

Footprints of the Buddha

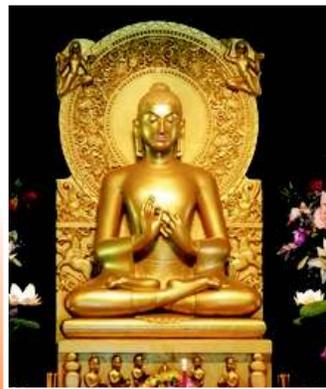
(Pilgrimage to Buddhist India)



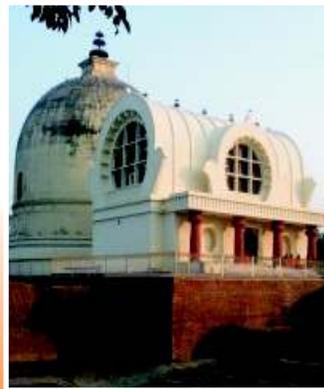
Lumbini



Buddhagaya



Sarnath

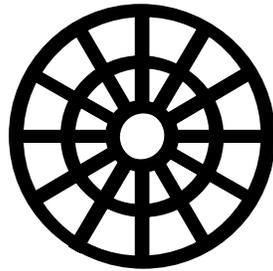


Kusinara

Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

Footprints of the Buddha

(Pilgrimage to Buddhist India)



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By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

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A word for you

This booklet was written for you so you can understand the significance of the most sacred Buddhist places in India. It is in these places that the Buddha dwelled and left his footprints 2600 years ago. Thousands of devoted and wise persons in the world have venerated these sacred and holy places by touching the earth with their foreheads, on which the Buddha has trodden.

In the *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha recommended that there are four places to be visited to arouse sober sadness reflecting on the nature of impermanence of the places inhabited by the *Sammā Sambuddha*.

A pilgrim with prior knowledge of the places and times in the life of the Buddha will develop a sense of awe and veneration upon visiting the sacred sites. This booklet was written to evoke these feelings in the pilgrim who will follow the footprints of the Buddha.

Our first visit is *Sārnāth* the birthplace of the Sublime *Dhamma*. It is here, at *Sārnāth* the Buddha set in motion the Wheel of the *Dhamma*, which cannot be overturned by anyone in the world (*appativattiyam*). This Dhamma is always excellent and brings us real peace, real happiness, the highest Bliss of Nibbāna!

Acknowledgment

Although many booklets have been written in Sinhalese for the Sri Lankan pilgrims, there are only a few available for English speaking pilgrims. This is a booklet for the pilgrims to be used as a handbook during the tour of Buddhist India in February 2010. We would like to share this booklet with our Buddhist or non-Buddhist friends who are contemplating a pilgrimage in the future as well.

The purpose of this booklet is mainly to serve as a simple guide during the pilgrimage as well as a source of future reference. Only the most significant sacred places during this pilgrimage are described due to time and space limitations.

In this effort, first I sincerely thank Ms. *Dhammikā* (Elsa Smart) from Edmonton who sponsored this booklet and the group who accompanied me on this pilgrimage from Canada and Sri Lanka for their co-operation and understanding. The invitation they extended along with travel assistance as a gift are indeed meritorious deeds. This is my fourth visit to the land of the Buddha.

Last but not least, I want to thank our tour organizer, *Mr. Hector Hapugoda*. Special mention must be made of *Upul Kulasingha Malli* (US Lanka Printers), for his endeavor to print and put this booklet in your hands so you can enjoy this wonderful pilgrimage following the footprints of the Buddha.

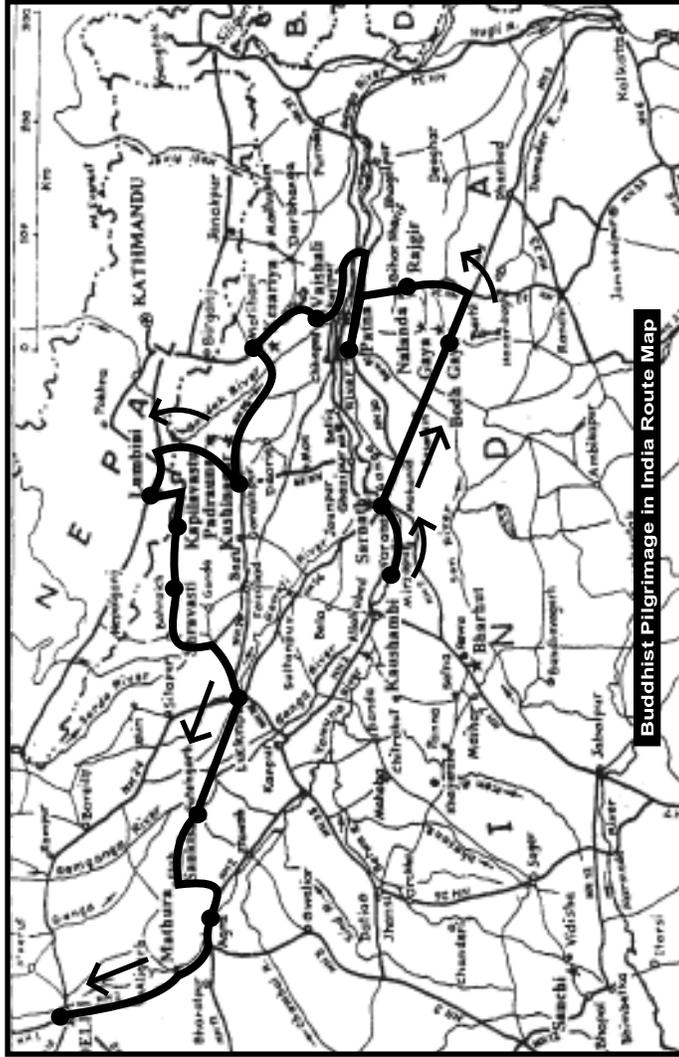
May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

January 18, 2010. Canada

Dedication

This
Booklet is
Dedicated
To
My mother,
To
The group of pilgrims
Who
participated in this pilgrimage
(February 10, 2010 –February 23, 2010)
with me
and
To
Every pilgrim who uses
this booklet.



Buddhist Pilgrimage in India Route Map

The Buddha's Utterance on the Four Places of Pilgrimage

"There are four places, *Ananda*, that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence, sober sadness (*samvega*). What are the four?

"Here the *Tathāgata* was born! This, *Ananda*, is a place that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence.

"Here the *Tathāgata* became fully enlightened in unsurpassed, supreme Enlightenment! This, *Ananda*, is a place that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence.

"Here the *Tathāgata* set rolling the unexcelled Wheel of the *Dhamma*! This, *Ananda*, is a place that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence.

"Here the *Tathāgata* passed away into the state of Nibbāna in which no element of clinging remains! This, *Ananda*, is a place that a pious person should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence.

"These, *Ananda*, are the four places that a pious person

should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence. And truly there will come to these places, *Ananda*, pious *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, laymen and laywomen, reflecting: 'Here the *Tathāgata* was born! Here the *Tathāgata* became fully enlightened in unsurpassed, supreme Enlightenment! Here the *Tathāgata* set rolling the unexcelled Wheel of the *Dhamma*! Here the *Tathāgata* passed away into the state of Nibbāna in which no element of clinging remains!'

"And whoever, *Ananda*, should die on such a pilgrimage with his heart established in confidence, at the breaking up of the body, after death, will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness."

-*D.N. Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (Sutta N0.16)*



Great Utterances of the Sammā Sambuddha

All conditioned things are impermanent
When one sees this with wisdom,
One turns away from suffering,
This is the path to purification.

*(Sabbe sankhārā aniccāti
Yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe
Esa maggo visuddhiyā)*

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory
When one sees this with wisdom,
One turns away from suffering,
This is the path to purification.

*(Sabbe sankhārā dukkhāti
Yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe
Esa maggo visuddhiyā)*

All things are without a soul
When one sees this with wisdom,
One turns away from suffering,
This is the path to purification.

*(Sabbe dhammā anattāti
Yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe
Esa maggo visuddhiyā)*

(Dhammapada Verses: 277-279)

Sārnāth, Isipatana-Migadāya



This is the famous *Sārnāth* Statue of the Buddha. This unique statue depicts the *Dhammacakka mudrā* (the posture of the setting of the Wheel of the *Dhamma*). It was at this site that the Buddha delivered his first sermon on the full moon day of *Esala* (July), two months after his Awakening. *Sārnāth* means sanctuary for deer (*Migadāya* in *Pāli*). Even today we can see some deer in this premises.

This wonderful site is located just 12 km from the city of *Vāranasi* (*Barānasi*). Even before the advent of the Buddha to deliver his first sermon, this place was called *Isipatana* (place for holy men to come down) because it was the place where the holy men

who had been practicing in the *Himālayan* ranges ascended and descended. They used to come to this area to find their most essential things such as salt and other requisites. This unparalleled place today has many things to observe and to understand the significance of the site. According to the Scriptures, after the attainment of Enlightenment the Buddha came to this place seeking his five former companions namely *Kondaṇṇa*, *Bhaddiya*, *Vappa*, *Mahānāma* and *Assaji*. But when he arrived at the place they did not readily to accept him at first. However, eventually they could not remain silent when the Buddha came closer and closer. They then arranged a proper seat, and offered some water for drinking and for washing his feet. The place where the Buddha met them is now called "*Sammukha Cetiya*" (meeting pagoda) which has been misused by Muslim invaders.

After receiving the Buddha as their companion, they then were not yet ready to accept his words about his attainment of Enlightenment. However, after a while they accepted him as 'the Buddha' and then the Buddha delivered his Maiden Discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (The Setting in motion of the Wheel of the *Dhamma*) to these five *Bhikkhus*. At the end of the discourse, *Ven. Kondaṇṇa* gained the vision of the *Dhamma* and became a stream enterer (*sotāpanna*) but not the others. This was because of the wrong views they held. They were strong believers of a soul or a permanent

entity. Thereafter the Buddha had delivered another sermon named "*Anattalakkhana Sutta*" meaning the Characteristics of Soullessness.

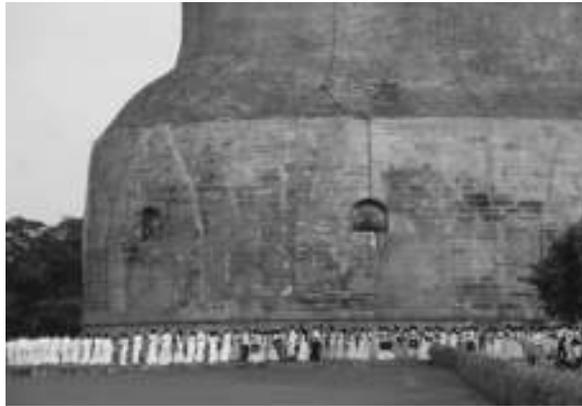
It was after this sermon that the Buddha spent the rainy season in this place at *Mulagandhakuti vihāra*, monastery. Day by day the *Sangha* grew unexpectedly and when the group of *Sangha* became 60 the Buddha dispatched them for the dissemination of the *Dhamma*.

The Emperor *Ashoka* visited *Sārnāth* in 234 BCE. When *Hiuen Tsiang*, the Chinese pilgrim monk, visited this place in the 7th century he had found 30 monasteries and 3000 monks living here in these premises of *Sārnāth*. It was at the end of the 12th century that Turkish Muslims sacked this place. The site was subsequently plundered for building materials and has remained in ruins until the present day. This site was entirely deserted until 1836 when the British began excavations and restoration.

Things to be seen and venerated

Dhammekh Stupa

This is the most significant structure of this site of *Sārnāth*. Almost all ancient buildings and structures of this site have been damaged or destroyed by the Turks. However, amongst the ruins the '*Dhammekh Stupa*' is no doubt so impressive, with its 128 feet height, and 93 feet diameter. This is said to be the exact spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. This *Stupa* has been built around 200 BCE by the Emperor *Ashoka*.



A group of Sri Lankan Pilgrims circumambulates the *Stupa*.

Colonel Cunningham as the first Archaeological Surveyor from December 1861 bore a

shaft from the top centre of the *stupa* and discovered a stone tablet on which an inscription was written with the word '*Dhamekha*', and mentions that this is the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. *Dhamekha* seems to be a distorted form of '*Dharmacakra*' which means turning the wheel of the Dharma. It is also said that at this spot the five ascetics who left Gautama Buddha in *Bodh Gaya* used to live in huts.

The lower portion of the *stupa* is covered completely with beautifully carved stones. The design consists of a broad band of Swastika (fylfot) carved in different geometrical patterns with a finely chiselled lotus wreath, running over and below the swastikas.

The *Dhammekh stupa* is considered to be the sacred place where the voice of Buddhism was first heard. Many dignitaries of Buddhist countries visit this place for circumambulation of the sacred *stupa* and to worship the Buddha. Some do three times, some 12 times, some others 37 times and still some others do 108 times with the intention of paying the utmost veneration to the Buddha and the well expounded *Dhamma*.

Mulagandhakuti Vihāra



The famous *Sārṇāth* Image is well installed here in this *vihāra*. The decaying ruins of the *Mulagandhakuti Vihāra* mark the place where the Buddha spent his first rainy season in seclusion. In the 7th century, a writer described it as 200 feet high with 100 niches containing a Buddha carving along each wall. A life-sized statue shows the Buddha turning the wheel of the *Dhamma*. The Mahā Bodhi Society has built the Modern Mulagandhakuti Vihāra in the 1930s in which the murals are really fascinating and meaningful. These murals, are excellent frescoes by *Kosetsu Nosu* Japan's foremost painter, teach us the life of the Buddha and some other Buddhist stories as well.

Ashoka Pillar



The *Ashoka Pillar* at *Sārnāth* survived the Turkish invasion but was broken during excavations. The base still stands in its original spot to be seen today. It has some interesting carvings. The splendid lion capital that topped the pillar, which thankfully survived its 45 foot drop to the ground, is on display at the *Sārnāth Archeological Museum*. The museum also houses some of the greatest treasures of Indian Buddhist art, including almost 300 images.

This is known as the Lion capital of *Ashoka* which is a sculpture of four "Indian lions" standing back to back. It was originally placed atop the *Ashoka* pillar at *Sārnāth*. The pillar, is sometimes called the Ashoka Column. This Lion Capital of *Ashoka* from *Sārnāth* has been adopted as the National Emblem of India and the wheel "*Ashoka Cakra*" from its base was placed in the center of the National Flag of India.

The Bodhi Tree

There is a sacred *Bodhi tree* in this premise that has grown from a sapling from the original tree in Sri Lanka. It was under the benign shade of the *Bodhi tree* that the Buddha sat with a firm resolution and gained Enlightenment in the year 588 BCE. This sapling was carried to India from Sri Lanka and planted by *Anagārika Dharmapāla* (1864- 1933), a Sri Lankan patriot and a great Buddhist revivalist who revived the Buddhist activities in both Sri Lanka and India after it had been virtually extinct in India for several centuries. It was he, the first Buddhist in modern times, who preached the *Dhamma* in three continents: Asia, North America and Europe. Later he received his ordination as *Ven. Devamitta Dhammapāla* and passed away in India. The Establishment of the *Mahā Bodhi Society of India* in 1891 was the most excellent service that he rendered to the Buddha *Sāsana* (Dispensation of the Buddha).

Sammukha Cetiya



This is the place where the Buddha met the five ascetics who were once practicing with him severe austerities. This Special *Stupa* is thought originally to have been built as a terraced temple during the Gupta period (4-6th Century) to mark the site as the place where the Buddha met his first five disciples. Later on a prince named *Govardhan* modified the *stupa* to its present shape by building the octagonal tower to commemorate the visit of *Humayun*, the powerful *Mughal* ruler. Today the *stupa* is a high earthen mound covered with a brickwork edifice topped by an octagonal tower. It is a Muslim structure named *Chaukandi* (in Urdu) means four corners. This is a clear remnant of the Muslim invasions of Buddhist sites in India.

Discourses delivered at Sārnath by the Buddha and His Disciples and historical significance

Discourses (Suttas):

1. *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (S.N. 56.11)*
2. *Anattalakkhana Sutta (S.N 22.59)*
3. *Panca Kanga (Rathakāra) Sutta (A.N.III.15)*
4. *Nalakalāpa Sutta (S.N.12.67)*
*(Dialogue between Ven. Sāriputta and Mahā
Kotthita)*
5. *Māra Pāsa sutta S.N. 4.4.4*

History:

- This is where the Theravāda *Bhikkhuni* Order, which is now flourishing in Sri Lanka, was re-established under the guidance of Ven. *Māpalagama Wipulasāra Mahā Thera* in 1996, who then served as the Secretary of the *Mahā Bodhi Society*.
- *Yasa* and his 54 friends received their ordination here.
- The Buddha's First *Vassāna* or Rains Retreat.
- The first 60 missionary monks set out for the dissemination of the sublime *Dhamma*.
- Rebuilding of the *Mulagandhakuti Vihara*

by *Anagārika Dharmapāla* (1865-1933). He was born in Sri Lanka in 1865, he joined the Theosophical Society in 1884. Inspired by H.P. Blavatsky, studied Pali and in 1891 founded the Mahā Bodhi Society of India. He then proclaimed himself as an *Anagārika*, a homeless wanderer, and worked hard for the main object of the Society, the restoration of Buddha Gayā into Buddhist hands, which was only achieved in 1949. In 1925 he founded the British Mahā Bodhi Society in London. In 1931 he entered the Order as Sri Devamitta Dhammapāla, and died in 1933.

Buddha Gayā



Buddha *Gaya* is located about 10 km south of the famous city *Gaya*, which is about 105 km from *Patna* in the state of Bihar, India. This is one of the well visited Buddhist pilgrimage centers of the Indian subcontinent. This sacred temple of *Gaya* has a 55m (180 ft) tower. The present temple was restored around 1880. The Buddha attained Supreme Buddha-hood under the *Bodhi* tree here at this place in 588 BCE on the Full Moon Day of *Vesak* (May).

According to Buddhist history, the young ascetic Siddhartha arrived at this place on the eve of *Vesak* Full Moon in the year 588BCE and with a firm resolution sat under this *Bodhi* tree to attain Enlightenment. The ascetic Siddhartha came to this place from the village named *Senāni* on the other shore of the river *Neranjara*, near *Uruvela*.

In the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*Sutta No. 26*) the Buddha explained this wonderful spot, in the 6th century BCE, as follows: "*Still in search, bhikkhus, of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages through the Magadhan country until eventually I arrived at Senānigāma near Uruvela. There I saw an agreeable piece of ground, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I considered: 'This is an agreeable piece of*

ground; this is a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. This will serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.' And I sat down there thinking 'This will serve for striving'."

So, on the Full Moon Day of *Vesak* (May) in this very place the Awakened One, the Compassionate One, the Light of the World, the Supreme Buddha, attained Imperturbability, Nibbāna and became the Sammā Sambuddha of our Era. It was by realizing the Dhamma, the Thirty Seven Factors of Enlightenment (37) based on **the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence** of all animate and inanimate things in the world.

* (Please read *Padhāna Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* (3.2 sutta), *Mahā Sihanāda Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (sutta No.12), and the *Mahā Saccaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Sutta No.36) to understand the Buddha's great effort, severe austerities, practiced for six years for the attainment of Enlightenment and how the deities rejoiced on hearing the great victory of the Buddha. Especially *Mahā Sihanāda Sutta* is a great source of inspiration. See the uniqueness of the Supreme Buddha, *Tathāgata*).

Things to be seen and venerated

Bodhi Tree



The most significant sacred object here, at the back of the *Mahā Bodhi* Temple Tower in a stone enclosure, is the ***Bodhi*** Tree under whose benign shade the Buddha Gautama, our Buddha, attained supreme Enlightenment. On that special day, the ascetic Siddhartha kept this firm resolution and sat under this *Bodhi-Tree*. **"Indeed, let my skin veins and bones remain; let the flesh and the blood of this body dry up; never will I abandon this seat without reaching the state of *Sammāsambodhi*".**

Like the Buddha, the *Bodhi* is majestic, silent and cool. All those who sit in its shade feel the calmness and coolness of emancipation. This is considered to be the oldest and the most venerated tree

in the world. This tree is said to be a descendant of the original tree (original tree was destroyed by a queen) a branch of which was taken to Sri Lanka by the *Arahant Sanghamittā* the sister of *Arahant Mahā Mahinda* and the daughter of the Emperor *Ashoka* who ruled India from 273-232 BCE. Thousands of people in Sri Lanka still venerate this sapling of the *Bodhi* tree taken to *Anurādhapura*, as *Jaya Sri Mahā Bodhi*. It has become one of the assets of the Nation.

It is said, that Cunningham took a seed from the original tree before it died in 1871 and planted it in its place in 1880. However, it is believed that the Tree we see today is a direct ancestor of the original one.

Emperor *Ashoka* made his pilgrimage to all the Buddhist places with his guru *Ven. Upagupta* and having recognized them as the very places related to the life of the Buddha, erected stone pillars with inscriptions as marks of respect and signs for future generations to visit.

Mahā Bodhi Temple

The *Mahā Bodhi* Temple is the erected tower, 55 meters (180 ft) in height, and it contains a gilded image of Buddha. The original shrine here is believed to have been erected by Emperor *Ashoka*. This place has been known by several names such as *Sambodhi*, *Bodhimanda*, *Vajrāsana* and *Mahābodhi*. In his 8th

Rock Edict issued in 256 BCE, Emperor *Ashoka* says that he '*went to Sambodhi*' referring to his visit to *Buddhagaya. Vajrāsana*, the Diamond Throne, which is 143x238x13.5 centimeters has unusual geometrical patterns on its upper surface and a row of geese around its sides. It is believed that the Emperor *Ashoka* must have placed this here in 260BCE during his visit. This is the platform where the Buddha performed his penance, and is described as the center of the universe.

Inside the Mahā Bodhi Temple



This is the serene *Mahā Bodhi* Statue of the Buddha, which adorns the main shrine of *Buddhagaya*. On either side of the main entrance to the temple there are niches containing two beautiful Buddha statues. The one on the left, crowned and bejeweled, dates from about the 10th century while the

one on the right is from the 7th century. Both *Buddhas* stand serenely on lotuses that rise above the jagged rocks and swirling waves of *samsāra*.

From the entrance, an arched chamber leads to the inner sanctum. Some of the paving stones on the floor have pictures and inscriptions carved on them. These were made by pilgrims from *Sindh* during the early 1300s. At the far end of the inner sanctum is the main shrine with a large Buddha statue seated on the *Vajrāsana*, the Diamond Throne, the very place where the Buddha attained Enlightenment and sat in meditation for seven days. When you climb up the stairs on the right that leads to the upper chamber, you can see some statues of the Buddha and the subduing of the elephant *Nālāgiri*.

Mahā Bodhi Statue

The original statue that was placed here, the famous *Mahā Bodhi* Image, disappeared centuries ago. Referring to the origin of the *Mahā Bodhi* Image, the legend says, "When the temple was built it was decided to enshrine a statue in it but for a long time no artist good enough to make such an important statue could be found. One day a man appeared saying that he could do the job. He asked that a pile of scented clay and a lighted lamp be put in the Temple sanctum and the door be locked for six months. This was done but being impatient, the people opened the door four days

before the required time. Inside was found a statue of great beauty, perfect in every detail except for a small part on the breast that was unfinished. Some time later a monk who slept in the sanctum had a dream in which *Maitriya* appeared and said that it was he who had made the statue". The present statue dates from about the 10th century and was found in the ruins and placed here by the British engineer J. D. Beglar who undertook this restoration work in 1880.

Outside the Mahā Bodhi Temple

Descending the stairs one can go outside and notice all the niches with statues in them on the temple walls. When you circumambulate towards the north keeping the entire sacred objects on your right, you can see *Ratanacankamana cetiya* (the jewel promenade shrine) where the Buddha mindfully walked up and down for seven days to stretch his legs. The unblinking shrine, the jewel Abode shrine, *Mahānāma's* shrine (a Sri Lankan monk built this shrine in 588CE), stone *Stupas*, stone pillars, and towards to south side, a lotus tank which is known as *Mucalinda* lake, and the spire-shrine like a smaller version of the *Mahābodhi* temple built in 11 century in the name of *Tārā* and *Avalokitesvara*.

About the Mahā Bodhi

The name Bodh Gaya was first used towards the end of the 18th century probably to distinguish the place from the nearby Hindu town of Gaya. *Ven. Fa Hien*, a Chinese gentle and pious pilgrim monk visited this place in about 402 CE. And another Chinese monk, *Ven. Hiuen Tsiang* who lived in India from 630-644CE also visited this place on their epic journey through the mountains and deserts of Central Asia. They both have recorded what they could see here. It is from their records that most discoveries were made later on.

The first Sri Lankan who visited this place, according to an inscription, was one *Ven. Bodhirakshita* in 1st Century BCE. This inscription is the only evidence of the earliest pilgrim from outside India. According to *Rasavāhini* (a Sri Lankan literary work) a monk named *Cullatissa* and a group of lay pilgrims have made their way to *Buddhagaya* in about 100BCE. Again the King *Silākāla* of Sri Lanka (518-531 CE) had spent his youth as a novice monk in one of the monasteries in *Buddhagaya*. Until modern times, the last Sri Lankan who visited was *Ven. Dharmadivākara*.

According to history, Sri Lankans were not only enthusiastic about visiting *Buddhagaya* but also have done much to make it a vibrant and thriving

centre of Buddhism. During the first half of the 4th century CE, the younger brother of king *Meghavana* (304-332) went on pilgrimage and found it difficult to get proper accommodation. Upon his return to Sri Lanka he informed the king, who in turn asked the Indian rulers for permission to build pilgrim rests at all the holy places. Permission was given to build one at *Buddhagaya*. That is how the great *Mahābodhi* Monastery came to exist on the north side of the Temple compound. An inscribed copper plaque above the door of this monastery announced that hospitality was to be given to everyone who came. It read, "**To help all without distinction is the highest teaching of all the *Buddhas***".

In short, Sri Lankans' contribution to this wonderful place is unparalleled in comparison to other nations. It was mainly because of the timely intervention of *Anagārika Dharmapāla* we Buddhists all over the world have the opportunity to respect and venerate this holy place today. It was because of his untiring efforts that the Buddhists could save this holy place for generations to come.

In the 16th and 17th century, a Hindu priest settled down near the crumbling *Mahābodhi* Temple and being ignorant of the true identity of the Buddha statues scattered around, he began to worship them as symbols of Hindu gods. It was his successors called *Mahantās* who eventually became so powerful and

wealthy and began to look upon the *Mahābodhi* Temple as their private property.

By 1877, the King of Myanmar received permission from the British Government to repair *Buddhagaya* and soon after, he sent a large delegation of officials and craftsmen. Unfortunately, due to lack of understanding of the archaeological or the religious significance, they inadvertently did great damage and destroyed much important evidence on the history of the *Buddhagaya* Temple. Finally, with the insistence of Alexander Cunningham, the then Director General of Archeological Survey, the Government intervened and completed the job at a total cost of Rs.100,000.

The most revolutionary period of history began from 1891. During this time *Anagārika Dharmapāla*, a young Sri Lankan, visited *Buddhagaya*, and to his shock he was greeted by greedy Brahmins nagging him for money. It was with great faith and abundant energy that he then and there conceived the audacious idea of restoring the *Buddhagaya* to its former glory. Thereafter, he made a clarion call to the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka "***Sinhalayini nagitive! Buddhagayāwa berāganiv!***" meaning 'O Sinhalese awaken! Save *Buddhagaya!*'

With a firm determination and a great devotion he worked hard to save *Buddhagaya* and other sacred places in India from the grip of Hindus. For this

purpose he established the *Mahā Bodhi Society of India* in 1891 and faced many hardships. Sometimes he was even physically battered, yet he fought for the noble goal, which he achieved before his death in 1932 as a monk by the name *Devamitta Dhammapāla*.

The Cave (Dungeshwary)



There are several Caves here on the top of the mountain. *Dungeshwary* cave temples are also known as the *Mahākāla* caves located 12 km northeast of *Buddhagaya*. According to Buddhist literature, the Buddha undertook six years of rigorous austerities (*dushkarakriya*) here before he went to *Senāni* Village and *Buddhagaya*. There are three main caves here, which have been converted to Hindu and Buddhist shrines today.

In the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya (Sutta No.36)*, referring to the austerities the Buddha said, "By this racking practice of austerities I have not attained any super human states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones." (Please read this *Sutta* to understand how the Ascetic Siddhartha practiced severe austerities).

Gijjakuta (Vultures' Peak)



This is another very special place connected to the life of the Buddha. One day *Devadatta* climbed to this peak and hurled a huge rock at the Buddha while the Buddha was practicing walking meditation. Fortunately, on its way down, the rock struck another rock and a splinter flew and wounded the Buddha's foot, to cause bleeding. *Ven. Sāriputta* attained Enlightenment in a cave named *Sukarakatha lena* (a cave dug by wild boars) at this site while he was listening to the *Dhamma* on the comprehension of feelings, given by the Buddha to *Ven. Sāriputta's* nephew, *Dighanakha* (*M.N. Sutta No. 74*).

It is believed that most of the *Mahāyāna* discourses such as Lotus *Sutta* have been delivered by the Buddha on this mountain peak, which is surrounded by a range of mountains.

Some discourses delivered at *Gijjakuta*:

1. *D.N. Mahā parinibbāna sutta* (*Sutta No. 16*).
2. *D.N. Atānātiya Sutta* (*Sutta No. 32*).
3. *D.N. Mahāgovinda Sutta* (*Sutta No. 19*)
4. *D.N. Udumbarika Sihanāda Sutta* (*Sutta No. 25*)
5. *M.N. Dighanakha Sutta* (*Sutta No. 74*)
6. *S.N. Ekapuggala Sutta* (*S.N. 2.3.2.10*)
7. *A.N. Devadatta Vipatti Sutta* (*A.N. 8.1.1.7*)

Veluvanārāma (Bamboo Grove)



When the King *Bimbisāra* heard that the Buddha had come to *Rājagaha* with a retinue of one thousand *Arahants*, he went to meet the Buddha and after listening to the Buddha he attained the First Stage of Sainthood (*Sotapanna*).

Thereafter, he invited the Buddha to his palace for the following day's meal, after which he decided to donate his pleasure garden, the famous Bamboo Grove (*Veluvana*) to the Buddha and the *Sangha*. This is the first donation of a monastery (*ārama*), to the Buddha and *Sangha*. The Buddha spent at least five rains retreats at this monastery and visited it on many occasions, delivering many famous discourses. In this site too we can see evidence of Muslim invasion. Towards the south there are number of Muslim tombs. This cemetery is believed to be the site of the *Veluvana Vihāra* built by *Bimbisāra* for the Buddha's residence. This Grove is generally called *kalandaka nivāpa* meaning sanctuary for squirrels. The Bamboo Grove

was named by the king as *Kalandaka Nivāpa*, after a remarkable encounter with a squirrel. King *Bimbisāra* was saved by a squirrel which jumped on him and made a loud screeching while he was sleeping under a tree and was about to be bitten by a black snake.

This is also the same monastery where both *Upatissa and Kolitha* (*Ven Sāriputta and Moggallāna*) first came to see the Buddha and listened to the *Dhamma*. Their ordination happened at this monastery while there was a great assembly of monks.

Discourses delivered at Rājagaha:

1. *S.N. Mahā Kassapatthera Bojjhanga* (No.46.14.4)
2. *S.N. Mahā Moggallānathera Bojjhanga* (No.46.15.5)
3. *S.N. Cundatthera Bojjhanga* (No.46.16.6)
4. *M.N. Cula Vedalla Sutta by Dhammadinna* (No.44)
5. *M.N. Ambalatthikā Rāhulovāda Sutta* (No.61)
6. *M. N. Mahā Sakuludāyi* (No.77)
7. *M.N. Cula Sakuludāyi Sutta* (No.79)
8. *S.N. Samiddhi Sutta* (S.N.1.20.10)
9. *S.N. Godhika Sutta* (S.N. 4.23.3)
10. *M.N. Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (No.58)
11. *S.N. Akkhosa Sutta* (S.N.1.7.1.2)
12. *S.N. Suseema Sutta* (S.N. 1.1.7.10)

University of Nālanda



In the Southeast of *Patnā*, the Capital City of *Bihār* State, there is a village called '*Bada Gaon*', in the vicinity of which, are the world famous ruins of *Nālanda* University.

This amazing complex of the ancient seat of learning, the largest Buddhist University of Asia, was founded in the 5th Century A.D. According to records, there were 2,000 teachers and 10,000 students from all over the Buddhist world who lived and studied at this University. This was the 'First Residential International University of the World'. The University flourished from the 5th to the 12th century. *Nālanda* was destroyed and 12,000 monks were killed by Muslim invaders led by *Bakhtiyār Balaji*.

Nālanda was visited by the Buddha where he stayed in *Pāvārika* Mango-Grove. Then the *Ven. Sāriputta* came to see the Buddha from the village he was born (*Nalakagāma*) in *Nālanda* and made the lion's roar regarding the Buddha's uniqueness, " **It is clear to me, Lord, that there never has been, will be or is now another ascetic or Brahmin who is better or more enlightened than the Lord**".

The construction of the main monastery of *Nālanda* was attributed to *Shakraditya*, the king of *Magadha* in the 2nd century AD. Travelers who visited *Nālanda* in the seventh century AD has written that successive kings had constructed the vast University. But, *Nālanda* came into prominence during the reign of Gupta King *Kumāragupta I*, in the fifth century AD, who ensured that it became the seat of Buddhism in *Magadha*.

It was renowned as the site of the great monastic university (*Nālanda Mahā Viharā*) which was to become the crown jewel in the development of Buddhism in India. The name *Nālanda* is said to have been derived from one of the Buddha's former births, when he was a king. '*Nālanda*' was one of his epithets meaning "insatiable in giving".

Nāgārjuna the *Mahāyāna* philosopher, *Dinnāga* the founder of the school of Logic and *Dharmapāla* the Brahmin scholar, taught here. The

famous Chinese traveller and scholar, *Hiuen-Tsiang* stayed here and has given a detailed description of the situations prevailing at that time. In modern times, careful excavation of the place has revealed many *stupas*, monasteries, hostels, staircases, meditation halls, lecture halls and many other structures which speak of the splendour and grandeur this place once enjoyed, when it was a centre of serious study.

Some Discourses delivered in *Nālanda*:

1. *M. N. Upāli Sutta (No. 56)*
2. *D.N. Kevaddha Sutta (No. 11)*

Vaishāli (Vishālā)



Vaishāli is about 55 km away from the capital city of Patna. In the present day, this is a small village surrounded by banana and mango groves as well as rice fields. However, excavations in this area have brought to light an impressive historical past. This region has been recognized by the historians, as one of the world's first democratic republics with an elected assembly of representatives flourishing in 6th century BCE. That was the time of the *Vajjins* and the *Licchavis*. According to the Buddhist literature, there had been 7007 representatives (kings) in this republican state.

It was at *Vaishāli* that the Buddha delivered the Jewel Discourse (*Ratana Sutta*) in order to dispel evil spirits and usher prosperity to the city. The Buddha visited *Vaishāli* frequently and most time dwelled in the Great Wood in the Hall with the Peaked Roof (*Mahāvane kutāgāra shālā*) or *Ambapāli's Grove*.

Emperor *Ashoka* visited this place in the third century BCE and erected one of his famous lion pillars here. A hundred years after the *Mahā Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, *Vaishāli* hosted the second great Buddhist council from which sectarianism arose in Buddhism.

The Buddha with a compassionate heart extended spiritual enfranchisement to women by admitting them to the Holy Order, which was founded here in the Great Wood, in the Hall with the peaked

Roof. Both ordination and higher ordination were granted, first to his foster mother *Pajāpati Gautami* and then to others. This is a very interesting story to be read by all women. (Please read. Gotami Sutta -A.N. 8. 6.1).

Emperor *Ashoka* built The Lion Pillar at *Kolhua*. It is made of a highly polished single piece of red sandstone, surmounted by a bell shaped capital, 18.3 m high. A life-size figure of a lion is placed on the top of the pillar. There is a small tank here known as *Ramkund*. This pillar beside a brick *stupa* at *Kolhua* commemorates Buddha's last sermon and announcement of his approaching *Nibbāna*. The lion faces north, the direction that the Buddha took on his last voyage.

Vaishāli museum houses some of the archaeological remains discovered here. Facing the museum is the *Abhishek Pushkarani*, which was holy to *Licchavis* for the coronation. On one side of the lake is newly built world Peace Pagoda (*Vishva Shānti Stupa*). This is a *stupa* built by a Japanese Buddhist sect, *Nipponzan Myohoji*. The *Shanti Stupa* has become a symbol of universal peace and acceptance over the centuries. This sect was founded by *Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fuji* (1885-1985) with the mission of building *Shanti Stupas* all over the world as a way of creating peace and transforming people's mind and heart. This order has built more than eighty (80) *Shanti Stupas* across the globe.

Discourses delivered at *Vaishāli*:

1. *Ratana Sutta of Sutta Nipāta*
2. *S. N. Ambapāli Sutta*
3. *S. N. Anuruddha Sutta (S. N. III. 1.2.4.4)*
4. *M. N. Mahā Sihanāda Sutta (M.N.12)*
5. *M.N. Cula Saccaka Sutta (M. N. 35)*
6. *M.N. Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M. N. 36)*
7. *M.N. Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta (M.N. 71)*
8. *M.N. Sunakkhatta Sutta (M.N. 105)*
9. *A.N. Sankhittha Gotami Ovada Sutta (A.N.8.2.6.3)*
10. *A.N. Gatami Sutta (A.N. 8.6.1)*

Kusinārā





Kusinārā is about 52 km from Gorakhpur and it is perhaps the only place where many pious devotees feel real sober sadness (*samvega*). Many pious devotees find it difficult to hide their tears upon entering the shrine where the Buddha in a passing away posture as a horizontally reclining statue is kept. "Is this the way that our *Sammā Sambuddha* passed away?" they think and some say. Many devotees become so sympathetic and even cry or faint at the site of the statue which depicts the swollen feet of the *Sammā Buddha* after many days of walking.

According to *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha said, "*Ananda*, let us cross the *Hiraññavati* River and go to the *Mallas' Sāla-grove* in the vicinity of *Kusinārā*." Then they approached there on reaching the village of *Kusinārā* on the further side of the *Hiraññavati* River, the Buddha realised that his end was fast approaching. He told "*Ananda* prepare me a bed between these twin *Sāla-trees* with my head to the North. I am tired and want to lie down." *Ven. Ananda* did so, then the Buddha laid down on his right side in the lion-posture, placing one foot on the other, mindful

and clearly aware. *Ven. Ananda* who served him for 20 years as the attendant monk was deeply saddened. **"Don't grieve, *Ananda!*"** the Buddha consoled him. "The nature of things dictates that we must leave those dear to us. Everything born contains its own cessation. I too, *Ananda*, am grown old, and full of years, my journey is drawing to its close, I am turning 80 years of age, and just as a worn-out cart can only with much additional care be made to move along, so too the body of the *Tathāgata* can only be kept going with much additional care".

Seeing *Ven. Ananda* lamenting the Buddha summoned him and addressed him, **"Enough *Ananda*, do not weep and wail!** Have I not already told you that all things that are pleasant and delightful are changeable, subject to separation and becoming other? So how could it be, *Ananda* – since whatever is born, become, compounded is subject to decay – how could it be that it should not pass away? For a long time, *Ananda*, you have been in the *Tathāgata's* presence, showing loving-kindness in act of body, speech and mind, beneficially, blessedly, wholeheartedly and unstintingly. You have achieved much merit, *Ananda*. Make the effort, and in a short time you will be free of the corruption."

At last, the Buddha addressed the monks and said, **" Now, O Monks, I declare to you: All conditioned things are of a nature to decay, strive**

on with diligence! " (*Handa'dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo vaya dhammā sankhārā appamādena sampādettha*). With these words, the Buddha entered the *Jhānas* (ascending and descending order and again from 1st to 4th) and eventually passed away on this very spot on the full moon day of *Vesak* in 543BCE, where we can now see the *Mahā parinibbāna stupa*.

The body of the Buddha was laid in state after His passing away for the next six days. Preparations were made for his funeral under the direction of *Ven. Anuruddha*, a cousin and disciple of the Buddha. On the seventh day, after honoring the body with perfumes and garlands, it was taken to the *Mukutabandhana Chetiya*, the sacred shrine of the *Mallas*. The last ceremony was performed by *Ven. Mahā Kassapa* and the body of the Buddha was cremated with due honor.

When the cremation was completed the ashes and bones were collected by the *Mallas* as relics, which consisted of a skull bone, teeth and inner and outer shrouds. The relics were then distributed into eight shares amongst the representatives of the eight Kingdoms, which constituted ancient northern India.

The kings who received relics built *stupas* in their respective jurisdictions. Today these relics are enshrined in *stupas* across Asia and venerated by millions of devotees recollecting the great virtues of

the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha (Triple Gem).

In ancient times, this was known as *Kusāvati*. When the Buddha preached *Mahā Sudassana Sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, he pointed out that it was once, a prosperous kingdom named *Kusāvati*. *Kusāvati* was governed by the *Mallas*. Their system of Government was Republican. For some reason, they were divided into two factions. Thus they were known as the *Mallas* in their city of *Pāvā* and the *Mallas* in the city of *Kusinārā*.

Kusinārā or *Kushinagar* was a celebrated center of the *Malla* kingdom of ancient India. This is one of the four most important holy sites for Buddhists. At this location, the Buddha *Sākyamuni Gautama* attained *Mahā Parinibbāna* (passing away not to be born again) after falling ill from eating a meal of a species of mushroom (*sukaramaddava*) which is normally translated as "pig's delight," and grown in a pig farm.

In this place, there are many of the ruined *stupas* and *vihāras* date back to 3rd century BCE to 5th century CE. The Emperor *Ashoka* is known to have contributed to significant construction at this site too.

At the time of the Buddha, *Kushinagar* was the capital of the *Mallas*, and the site of the Buddha's demise. It was a small city, "a branch-township with

wattle-and-daub houses in the midst of the jungle," and *Ven. Ananda* was, at first, disappointed that the Buddha should have chosen it for his *Parinibbāna*. But the Buddha, by preaching the *Mahā Sudassana Sutta*, pointed out to him that in ancient times it had flourished as a city named *Kusāvati*, the royal city of the king *Mahā Sudassana*.

According to the commentaries it is said that the Buddha had three reasons for coming to this small township of *Kusinārā* to pass away:

1. Because it was the proper venue for the preaching of the *Mahā Sudassana Sutta*;
2. Because *Subhadda* would visit him there and, after listening to his sermon, would develop meditation and become an *arahant* while the Buddha was still alive; and
3. Because the *brahmin Drona* would be there, after the Buddha's demise to solve the problem of the distribution of his relics.

Things to be seen and venerated

Parinibbāna Stupa

The remains of both the *Parinibbāna Stupa* and *Parinibbāna Temple*, when rediscovered, were covered in a 40-foot high mound of bricks surrounded by a dense thorny forest. After E. Buchanan, an officer

of the East India Company, arrived in *Kasia* in the course of his survey-work, in 1854 H. H. Wilson suggested that ancient *Kushinagar* and *Kasia* were the same. When the work resumed around 1861–1862 with the arrival of General Alexander Cunningham, an archaeological surveyor, proved the site to be that of the Gautama Buddha's passing away. Excavations began in the late 1800's and many important remnants of the main site were unveiled.

The two places most frequently visited in *Kusinārā* are the *Mahā parinibbana Stupa*, which is built on the site of Buddha's *Mahā parinibbāna* and the *Makutabandhana* the cremation site of the Buddha, which is 1.6 km away from the main site.

Mahā Parinibbāna Temple

Close to the *Mahā Parinibbāna Stupa* is located a 1500 year old Buddha image as He attained *Parinibbāna*. The present temple was built by the Indian Government in 1956 as part of the commemoration of the 2500th year of the *Mahā Parinibbāna* or 2500 Buddhist Era. Inside this temple, one can see the famous Reclining Buddha image lying on its right side with the head to the North. The statue is an amazing sculpture, which depicts three modes of facial expression from three angles. It is 6.1 m long and rests on a stone couch.

On the front of the couch are three sculptures, believed to represent *Ven. Ananda* near the feet, *Ven. Subhadda* at the middle and *Ven. Dabba-malla* who was the chief of those who appointed lodgings, at the corner. He was from *Kusinārā*. At the centre is an inscription of the 5th century AD, which states the statue was "*a gift of the monk Haribala of the Mahāvihara and was fashioned by Dinna*". This 1500-year old reclining Buddha image was carved out of one block of red sandstone brought from Mathura during the Gupta period. It was discovered in 1876 in a dilapidated condition and the scattered fragments were successfully pieced together.

Excavation showed that the original temple on the site consisted of an oblong hall and antechamber with its entrance facing the west. Large number of bricks with carved surfaces found among the rubbish indicated that the temple had a barrel-vaulted roof like that of the modern temple.

Makutabandhana or the cremation site



As *Ven. Buddhaghosha*, the famous commentator explains it *Makutabandhana* was a Hall in which the *Malla* chiefs put on their ornaments on festival days. This is where the remains of the Buddha were cremated. According to Buddhist literature, after the passing away of the Buddha, the *Mallas* wanted to bring the body through the southern gate but were unable to move it as *Ven. Anuruddha* noted that the gods wished otherwise. The gods wanted the funeral procession to go through the northern gate, going through the center of the city and the cremation ceremony to be held outside the eastern gate at *Makutabandhana Cetiya*.

The remains were taken to *Makutabandhana* and placed on a pyre. When the *Mallas* came forward to light the funeral pyre it refused to catch fire. According to *Ven. Anuruddha*, the gods were waiting for Venerable *Mahā Kassapa* who was in the forest at that time. On arrival, of *Ven. Mahā Kassapa* arranged his outer robe on one shoulder bowed down with clasped hands and walked respectfully around the pyre three times. Uncovering Buddha's feet, he bowed down with reverence. The 500 monks did the same and it was said that the pyre then caught fire by itself.

After cremation of the Buddha's body at the *Makutabandhana*, the relics were collected and deposited in their Assembly Hall until the Brahmin,

Drona divided the relics and handed them to various claimants from eight different regions of India who built *stupas* and enshrined the relics:

1. *Ajātasattu of Magadha*
2. *Licchavis of Vaishāli*
3. *Sākyans of Kapilavatthu*
4. *Bulayas of Allakappa*
5. *Koliyas of Rāmagāma*
6. *Brahmin of Vethadipa*
7. *Mallas of Pāvā*
8. *Mallas of Kusinārā*

The Brahmin *Drona* built a great *stupa* for the urn and the *Moriyas of Pippalavana* built a great *stupa* for the embers. Thus the relics of the Buddha were distributed and even today many millions of people respect and venerate these relics daily of the Buddha in different countries in the world.

Discourses delivered at *kusinārā*:

1. *D.N. Mahā Sudassana Sutta (Sutta No.17)*
2. *S.N. Parinibbāna Sutta (S.N.1.6.2.5)*

Lumbini, the Birth Place of the Buddha



"Hida bude jāte Sākyamuni" (This is the place where Buddha *Sākyamuni* was born) was inscribed on a pillar that was erected by the great Emperor *Ashoka* during his visit to *Lumbini* in the 20th year of his coronation (249 BCE). When he visited *Lumbini*, it was a flourishing village. He constructed four *stupas* here and a stone pillar was topped with a figure of a horse. This stone pillar bears an inscription, which in English translation, runs as follows: *"King Piyadasi (Ashoka), beloved of devās, in the 20 year of the*

coronation, himself made a royal visit. The Buddha Sākyamuni having been born here, a stone railing was built and a stone pillar erected to the Bhagavān having been born here, Lumbini village was tax reduced".

According to the *Accariya Abbhutadhamma Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, when the Buddha was born many miraculous things happened on that particular day. It is said by *Ven. Ananda*; "I heard and learned this from the Blessed Ones own lips: 'Other women give birth seated or lying down, but not so the Bodhisatta's mother. The Bodhisatta's mother gave birth to him standing up.' 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, first gods received him, then human beings.', 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. Four young gods received him and set him before his mother saying; "Rejoice, O Queen, a son of great power has been born to you.", 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he came forth unsullied, un-smearred by water or humors or blood or any kind of impurity, clean, and unsullied. Suppose there were a gem placed on Kasi cloth, then the gem would not smear the cloth or the cloth the gem." Read: *Nālaka Sutta* also for more information (Su.N. 3.11).

Lumbini is situated at the foothills of the Himalayas in modern Nepal. In the time of the Buddha, this was a beautiful garden full of green and shady Sal trees. According to the history of Buddhism

queen *Māyā* on her way to her parents' village stopped here in this pleasure garden. It was during this time that the baby *Siddhārtha* was born at this place. Millions of Buddhists all over the world visit this place to see and venerate the Buddha. Prince *Siddhartha*, the light of Asia was born here in this very place in 623 BCE.

The famous Chinese pilgrims both *Ven. Hiuen Tsiang* and *Fa Hien* have described in their records that '*Lumbini* where the Lord was born is a piece of heaven on earth and one could see the snowy mountains amidst a splendid garden-embedded with *stupas* and monasteries!' This exact location remained uncertain and obscure until December 1, 1886 when a wandering German archaeologist Dr. Alois A. Fuhrer came across a stone pillar and ascertained beyond doubt it is indeed the birthplace of our Lord *SammāSambuddha*.

Things to be seen and venerated

The *Ashokan* Pillar

As mentioned earlier, this pillar was erected by Emperor *Ashoka* and discovered by a German archaeologist Dr. Fuhrer. This is the first epigraphic evidence relating to the life history of the Buddha and is the most visible landmark of the garden. The inscription engraved in the pillar in *Brahmi* script evidences the historic importance of the place.

The Sacred Pool

To the South of the *Ashokan* Pillar, there can be seen the famous sacred pool '*Pokkharani*'. This is believed to be the same sacred pool in which the queen *Mahā Māyā* took a holy dip just before giving birth to the baby-Buddha and where the infant Buddha was given his first purification bath. Architecturally the pool has the projecting terraces in descending order and is reverted with fine brick masonry. In the *Sutta* it is said as follows: "*When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, two jets of water appeared to pour from the sky, one cool and one warm, for bathing the Bodhisatta and his mother.*"

Sanctorum of the Birthplace

The single most significant place of the *Lumbini* is the stone slab located deep in the sanctorum, which has been revealed after a hard and meticulous excavation under the three layers of ruins over the site of the famous *Māyā Devi* temple. This stone slab foundation pinpoints the location of the original place marking the exact spot of the birthplace of the Buddha.

Image of Queen *Māyā*

This is also one of the most important shrines here in *Lumbini*. The bas-relief image of *Māyā Devi*

(Queen *Māyā*), is well installed here in a small pagoda-like structure, the image shows the loving mother of our Buddha. Supporting herself by holding on with her right hand a branch of Sāla tree, with newly born infant Buddha standing upright on a lotus pedestal on an oval halo. Two other celestial figures here are depicted in an act of pouring water and lotuses bestowed from heaven. Earlier this image was placed in the famous white temple of *Māyā* Devi beside the pillar, which has now totally dismantled to make way for the excavations, which revealed the Sanctorum the exact spot where the Buddha was born.

The Buddhist Temple

The monastery or the Buddhist temple inside the surrounding complex of *Lumbini* has been built in the manner of modern Buddhist shrines in Nepal. The main shrine hall contains a large image of Buddha and medieval style murals decorate the walls.

Kapilavastu



Kapilavastu is the capital of the *Sākya* clan and the seat of *Suddhodana's* capital. According to Buddhist literature, this is the place where the Buddha spent his childhood grappling with the overwhelming and puzzling problem of human existence, of suffering, disease, old age, pains and death. It was here that he decided to renounce the sensual pleasures of life, the power of the ruler, and security of family life to take up the mendicant's bowl in his quest for enlightenment at the age of 29. The ancient city, now in ruins, from where Buddhism started, abounds in several *stupas*. Stone caskets containing relics believed to be that of Buddha, have been recovered from the main *stupa* here.

Kapilavastu, now known as *Piprahwa* lies at a distance of 110 km from *Gorakhpur* and 20 km from *Siddharthnagar*. *Siddhartha's* father *Suddhodana Sākya* was the ruler of *Kapilavastu* for which reason the Buddha is also referred to as the *Sākyamuni* (The sage of *Sākya*s). Prince *Siddhartha Gautama* left his palace in *Kapilavastu* at the age of 29, and revisited seven years later, after the attainment of Full Enlightenment. It was during this visit he converted many thousands of *Sākya*s to Buddhism. Mainly *Suddhodana*, *Yasodhara*, *Rahula* and *Nanda* became Buddhists in this historical revisiting.

In this present day, *Kapilavastu* comprises of several villages, and the chief among them are

Piprahwa and *Ganvaria*. A large *stupa* stands at the ancient site, in which is said to have enshrined the bone relics of the Buddha. The presence of these relics are testified by an ancient *Brahmi* inscription discovered at this spot. The ruins of the palace of *Suddhodana* as well as the *Nigrodārama* Monastery where the Buddha spent several times together with the retinues of the *sangha* are spread over a large area.



Things to be seen and venerated

The Great Stupa

Here in this *stupa* archaeological excavations carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India between 1971 and 1977 have revealed some stone caskets containing relics believed to be that of the Buddha's. This had been built during the *Kushan* period of India. The seals and inscriptions over the lid of the pots discovered read "*The Devaputra Vihāra of the Kapilavastu Bhikshu Sangha*" here the title *Devaputra* refers to *Kanishka*, a great patron of

Buddhism who built the biggest *Vihāra* at *Kapilavastu* and renovated the main *stupa* too.

Palace

Excavations carried out by *Dr. K.M. Srivastava* indicated the ruins of the palace of *King Suddhodana*, the father of Prince *Siddhartha Gautama*. It is said that it was the place where *Prince Siddhartha* spent his early days of life enjoying the sensual pleasures in the palace. The geographical conditions described in Buddhist scriptures are similar to those in present *Piprahwa*.

New Kapilavastu (in Nepal)

(There is another place called *Kapilavastu* today, which is in *Tilaurakot*, Nepal. Some people believe that it was the citadel complex of the larger surrounding *Kapilavastu* Kingdom, founded by *Siddhartha's* father *Suddhodana*. *Tilaurakot* was excavated by *Dr. Robin Coningham* of Bradford University in the UK. Coningham commenced work on the site in 1997, along with *Dr. Armin Schmidt* and *KoshAchrya*.

The excavation revealed a considerable walled fortress approximately 300 meters long and 200 meters wide and containing exposed foundations of

several building complexes. Some 150 meters before *Tilaurakot's* western gate (the modern main entrance) lies a small, neglected, but quaint museum housing coins, painted grey ware, and northern black polished ware pottery, and toys excavated from the site dating between the seventh century BCE and fourth century CE. The museum also has a good collection of jewelry and other ornaments of that period. *Tilaurakot* lies 25 kilometers east of *Lumbini*.)

The 5th century AD Chinese pilgrim *Ven. Fa-Hien* described *Kapilavastu* as a "*great scene of empty desolation. A few monks, a few families and animals such as lions and white elephants habited here*". This is about *Kapilavastu* at *Piprahwa* in India. This site *Kapilavastu* lies between two important Buddhist destinations - *Lumbini* and *Sāvatti*.

Some Discourses delivered at Kapilavastu

1. *A.N. Gotami Sutta (A.N. 8.2.6.1)*
2. *M.N. Madhupindika Sutta (M.N. 18)*
3. *M.N. Sekha Sutta (M.N. 53)*
4. *D.N. Maha Samaya Sutta (Sutta No.20)*

Sāvatti (Jetavanārāma)



The Foundation of the Fragrance Chamber where the Buddha dwelled rendering his unparalleled service to humans and gods

The Buddha lived for 19 years in this fragrance chamber (*Gandha-kuti*) at *Jeta's Grove* in *Sāvatti*. *Sāvatti* is one of the six largest cities in India during the lifetime of the Buddha. The city was located in the fertile *Gangetic* plains in the present day's *Gonda* district of *Uttar Pradesh*. *Jetavana* monastery was the most famous monastery in *Sāvatti* built by the millionaire *Anāthapindika*. The Buddha delivered most of his discourses here. That is why most discourses commence with the phrase "***Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatti in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapindika's Park***".

According to Buddhist tradition, the city was called *Sāvatti* because the sage *Sāvatta* lived here. Another tradition says that there was a large courtyard for caravans here, and when the people from different parts of the country met here asked each other what kind of goods have you got here ("*Kim bhandam atthi?*"), then they replied "*Sabbam atthi*" meaning "we have all things" or "we have everything". Thus, the name of the city was based on the reply given by them *sambbam atthi*, "*Sāvatti*'.

This city is located on the banks of the river *Aciravati* (now called the *Rapti River*). *Sāvatti* was the capital city of the kingdom of *Kosala* where king *Pasenadi* ruled righteously. He was one of the benefactors and faithful disciples of the Buddha.

Ven. Buddhaghosa says that in the Buddha's day, there were fifty seven thousand (57,000) families here in *Sāvatti*, and that it was the chief city in the country of *Kosala*, which was three hundred leagues in extent and had eighty thousand villages. He stated the population of *Sāvatti* to have been 180 million.

The Buddha's first visit to *Sāvatti* was at the invitation of *Anāthapindika*, whom he met in *Rājagaha* for the first time in his life where the Buddha addressed him by his real name '*Sudatta*'. The main monasteries in *Sāvatti* were the *Jetavana* and the *Pubbārama*. *Sāvatti* also contained the monastery of

Rājakārama, built by *Pasenadi*, opposite *Jetavana*. Not far from the city was a dark forest called the '*Andhavana*' where some monks and nuns lived. This is the forest where the Buddha advised *Ven. Rāhula* to attain Enlightenment. The discourse delivered here was *Cula Rāhulovāda Sutta of the Majjima Nikāya* (*Sutta No.147*).



Jetavana Monastery & Anāthapindika's Stupa

The chief patrons of the Buddha in *Sāvatti* were *Anāthapindika*, *Visākhā*, *Suppavāsa* and *Pasenadi Kosala*.

A renowned Buddhist author, Woodward, states that of the four *Nikāyas*, 871 *suttas* are said to have been preached in *Sāvatti*; 844 of which are in *Jetavana*, 23 in the *Pubbārāma* and four in the suburbs of *Sāvatti*. These *suttas* are distributed as follows: Six in the *Digha Nikaya*, 75 in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, 736 in the *Samyutta Nikāya* and 54 in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. The Commentaries state that the Buddha spent twenty five rainy seasons in *Sāvatti*,

this leaving only twenty to be spent elsewhere. Of the 25 rainy seasons Buddha lived in *Sāvatti*, he spent 19 in the monastery named *Jetavana*, and 6 in the monastery called *Pubbarama*. Thus, *Sāvatti* is the place where Buddha lived the longest time and gave most of his discourses and instructions to the fourfold *Sangha* (monks, nuns, lay men and lay women).

Things to be seen and venerated

Of the ancient *Sāvatti* the city walls are still standing. Within these, the remains of three ancient buildings can be visited: *Jetavanārāma* monastery, *Angulimāla's stupa*, *Anāthapindika's stupa*, Outside of *Sāvatti* is located the *stupa* where the 'Twin Miracle' took place. Among all the sites *Jetavana* monastery is the main pilgrim destination where most Buddhists visit the *Gandhakuti* or the Buddha's very simple, 'Fragrance Chamber' and the *Ananda-bodhi*.

Some Discourses delivered at *Jetavanārāma*:

1. *Mangala Sutta of Sutta Nipāta*
2. *M.N. Anāthapindikovāda Sutta*
3. *M.N. Dhammadāyāda Sutta*
4. *M.N. Vatthupama Sutta (M.N. 7)*
5. *M.N. Kakacupama Sutta (M.N.21)*
6. *M.N. Vammika Sutta (M.N.23)*
7. *M.N. Ariyapariyesana Sutta (M.N. 26)*
8. *M.N. Cula Hatthipadopama Sutta (M.N. 27)*
9. *M.N. Cha Chakka Sutta (M.N. 148)*
10. *S.N. Nanda Sutta (S.N. 21.8)*

11. *S.N. Sangāma Sutta (S.N. 3.II.14.4)*
12. *S.N. Paticcasamuppāda Sutta (S.N.12.1.1)*

At Pubbarāma:

1. *S.N. Punnama Sutta (S.N.III.1.2.3.10)*
2. *M.N.Mahā Punnama Sutta (M.N.109)*
3. *M.N.Ganaka Moggallāna Sutta (M.N. 107)*
4. *S.N. Satta jatila Sutta (S.N. III.2.1)*
5. *S.N. Pavārana Sutta (S.N. 8.7)*

Sankassa



Sankassa, also known as ***Sankissa***, ***Sankasia***, or ***Sankasya*** was an ancient city in India. The city came into prominence at the time of the Buddha. According to Buddhist literature, the distance from *Sāvatti* to here was thirty leagues. Currently in this place there are some ruins of old monasteries and Buddhist monuments. It was rarely visited by pilgrims, mainly because of the lack of facilities. However, in recent times, many pilgrims especially

from Sri Lanka have started to visit this place because of new developments of the place.

Sankassa is now identified with *Sankissa Basantapura* on the north bank of the *Ikkhumati* river (*Kālinadi*), between *Atranji* and *Kannauj*, in *Farrukhabad* district, *Uttar Pradesh*, India.

According to tradition and the commentaries, it is believed that *Sankassa* was the place where the Buddha returned to human realm, right after preaching the *Abhidhamma* to gods in the heaven *Tāvātimsa* headed by his mother *Māyā*. It is said, as the time approached for the Buddha to leave *Tāvātimsa* after his three months retreat, *Ven. Mahā Moggallāna* and *Ven. Anuruddha* announced his returning to the multitude who had been waiting at *Sāvatti* while *Ven. Moggallana* was giving a *Dhamma* sermon. They then made their way to *Sankassa*.

According to literature, the descent of the Buddha took place on the day of the *Mahāpavarana* festival. *Sakka* provided three ladders for the Buddha's descent from the *Mount Sineru* to the earth: on the right was a ladder of gold for the gods; on the left a silver ladder for *Mahā Brahma* and his retinue; and in the middle a ladder of jewels for the Buddha. The assembled people covered the earth for thirty leagues around.

The Buddha was accompanied by *Pañcasikha, Mātali, Mahā Brahmā and Suyāma*. Ven. *Sāriputta* was the first to welcome the Buddha followed by *Uppalavannā*. On this occasion was preached the *Parosahassa Jātaka* to proclaim to the multitude the unparalleled wisdom of Ven. *Sāriputta*.

It is said that the Buddha's descent to *Sankassa* had provided opportunity for Ven. *Moggallāna* to show his eminence in *iddhi, Anuruddha in dibbacakkhu, and Punna* in skill in preaching, and the Buddha wished to give Ven. *Sāriputta* a chance of shining in his wisdom. He therefore asked of *Sāriputta* questions, which no one else could answer.

The site of the city gate of *Sankassa* is one of the "un-abandoned spots" of the world (*avijahitatthānam*) by all the Buddhas in the past. They all descended at this spot to the world of men after preaching the *Abhidhamma*. From *Sankassa* the Buddha went to *Jetavana Monastery*.

According to the tradition, *Bodhisatva Maitree*, as millionaire named *Siriwardhana* was born here in *Sankassa* during the time of the Buddha Gautama and on this very day, the day that the Buddha descended from heaven *Tāvātimsa*, *Siriwardhana* came to this spot and got admission to the Dispensation of the Buddha here at this place.

The Emperor *Ashoka* had built a *Stupa* at *Sankassa* together with the famous *Ashokan Pillar* with an elephant on the top to represent the elephant that was dreamt by *Māyā*.

When the Chinese pilgrims *Hiuen Tsiang* and *Fa Hien* visited the place in the 7th century, they found three ladders in the dilapidated shrine, which had been built of bricks and stone by the ancients to commemorate the Buddha's descent but the ladders were nearly sunk in the earth.

Jayachandra from Kanauji, a Hindu treacherous ruler, together with his gang destroyed and looted *Sankassa*. Thus the place had been completely deserted. It was discovered by General Cunningham in 1842. The Buddhist revivalist, *Anagārika Dharmapāla* from Sri Lanka visited this place 87 years after this discovery. In 1957, *Ven. Pandith Madabavita Vijesoma Mahā Thera* arrived and started to re-establish this holy place. The present glory of *Sankassa* is the result of the great dedication and endeavor of the *Ven. Julampitiye Nyānaratana Nāyaka Mahā Thera*, the present incumbent of the *Sri Devārohana Maitreya Mahā Vihāra, Sankassa*.

This is the ending of our outer world pilgrimage; it is like the cycle of *samsāra*. You can start at any place. We started from *Sārnāth* where the light of *Dhamma* was lit by the Buddha. What is more

important is not the outer world pilgrimage but the inner world pilgrimage. This is the only way to end the *samsāric* pilgrimage and come to the termination and realize real happiness, the Real Peace of *Nibbāna*.

**May we all come to the termination of samsāric
pilgrimage
and attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbāna!**

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I sincerely thank the following writers for their wonderful contributions on the Buddha and the holy places in India:

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**May You all be well happy and Peaceful!
May You all be well happy and Peaceful!
May You all be well happy and Peaceful!**

**May the Fragrance of the Sacred
Dhamma Pervade
all Directions of the World**

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May they all, may we all attain Nibbāna!