where the god Tulsi Das is believed to have breathed his last. It is thought that Tulsi Das authored the Ram Charit Manas from Aranyakand to Utter Kand. Inside the temple, visitors can see Manas Pothi's own handwritten materials, as well as Tulsi's wooden boat and his shoes.

23. Assi Temple: The Assi Ghat is located at the southern end of the city of *Vārānasi*. It is situated at the point where the Assi River meets the Ganga, so the name "Assi" was given to the temple. On the top of this temple is enshrined an old Śiva linga, called

Asisanga-meshwara. However, the popular attraction of this temple is the linga of an outcast Śiva statue under a *peepul* tree. According to Puranas (an ancient Sanskrit *Sūtra*), the goddess Durga had thrown her sword there after killing the Shumbh Nishumbh devil.

24. Lolarka Lake: Situated above Tulsi temple, the lake is famous for its rocky steps. Some people think that this is the ancient place of *Banāres*. The god who inhabits this lake is the sun, whose spirituality dates back to “*non-Arya*” times when the fertility culture was popular. This place is also famous for its sacred prayers (blessings for women without children, but who have become pregnant), so many couples without children often come here to pray.

25. Śhivala Temple: The next important temple is the Śhivala Shrine, built by King Panchkot. On top of it is a palace of Haharaja Chet Singh, who fought against England in 1781. It is held that Kapil Muni was the founder of the famous Sankhya philosophical school whose followers lived near the temple around the 17th century.

26. Hanuma Shrine: After the Śhivala Shrine, there are the Hanuman Temples. They hold statues of the famous *Bhakti* saint called *Vallabhacharya*, who lived and preached at the end of the 15th and 16th centuries. This temple was built by Mahant Harihar. There is one statue of Śiva, helped Kal Bhairava escape from demons. Its Śiva is one of a set of eight *Bhairava* statues.

27. Harishchandra cremation ground: Next to the Hanuma Shrine is this cremation ground, governed by Nagar Nigam. It has been revered from ancient times. This is one of India’s most sacred cremation grounds. Another is Manikarnika (see #9 above).



Cremations at the Ganga River

Its former name of Hari honors the legendary king of Kashi City, who was known for his benevolent and giving. Legend has it that, to test the king's heart, the gods sent the Brahmin Vishvamitra to visit his palace, including the king, his wife, and his son. Because of his vow of giving, the king offered both queen Tara and prince Rahul, even the king himself, to serve Brahmin assistants who burned corpses and did other work in the burned yard. A Dom (a Brahmin doing the job of torching corpses and other works in the yard) assigned Harishchandra to collect fees before he burned the dead.

One day, a poor woman pleaded to have her dead child burned. Harishchandra recognized her as his wife and the dead child as his lovely little prince. Tara did not have money to pay for the cost of the fire. Harishchandra knew that it was his duty to spend the costs of his last rituals; otherwise the child's soul would forever be uneasy. However, he himself was

a poor slave without a coin. As a caretaker in the cremation ground, he could let his own son be burned without paying, but Harishchandra was not a deceiver, so the exposed baby's dead body was not burned. The deities pretended to check Harishchandra's conduct. Harishchandra did not take advantage of his job of burning his son's body without money, for he truly was a moral and honest man. Then the gods touched his heart, and his capital was returned to King Harishchandra so that he could enjoy a happy life with his wife and children.

28. Kedar Temple: This temple takes the name of the donor, Kadareshwara, who built this shrine. Near the temple is Lake Gauri. Both the lake and the temple are very popular. Many Bengali people live around the temple. The temple includes the gods Ganesh, Laxmi, and Annapurna, several gods of Hindu polytheism.

29. Chauki Temple: This temple is located next to Kedar Temple. There is a very big old tree standing on top of the concrete steps. Under a tree are some naga rocks and images of sacred snakes. On the Nag Panchami holiday in July or August, thousands of believers attend a ceremony to celebrate sacred gods.

30. Dashashvamedha Temple: Dashashvamedha means "*the sacrifice of ten horses,*" and this temple is one of the most popular shrines in *Banāres*. The south area of the temple is known as Rudrasara or Rudrasarovar. Among its most famous images, there is the goddess *Shitala*, who treats smallpox and measles for villagers.

31. Prayag Temple: North of this temple is an area called Prayag, named for its famous *tirtha*. At the Dashashvamedha Temple are worshipped three lingas of the god *Śiva* (Brameshwara, Shulankeshwara, and

Dashashvamedha). From this temple, visitors can easily reach the famous Vishwanath Temple.

32. Man Mandir Temple: After the Dashashvamedha Temple comes this temple, which was built by Man Singh. The Mughal empire's general commander, Akbar, said to have base his army here. One of the attractions of this temple is the observatory, built by King Rajput XVIII. The temple also has an ancient Puranic linga, called Someshwara.

33. Temple Mir: Mir is the name of a multicolored ethnic group who lived in this city. A Mr. Mir Rustam Ali was appointed by Nawab in Avadh as governor of Kashi in the early 18th century. Although Mir Ali was a Muslim, he helped greatly to develop *Banāres*. Songs praising his contribution are still sung by Hindu people today throughout the city. Passionately fond of music and dance, Mir Ali began holding music concerts at Budhwa Mangali. That festival is just one of the many festivals in the world that have grown up since Kashi's height. After 1940, the Mangalore Buddhwa Festival began to decline into a mere ritual, and then ended.

34. Lalita Shrine: After the Mir shrine is the Lalita Temple, built by a Nepalese king who was named after the temple. At the top of the temple there is a beautiful stupa dedicated to the god Mahadeva Pashupatinath, made of wood and engraved in the Nepalese style.

35. Manikarnika Temple: This temple has long been known as one of the most sacred shrines in the city. It is said that the sanctuary of Manikarnika was known long before the Ganga reached *Banāres*. According to legend, this is where Śiva created the universe, and it is here that people will survive the destruction of the universe.

In the center of the temple grounds is Lake Chakrapushpani, which forms the image of Vishnu and his sweetheart. It was in this lake that the goddess Parvati once dropped her earrings while bathing. On the steps, a few meters from the water, there were signs of Vishnu's footprints on the marble slab of the ladder. This place is sanctified by the gods of Śiva, Vishnu and the Ganga River; for Hindus, there is no place as sacred as this. Soaking in the river in front of this temple is a necessity for all believers. Manikarnika Temple is also the most sacred crematorium in *Banāres*. Hindus believe that anyone cremated here will achieve liberation. The most important image in this temple is Śiva's linga, called Tarakeshawara. The presence of this temple at Manikarnika was appropriate because it was here that Śiva chanted silently the *Taraka* mantra in the deceased's ear so that they would both be saved at the last moment. From Manikarnika Temple it is easy to reach the enormous Vishwanath Temple for a dip in the Ganga water there.

36. Panch Ganga Temple: If the Dasashwamedha Shrine is considered to be the most admired one in *Banāres*; the Manikarnika Temple is said to be the most sacred; and the Panch Ganga Temple is thought to be the greatest. This is one of the five main temples where pilgrims (*Panchtirthi*) believe that bathing in the Ganga before this temple is inspiring. Aurangzeb built a Muslim mosque on the foundation of this temple. Previously, this was a Vishnu temple, which was called Vindu Madhav, but in the 16th century, Aurangzeb descendants of Mughals destroyed it and built a mosque there instead.

It was at this temple that the saint Ramanand finally accepted the devotional poet Kabir as his disciple.

This temple was named Panch Ganga because it was said that the four underground rivers-the Kiran, the Dootpapa, the Dharmanand, and the Saraswati-met the Ganga here.



Bhikkhuni Gioi Huong with Indian pupils
at a primary school in *Sarnatha*

In addition to the temples described above, there are also temples such as the following:

37. Lala Mishra Temple (built by King Reewa)
38. Bhadaini Temple (built by Nagar Nigam)
39. Janaki Temple (built by Thakur Asharfi Singh)
40. Akroor Temple (built by Rai Shiv Prasad)
41. Vatsh Raj Temple (built by Babu Shekhar Chand)
42. Prabhu Temple (built by Nirmal Kumar)
43. Chet Singh Temple (constructed by King Panchkot)
44. Niranjani Temple (constructed by Panchkot)
45. Dandi Temple (constructed by Laloo ji Agrawal)
46. Gulariya Temple (constructed by Laloo ji Agrawal)
47. Maisoor Temple (constructed by Maisoor State)

48. Lali Temple (constructed by Lalli)
49. Tripura Bhairavi Temple (built by Maya Nand Giri)
50. Foota Temple (constructed by Swami Mahesaware Nand)
51. Vijaya Nagaram Temple (built by King Vijaya Nagar)
52. Narawa Temple (constructed by Nagar Nigam)
53. Somesawar Temple (built by Kumar Swami)
54. Man Sarower Temple (constructed by Nagar Nigam)
55. Narad Temple (constructed by Danta Gai Swami)
56. Raja Temple (built by Mandho Rao Pasawa)
57. The Khori Temple (constructed by Kavindra Nrayan)
58. Ganga Mahal Temple (built by Madhura Panda)
59. Dhobia Temple (constructed by Kumar Swami)
60. Diapatia Temple (built by Bengal Naresh Dipayi)
61. Chaushatti Temple (constructed by Udaipur king)
62. Roman Temple (constructed by Udaipur)
63. Munshi Temple (built by Shridhar Munshi)
64. Darbhanga Temple (constructed by Shridhar Munshi)
65. Ahalyabai Temple (constructed by Queen Ahalyabai of Marathasay)
66. Shitala Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
67. Rajendra Prasad Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
68. Ghara Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
69. Naipali Shrine (built by Nonhi Babu)
70. Jad Shie Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
71. Sindhia Shrine (built by King Gwali)
72. Sankata Shrine (built by Prince Baroda)
73. Ganga Mahal Shrine (built by Maharaja Gwalior)
74. Bhonsala Shrine (built by Nagpur)
75. Naya Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
76. Ganesh Shrine (built by Madho Pasawa)
77. Agnisawar Shrine (built by Madho Pasawa)
78. Mehata Shrine (built by Madho Pasawa)
79. Mangal Gauri Shrine (built by Madho Pasawa)

80. Panch Ganga Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
81. Beni Madhav Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
82. Durga Shrine (built by Diwan Gwalior)
83. Brahama Shrine (built by Diwan Gwalior)
84. Shitala Shrine (built by Buendi)
85. Lal Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
86. Gai Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
87. Bala Bai Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
88. Trilochan Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
89. Gola Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
90. Nandu Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
91. Packka Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
92. Telie Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
93. Naya Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
94. Prahalad Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
95. Raj Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
96. Varuna Sangam Shrine (built by Nagar Nigam)
97. Adi Keshav Vishnu Temple
98. ...and more temples



Bathing in and boating on the Ganga River at dawn

Far away from the Raj Shrine is a flat land. In ancient times, the city of *Banāres* was located on this land. Excavations over the centuries here discovered many objects dating back some three thousand years. At the top of this Raj is Adi Keshav, or the original Vishnu temple, where Vishnu first visited there when he was the representative of the god Śiva to Kashi, sent to kill King Divodasa so that he would go back to heaven and let Śiva descend to take his proper place in Kashi.

With the large number of more than 100 shrines and temples, *Banāres* is the center of the Hindu world. In addition to the temples, there are also a number of famous universities and other well-known sites:

1. Banāres Hindu School (often abbreviated as B.H.U.): At the beginning of the 20th century, Professor Madan Hohan Malaviya founded an institute with the idea of combining the best educational traditions of the West with those of India. Professor Madan Hohan submitted a petition for it to the National Assembly in 1905, and it was supported by Dr. Annie Besant and His Majesty Darbhanga in Bihar. In the end, Prabhu Narain Singh offered 1,300 acres of land for the school, and on October 1, 1917, their great dream came true. Professor Malaviya became vice president of B.H.U. and continued his position until his death in 1948. The university is now one of the largest universities in Asia, with a student body of some 30,000 coming from 48 countries and an area of 1,300 acres, along with a prestigious teaching staff. On the campus of B.H.U., there is also the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum, which preserves and displays rare and beautiful paintings, valuable books, exquisite statues and sculptures, and other items of the faiths of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jain, Muslim, and others.

Among the most beautiful items are a collection of Buddha statues from the Gupta period that were discovered in *Vārānasi*. Some other patterns of the Pala period that illuminate the origins and art of the Indian-Tibetan painting style of the 14th century. The museum also displays other unearthed archaeological objects that belonged to cultures such as the Rajasthani, Pikhshayayi, Nepal, Tibet, Lorachanda, Shahnama, Hamja Nama, and many others. It also possesses a small set of relatively good paintings dating to the middle ages.

Also on this university campus there stands the ancient Vishwanath Temple, made of new marble. Its shape, its walls, and its carvings are known to be true copies of those in the previous temple, which was destroyed by Aurangzeb.

A second museum is at the Ramnagar Fortress on the opposite bank of the Ganga River; visitors must take a boat to reach there.

The Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; in the hot season from May through July, it is open from 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. except on Sundays and holidays.

2. Bharat Kala Bhavan: This is a small private university that has a music department.

3. Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya University: It teaches Sanskrit and the traditional Vedas, as well as grammar, Veda literature, Buddhist philosophy, Jain, yoga, and astronomy. Therefore, it is suitable to have been called a great center of Sanskrit for many centuries. There are currently about 500 students in attendance.

In ancient times, education was reserved for the Bhamas, because their duty was not only to perform

rituals but also to spread knowledge of the Vedas to children who belonged to the higher classes in society. In the ancient educational system, students would leave home at 10 or 11 years old to learn under the guidance of a *Guru* or an *Acharya*. During 15 years of training, the students became a *brahmacharya* or would live singly. A student was only allowed to associate with the guru after completing the course and would repay the guru with deep gratitude.

As a result of the training process throughout ancient India, where Brahmins typically live, certain places there became popular as respected educational centers. *Banāres* has been a long-term Brahmin fortress since the seventh century. It has also been a place that draws students from all over India to gain the higher knowledge. In Buddha's time, the Stories of the Buddha's Former Births (*The Jātaka Nikāya*) also described *Vārānasi* as being Brahmapur (a source of knowledge).

In 1791, Jonathan Duncan, an employee of the Eastern India Company in *Banāres*, received a proposition from the noble Cornwallis and president of India to extract a portion of income from *Banāres* to support the Hindu College in its mission of teaching the Sanskrit language as well as various Indian religions. As a result, on October 28 of that year, the modern Sanskrit University was founded at a rented hall near Maidagin Tank. Later, this center became the Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya University.

4. Sampurnanand Sanskrit University: It was established in 1721 as a center for teaching the Sanskrit Patshala language. In addition, it taught arts, science, business, law, sociology, journalism, education, and other fields. The university maintains

a Sarsawati Bhawan Library that contains many valuable rare books.

5. Kashi Vidaya Pith University: It opened in 1921. Former Prime Minister Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri attended and received the Shatri degree from this university.

6. The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies: It was established at *Sārnātha* by the Most Venerable Sri Dali Lama in 1971. It was approved as a private university by the government of India in 1988.

7. Dharma Chakra Vihar - International Institute of Original Buddhist Studies and Research: It was founded at *Sārnātha* by the Most Venerable Japanese-Indian Pragyā Rashmi. This is a branch of the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, so it has the same programs and courses.

8. Chunar Fortress: It is situated at the northern end of the Kaimur hill, which is a very convenient place. The wall is made of red sandstone; thus it looks majestic, firm, and solid as a structure that can conquer the Ganga River at its turning point before it flows 22 km to the northern portion of *Vārānasi*. The chronicle of the chunar stone appeared at the earliest time under the Vikramaditya dynasty of Ujjain in the year 56 C.E. For many centuries, the sandstone chunar has been popularly used in sculptures and architecture. The best-known use is on the King *Aśoka* pillar, with its extremely high polish and solid appearance.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương giving oil-fried cake to birds
on the Ganga River

The Chunar Fortress is unlikely to be destroyed because of its thick wall that was built to protect it by the Muslim Mughal. Visitors enjoy standing on the fortress to view the Ganga River with its white sand beaches that in the dry season appear as fine as silk. Especially at sunset, the scene is deeply impressive and memorable. King Akbar conquered and occupied the fortress in 1575. Since then, King Nawabs of Avadh ruled the city until the British colonization.

9. Jaunpur Area: The large Jaunpur area of some 64 square kilometers at the northwest end of *Vārānasi* was laid out by Feroz Shah in 1360 to protect the eastern side of Delhi. The Gomti River divides the Jaunpur in half and is connected by the Akbari Bridge with its 15 spans that withstand floods and earthquakes. The bridge was designed and built in the 16th century by an Afghan architect. At the southern end of the bridge is a historic figure of a large lion fighting with an elephant.

VI. THE FESTIVALS IN VĀRĀNASI

Because *Vārānasi* is a religious city, it holds countless festivals, which is why there is a saying: “seven days, nine festivals.” The various festivals, such as Natimli’s Bharat Milap, Chetganj’s Nak-kataiya, Nag Nathaiya Leela, and Ram Nagar’s Ram Leela, are solemnly celebrated. Besides these, there are the great religious rituals such as Kartik Purnima, Grahan bath, and Durga mela in the month of shrawan. There are also national ceremonies such as Holi, Diwali, Dussehara, Durga Bisarjan, Dev Dipawali, Lokark Chowth, Ganesh Chouth (commemorating the birthday of Lord Ganesh), Panch Kroshi Yatra, Ram naumi, Shiv Ratra, Rath yatra, Buddh Purnima, Mahavir Jayanti, and many more.

1. Ganesh Chouth Festival: It is celebrated in Krishana Chaturthi of the month of Magh (January or February). A crowd gathers at the Baraganesh Temple in Lohatiya and worships Shri Ganeshiji. In ancient times, it was believed that if people stood motionless in one place from morning to night here, they would gain insight. This legend may have led to the ascetic’s way of standing on one foot in constant sunlight to seek liberation.

2. Makar Sankranti Festival: Held on January 14. On this day, people bathe in the Ganges and make offerings of Khichri (rice, peas, and sesame) to the temples.

3. Basant Panchami Festival: At this festival, people celebrate Sarsawati Pujan with musical shows. All women wear a *basanti* (yellow dress).

4. Maha Shiv Ratri Festival: This is an important ceremony in *Vārānasi*. On these occasions, every temple dedicated to Śiva is beautifully decorated.

Devotees also go down to the Ganga River to bathe and line up there to worship the god Baba Vishaw Nath. Dances are also performed in praise of that god. The ceremonies of Dhrupad mela and Gandharva mela are also very important.

5. Holi Festival: This is an important ceremony in *Vārānasi* and lasts three days. It is an ancient and popular festival of spring and of colors and of love, and signifies the victory of good over evil. On these days people flock to Vishwanath, Annupurna, and other temples. In yards and on the streets, people throw colorful powder and colored water in delight, and laugh and dance with harmony. The melody of hilarious music resounds. After that, everyone takes a shower and puts on fresh new clothes, then goes to the houses of friends and relatives to share Abir and gulal. Holi is a symbol of belief and joy.

6. Borhawa Mangal Festival: It is organized on the rowboats on the Ganga River from which people pray for the dead, especially those raped or murdered. The traditions of Thumari and Chaita are still practiced in the month of Chait (March or April) in the city of *Banāres*.

7. Ram Naumi Festival: This festival existed in *Banāres* as long ago as the 17th century. People go to the Ganga to bathe and then gather at the Ram Mandir temple to pray.

8. Ghazi Miyanka Mela Festival: It is held in Bakariya Kund, Alaipur, to commemorate the Salar Masood. Muslim (Mohammedan) and Hindu women concentrate heavily on observing these festivals.

9. Panch Kroshi Parikrama Festival: This is one of the most important ancient ceremonies held in the area.

10. Hanuman Jayanti Festival: It is celebrated on the day of birth of the monkey god Hanuman and lasts for five days. Various musical and cultural programs are held on this occasion.

11. Nag-Nathaiya Leela Festival: It is one of the biggest festivals in *Banāres* and is held at Tulsi Temple, shri Krishana. This ceremony is held during November and December.

12. Navratra Spring Festival: This special ceremony is held twice a year in Durga Mandir (Durga Kund) and lasts nine days. Everyone attends, especially women who come to pray for the “Navratra” (goddess of beauty) who can bless, maintain, and grant them new beauty.

13. Dhan Teras Festival: It is celebrated in the Kartik month (October or November). During the festival, businessmen in particular come to pray to Laxmi, the goddess of prosperity. They bring many jars because they are a good omen. In this case, each of these participants is logged in at the Chaukhamba and Thatheri markets. The Annapurna (god of giving) rites last for four long days.

14. Deepawali Festival (aka the “Turn on the Light Festival”): On this occasion, everyone’s house as well as the altars of Ganesh (god of elephant) and Laxmi (the goddess of prosperity) are brightly lit with many pretty oil lamps. People come from everywhere to revel and to enjoy sweet cakes together. It is considered the largest and most joyous New Year festival in the lunar calendar of the Asian culture.

15. The Goddess Durga Festival: This is a very popular ritual of *Banāres*, held in Durga Kund in the Shravana month (from late July to late August). Masses of people from the heart of the city to its outskirts are

invited to attend this exciting festival. They gather in the public spaces to admire various displays and play many games for fun.

16. Kazari Teez Festival: This is a festival devoted to women, held on the third day of the Bhadrapad Krishanatritya month (August or September), especially at Ishiwargangi and Shankudhara. On this day, women keep the “fast” (going without eating on that day, consuming only water and fruit) so they can pray that their husbands will live long lives and gain a bright future.

17. Ganga Dashhara Festival: Following the Indian custom, in this Jyesth Sukla Dashami Rite, devotees gather at *Vārānasi* to bathe in the Ganga River.

VII. VĀRĀNASI TRAVEL FACTS

1. The City: *Vārānasi* is located on the west bank of the Ganga River in the northern part of the state of Uttar Pradesh; the capital is Lucknow. *Vārānasi* is 764 km from Delhi, 678 km from Calcutta, and a 12-hour drive from Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. *Vārānasi* is connected to many other holy places by good roads, such as Lumbini, the Kingdom of Kapilavastu, Kusinagar, and Śravastī. *Vārānasi* can be reached from all major Indian cities by air, train, and road.

Vārānasi area: 1550.3 sq kms

Population: 25.80 lakhs

Rural: 14.50 lakhs

City: 10.58 lakhs

Population density: 972 / sq kms

Education/literacy: 75.3% of the males are literate and 53.7% of the females are (2001 Census)

2. Clothing: In summer, visitors to *Vārānasi* and residents typically wear cotton clothes and light, thin

fabrics. In winter, they may carry a light sweater, but need thick coats for the cold months of December, January, and February.

3. Languages spoken: Hindi, English, Bengali, Urdu, and Bhojpuri.

4. Main markets: Godwalia, Chowk, Thatheri Bazar, Choukhambha, Goal ghar, Dashashawmegh, Visheshawar ganj, Maidagin, Lahurabeer, and Rothyatra.

5. Industry: The Banāres saree has a long history of being made here. The ārānasi sarees, made of silk, cotton, zari, or kotan, are valued throughout India and abroad. Toys made of wood, wall carvings, cigarettes, powdered tobacco, betel leaf, confectioneries, and brass items are among *Vārānasi*'s famous objects. Carpets are also woven here and exported to foreign countries. Food coolers (Airstream brand with a water machine made in *Vārānasi*) are also popular here.

6. Distance from *Vārānasi* to other places

Bharat Mata Mandir	1 km
Durga Kund	5 km
Tulsi Manas Shrine	5 km
Sankat Mochan	6 km
Vishawnath Shrine	6 km
Banāres Hindu University	7 km
Sārṇātha	10 km
Ram Nagar Citadel	17 km

7. Means of transportation to Sārṇātha

a. Train: There are direct trains from Chennai, New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Lucknow, and Gorakhpur, to *Vārānasi*. Once there, travelers can easily take a bus to Sārṇātha or can rent an auto-rickshaw or a taxi. From *Vārānasi* to Sārṇātha is about 8 km.

b. Plane: There are many flights from New Delhi, Bombay, and Lucknow to *Vārānasi*. There are also direct international flights from Kathmandu (Nepal), Bangkok (Thailand), Hanoi (Vietnam), Thimphu (Bhutan), and other cities.

c. Car: Most areas throughout India's Buddhist holy lands have convenient routes to Sārnātha. Public transport from all over to *Vārānasi* is mainly by bus and car; from the city, many buses and cars can take visitors to Sārnātha.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương and her older sister, Tịnh Tâm Giải,
at *Vārānasi* Airport

8. A few points to remember

a. Traffic jams are common in the city, so visitors should allow extra time to deal with any delay.

b. Auto-rickshaw is the best vehicle for traveling in this crowded city.

c. To visit most pagodas and temples, visitors are advised to hire a local guide. It is well worth the expense and saves much time and confusion.

d. To see the beauty of the temples along the Ganga River, take a boat ride. Visitors should start going down to the river at about dawn (4:00 a.m.).

9. Best season for pilgrimage

To visit *Sārnātha* and other Buddhist holy places, for their comfort and enjoyment, pilgrims are strongly advised to go in the winter, from October to March. The summer months from April to August are too hot for most people to enjoy traveling then.

Enjoy a wonderful, inspirational, eye-opening time in *Sārnātha*!



At a Ganga River ghat

Notes

¹ *Banāres-Sārnātha*, Lustre Press, Roli Books, New Delhi-110 048, 1998. P. 69 on.

² Ibid.

³ *Buddhism and Sārnātha*, Kamla Rohatgi, S.P. Rohatgi, Bhartiya Kala Prakashan-Delhi, 1991. P. 50 on.

⁴ Delhi is the capital of India, while Vārānasi is generally considered to be the country's religious capital.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Sārnātha & Vārānasi City Guide*, Salil Kumar Srivastava, Vārānasi, 2000. P. 14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The Eternal City-Vārānasi*, Government of India Tourist Offices, Thomson Press, Faridabad. 1990. P. 20 on.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Applying colorful powder to the forehead of believers.

¹² A soup of yellow beans with salt is often served at daily Indian meals.

¹³ *Banāres-Sārṇātha*, Lustre Press, Roli Books, New Delhi-110 048, 1998. P. 113.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Banāres-Sārṇātha*, Lustre Press, Roli Books, New Delhi-110 048, 1998. P. 72 on.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Banāres-Sārṇātha*, Lustre Press, Roli Books, New Delhi-110 048, 1998. P. 98.

¹⁸ *Bodhisattva and Śūnyatā in the Early and Developed Buddhist Traditions*, Dr. Bhikkhunī Giói Hương, 1st and 2nd reprints, Delhi-7, Eastern Book Linkers, 2003-2006; Vietnam Buddhist University, 3rd reprint, 2010. P. 105 on.

¹⁹ *Banāres-Sārṇātha*, Lustre Press, Roli Books, New Delhi-110 048, 1998. P. 33.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Ganga-India's River of Life*, Rupinder Khullar, Subhadra Sen Gupta, Heritage Series, Mumbai, 1996. P. 59 on.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Sārṇātha & Vārānasi City Guide*, Salil Kumar Srivastava, Vārānasi, 2000. P. 9.

²⁵ B.H.U. is organized into 6 institutes and 14 faculties (or streams) and about 140 departments. As of 2017, the total enrollment at the university was 27,359 students coming from 48 countries. It has more than 75 hostels for resident students. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banaras_Hindu_University

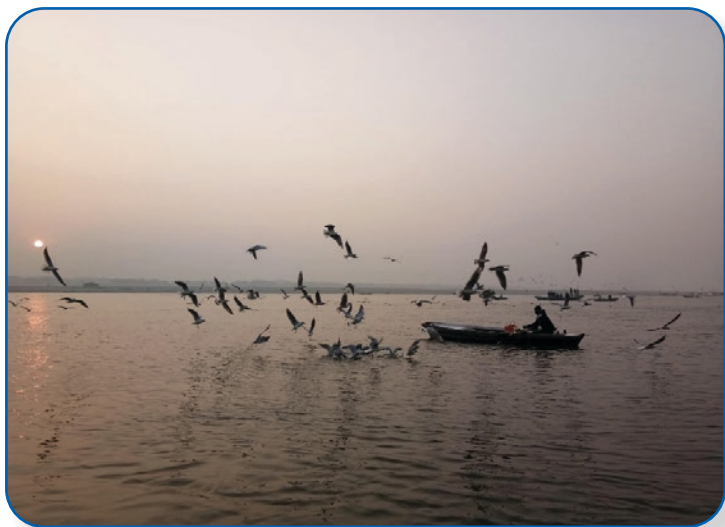
²⁶ *The Jātaka Nikāya*, ed. V. Fausboll, London: PTS, 1962; ed. E. B. Cowell, tr. by Robert Chalmers, *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vol., Low Price Publications, Delhi 52, 1993.

²⁷ A lakh, in the Indian numbering system, equals 100,000 (scientific notation: 10⁵). In the Indian convention of digit grouping, it is written as 1,00,000.

APPENDIX GANGA, THE INDIAN RIVER OF LIFE



The Bank of the Sacred Ganga River



The Ganga River at sunrise

*Ganga cha Yamune Chaica
Godavari Saraswati
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri
Jale Asmin Sannidhim Kuru.*

For centuries, Hindus have taken their morning dip while saying this prayer to the seven sacred rivers of India, beseeching that they might be purified by their holy waters. In this shloka, the one river that is called “first,” even before the mighty Indus, is the Ganga.

The Ganga is both the mother goddess and the giver of life. Serene and gentle or tempestuous and destructive, it is a river that is woven into the fabric of a mighty nation as it flows across the plains of North India.

Many rivers in the world are bigger than the Ganga. In the Indian subcontinent itself the Brahmaputra and the Indus are much longer, but neither of them

possesses the character of this river. It is so much more than a river to the people who live by its banks and the millions who come to the holy cities through which it flows, to take a ritual dip in its sanctified waters. The Ganga is a part of Indians' history and mythology, their legends and folklore. It has seen kingdoms rise and fall by its banks, has washed preachers and poets sitting by its flowing waters; it is a wise, old river and a truly great one.

The Ganga begins its journey high in the remote, perilous reaches of the Garhwal Himalayas. Locals call it *Devabhoomi*, or land of the gods, which is an enchanting landscape of pine forests, steep mountain tracks, and rushing hill streams, through which pilgrims and ascetics travel to the temple of Gangotri, dedicated to Ganga.



Thượng Tọa Hạnh Nguyên, Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, and Rev. Viên Quang cùng quý Phật tử chanting on the Ganga River, 2016

After a 20 km trek from the temple of Gangotri, the pilgrim trail ends at Gaumukh some 4,500 meters above sea level where the Ganga emerges from the immense expanse of the Gangotri Glacier. The glacier is a sea of ice nearly 30 kilometers long, surrounded by snow-capped peaks ringed with clouds. Here, from an ice cave festooned with icicles the river emerges; and, as the ancient sages said, maybe it really *does* emerge from Lord *Śiva*'s hair.

In Hindu myth, Ganga is the daughter of the Himalayas and she was persuaded to come down to earth by King Bhagirath. His sixty thousand ancestors had been burned to ashes at the curse of Vishnu whom they had slighted; and the grieving king begged Ganga to rescue their souls from eternal damnation through her sacred waters. However, Ganga was not pleased and descended to earth in such a torrential force that the gods feared she would destroy everything that came in her way. So, Lord *Śiva* broke her fall by letting her flow through the tangled locks of his hair.

As it travels through the 2,400 kilometers of its journey to the sea, the Ganga has many names. At Gangotri, it is called Bhagirathi as it begins to make a tumultuous way down the hills. Along its route, other hill rivers flow into the Bhagirathi to swell its waters. At the site of these unions are small places of pilgrimage called Prayags.

At Devprayag, the Bhagirathi coming from the west Garhwal Hills meets the Alaknanda flowing down from the east. Earlier along the route to the pilgrimage of Badrinath, the Mandakini River merges into the Alaknanda. From Devprayag the combined waters of these three rivers become the mighty Ganga. It has developed into a huge, tumultuous torrent of

water flowing down a deep gorge, crashing against boulders, frothing against the hills on the sides, and cascading down in a roaring stream. Seeing its mercurial swiftness, a viewer might understand why *Śiva* had offered his unprotected head in her path, for this primal force of nature could only destroy.

The gray-green waters of the Ganga eventually emerge from the Shivalik Hills and enter the plains of North India at Rishikesh. Here it becomes calmer as it begins to spread across the expanse of the plains. Rishikesh welcomes the seekers of spiritual peace, the swamis and rishis who come looking for answers to numerous religious retreats. The suspension bridge called Laxman Jhoola that spans the river is supposed to mark the spot where a man called Laxman performed penance for a hundred years for hurting his guru. The water here teems with fish that are considered sacred and come tamely up to banks to catch the offerings of the pilgrims.



Birds gather at a pilgrimage's boats to receive food donation



Bhikkhunī Gióí Hương giving fried cakes to birds on the Ganga

Further downstream lies the temple town of Haridwar where by now the Ganga has become earthbound and is no longer just a young, rebellious river. At Haridwar, the Hindu trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Śiva are worshipped. At the top of the most important ghat of Har-ki-Pauri, it is said, even the marks of Vishnu's feet are seen. The town is full of temples and ashrams, bustling with pilgrims, sadhus, and sightseers.

At Haridwar, devout Hindus worship the Ganga with flaming oil lamps every evening during an elaborate and visually dramatic *arati*, or ritual worship ceremony during which they sing songs of praise to the deity. As dusk falls, priests walk down to the river bank carrying large brass lamps lit with a multitude of flames. To the ringing of bells and the sound of conches, the intoning of mantras and the wafting of incense, they sway their lamps over the water, making the flames flare and leap. Pilgrims float *diyas*-leaf bowls containing a small flame-on the water until the Ganga glitters like a bejeweled dancer.

After Haridwar, the river moves across the flat expanse of Uttar Pradesh. Along the way, many other rivers flow into it to swell its waters—the Jamuna at Allahabad, the Gomti after Varanasi, the Ghagra, the Sone and Gandak in Bihar. It is as if the smaller rivers are paying their respects to the goddess by merging into her welcoming waters.

Slowly, the landscape beside the river begins to change. Rocky hills fade away to flat fields of wheat and sugarcane. Villages of thatched huts and mango groves grow by its side, and the village women come to bathe and wash their clothes, cattle wallow there, and little boys leap and dive into its waters. Now the Ganga is the giver of life, kinder and gentler. Yet even here, during the monsoons it can turn into a fierce, mud-brown torrent that covers the fields in silt and can even carry away the huts, the cattle, and the people.

Hindus worship the Ganga with the greatest pomp and grandeur at Allahabad. Its many names show how important that city is to the pilgrims arriving there. It is variously called Tirtharaj (“the king of pilgrimages”), Prayag, Sangam, and Triveni. Here the blue waters of the Jamuna meet both the coffee-brown Ganga and the invisible river Saraswati—a *sangam*, or a meeting of three rivers that gives it a special sanctity.

Allahabad comes alive every winter during the auspicious Magh Mela festival. Every twelve years, the city is transformed into a fantastic congregation of the Kumbh Mela, a pilgrimage and festival beloved by Hindus. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, sadhus, and sightseers make up a colorful mass of humanity. A stream of pilgrims takes a dip in the river on the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti, hoping to be cleansed of their sins.

The Kumbh Mela becomes a microcosm of India where Rajasthani women in *ghagras* and silver jewelry walk beside Tamilians in pristine white and excitable Bengalis huddled in balaclavas and voluminous shawls. Impromptu markets spring up everywhere, and the joyous atmosphere resembles that of a village fair.

Now the Ganga heads for Varanasi, also called Benares. It is a city that has loved and worshipped the Ganga with the greatest style. It is one of the oldest living cities in the world. In Varanasi, all the tortuous lanes seem to lead to the Ganga. It is a city that sings the praises of *Śiva* and the goddess that he brought down to earth.



Daily activities on banks of the Ganga

Through centuries, the banks of the river have been built into rows of stone steps going down to the edge of the water, called ghats. Varanasi has over eighty of them, and the best introduction to both the river and the ghats is made at dawn. As the first temple bells begin to ring, visitors often join the pilgrims as they

head to the river for their early morning dip. Travelers like to take a boat at the Dasaswamedha Ghat and go up and down the length of the city to view the intricate medieval architecture of the various ghats.

As the sun rises, touching the ripples of the river with gold and amber, the boat will float past Brahmins sitting under their round umbrellas as well as worshippers standing chest-deep in the water facing east and intoning prayers to the rising sun. One ghat will be full of moored boats, another will have washer-men whipping clothes against large stones. In some ghats, like Manikarmika, flames leap over funeral pyres. At Varanasi, the Ganga is a wise, old river that has seen an endless panorama of life and death. Like a goddess, it is beautiful and kind but also a bit detached, watching humans' small victories and defeats with serenity.

The river flows on, through the plains of Bihar, past cities like Patna where once Pataliputra, the majestic capital city, of King *Aśoka* stood. At one time Bihar was the home of great religious thinkers like the Buddha and Mahavira, and lay at the heart of great dynasties.

Then, entering Bengal, the river is nearing the end of its journey. Here the landscape is crisscrossed by rivers and streams, all heading to the sea. Slow-moving, silt-laden, turgid rivers full of fishing boats curve their way around series of mud flats. The banks are lined by palm and coconut trees, and the fields are green with rice. Ponds glisten by round thatched huts where dark, lithe women carry shining brass water-pots balanced casually against their hips.



Dip in the Ganga River

The Gangetic Delta has other rivers like the Palma and Brahmaputa flowing into it. It is green with mangroves where the salty sea comes into marshes and where the striped shadow that lurks in the deep dark of the Sunderban jungles might be a tiger.

At Calcutta, the Ganga is called the Hooghly. There ships come in from the Bay of Bengal to dock and unload their cargo or passengers. This was once the heart of the British Raj. Whitewashed, pillared colonial mansions still stand by the river, beyond which lies the crowded, volatile city that has always been so vibrantly alive.

The tired Ganga now flows past the island of Sagardwip, where the festival of Gangasagar Mela is celebrated every winter. The ashes of ancestors of the legendary King Bhagirath are said to have been purified here. Then the Indian Ocean finally welcomes the travel-weary river into its surf-tipped waves. There the “daughter of the Himalayas” now merges into the sea.



Bhikkhunī Giói Hương with local Indian students, September 2019

Notes

¹ Adapted from *Ganga-Indian River of Life*. Rupinder Khullar, Subhadra Sen Gupta, Heritage Series, Mumbai, 1996. Pp. 1-6.

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with the giving lecture Mudra



The Most Ven. Trí Quảng (the monk with the hat), Ven. Siri Sumedha
(next left) and Bhikkhuni Giới Hương (fourth person to the left
with glass) and Vietnamese Pilgrimage at Mūlagandhakutī Vihāra,
Sārnātha, in 2000

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