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Buddhist Pilgrimage

New Edition 2009

Chan Khoon San

Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati.
The Gift of *Dhamma* excels all gifts.

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New Cover Design

Inset photo shows the famous Reclining Buddha image at Kusinara. Its unique facial expression evokes the bliss of peace (*santisukha*) of the final liberation as the Buddha passes into *Mahaparinibbana*. Set in the background is the Great Stupa of Sanchi located near Bhopal, an important Buddhist shrine where relics of the Chief Disciples and the Arahants of the Third Buddhist Council were discovered.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the spiritual advisors who accompanied the pilgrimage groups to India from 1991 to 2008. Their guidance and patience, in helping to create a better understanding and appreciation of the significance of the pilgrimage in Buddhism, have made those journeys of faith more meaningful and beneficial to all the pilgrims concerned. They are:

- Sayadaw U Jnanapurnik of Kathmandu, Nepal;
- Sayadaw U Indaka of Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar;
- Venerable B. Saranankara Mahathera of Sentul, Kuala Lumpur;
- Sayadaw U Rewata, Sayadaw U Pannacara, Sayadaw U Wathawa and Sayadaw U Kittidhaja of Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar;
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- Venerable U Nyanaramsi of Subang Jaya Buddhist Association;
- Sister Uppalavanna of Kathmandu, Nepal.

PREFACE TO NEW EDITION 2009

This is the third edition of ‘‘Buddhist Pilgrimage’ since it was first published in 2002. It comes with a new cover design and contains many new topics and fresh information on several Buddhist sites. An error concerning the religious history of the Matha Kuar shrine in Kushinagar has been rectified. Since 2002, the author has re-visited the Buddhist circuit seven times and travelled to many new Buddhist heritage sites, notably the Ananda *Stupa* in Hajipur; Pava near Kusinara; Lauriya Nandangarh in northern Bihar; Kosambi in Allahabad; Ramagama and Devadaha in Nepal; Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh; the Ajanta Caves in Ajanta; and Diksha Bhumi in Nagpur, Maharashtra. A chance remark he heard about the Buddha’s alms bowl still existing in Afghanistan prompted the author to carry out a research of its whereabouts after the Buddha had donated it to the Licchavis before his *Parinibbana*. The result is a new article entitled ‘The Journey of the Buddha’s Alms Bowl’ in PART III, 5, page 153. Among the colour plates, I have included some rare Buddhist sites in Northern Pakistan. Although the light of *Dhamma* no longer shines in that country, yet it possesses some of the most beautiful Buddhist relics from its glorious past. Sadly, many of them were destroyed by the Talibans who overran the Swat Valley in 2007 e.g. Jehanabad Buddha carved on rock and Gandharan sculptures in Swat Museum.

The idea of a pilgrimage originated from the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago! Before he passed into *Mahaparinibbana*, the Buddha advised pious disciples to visit four holy places the sight of which will arouse faith and religious urgency after He was gone, namely: Lumbini, Buddhagaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. The pious disciple should visit these places and look upon them with feelings of reverence, reflecting on the particular event of the Buddha’s life connected with each place. Since the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha, these four shrines of Buddhism have become the focal points for pious disciples to rally around and seek inspiration. By the time of King Asoka, four more places, namely: Savatthi, Sankasia, Rajagaha and Vesali, that were closely associated with the Buddha and scenes of His principal miracles, were added to the pilgrimage itinerary. Together, they make the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage.

The aim of this book is to share my experience and knowledge with fellow Buddhists about the benefits of undertaking a pilgrimage to the Eight Great Places with the correct mental attitude. In Buddhism, understanding plays the key role in one's spiritual progress. So, for the intending pilgrim, it is imperative to understand that a pilgrimage is essentially a spiritual journey in veneration of the Blessed One. This act of veneration purifies one's thoughts, speech and action and through it, many noble qualities can be developed. Part I of this book discusses these mental aspects. A book on Buddhist Pilgrimage would not be complete without reference to the famous pilgrims of old, namely: King Asoka and the Chinese pilgrims, whose faith and fortitude are an inspiration to all who follow their footsteps. The downfall of Buddhism and the devastation of Buddhist shrines at the end of the 12th century AD followed by six centuries of oblivion, which was the darkest period of Buddhism are retold in this book. Finally, the restoration of the Buddhist shrines and the revival of Buddhism in India are described to enable the reader to appreciate the efforts of the great men who have dedicated their lives to this noble cause. In particular, the invaluable contributions of four great pioneers, namely: Sir Alexander Cunningham, Anagarika Dharmapala, Venerable Sayadaw U Chandramani of Kushinagar and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar are described in their biographies.

Parts II & III of this book trace the history and religious significance of each of the Eight Great Places and the objects of interest that can be found there. Part IV describes other important shrines along the pilgrimage route that pilgrims should also visit if there is sufficient time. A notable example is Sanchi. Although the Buddha did not visit Sanchi, it is a very important Buddhist centre because relics of the Chief Disciples and the Arahants of the Third Buddhist Council responsible for propagating the Buddha Sasana beyond the borders of India were discovered there. In fact, Ven. Mahinda who founded the Buddha *Sasana* in Sri Lanka, stayed one month at Sanchi in a vihara built by his mother Devi, before embarking on his Dhamma mission to the island.

The Third Buddhist Council was held around 250 BC in Pataliputta (Patna). The Most Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was instrumental in convening the Third Council and despatching *Dhamma* missions to

various parts of the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka and Burma to propagate the *Dhamma*. Thanks to his wisdom and foresight, when Buddhism disappeared from India after the Muslim conquest during the twelfth century AD, the light of the *Dhamma* still shone brightly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other Theravada countries where the *Sasana* had been founded. Today we are witnessing a new phenomenon whereby monks from other Buddhist countries are returning to India to revive the Buddha *Sasana* in its country of origin! Pilgrims who stop at Patna should visit the Kumhrar Park, which is believed to be the site of Asokarama, venue of the Third Council.

Interestingly, an account in the Mahavamsa written during the fifth century AD says that the President of the Third Council Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was a Brahma-god named Tissa in his previous existence. At the time of the Second Council, the *Arahants*, foreseeing danger to the religion in the future, approached him for help as his lifespan in the Brahma realm was coming to an end. He consented to be born in the world of men in order to prevent the downfall of the Buddha's religion. Subsequent events appear to confirm the prophecy of the *Arahants* of the Second Council. An account of the life of Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa and his role in spreading the Buddha Sasana to various parts of the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka and Burma is given on Page 148.

Part V of this book provides information on travelling around the Buddhist circuit, road distances, maps showing the locations of the shrines and the pilgrimage groups organized by the author from 1991-2008. A pilgrimage to the Eight Great Places is one of the happiest and most fulfilling moments of one's life and makes one realize how fortunate it is to be able to travel there and gaze upon these ancient sacred shrines. There is no place on earth that has more powerful and inspiring objects of faith than those one gets to see and worship at the Eight Places of Pilgrimage. In fact, the sights of these holy shrines create such a deep and lasting impact in the mind that the pilgrim will always remember them with joy and reverence for years to come. It is hoped that this book will be useful to intending pilgrims and encourage more Buddhists to undertake the pilgrimage so that they too, can benefit from the journey of piety and faith.

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Spiritual Advisors:

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- Ven. Saranankara of Sentul (1997)
- Sayadaw U Rewata of Myanmar (1997, 1999, 2001)
- Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma of Myanmar (2002, 2006)
- Sayadaw U Wathawa of Myanmar (2003)
- Sayadaw U Indaka of Myanmar (2004)
- Sayadaw U Pannacara (Myanmar) & Ven. U Nyanaramsi (2006)
- Sayadaw U Kittidhaja of Myanmar (2007)
- Sayadaw U Nyanodaya of Myanmar (2008)

Group Leaders:

- Dr. Wong Wai Cheong, Bro. Tan Boon Chhai and Sis. Flora Tan (1991)
- Bro. Chan Weng Poh, Wong Fok Gee, Yap Pak Choong, Lam Cheok Yew & Sis. Helen Too (1997)
- Bro. Danny Teh Kok Lai, Sis. Wooi Kheng Choo and Kieu Choon Lai (1999)
- Sis. Tan Lei Hong and Bro. Chiu Sheng Bin (2001)
- Bro. Thon Lek, Chan Weng Poh, Cheah Swee Seng and Yong Song Kong (2002)
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- Sis Helen Too, Bros. Lai Yoke Wah and Tan Ching Keat (2008)

I take this opportunity to thank all members of the Pilgrimage groups from 1991-2008, for their co-operation and assistance, in making the journeys smooth and pleasant. Last but not least, I wish to commend the generosity of all the donors who have contributed in cash and kind to the purchase of requisites for offering to the various monasteries in the holy places during all the pilgrimages mentioned.

FORGIVENESS OF FAULTS

During the two weeks or so of the pilgrimage, it is inevitable for many of the pilgrims, including the author, to lapse into moments of heedlessness and commit faults through body, speech or mind against our spiritual advisors or against our fellow pilgrims. On behalf of all the members concerned, the author takes this opportunity to ask for forgiveness from our spiritual advisors and also from each other. If we had been heedless at the holy shrines, we too seek forgiveness from the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*.

Kāyena vācā cittena – Pamādena maya katam

Accayam khama me bhante – Bhūri-pañña tathāgata!

If by deed, speech or thought, heedlessly, we have done wrong, forgive us, O Master! O Teacher Most Wise.

REJOICING AND SHARING OF MERITS

May the merits of this *Dhammadana* be shared with relatives, friends and all beings. May they be well, happy and peaceful!
Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Chan Khoon San, Klang,
Klang, 1 April 2009

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bro. Chan Khoon San was born on 8 August 1941 in Penang. After completing sixth form, he underwent two years of teacher training at the Malayan Teachers College in Brinsford Lodge, England. On completion of the course, he returned home and taught briefly from 1964 to 1967. In 1968, he entered the University of Malaya and graduated with a B.Sc. (Hons) degree in Chemistry in 1971. From 1971 till retirement in 1996, he worked as a Senior Research Chemist in the oil palm industry.

After retirement Bro Chan went to Myanmar to practice Satipatthana Vipassana meditation under the guidance of **Chanmyay Sayadaw Bhaddanta Janakabhivamsa** at the Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon. Since then he has gone on meditation retreats in Myanmar every year practising under various Vipassana teachers at Chanmyay Yeiktha in Hmawbi. For the rest of the year, he teaches Sutta classes at various Buddhist societies in the Klang Valley.

Bro. Chan has written two well-known books on Buddhism, namely: **‘Buddhism Course’** and **‘Buddhist Pilgrimage’**. Since 1991, he has organized eleven trips to India visiting the various holy places of Buddhist Pilgrimage. Presently he works as a part-time Consultant Chemist, writes and publishes books and articles on Buddhism.

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PART I

Significance, History, People

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10. Notes to Part I

1. Mental Aspects of a Pilgrimage ¹

1.1 Journey of Faith and Devotion

For the majority of Buddhists, going on a pilgrimage to the holy places mentioned by the Buddha, is a once-a-lifetime undertaking. With so much time, money and effort involved, it behooves the intending pilgrim to truly understand what a pilgrimage is all about, especially the mental aspect, since the physical part is normally taken care of by a travel company. **A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place as an act of faith and devotion.** In the scriptures, faith or *saddha* is the professing of confidence in and the sense of assurance based on understanding that one places on the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. It is not the blind belief based on wrong view. As ignorance is the leader of immoral mental states, so *saddha* is the leader of moral mental states because its chief characteristic is the **purification of the mind.**

Thus the pilgrim is no ordinary tourist who travels for the pleasure of sightseeing and enjoyment. Unlike sensual delights, the sight of the holy shrines do not arouse craving but act as a condition for wholesome mental states to arise in the pilgrim's mind. The Buddha himself advised us to visit those places where he was born, where he attained Enlightenment, where he preached the First Sermon and where he passed away into *Mahaparinibbana*, and look upon them with feelings of reverence. By showing veneration or reverence at the holy shrines, one is able to purify one's thought, speech and action. In this way, the pilgrim is endowed with the morality of Right Thought, Right Speech and Right Action. So we can see that visiting the places of pilgrimage with the correct mental attitude can help us in our practice of the Buddha's Teaching. According to the great commentator, **Ven. Buddhaghosa** the positive feeling resulting from seeing these sites is the religious excitement or the sense of urgency they produce. Another commentator, **Ven. Dhammapala**, explained that this sense of urgency means the mind possesses the knowledge that one should shrink from doing wrong, namely, the knowledge of morality.

1.2 Development of Perfections (*Paramis*)

The second aspect of a pilgrimage is that it is also **an act of renunciation** whereby the pilgrim does not crave for luxury but is contented with simple accommodation, food and transport. This non-greed state of mind enables one to endure any discomfort without complaint but with patience and loving-kindness. In the course of visiting the sacred places, **one feels that one is in the Master's presence** and this fullness of faith conduces to joy and the observance of morality, the foundation of all merit. Many pilgrims take the opportunity to bring with them requisites to perform *dana* out of reverence and gratitude to the *Sangha*, who take care of the holy places. The holy shrines are also conducive places for pilgrims to reflect on the Buddha's virtues and practise mindfulness to develop wisdom. These are various practices by which one can show veneration at the holy shrines or *cetiyas* in addition to the normal acts of devotion like the offering of flowers, lights, incense, and worship (*puja*). In the course of the pilgrimage, one can arouse many wholesome factors that cause one's volition to become superior and lead to the accumulation of superior wholesome *kamma*. Indeed, one can develop the Perfections (*Paramis*) and earn much merit when going on a pilgrimage. But it should not end when one has returned home. After the journey is over, one should always try to recollect the joyful moments spent at holy places to keep them vivid in one's memory. Such recollection is **productive of joy** and is a skilful means of re-enforcing one's good *kamma* already acquired. In times of sickness, fear and worry, or sorrow, one can easily dispel these negative mental states by rejoicing in one's wholesome actions during the pilgrimage.

1.3 Taking the Eight Precepts during Pilgrimage

Besides developing faith and performing charity, the pilgrimage is also a suitable time to practice the Buddha's Teaching by cultivating *sila* or morality. This is because morality is the foundation of all meritorious actions without which there can be no act of merit.

4 • Buddhist Pilgrimage

Thus many well-informed Buddhists undertake the **Eight Precepts** or *Uposatha Sila* to maintain purity of mind at the Four Holy Places of Pilgrimage, namely: Lumbini, Buddhagaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. However among the less-informed Buddhists, some may prefer to eat vegetarian meals throughout the journey, thinking that it is a form of precept taught by the Buddha to keep oneself pure (as some members are taught to believe by certain proponents of vegetarianism).

As the **Buddha did not advocate vegetarianism** for the *Sangha* and the laity, it is proper to explain that **keeping Eight Precepts** is far more superior than keeping a vegetarian diet as far as morality (*sila*) is concerned. Of course, some Buddhists may prefer to eat vegetarian food for health or other personal reasons. This is acceptable provided that they understand that it cannot replace the Eight Precepts where a **greater degree of restraint of the senses must be exercised**.

1.4 Buddhist Fellowship

Fellowship means a community of interests involving regular meetings, the sharing of responsibilities and good friendship for mutual support. This aspect of Buddhist fellowship is important in order to encourage and help one another in the practice of the Buddha's Teachings and to strengthen our faith in times of trial and tribulation. A pilgrimage in a group to the Four Holy Places is one of the best ways to cultivate Buddhist fellowship. Over the two weeks or so of the journey, members of the group will have the opportunity to interact closely and get to know each other well under conditions where *metta* (loving-kindness), *mudita* (appreciative joy), generosity and faith prevail. The bonds of comradeship formed through the **performance of meritorious actions together** will endure long after the pilgrimage is over and members will cherish fond memories of each other whenever they recollect the happy moments spent at the holy places. A journey to the Four Holy Places with fellow Buddhists united by faith and piety is true Buddhist fellowship and a wonderful way of forging friendship. Indeed, many pilgrims have undertaken the pilgrimage more than once after experiencing the **joys of such wholesome fellowship!**

1.5 Arousing Religious Urgency during Pilgrimage²

According to the Scriptures, the Four Holy Places of pilgrimage are called *Samvejaniya-thana*, or places that will **arouse awareness and apprehension** of the nature of impermanence. Thus skillful pilgrims take the opportunity of a pilgrimage to arouse religious urgency (*samvega*) by reflecting on the last words of the Buddha before he entered into *Parinibbana*: “Indeed, *bhikkhus*, I declare this to you: It is the nature of all conditioned things to perish. **Accomplish all your duties with mindfulness.**”

The Four Holy Places were once great centres associated with the Buddha, *Dhamma* and famous *Arahant* disciples of the *Sangha*. One reads in the Pali scriptures about the glory of Buddha’s Birth at Lumbini, his Enlightenment at Buddhagaya, the First Sermon at Isipatana, and his *Parinibbana* at Kusinara. Today the Buddha and the Great *Arahants* are no longer around, for even the Enlightened One and the Great *Arahants* have to succumb to sickness, old age and death. Thus **the world of living beings** (*satta-loka*) does not remain constant but is subject to change according to the Law of Impermanence. Reflecting on this one becomes truly apprehensive, and this arouses **religious urgency** (*samvega*) to practise the Noble Eightfold Path to realize Nibbana, the cessation of all suffering.

After Lord Buddha’s *Parinibbana*, his devotees all over India built *stupas* and *viharas* to commemorate important events of the Buddha at these places. Thus we read about the 84,000 *stupas* built by King Asoka to honour the 84,000 Dhamma-khandas and monuments built by Buddhist kings of various dynasties to honour the Buddha. Today the pilgrim has to travel long distances over poor road conditions to remote areas in Northern India only to see the vestiges and ruins of these once glorious monuments that have been damaged or destroyed over time. Thus one becomes aware that the **conditioned world** (*sankhara-loka*) and **the natural world** (*okasa-loka*) do not remain constant but are subject to changes according to the Law of Impermanence. Reflecting on this one becomes truly apprehensive, and this arouses religious urgency to practise the Noble Eightfold Path to realize Nibbana, the cessation of all suffering.

2. Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage^{3, 4}

In answer to Ven. Ananda's concern that the monks would no longer be able to see the Buddha and seek inspiration after His *Parinibbana*, Lord Buddha mentioned four places, which a pious disciple should visit and look upon with **feelings of reverence**. What are the four?

- a. **Lumbini:** "Here the *Tathagata* was born! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
- b. **Buddhagaya:** "Here the *Tathagata* became fully enlightened, in unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
- c. **Sarnath:** "Here the *Tathagata* set rolling the unexcelled Wheel of the Law! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
- d. **Kusinara:** "Here the *Tathagata* passed away into *Nibbana* wherein the elements of clinging do not arise! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."

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

Mahaparinibbana Sutta

The four other sacred sites are the places sanctified by the Buddha and scenes of **four principal miracles** that He performed, namely:

- e. **Savatthi**, where the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle to silence the heretics after which He ascended to Tavatimsa Heaven to preach to His mother.
- f. **Sankasia**, where the Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Heaven accompanied by Brahma and Sakka, after preaching to His mother and the *Devas* for three months.
- g. **Rajagaha**, where Buddha tamed the drunken elephant, Nalagiri.
- h. **Vesali**, where a band of monkeys dug a pond for the Buddha's use and offered Him a bowl of honey.

Together, they make the Eight Great Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage. According to the *Buddhavamsa* Commentary, for all Buddhas there are four places that do not vary or are unalterable, namely:

- Seat of Enlightenment (*Bodhi pallanka*) at **Bodhgaya**,
- Turning of the wheel of *Dhamma* in Deer Park, **Sarnath**,
- Placing of the first footstep at the gate of the city of **Sankasia** at the Descent from Heaven,
- Placement of the four legs of the bed in the Perfumed Chamber (*Gandhakuti*) at Jetavana in **Savatthi**.

Note: The four unalterable places of all Buddhas are included in the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage. Of the eight, seven are in India while the eighth, the Buddha's birthplace, Lumbini, is in Nepal. The names of some of the places mentioned in the Pali scriptures are no longer used in India. Their modern names are in parentheses: Buddhagaya (Bodhgaya), Kusinara (Kushinagar), Rajagaha (Rajgir), Savatthi (Sravasti) and Vesali (Vaishali).

2.1 Mental Attitude when Approaching the Holy Shrines

It is imperative for the pilgrim to realize that the principal purpose of the pilgrimage is to honour the Buddha. Therefore when approaching the holy shrines, one should show proper respect. The Buddha is the **King of Dhamma** (*Dhammaraja*) and one should approach the shrine as one would approach the presence of a king. Hence one should not engage in taking photographs excitedly, or look here and there treating the visit like a sightseeing tour or engage in frivolous talk but remain calm and serene in sense faculties. **One should walk mindfully**, head down and with palms clasped together in reverence maintaining noble silence or mentally reciting the virtues of the Buddha. As we enter the shrine, we should focus our mind as if we are entering the court of the *Dhammaraja*. Finally we should pay homage (*puja*) by taking refuge in the Triple Gem followed by Five or Eight Precepts and reciting the Virtues of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. This is the proper way in which a pious disciple should visit the holy places and look upon them with **feelings of reverence**.

3. Famous Pilgrims of the Past^{5, 6, 7}

The four sacred places and four places of miracles are known as *Atthamahathanani* or the Eight Great Places. **Emperor Asoka** called a visit to these eight shrines “*dhammayatra*” (*dhamma* expedition) or a pilgrimage of piety. On his twentieth regnal year in 249 BC, he heeded the exhortation of the Buddha and embarked on a holy pilgrimage visiting all these places. His pilgrimage was literally a ‘landmark’ journey because wherever he went he built *stupas* and raised pillars with inscriptions to commemorate his visit to these holy places. These towering monolithic pillars made of polished sandstone and topped with animal capitals have helped to identify the exact locations of the Buddhist world’s most sacred places even after they fell into ruins following the downfall of Buddhism in India. Today after 2250 years, many of these Asokan pillars still stand proclaiming his faith and devotion. Modern day pilgrims can still see these pillars in **Lumbini**, **Vesali** and **Lauriya Nandangarh**, the famous Lion Capital at **Sarnath Museum** and the Elephant Capital at **Sankasia**. Thereafter succeeding Buddhist kings, queens, nobles and wealthy people followed King Asoka’s example. As a result, India became studded with Buddhist monuments and shrines.

From China came the devout and earnest Buddhist monks, like **Fa Hsien**, **Hsüan Tsang** and many others, who travelled great distances braving immense hardships, perils, and even death to fulfill their desire to visit the holy places. In the **Kao-seng-chuan** (Chinese Monks in India by I-Ching), another pilgrim, **I-Ching**, described how he had to pass many days without food, even without a drop of water and wondered how the other travellers, under such difficult conditions, could keep up their morale and spirit. On the long, long trek, many died from sheer physical exhaustion or sickness and some had to leave their bones in desert-sands or somewhere out in India. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, they never faltered nor wavered, such was their **indomitable spirit** and desire to gaze on the sacred vestiges of their religion. Never did men endure greater suffering by desert, mountain and sea and exhibited such **courage, religious devotion** and **power of endurance!**

The pioneer among them was **Fa Hsien**. He took five years to walk from the Western border of China across the Taklamakan desert, one of the most hostile environments on this planet, and over the windswept passes of the Pamir and Hindu Kush mountain ranges to Northern India. After spending six years in India, he sailed to Sri Lanka, where he spent two more years. His homeward journey by sea took another year in which he stopped for five months in Java. Fa Hsien left an account of his journey of AD 399-414 in the **Fo-kwo-ki** (Record of the Buddhist Country). One hundred years after Fa Hsien, two monks, **Sung Yun** and **Hui Sheng** of Loyang (Honan-fu), were sent by the Empress of the Northern Wei dynasty to obtain Buddhist books from India. They started out in AD 518 and after reaching as far as Peshawar and Nagarahara (Jalalabad), returned to China in AD 521. Sung Yun left a short narrative of his travels but Hui Sheng did not record any detail of the journey.

Undoubtedly the most renowned Chinese pilgrim was the great *Tipitaka* master, **Hsüan Tsang**, who secretly set out on the long journey to the West in AD 629 at the age of twenty-seven. His travel in India was the most extensive, taking almost seventeen years (AD 629-645). When he returned to China, the T'ang Emperor T'ai Tsung bestowed upon him great ovation and public honour. Hsüan Tsang's record of his travels, known as **Si-yü-ki** (Record of the Western World), is a detailed and romantic account of the Buddhist shrines in India and other countries he passed through. His devotion, piety and love for learning became a source of inspiration to his contemporaries and later generation of pilgrims including **I-Ching**, who took the sea route to India and back. His travels covered the period AD 671-695 in which he spent ten years studying in Nalanda and another ten years in Sri-vijaya, Sumatra translating the scriptures. He wrote his account in the **Nan-hai-ki-kuei-nai-fa-chuan** (Record of the Inner Law sent home from the South Sea).

The records of the Chinese pilgrims are the only available writings describing the condition of Buddhism and the Buddhist sites as they existed at that time and have proven to be invaluable in locating their ruins during excavations in the 19th century by **Sir Alexander Cunningham** and others.

4. Record of the Buddhist Country by Fa Hsien⁸

Fa Hsien, whose original name was **Kung**, was born in Wu-Yang village in the district of Ping-Yang in **Shansi Province**. Because his three older brothers all died during childhood, his father had him entered as a Samanera at the age of three in the hope of saving his life, but still kept him at home. The child fell dangerously ill, and the father sent him to the monastery where he soon got well and refused to return to his parents. When he was ten, his father died. An uncle considering the loneliness of his mother, urged him to renounce the monastic life and return to her, but the boy replied: "I did not leave the family in compliance with my father's wishes, but because I wished to be far from the dust and vulgar ways of life. This is why I chose monkhood." The uncle approved of his words and gave up urging him. When his mother died, it appeared how great had been his affection for her but after her burial he returned to the monastery.

In AD 399, at the age of twenty-five, Fa Hsien travelled to India with some fellow monks, namely: **Hui-king**, **Tao-ching**, **Hui-ying**, **Hui-yu** and others, for the purpose of seeking the *Vinaya* or Monastic Rules. Starting from **Ch'ang-an** (Xian), they travelled by stages on foot till they reached **Chang-yeh**, a military station at the north-west extremity of the Great Wall, where they met another party of Chinese monks led by **Pao-yun** and **Sang-king**, also on their way to India. After spending the rainy season together in Chang-yeh, they pressed on to **Dunhuang** at the edge of the Taklamakan desert, where they stopped for over a month. The local prefect provided them with the necessities to cross the desert and Fa Hsien's party started out first on their long trek across the Taklamakan desert. Walking for seventeen days about 1500 li (1 li = 0.28 km) in a southwest direction, keeping to the edge of the desert, they reached the rugged and barren country of **Shen-shen** (Loulan), south of **Lop Nor**. The king of this country honoured the Buddhist religion and there were some 4000 monks, belonging to the Small Vehicle or *Hinayana* (**Note 1**).

After resting there for about a month, they travelled northwest for 15 days, probably following the course of the **Tarim** River, and arrived at the country of **Karashahr** near present-day **Korla**. There they met

again the party of monks led by **Pao-yun**, who had travelled by the northern route to **Hami** and **Turfan**. While Fa Hsien's group remained at Karashahr under the protection of an important official, Pao-yun's group was not so lucky and they had to return to Turfan to procure the necessaries for their journey. After staying in Kara-shahr for two months, Fa Hsien and his company continued their journey southwest across the desert. On the road, there were no dwellings or people. The sufferings of their journey on account of the difficulties of the road and rivers exceeded human comparison. They were on the road for a month and five days before they reached the prosperous, oasis town of **Khotan**. The ruler of the country provided them with accommodation in a monastery where they stayed for three months and were able to witness the grand procession of images, which began on the 4th month and lasted for fourteen days.

From Khotan, the pilgrims spent twenty-five days on the road to **Yarkand**, where they stopped for fifteen days before continuing their journey. After another twenty-five days of walking, they arrived at **Kie-sha (Kashgar)**, in the middle of the **Tsung-ling** or Onion Mountains (**Note 2**), in time to witness the *Pancavassika Parisa* or Quinquennial assembly, a five-yearly event instituted by King Asoka, in which the ruler made a great offering to the *Sangha*. Leaving Kie-sha, they entered the great Pamir mountain range, taking a month to cross it, and keeping along the Tsung-ling, continued their journey southwest for fifteen days over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road. Fa Hsien described it thus:

*“The mountainside is simply a stone wall standing up 10,000 feet. Looking down, the sight is confused and there is no sure foothold. Below is a river called **Sint'u-ho (Indus)**. In old days, men had cut away the rocks to make a way down and spread out side ladders, of which there are 700 steps to pass. When these are negotiated, the river is crossed by a hanging rope bridge. The two banks of the river are something less than 80 paces apart.”*

After crossing the river, they arrived at the country of **Udyana**, which comprises the regions from **Chitral** to **Swat Valley** in present day **North Pakistan**. It was then a flourishing centre of Buddhism, with five hundred monasteries belonging to the Small Vehicle. Three

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of the pilgrims, Hui-king, Tao-ching and Hui Yu went on ahead to **Nagarahara** (Jalalabad) to pay reverence to the Buddha-shadow (**Note 3**) at the **Gopala Naga** cave and the tooth and skull bone relics at **Hadda** while Fa Hsien and Hui Ying remained at Udyana to spend the rains-retreat. When over, they journeyed south to **Swat** and descending eastward for five days arrived at **Gandhara** (region between Takkasila and Charsadda). From there, they travelled south to **Peshawar** to see the famed *stupa* of **Kaniska** and the alms-bowl relic (**Note 4**). Here they met the party of Pao-yun and Sang-king who had come to pay homage to the alms-bowl relic. One of Fa Hsien's friends, Hui-yu, who had previously gone to Nagarahara also came to Peshawar and at this point, he decided to return to China with Pao-yun and Sang-king. Meanwhile Fa Hsien's companion, Hui-ying, dwelling in the temple of the alms-bowl relic died there.

Fa Hsien now proceeded alone westward to Nagarahara. On the borders of the city of **Hadda** he visited the *vihara* of the Buddha's skull-bone. At the capital of **Nagarahara**, he visited the *viharas* of the Buddha's religious staff and *sanghati* (outer robe) and the Gopala Naga cave to pay homage to the Buddha shadow. He teamed up with his two remaining companions, Tao-ching and Hui-king and together they spent two months of winter there. When over, they proceeded south and encountered great difficulties and extreme cold crossing the **Safed Koh** mountain range. Hui-king, barely recovering from an earlier illness, was unable to proceed onwards. He died of exhaustion in Fa Hsien's arms, urging them to press on lest they too perished. With great effort, the surviving pilgrims crossed the mountain range and entered **Afghanistan** where they spent the rains-retreat in the company of 3000 monks in the vicinity.

When over, they crossed the **Punjab**, where they saw the Buddhist religion flourishing and after passing many monasteries with myraids of monks, the pilgrims reached **Mathura** country. Fa Hsien then visited in succession **Sankasia**, **Kanauj**, **Saketa** or **Ayodha** and **Savatthi**, where the monks at Jetavana monastery were astonished to see them for they had not seen men from Han (Chinese) come so far as this before in search of the Buddha's law. Moving eastward, they travelled to the ancient Sakyan kingdom, where they visited the birthplaces of **Kakusandha** Buddha and **Kanakagamana** Buddha

and saw the Asokan pillars erected there. The capital, **Kapilavatthu**, was like a great desert, without any inhabitant. There were only a congregation of monks and about ten families of lay people. The roads were devoid of travellers for fear of wild elephants and lions.

From Kapilavatthu, the pilgrims travelled to **Kusinara**, scene of the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*. In this city too, there were few inhabitants and such families as were there, were connected with the congregation of monks. Moving onwards, they went to **Vesali** and **Pataliputta**, the capital of ancient **Magadha**. From there, they moved on to **Nalanda** and **Rajagaha**, where Fa Hsien ascended **Gijjhakuta** hill and after offering flowers, incense and lights, remained there the whole night contemplating and reciting the suttas. Continuing the pilgrimage, they went to **Buddhagaya**, scene of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Deer Park at **Sarnath** where the Buddha preached the First Sermon, **Varanasi** and lastly **Kosambi** in Allahabad district, where they visited the ruins of **Ghositarama** monastery. Returning to Pataliputta, **Tao-ching** decided to take up permanent residence in India after seeing the strict decorum observed by the monks in India with regard to the Disciplinary rules compared with the meagre character of the precepts known in China.

For Fa Hsien, the purpose of his sojourn was to seek copies of the Monastic Rules to take home but throughout the journey, he was unable to obtain a single copy as the rules were transmitted orally. Here he was able to obtain a copy used by the Mahasanghikas at Jetavana monastery. Fa Hsien spent three years learning Sanskrit and copying out the Rules. Then following the course of the Ganges river in an easterly direction, he travelled to **Tamralipti** (modern Tamluk in West Bengal), where he spent a further two years copying the sacred texts and drawing image pictures. From the port of Tamralipti, he took a ship to **Sri Lanka** where he spent two more years collecting and copying the Buddhist texts including the **Mahisasaka** monastic rules, unknown in China.

Fa Hsien had been away from his homeland for many years. Of the four monks who accompanied him to India, one returned to China after going only as far as Peshawar, two died in India and one remained behind in India. At the **Abhayagiri** monastery in

Anuradhapura, the sight of a merchant making a religious offering of a white silk fan from China made him feel sad and homesick. Having completed his original purpose of obtaining the knowledge of the precepts to spread throughout the land of Han, he decided to return home. In his voyage home by sea in 412 AD, he had several miraculous escapes. His ship sprung a leak during a violent storm and was driven to the island of **Yepoti** (Java), then the center of Hindu rule, where he found a Brahmin society there but no Chinese and very few Buddhists.

After spending five months at Yepoti, Fa Hsien took another boat bound for **Canton** but after a month and some days, he encountered another storm. The crew and passengers were terrified and all the Brahmins on board blamed the Shraman (monk) Fa Hsien for the bad luck and threatened to maroon him on the first island they landed. Luckily his *dayaka* (religious patron) was on board to prevent them from carrying out their threat. After seventy days at sea with no sight of land, the crew realized that the ship was off-course and decided to set a northwest direction to look for land. After twelve days continuous sailing, they arrived at the southern coast of Lau-shan near the prefecture of Chang-Kwang. Meeting with two locals, they finally realized that they had landed at **Tsing-Chow**, on the shores of the **Shantung Peninsula** instead. Yet in spite of all the perils of the sea, Fa Hsien had managed to return home safely with his precious cargo of the sacred texts intact.

After resting at **Tsing-Chow** for the summer, he proceeded to **Nanking** where he exhibited the sacred books he had brought back. He was away fourteen years and had encountered great hardships and dangers in his travels through nearly thirty different countries. Having been protected by the power of the Triple Gem and delivered safely from all dangers, he desired to share his experiences with readers by writing these records of his travels from AD 399-414. At Nanking, he executed translations of some of the works which he had obtained in India with the assistance of **Buddhabhadra**, an Indian Sramana. He died at the age of eighty-eight in the monastery of Sin in Tsing-Chow after having accomplished his mission of translating into Chinese the Buddhist texts, which he had taken so much time and trouble to bring back from India.

5. Record of the Western World by Hsüan Tsang⁸

The ‘T’ang Dynasty Record of the Western World’ is an objective record composed in twelve books by the famous Chinese pilgrim **Hsüan Tsang** about his epic journey from China to Central Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent and back in AD 629-645. It should not be confused with the popular Chinese fiction Si-yu-ki or Travels to the West featuring the adventures of the mythical Monkey God, which have been made into films and TV shows for entertainment.

While Fa Hsien went to India to seek the *Vinaya* or Monastic Rules, Hsüan Tsang’s purpose of going to India was to learn from the wise men there on the points of doctrine that were troubling his mind. When his application to leave China was refused by the authorities, he departed in secret from **Chang’an** (Xian) in AD 629 at the age of twenty-seven. Heading up the **Gansu** corridor, he passed **Lanzhou** and worked his way to the end of the Great Wall near **Dunhuang**. There he took the northern branch of the Silk route passing through **Yumen Guan** (Jade Gate Pass) and after crossing the **Gobi** desert, arrived at **Hami**. There, he was summoned to **Turfan**, the capital of the **Uighur** country, by its pious Buddhist ruler to become the country’s chief priest, an offer Hsüan Tsang declined. After failing in his attempt to detain Hsüan Tsang, he remitted the pilgrim to **Karashahr**, from which the latter advanced to **Kucha**.

Kucha was an oasis town on the edge of the desert, famous for its excellent horses. The ground was rich in minerals and its soil was suitable for agriculture. It had one hundred monasteries with over five thousand **Sarvastivadin** monks. All the monasteries had highly adorned images of the Buddha, which were paraded on special occasions in a procession of idol-carriages. In Kucha, the king observed the Quinquennial Assembly, originally instituted by King Asoka, whereby a great offering was made to the *Sangha* every five years. Outside the main city gate, Hsüan Tsang saw two erect figures of the Buddha, about 90 feet tall, and in front of them was a place erected specially for this festival. After staying here for two months, he continued his journey to **Aksu** and crossing the snowy **Tian Shan**

mountains, reached the shores of **Lake Issyk Kul** in **Kyrgyzstan**. This mountain lake, 5200 feet above sea level, is the second largest in the world covering an area of 6200 sq. km.

He then proceeded northwest along the fertile valley of the **Chu river** passing the Kyrgyz lake-land area of **Myn-bulak**, known as the “Thousand springs”. Moving westward, he passed the Tartar town of **Taras** and the country of **Nujkend** on the **Chatkal range**, and arrived at **Tashkent** in **Eastern Uzbekistan**, which was then under the control of the Tuh-kiueh (Huns or Eastern Turks). The next stop was **Samarkand**, a very populous country located at the junction of the trade routes between China and India. It was the emporium of the Silk route where the merchants bartered their goods, and according to Hsüan Tsang, *“The precious merchandise of many countries is stored up here. Its inhabitants are skilful in the arts and trades beyond those of other countries. The people are brave and energetic and are copied by all surrounding people in point of politeness and propriety.”*

From Samarkand, the pilgrim proceeded to **Kesh** (Karshi) and moving south entered the mountains. After traveling about 90 miles up a steep and precipitous road, he arrived at the **Iron Gate** (Derbent in Uzbekistan), a mountain pass bordered on both sides by very high rocky walls with an iron colour. Here double wooden doors had been erected and many bells were fixed on them. The doors were strengthened with iron and impregnable. Because of the protection afforded to the pass when these doors were closed, the pass was called Iron Gate. Passing Iron Gate, he reached **Tukhara**, a country controlled by the Turks and crossing the **Oxus** river (Amu Darya) near **Termez**, arrived at **Kunduz** in Afghanistan. Here he met the eldest son of the Turkish Khan, brother-in-law of the king of Turfan, from whom Hsüan Tsang had letters of recommendation. After some delay, he proceeded with some monks from **Balkh** to that city, formerly capital of the Bactrian kingdom of **Milinda**. It had about a hundred monasteries and three thousand monks.

After paying reverence to the sacred relics, he departed from Balkh and made the difficult and dangerous journey across the **Hindu Kush** mountain range to **Bamiyan**. Here the people worshipped the

Triple Gem but still maintained a hundred tutelary deities, whom the merchants sought to propitiate when business was bad. There were ten monasteries with about a thousand monks of the Lokuttaravadin School. Hsüan Tsang saw the colossal **Bamiyan Buddha** images, about 55 and 35 metres tall, carved out of a mountain-side in the 4th–5th centuries AD, and mistook the smaller one to be bronze due to its gilded surface. He also saw a large reclining Buddha image and paid reverence to some tooth relics. (In an act of religious bigotry, the fanatical **Talibans of Afghanistan** destroyed these ancient Buddha images in 2001, despite worldwide protests and condemnations.)

Moving eastward, Hsüan Tsang entered the passes of the Hindu Kush and crossing the **Siah Koh** ridge, arrived at the country of **Kapisa**. It had one about hundred monasteries with six thousand Mahayana monks and a great monastery with three hundred monks of the Small Vehicle. There were also some ten *Deva* temples with about a thousand Hindu ascetics of various sects, such as naked ascetics (*Digambaras*), those who covered their bodies with ashes (*Pasupatas*) and those who wore chaplets of bones on their heads (*Kapaladharinas*). Every year, the king would make a silver image of the Buddha and offer alms to the poor, destitute and bereaved in his kingdom. After spending the summer of AD 630 in Kapisa, Hsüan Tsang went to **Nagarahara** (Jalalabad). Here he found many monasteries but few monks. The *stupas* were desolate and ruined. He visited the famous **Naga Gopala** cave, which according to legend, once contained the shadow left by the Buddha after he had tamed the *naga* (serpent). At the *vihara* of the skull-bone relic, he found that the caretakers were Brahmans appointed by the king and they charged the worshippers a fee in order to see the relic.

From Nagarahara, the pilgrim entered **Gandhara** by the **Khyber Pass**. Here he found the towns and villages deserted with few inhabitants. There were about a thousand monasteries, which were in ruins, overgrown with wild shrubs and empty. The *stupas* were mostly decayed. At the capital, **Purushapura** (Peshawar), there was only one monastery with fifty Mahayana monks. However, the *Deva* temples numbering about one hundred were fully occupied with heretics.

According to Hsüan Tsang, “*Centuries ago, there was a treacherous Hun king from Sakala named **Mihirakula**, who killed his benefactor, the king of Kashmir and usurped the throne. Then he came to Gandhara and killed its ruler in an ambush. He exterminated the royal family and chief minister, overthrew the stupas and destroyed the monasteries, altogether one thousand six hundred foundations.*”

Travelling north, the pilgrim arrived at **Udyana**, a flourishing centre of Buddhism during the time of Fa Hsien. But now, all its one thousand four hundred olden monasteries lay waste and desolate. Formerly, there were some eighteen thousand monks but now there were very few. After visiting the shrines, he continued his journey to **Takkasila** (near Rawalpindi). Here again, he saw the aftermath of the devastation by the Hun king Mihirakula — many monasteries destroyed and deserted. From Takkasila, he went to **Kashmir** where Buddhism still prevailed. There were still a hundred monasteries and five thousand monks. It appeared that after the death of Mihirakula, his descendants, who then ruled Kashmir, atoned for his misdeeds by erecting *stupas* and monasteries for the Buddhists. At the capital **Srinagar**, Hsüan Tsang spent two years (AD 631-633) studying philosophy and copying the scriptures under a Mahayanist teacher.

From Kashmir, the pilgrim travelled south passing **Jammu** and reached **Sakala** (Sialkot near Lahore), the seat of the Bactrian king Milinda of old and of the infamous Mihirakula of late. As he was leaving Sakala, he was robbed by brigands and spent the night in a neighbouring village. Moving on, he reached a large town, probably **Lahore**, where he remained for a month. Then he went to stay a year in **Chinapati**. In AD 634, he travelled to **Jalandhar** and reaching the **Sutlej** river, passed **Satadru** and **Paryartra** before arriving at **Mathura**. Along the way, he could see the decline of Buddhism and the rise of neo-Brahmanism of the Gupta age. Mathura, a stronghold of Buddhism during the time of King Asoka and centre of the Sarvastavadin school under the famous monk **Upagupta**, was now a shadow of its past, with only twenty monasteries and two thousand monks. After visiting the local shrines, the pilgrim ascended the **Yamuna River** to **Kuru-kshetra** (Thaneswar), the holy land of the Hindus and scene of the legendary Mahabharata wars between the Pandava brothers and the Kauravas, cousins as well as bitter rivals.

There were only three monasteries with about seven hundred monks but one hundred *Deva* temples with great numbers of various sectarians.

Travelling east, he reached the Ganges and following its downward course, passed several towns where he noted the rising tide of Brahmanism. He visited **Sankasia** and saw the shrines associated with the Buddha's descent from Heaven. Next he went to **Kanauj** also known as Kanyakubja, i.e., "city of the hump-backed women", which King **Harsha Vardhana** had made his capital. He did not meet the king who was away, but who later became his friend and patron. From Kanauj, he went to **Ayodha** or **Saketa**, where the Mahayanist teacher **Vasubhandu** composed his *sastras* or treatises and reaching the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, arrived at **Prayag** (Allahabad). There were two monasteries with few followers but many *Deva* temples with great numbers of sectarians. At the confluence of the two rivers, Hsüan Tsang saw hundreds of Hindu devotees drowning themselves in the waters after fasting for seven days, in the belief that this would wash away their sins and lead them to heaven. He went to **Kosambi** and visited **Ghositarama**, now an old habitation in ruins, which the rich merchant Ghosita had built for the Buddha to stay whenever he was in Kosambi.

Moving northwards, the pilgrim travelled to **Sravasti** and visited **Maheth**, where he saw the *Sudatta stupa* marking the site of Anathapindika's house and beside it the *Angulimala stupa*. At **Saheth**, he found **Jetavana** in ruins and deserted. From Sravasti, he went to **Kapilavastu**, capital of the old Sakyian kingdom; **Lumbini**, birthplace of the Buddha; **Ramagama**, which had been waste and desolate for many years; and **Kusinara**, scene of the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*. Travelling south 500 li, through a great forest, he reached **Varanasi**, the sacred city of the Hindus. There were about thirty monasteries with three thousand monks but over a hundred *Deva* temples with about ten thousand sectarians, mostly **Siva** worshippers. At the Deer Park in **Sarnath**, he visited a monastery with fifteen hundred monks of the Sammitiya School and paid reverence at the shrines in the vicinity. Following the course of the Ganges eastward to **Ghazipur**, then northeast, he arrived at the city of **Vesali**. There were several hundred monasteries, which were

mostly dilapidated with very few monks. The city was in ruins and practically deserted. He saw the Asokan pillar with a lion capital on top and beside it, the *stupa* built by King Asoka. Near the pillar was a pond dug by a band of monkeys for the Buddha's use and further south was a *stupa* marking the spot where the monkeys, taking the Buddha's bowl, climbed a tree and gathered him some honey. Travelling northwest, he passed the **Vajjian** country and went to **Nepal**. Then returning to **Vesali** and crossing the Ganges, he arrived at the country of **Magadha**.

Pataliputta (Patna), capital of the great Mauryan Empire during the time of King Asoka, was in decay. There were fifty monasteries with about ten thousand monks, the majority being Mahayanists. In the old city, Hsüan Tsang saw hundreds of monasteries, *Deva* temples and *stupas* lying in ruins. He also visited **Kukkutarama** monastery built by Asoka, but the building had long been in ruins and only the foundation walls remained. Travelling south, he passed the Tiladaka *vihara* where learned men and scholars from different countries came to study. Inside one building, he saw images of Avalokitesvara and Tara beside a standing image of the Buddha, an indication of the growing influence of **Tantrism**. Moving on he reached the Neranjara river and crossing it, arrived at **Gaya**. Here he visited **Pragbodhi** (Dungeswari) where the *Bodhisatta* underwent six years' austerities, **Sujata's** village, **Uruvela** forest and **Bodhgaya**, scene of Buddha's Enlightenment and holiest spot to all Buddhists. Then he went to **Rajagaha** where he visited all the sacred shrines, including Vulture Peak, Bamboo Grove, the hot springs, Pippala stone house and Sattapanni caves, venue of the First Buddhist Council.

He was in Nalanda around AD 635 and enrolled at the famous **Nalanda University**, India's premier Buddhist seat of learning, to fulfill his purpose of coming to India and learn from the wise men about Buddhism. Admission was based on merit in which the gate-keeper, a responsible officer of considerable learning, would ask some difficult questions and the candidate had to answer them to his satisfaction. Normally, out of ten candidates, seven or eight would fail this screening test. Hsüan Tsang, who already had a solid grounding of scholarship, was able to gain admission into the University. Here he studied **Yogacara** philosophy under the famous

Mahayanist teacher **Silabhadra**. He also studied Hindu philosophy and mastered the Sanskrit language. During his residence in Nalanda, he distinguished himself by his diligence and scholarship.

In AD 638, he interrupted his studies and travelled to **Champa** (Bhagalpur) and **West Bengal**, ending up at **Tamralipti**, where he intended to take ship to **Sri Lanka** and study the Theravada doctrine. There he was told that the island was within easy reach of South India. So he decided to travel by land rather than take the risk of a long sea voyage. Moving in a southwesterly direction, he passed **Orissa** state, which had some hundred monasteries with ten thousand Mahayanist monks, and **Kalinga** where the heretics, mostly *Niganthas* predominated. Then continuing the journey through **Kosala** (the land of **Nagarjuna**, founder of the Madhyamika doctrine) and **Andhra**, he reached **Amaravati**. There were numerous monasteries but they were deserted and ruined. Of those preserved, there were about twenty with a thousand monks of the Mahayana tradition. He saw two establishments situated on two cliffs, one in the east called **Purvasaila** (East cliff), and the other on the west called **Aparasaila** (West cliff). Both used to be inhabited by monks but were now deserted and wild. After spending the rainy season of AD 639 in Amaravati, the pilgrim proceeded south passing the country of **Chola**, which he described as “*wild and deserted, a succession of marshes and jungle, with a small population and troops of brigands go through the country openly*”. Then continuing south through a wild forest district and travelling 1500 li, he arrived at the country of **Dravida**.

At the capital **Kanchipuram** (near Madras), there were about a hundred monasteries with ten thousand Mahayanist monks. Here he learned that **Sri Lanka** was facing unrest and famine following the death of its ruler. So he gave up the idea of going to the island. Moving northwards, he entered a forest and passed many deserted villages where brigands roamed in search of victims. After travelling 2000 li without incident, the pilgrim arrived at **Konkanapura** (Golconda near Hyderabad), which had about a hundred monasteries with ten thousand monks from both traditions. From Konkanapura, he crossed a wild country, infested with wild beasts and robbers, and arrived safely in the state of **Maharashtra**, where he visited the

famous rock-cut cave monasteries or *lenas* at **Ajanta**. From Ajanta, he travelled to **Valabhi** around AD 641 passing **Bharoch**, **Malava** and **Kachha**. Valabhi was the capital of the **Maitraka** kingdom in **Gujerat** and a famous centre of learning and commerce. According to Hsüan Tsang, “*There were about a hundred families who possess a hundred lakhs (millionaires). The rare and valuable products of some distant regions are stored here in great quantities.*”

He visited a great monastery where two distinguished Mahayana Masters, **Sthiramati** and **Gunamati** had resided and composed their treatises. Moving west, he passed **Surashtra** and **Gurjjara** before arriving at **Ujjain**, the capital of **Avanti**. There were scores of monasteries but they were mostly in ruins and only three hundred monks remained. Moving west, he travelled to **Sindh** where he saw several hundred monasteries occupied by some ten thousand monks of the Sammatiya School. Then moving north and crossing the Indus, he arrived at **Multan**. Here the believers and monks were few. There were ten monasteries, all in ruins. At this point, he decided to return to **Nalanda** as he had visited most of the Buddhist shrines in India.

Back at Nalanda, Hsüan Tsang devoted his time fully to the study of the Mahayana doctrines and participated in philosophical debates. After acquiring an encyclopedic learning, he was looking forward to return to China and spread the new learning. The king of Assam, **Kumara-raja**, heard about the Chinese master’s ability and invited him to the capital **Kamarupa** in AD 643. While Hsüan Tsang was there, Kumara-raja received an order from his overlord, King **Harsha Vardhana**, to bring the Chinese monk to see him at Kajinghara, a small kingdom on the banks of the Ganges. At the meeting, both men established a close relationship. Harsha Vardhana invited Hsüan Tsang to his capital at **Kanauj** where he convoked a religious assembly on the banks of the Ganges, attended by the kings of twenty vassal states, together with monks and Brahmans. Hsüan Tsang was appointed ‘Lord of the Discussion’. For the next three weeks, Harsha would offer food to the monks and Brahmans daily. After this, he would carry a life-size golden image of the Buddha on his shoulder up a tall tower, where he paid homage to the Triple Gem with a great offering of silken garments decorated with precious stones. On the last day, the heretics tried to sabotage the assembly by

setting fire to the tower and attempting to assassinate the king in the resulting confusion. But the attempt on Harsha's life was foiled when the king himself arrested the culprit. He confessed that the heretics and Brahmans, jealous of the reverence and honour accorded to the Buddhist monks by the king, hired him. Thereupon the king punished the ringleader and banished the Brahmans to the frontiers of India. After this, Harsha took his honoured guest to **Prayag**, where he held the Quinquennial festival in which he gave away all his wealth accumulated over five years, following the example of King Asoka.

After witnessing the ceremonies at Prayag, Hsüan Tsang stayed for ten more days with Harsha and then started his return journey to China. To ensure his safe passage to the border, Harsha provided him with a military escort led by **Kumara-rajā**. He returned to China by the opposite direction in which he came to India, by way of **Jalandhar**, **Takkasila** and **Nagarahara**. Then crossing the **Hindu Kush**, he entered northern Afghanistan. Moving in a northwest direction, he reached **Badakshan** and traversing the mountains and valleys of the **Pamirs**, passed several towns in **Tajikistan**. Then crossing the **Sarykol** range, which forms the border between China and Tajikistan, he reached **Kashgar** in Xinjiang province. From Kashgar, he travelled to **Yarkand** and **Khotan**, and crossing the **Takla Makan** desert, arrived at **Dunhuang**. After resting for some time at Dunhuang, he returned to **Chang'an** (Xian) in AD 645. There the officials and monks him received with great honour. He appeared before the Emperor a few days later to pay his respects. He had brought back with him the following articles:

1. One hundred and fifteen grains of Buddha relics.
2. Six statues of the Buddha.
3. One hundred and twenty four Mahayana works or sutras.
4. Other scriptures amounting to six hundred and fifty seven works, carried by twenty-two horses.

Hsüan Tsang spent the remainder of his life translating the Sanskrit works brought back by him with the aid of a team of translators. He died in AD 664 at the age of sixty-two, after fulfilling his mission of learning from the wise men in India about Buddhism and bringing back the knowledge to China.

24 • Buddhist Pilgrimage

For a copy of the route taken by Hsüan Tsang, please refer to the 'Map of Hsuan Tsang's Jorurney To India' in PDF format.

6. Decline and Downfall of Buddhism in India^{5, 9,} 10, 11, 12

Buddhism in India suffered two extensive devastations in its history. The first was by the **Hephthalites** or White Huns (**Note 5**), who invaded India in 470-480 AD and conquered the border provinces of Gandhara and Kashmir. The Hun king, **Mihirakula** was a barbarian and a sworn enemy of Buddhism, bent on destroying the Buddhist establishment. Their conquest was accomplished with great ferocity and the Gupta regime was completely extinguished. It was not until 533 AD that Mihirakula was subjugated by **Yasodharman** of Mandasor. Hsüan Tsang who passed through Gandhara and Kashmir one hundred years later heard about the devastation and reported that in Gandhara alone, “*Mihirakula overthrew stupas and destroyed monasteries, altogether one thousand and six hundred foundations.*”

According to **M. Ashraf Khan (Ref. 45, page 6)** the local Brahmins had been dissatisfied of being deprived of royal patronage from successive Buddhist kings since Asoka's time. So they colluded with the Hephthalites during their invasion of **Gandhara** in about 470 AD leading to the slaughter of Buddhists and plundering and destruction of Buddhist monasteries as reported by Chinese pilgrims later.

At that age, Buddhism had enough vitality to heal the wounds inflicted by the Huns for over a decade. *Sangha* life picked up again in new monasteries built over the ruins of the demolished ones. However, in the western part of India, namely: Gandhara, Kashmir and western Uttar Pradesh, Buddhism had lost much ground to the neo-Brahmanism of the Gupta age. In the eastern part, in Magadha (Bihar) and West Bengal, it began to revive again under the Buddhist king, **Harsa Vardhana** (7th century AD) and later on, under the patronage of the **Pala kings** (8th-12th century AD).

This was a period when the *viharas* underwent transformation from being monastic training centres to larger institutions or **Mahaviharas** dedicated to learning and scholarship. These *Mahaviharas* such as **Nalanda, Odantapuri** and **Vikramasila** in Magadha had as many as 10,000 students from every Buddhist country. Kings, nobles, wealthy

merchants and ordinary people all contributed their share towards the maintenance of these famous universities, but although their financial support made these Buddhist institutions famous and prosperous, yet they undermined the high ideals of renunciation and simple lifestyle upon which the *Sangha* was founded. Philosophical speculations and logic in the Mahayana tradition to counter the realistic Nyaya position propounded by the Brahmin scholars of Mithila was the chief activity of these Mahayana centres. The logical controversy between Nalanda and Mithila dragged on for hundreds of years, from the 5th to 12th centuries AD.

So the monks slowly became accustomed to an easy life devoted to academic pursuits and religious rituals and relaxed their moral code to accommodate worldly practices and beliefs. According to **I-Ching** who studied in Nalanada from 675-85 AD, “*the venerable and learned priests of Nalanda monastery ride in sedan-chairs when they travel. The necessary baggage are carried by their attendants; such are the customs among the Bhikshus in India*”. (Ref. 7, page 30)

I-Ching also noticed a tendency among monasteries in India to hoarding, which prompted him to add this censorious note: “*It is unseemly for a monastery to have great wealth, granaries full of rotten corn, many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury, without using any of these things, while all the members are suffering from poverty. The wise should always act according to the proper judgement of what is right or wrong.*” (Ref. 7: page 194)

Such easy lifestyles and wealth contributed to the disintegration of the Order into diverse sects, to a weakening of morality and corresponding erosion of the laity’s faith in the *Sangha*.

Earlier in the Gupta period (c. AD 300-550), the **Mahayana** doctrine had reached the stage whereby *Arahantship* was openly condemned and *Bodhisattaship* held up as the goal towards which every good Buddhist should aim for. According to the Pali scholar **Rhys Davids** in his book “The History and Literature of Buddhism”, the whole exposition of this theory was set in the **Lotus Sutra** or the *Saddharma Pundarika* as it is called in Sanskrit. It was so subversive

of the original Buddhism and even claimed to have been preached by the Buddha himself. With the passage of time, more philosophical speculations in the Mahayana tradition emerged and led to the worship of various Mahayanist gods and “*Bodhisattas*” conceived to symbolize the philosophical speculations. According to Rhys Davids, as time went on, converts to the Mahayana who were well acquainted with the Hindu deities of the day, conveniently adopted many Hindu deities into the Buddhist pantheon. These Hindu deities were represented as “*Bodhisattas*” in order to bring about reconciliation between the two faiths and to attract more devotees. To convince the naive devotees that it was indeed a Buddhist deity, each icon had a small Buddha image on its head.

Grand temples were built in honour of these new “*Bodhisattas*”, in which elaborate ceremonies were performed, which attracted people from all walks of life and encouraged different superstitious beliefs and modes of worship. These practices formed the basis for the development of **Tantrayana** by Buddhists who adopted the methods of Hindu Tantrists by incorporating Vedic and Hindu beliefs into the religion (refer to Indian Buddhism by Hajime Nakamura).

During the later part of the Pala period (9th to 11th century AD), Buddhism became heavily **adulterated by the Tantric cult**, with its magic spells, yoga and practices that were completely alien to the earlier form of Buddhism. The religion was now reduced into an **esoteric yogic system** with emphasis in the efficacy of magic spells and *mantras* and practice of *mudras* (physical postures), *mandalas* (mystical diagrams), *kriyas* (rites), etc. Tantric mystics were accepted as great leaders who claimed to have discovered the shortest route to Deliverance. In some quarters, it was believed that the “grace of the teacher” was sufficient for the realization of the Sublime. The highly symbolic language of esoteric Tantric writers encouraged some of these gurus to ridicule the monastic code and even propagate mass indulgence in wine and women as a way to attain the highest knowledge. The discovery in the ruins of Nalanda of several Tantric images, all of which belonged to the Pala period of its history, provides evidence of the development of Tantrayana at Nalanda University.

According to **Ven. Jagdish Kashyap**⁹, the religion had become so polluted and weakened by these perverted forms of practice that it became practically impossible to revive after the destruction of the Mahayana temples and monasteries by the Muslim invaders.

The Fatal Blow

The **Turuskas** or **Khaliji Turks** (**Note 6**) from Afghanistan dealt the fatal blow to Buddhism in India at the close of the 12th century AD. They were fanatical Muslims, bent on conquest and destruction. By then, they had conquered the western part of Uttar Pradesh called the **Doab**, the region bordered by the Yamuna and the Ganges rivers, where they had settled themselves with expansionist aims. Soon they began their invasion, spreading terror and panic through all the towns and countryside in their path, and their advance posed a tremendous threat to all monasteries and temples of northern India. The whole doomed area in the east, ancient Magadha (Bihar) and North Bengal, fell to the marauders. Especial ferocity was directed towards Buddhist institutions with huge Buddha and “*Bodhisatta*” images, which were systematically plundered, destroyed or vandalised. The shaven-headed monks wearing distinctive monastic robes were easily spotted and massacred wholesale as idolaters! (**Note:** Since the usual Muslim word for what they understand to be an ‘idol’ (*budd*) is in fact borrowed from the Sanskrit ‘*buddha*’, one can imagine that these ‘*buddha*-smashers’ on their fanatical campaigns took particular care to seek out and destroy Buddhist institutions.)

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the structures of the **Vikramalasila Mahavihara** (probably sited near Colgong, District Bhagalpur, Bihar) were razed to the ground by the invaders, who out of wrath were said to have uprooted even the foundations and threw them into the Ganges. The same fate was met about this time by the **Odantapuri Mahavihara** (sited at Bihar Sharif near Nalanda), which had been turned into a garrison of Muslim soldiers, who in about 1198 AD under **Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji** committed such a savage massacre of the Buddhist *bhikkhus* of the *Mahavihara* that not a single human being was around to acquaint the killers of the

contents of books stored in the library! The story of this assault was told long afterwards, in 1243 by an eye-witness to the Persian historian Minhaz. In his book, *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri*, he reported as follows (Ref. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, page 357):

*“Most of the inhabitants of the place were Brahmanas with shaven heads (monks). They were put to death. Large numbers of books were found there, and when the Mahammadans saw them, they called for some person to explain the contents. But all of the men were killed. It was discovered that the whole fort and city was a place for study (madrasa): in the Hindi language the word **Bihar** (i.e. Vihara) means a **college**.”*

In the destruction of the University of Nalanda, the same historian recorded that thousands of monks were burned alive and yet more thousands beheaded, and the burning of the library continued for several months. **Such was the savagery of the Muslim invaders!**

The Last Days of Nalanda Mahavihara

At that period of history, Buddhism had evolved into a philosophical and academic tradition and the heart of its tradition lay in the universities rather than among the masses of the people. When the Muslims destroyed the great universities of Magadha and exterminated the monks, **they literally destroyed its physical heart**. Yet a lingering pulse of life still continued. For some time a few brave monks still hung on near the ruined universities. As reported by a Tibetan pilgrim named **Dharmaswamin** four decades later in 1235AD, somewhere in the vast deserted ruins of Nalanda University, an old nonogenarian monk named **Rahula Sribhadra** had made his dwelling and was still teaching Sanskrit grammar to seventy students. He was in the last stage of poverty and decrepitude, supported by a lay disciple named **Jayadeva**. While the Tibetan pilgrim was there, another Turkish raid took place, the object of which was to hunt down and kill any monk, who obstinately remained or to ransack the ruins in the hope of finding buried treasure. The monks had been warned earlier about the impending

raid and all had left Nalanda except the old monk and his Tibetan pupil, who carried his master to a safe distance into hiding. While they were in hiding, 300 Turkish soldiers arrived, armed and ready for the assault. Finding the place empty, they left. Then the two refugees stole out of their hiding place and returned to Nalanda. Dharmaswarmin records that the Tibetan pupil finally completed his studies and returned home with the teacher's consent. This is the last glimpse of Nalanda vouchsafed to us before its lapse into utter darkness! (Ref: Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India by Sukumar Dutt, pages 347-348)

The extermination of Buddhist monks dealt a fatal blow to the organization of the *Sangha* in India. With the monks gone, no one was left to carry on their work or lead the demoralized laity who were forcibly converted to Islam or absorbed into Hinduism and Jainism. Although the latter religions were subjected to the same persecution, their priests and leaders were not easily recognized among their people to be singled out for extermination. So they could survive and rebuild their communities. The high-caste Brahmin priests had always opposed Buddhism (**Note 7**) because of its criticism of the unjust caste system and while it was under the protection of royal patronage, they had kept silent. After the downfall of Buddhism, they could act without restraint, and began to appropriate and convert Buddhist temples that had escaped destruction into Hindu temples (**Note 8**). In parts of India far from the invaders' control, the caste system regained its dominance and under community pressure, the demoralized Buddhist laity was absorbed into Hinduism, into the lowest castes.

Yet a handful of survivors were left in the aftermath of the **Buddhist Holocaust**. They dispersed and fled with their cherished treasures of Buddhist scriptures to remote secluded monasteries far away from the invader's track or to the nearest port to take ship and sail to **Arakan** or **Burma** for safety. A few of them were later found to be sheltered and settled at the areas of **Chittagong** and Arakan, the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, who have been claiming direct lineage with the Buddhists of the glorious past. Many trekked north across the Himalayas to seek sanctuary in the more hospitable countries of **Nepal** and **Tibet**. Thus came about the final dispersal of

the Buddhist *Sangha* in India. With the downfall of Buddhism in India, the Buddhist shrines and monuments fell into disuse. They were plundered and destroyed, or just ignored and neglected, and in the course of time fell into ruins and oblivion. **This period is the saddest part of Buddhism** that must not be forgotten.

According to **A. K. Warder** (Indian Buddhism, page 484), when confronted with the new wave of devastation by the fanatical Turks of Afghanistan, the Buddhist countries of Central Asia and Northern India could apparently not find enough good soldiers, enough military spirit to defend themselves. **The Buddha's teaching of non-violence must surely have had some effect.** Formerly Buddhism had spread among the barbarian peoples themselves (notably the Kushans under **Kanishka** and Bactrians under **Milinda**) thus defying the forces of militarism and destruction by civilising the people who had practised them. The new invaders were different. They were not open to the idea of the people they had conquered for they already had their own religion and fanaticism. The Kushans saw in Buddhism a means to consolidate a great empire by promoting the harmony of its own people. The Turks did not concern themselves with consolidation (until much later under the Mughal Emperor Akbar) but only with expansion and more plunder and more slaves. They chose the way of violence and took all India with them destroying her civilization.

In 1684, after nearly five centuries of oppression, the Indians united under the **Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji** (Mumbai Airport is named after him) and were able to end Muslim rule in India. The decisive point for us is that Turkish power and Muslim rule had collapsed, the Marathas had re-established religious tolerance over most of India and the British continued this Maratha policy over a still wider area. It became possible for Buddhists not only to make pilgrimages to India but also to start restoring Bodhgaya, Sarnath and other holy shrines and once more to build temples for the monks to stay. In fact, the **demise of Muslim rule** and the **arrival of the British Raj** were the most significant events that paved the way for the revival of Buddhism in India.

7. Revival of Buddhism in India^{13, 14}

7.1 A New Dawn for Buddhism in India

After the downfall of Buddhism in India, even the association of the name of Asoka with his pillars was quickly forgotten. According to the Muslim historian **Shams-i Siraj Afif** of the reign of **Sultan Firoz Shah of Delhi** (1351-88), when the two stone pillars at **Topra** and **Mirath** were transported to Delhi as trophies, many Brahmin *pandits* were asked to decipher the writing on the base of the pillars but none was able. In order to flatter the sultan, they concocted a fanciful reading that the inscriptions stated that no one would be able to remove the column from its place till there should arise in later days a Muslim king named Sultan Firoz. As to what the pillars were used for, Shams-i Siraj wrote that the local tradition was that these columns of stone had been the **walking sticks** of the accursed giant **Bhima** (one of the Pandava brothers of the *Mahabharata* folklore). It goes on to say that even the beasts in those days were much larger than nowadays and Bhima used them to goad his giant-sized cattle while tending them. When he died, these columns were left as memorials to him. (Ref: Legend of King Asoka by John S. Strong)

The disappearance of Buddhism in India lasted six centuries, from the 13th to 18th centuries AD. According to **Ven. Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap**, it was almost so complete that even in recent times, the local people of Patna, Rajgir and Mathura, once the strongholds of Buddhism, could not even recognize the Buddhist relics that were discovered there. While in many places, the Buddha statues that were not destroyed came to be worshipped as Hindu deities. Buddhist *stupas* that had been abandoned for centuries became so overgrown with wild vegetation and trees that they resembled small hills.

After six centuries of darkness, light dawn on Buddhism with the coming of the **British Raj** in the 18th century that attracted a crop of scholars and explorers. These newcomers from the West were filled with enthusiasm to discover what lay hidden in this ancient country. Asokan pillars towering in the open were the first monuments that

came under their scrutiny. Their discoveries began in 1750 with the discovery of fragments of an Asokan inscription of the **Delhi-Mirath** Pillar, followed by inscriptions on the **Delhi-Topra** Pillar, the **Allahabad-Kosambi** Pillar and **Lauriya Araraj** and **Lauriya Nandangarh** Pillars, the last two in Bihar. During the early 19th century, rock inscriptions were found at **Girnar** in Gujerat, **Dhaulti** in Orissa (Kalinga), and **Shahbazgarhi** near Peshawar in Pakistan.

With the discovery of these ancient inscriptions, the next task was to find out what was written and who was the author. But there was no Indian scholar competent enough to decipher them. In 1837, **James Prinsep**, an official of the Indian Mint and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal succeeded after several years of painstaking study and hard work, in deciphering the inscriptions, which were written in **Brahmi**. He published his results containing English translations of the seven pillar Edicts, the opening words of which were: “*Thus spake the beloved of gods, King Piyadasi*”

Who was this King Piyadasi still remained a mystery. As luck would have it, that year **George Turnour**, an historian and officer of the Ceylon Civil Service, published his English translation of the **Mahavamsa**, a Pali chronicle of Ceylon. The occurrence of the word ‘Piyadasi’ in the Mahavamsa helped Prinsep in identifying King Piyadasi as the great **Buddhist Emperor Asoka**. The deciphering of the Asokan inscriptions and the identification of Asoka was an epoch-making event. It revealed that India during Asoka’s time was **Buddhist India!** Obviously the Brahmins who wrote India’s history had intentionally blacked out that golden period. This discovery enriched the history of India and of Buddhism to such an extent that all previous books on Indian history had to be re-written!

7.2 The Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India^{15, 16, 17}

The arrival of **Sir Alexander Cunningham** (1814 -1893) accelerated the discovery and restoration of the archaeological sites in India. He was the first Director General of Archaeology and undoubtedly the **greatest explorer of Buddhist heritage in India**. He came to India

in 1833 and served in the army and other government departments in India and Burma as an engineer. He took up archaeology because he had an innate concern for ancient remains, and was deeply disturbed by the way the monuments were suffering from the ravages of nature and the plunder of man. His association with Buddhist monuments began when he undertook excavation of the Dhamek *stupa* in Sarnath around 1840 where he saw the irreparable damage of its beautiful facade due to the **meanness Jagat Singh**, minister of Benares (see page 106). His achievements as an archaeologist during a span of 28 years led to his appointment as Surveyor of Indian Archaeology in 1861. That same year a French scholar, **M. Stanisla Julien**, had published a translation of the travel records of the famous Chinese pilgrim **Hsüang Tsang** who was in India in 629-644 AD.

Following the descriptions of cities, places and land routes recorded by the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hsien and Hsüang Tsang in their travels, Cunningham initiated a systematic survey of the archaeological remains of northern India that resulted in the discovery of several ancient Buddhist sites such as **Kusinara, Sankasia, Savatthi, Nalanda, Kosambi** and many others that had become obscured with time. In 1865, the department was abolished but revived in 1870, with **Cunningham as Director**, the post he held until he retired in 1885. During his retirement in London until his death in 28 November 1893, he wrote several books on Buddhism based on his findings. His contribution to the restoration of Buddhist Heritage in India is unrivalled. Buddhists in particular owe him a special debt.

While Cunningham dedicated himself to the restoration of Buddhist heritage sites, another person who dedicated his life to reclaiming them back to Buddhists was **Anagarika Dharmapala** (1865-1933), **pioneer of the Buddhist revival-movement** in India. Born in Sri Lanka by the name of **David Hewavitarana**, he later took the name of Anagarika Dharmapala, which means “Homeless Guardian of the Dhamma”. Dharmapala came to Bodhgaya in 1891 after reading several articles written by **Sir Edwin Arnold**, author of the “**Light of Asia**”, describing the deplorable condition of the Maha Bodhi Temple, the most sacred place of worship of Buddhists. What he saw shocked and saddened him so deeply that he vowed to devote his life “*to make this sacred spot to be cared for by our own bhikkhus*”.

Realizing that it would not be an easy task to accomplish unless the message of the Buddha spread, he founded the **Maha Bodhi Society of India** to spearhead the movement. With the Maha Bodhi Society, started the process that generated considerable interest about the rich heritage of Buddhism, which had nearly become extinct in the country of its origin. Starting at Bodhgaya, where the battle to regain control of the **Mahabodhi Temple** began, the Maha Bodhi Society expanded its activities to Sarnath, venue of the First Sermon.

When Anagarika Dharmapala came to India in 1891, Sarnath had been reduced to a tiny village surrounded by jungle, which was the grazing ground of wild pigs. Dharmapala decided to restore it into a living shrine, by building a new *vihara* beside the famous Deer Park. With the completion of the **Mulagandha Kuti Vihara** in 1931, and the subsequent establishment of the Maha Bodhi Society Library, Free Clinic, Schools and Teachers Training College, Pilgrims' Hostel and *Sangharama*, Sarnath is once again pulsating with life.

Without the financial assistance of its benefactors, the Maha Bodhi Society would not be able to accomplish much of its Buddhist Revival activities. Chief among its benefactors was **Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Mikahala Foster**, Hawaiian wife of a wealthy American banker in Honolulu. Anagarika Dharmapala met her on board the SS Oceanic at Honolulu on 18 October 1893. It was said that she had a fiery temper that she found hard to control. Anagarika Dharmapala assisted her to cultivate calmness in order to gain control over the bad temper. She was so impressed by this change that she decided to use her enormous wealth to support the Buddhist Revival Movement headed by Anagarika Dharmapala. Known as "**Visakha of Modern Buddhist Revival**", she was the principal sponsor of the activities of the Maha Bodhi Society. A marble plaque inscription in front of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sarnath records her great support below:

"MULAGANDHAKUTI VIHARA Erected by the **ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA**, Founder and General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society with the Help of **MRS. MARY ELIZABETH FOSTER** of Honolulu and Others on the Site where **OUR LORD BUDDHA GAUTAMA** Promulgated the Saddhamma 2520 Years Ago. May all living beings be happy! 2475 B.E. 1931 C.E."

Another great personality who was a friend in need was the famous archeologist, **Sir John Marshall**, Director General of Archeological Survey of India 1902-1928, best known for his discovery of Indus Valley Civilization at Harappa and Mohenjodaro and his excavations of Taxila which lasted twenty years. In 1925, when the Indian Government decided to stop the construction of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara on the grounds that it was too near the Dhamek Stupa, the Maha Bodhi Society appealed for his help. A meeting was held in Taxila (near Islamabad) between Sir John Marshall, **Devapriya Valisinha**, secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society and **Dr. C. A. Hewavitarne** younger brother of Anagarika, in which the Sarnath Vihara building in question was discussed. As a result of the intervention of Sir John Marshall, the dispute was amicably settled in 1926 with an offer of an alternative plot of land for the Vihara by the Indian Government, financial compensation of expenditure incurred on earlier foundation works and 20 acres of land to be developed into a park at their cost as an annexe to the Vihara.

On the other hand, the people of nearby **Varanasi showed complete indifference** towards the Buddhist cause. As a matter of record, none of its citizens contributed even a single rupee towards the cost of the Vihara. (**Ref:** The Maha Bodhi, Vol. 46, October 1938, pp. 433-34)

With its headquarters in Calcutta, the Maha Bodhi Society has expanded its activities to many cities in India, as well as overseas in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, England and USA. The impact of the expanding activities of the Maha Bodhi Society was soon felt throughout India spurring millions of low caste Hindus to embrace Buddhism, following the example of their leader **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**, Champion of the Depressed Castes of India who chose **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar to be his mentor in a historic ceremony on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The Nagpur event was the **greatest religious conversion** in the history of mankind. It opened the floodgates for the masses of low-caste Hindus to enter the fold of Buddhism and escape the scourge of the caste system, as each year more and more low-caste Hindus embrace Buddhism swelling the Buddhist population to about 50 million today according to estimates by Buddhist scholars.

Gradually, all the Eight Great Places of pilgrimage were restored and developed as religious-cum-tourist resorts. Most of them have regained much of their lost glory and are pulsating with life, thanks to the concerted efforts of the *Sangha*, archeologists, historians, scholars and lay devotees in their restoration. In particular, the **Burmese and Sri Lankan Buddhists** have played a crucial role by building *viharas* to accommodate the *Sangha* so that the *bhikkhus* can act as custodians of the holy shrines and enhance the sanctity of the environment. Many of these venerable monks have lived in India nearly their whole life **servicing the cause of the *Sasana*** with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships, including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment. Many of the shrines are located in rural areas that lack basic amenities, and the monks there play a useful role in promoting the education and welfare of the local population. Once again, they are living shrines, worthy of worship and veneration to which thousands of devotees come every year from all over the world to pay homage to the **Greatest Teacher** (*Sattha*) the world has ever known, the Lord Buddha, and earn merit by this pilgrimage of piety and faith.

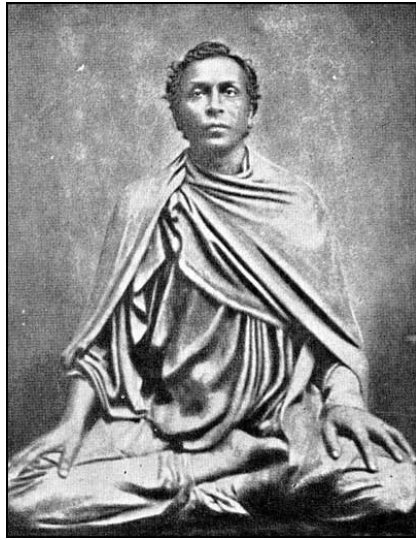
A visit to these **repositories of glorious Buddhist heritage** will certainly uplift the mind and enable one to develop many noble qualities. The sight of fellow pilgrims, who come from far and wide, with the common aim of honouring the Blessed One, will surely arouse appreciative joy (*mudita*) in one's heart. For the skillful pilgrim the sight of these once glorious shrines that are now mostly in ruins can be an opportunity to reflect on the impermanence of all conditioned things (*sankhara*) and arouse the religious urgency to practice the Lord's Teaching.

For the disciple who has completed this journey of piety and faith, the spiritual impact is unique and unforgettable. No place on earth can offer the pilgrim **more powerful and inspiring objects of faith** than those one gets to see and worship at the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage. In fact, the sights of these holy shrines impact so deeply in the mind that the pilgrim will always remember these revered images with joy long after the journey. All devout Buddhists should heed the Buddha's exhortation and go on a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime to experience the benefits.

The Four Great Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India



1. Ven. U Chandramani of Kushinagar, Hero of the Sasana in India (1876-1972)



2. Anagarika Dhammapala, Founder of Maha Bodhi Society of India (1864-1933)



3. Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Champion of Untouchables of India (1891-1956)



4. Gen. Alexander Cunningham, Explorer of Buddhist Heritage in India (1814-1893)

8. Sayadaw U Chandramani of Kushinagar, Hero of the *Sasana* in India^{18, 19}

The greatest religious conversion in the history of mankind took place on 14 October 1956 at a 14-acre vacant plot of land now known as ‘**Diksha Bhumi**’ in Nagpur, Maharashtra (see Plate 49). On that historic day, 380,000 Dalits (Untouchables) converted to Buddhism under the leadership of **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**. The person chosen by Dr. Ambedkar to administer the Three Refuges and Five Precepts was none other than **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar, whom Dr. Ambedkar regarded as his true mentor. The Nagpur conversion was indeed a great miracle because never before in the history of any religion in the world has so many people at one time and at the instance of one man changed their religion voluntarily.

Why, of all Buddhist monks living in India at that time, did such an intelligent leader as Dr. Ambedkar choose Ven. U Chandramani, a Burmese Sayadaw to be his *Dhamma* guru and mentor? The answer to this question is revealed by reading life story of this noble personage, whom many regard as the “Hero of the *Sasana*” in India.

8.1 The Early Years

Sayadaw U Chandramani was born on June 1876 in **Akyab** district (modern Sittwe) of Arakan (Rakkhine) State in Myanmar. He was the eldest of three siblings, born to rich parents. At the age of ten, he studied under his uncle **Sayadaw Ashin U Sandimar**, a famous Tipitaka teacher. Two years later he became a *samanera* and was named **Shin Chandra** (‘Shin’ in Burmese means ‘novice’). At that time, **Anagarika Dhammapala** and **Colonel Olcott**, founders of the Maha Bodhi Society of India had arrived in Sittwe to help form a Maha Bodhi Society there. At a meeting in Sittwe, Colonel Olcott explained the necessity of reviving the Buddha *Sasana* in India and suggested that a young novice who had the necessary courage and qualifications should be selected, trained and posted to India. Finally

two novices from Sayadaw U Sandimar's monastery, Shin Chandra and Shin Thuriya were chosen for the task. In November 1891, **Shin Chandra** and **Shin Thuriya**, together with student, **Thar Doe Oo**, as attendant and companion, set sail on the noble mission for India.

On arrival, the trio went to stay at to the Kuthodaw Rest House in Bodhgaya built by King Mindon (1808–1878) near the Bodhi tree. They were placed under the charge of a learned Sri Lankan monk, **Ven. Chandajoti**, who lived there with three other Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* namely: **Ven. Sumangala**, **Ven. Pemmananda** and **Ven. Sudassana**. The Hindu Mahant who was occupying the Mahabodhi Temple objected to the presence of the *bhikkhus*. In February 1892, he instigated his followers to ransack the Rest House resulting in two of the monks being severely beaten up by his men. Luckily, the Burmese novices and their attendant were out with some visitors.

When news of the attack reached Anagarika Dhammapala and Colonel Olcott, they travelled from Calcutta to rescue Ven. Chandajoti, Shin Chandra, Shin Thuriya and Thar Doe Oo. A pupil of Ven. Sumangala, who also suffered some beating, accompanied them to stay in a house near Gaya. It took Ven. Sumangala four months in hospital to recover. From that time onwards, no Buddhist monks or lay worshippers were allowed to stay at the Kuthodaw Rest House. (**Note 9**)

Horrified by the incident, Shin Chandra went back to Burma in 1892 but returned to Calcutta within a few months, in 1893, with great determination to continue his mission in India. In Calcutta, Shin Chandra and Thar Doe Oo met the **Arakanese merchant U Kyi Zayi** who was so impressed by the young *samanera* that he decided to provide them lodgings at the Arakanese Maha Bodhi Society building. They stayed there with an Indian monk, **Ven. U Jinananda** who acted as their tutor. Unfortunately the Society broke up just before the start of the 1895 rains-retreat, and the novice and his friend had to move to another temple under the charge of **Ven. Mahawira**. He was so impressed by the keenness of Shin Chandra, that he rented a small house for them at Gamma Village in Ghazipur District, where Shin Chandra studied Pali, Hindi and Sanskrit under

an Indian **Pandit Jarnegayran**. It was in Gamma Village that both Shin Chandra and Thar Doe Oo started to eat only vegetarian meals.

Meanwhile Ven. Mahawira was thinking of returning to his permanent abode in **Kushinagar**. When U Kyi Zayi heard this, he approached Ven. Mahawira and expressed his wish to donate a monastery provided a suitable plot of land was found in Kushinagar. Ven. Mahawira went there to search for a suitable site and found one. He negotiated with the Hindu landowner to sell him a five-acre plot of land at thirty-five rupees per acre and informed U Kyi Zayi who donated one thousand rupees to start the building. Unfortunately on the way to Kushinagar, Ven. Mahawira was robbed of all the cash and he had to put up temporarily with a Hindu Sadhu nearby.

8.2 Shin Chandra Comes to the Rescue of Ven. Mahawira

One day, a letter came from U Kyi Zayi in Calcutta explaining that he had donated one thousand rupees to Ven. Mahawira to build a monastery in Kushinagar. He suggested that Shin Chandra should go there to assist. Although he only had half a rupee for the train fare, Shin Chandra and a Punjabi friend named Yogi set out on foot. After three days walking, they got a train and arrived at **Deoria Station** the next morning. There they heard the bad news that Ven. Mahawira had been robbed. They did not know where he was but heard rumors that he was still at Gorakhpur town, about 50 miles away. So they took a train to **Gorakhpur** only to learn that he was actually in Kushinagar 35 miles away. Shin Chandra and Yogi started off on foot on that 35-mile journey to find Ven. Mahawira staying with a Hindu Sadhu. Shin Chandra cabled U Kyi Zayi with details of what had happened. Soon they received another donation of one thousand rupees from U Kyi Zayi to start the building, with a further guarantee that any additional money required would also be provided by him. Ven. Mahawira then bought the plot of land in 1898. Shin Chandra assisted him with the buying and storage of building materials including timber, bricks and mortar.

8.3 Scriptural Training and Higher Ordination in Burma

Three months later, Shin Chandra returned to Gamma village to resume his studies. While he was there the Head Teacher suddenly died of cholera. Shin Chandra became very sad and depressed. When U Kyi Zayi learned about the tragedy, he quickly arranged to send him back to Moulmein to spend the rains-retreat in 1899. After the rain-retreat, Shin Chandra was transferred to Mandalay where he studied the Pali Scriptures under several renowned teachers and attained mastery in Pali and Buddhist Philosophy. While studying, he also was teaching Sanskrit to other students, notably to a novice, **Shin Sakkapala**, who in later life was to become a well-known **Aggamahapandita, Taung Pauk Sayadaw**.

While in Mandalay, Shin Chandra also received Higher Ordination (*Upasampada*) at the **Panwar Vihara** (also known as Ramugrama Vihara) in February 1903. His preceptor was his uncle Sayadaw U Sandimar of Akyab. Our new Bhikkhu, **Ashin Chandramani**, followed Sayadaw U Sandimar to Akyab. After two months in Akyab, he returned to Kushinagar to stay with Ven. Mahawira.

Together with three other monks, they spent *vassa* (rain-retreat) that year in Kushinagar. He spent his time teaching his three fellow monks Hindi, Sanskrit and Pali, as well as Buddhist literature to five local Indians. Ashin Chandramani also assisted in completing the unfinished parts of the building that U Kyi Zayi had donated.

Thereafter Ashin Chandramani started to translate the Dhammapada into Hindi and in 1909 a thousand copies were distributed in India. He also translated two important medical books from Sanskrit to Burmese. His translation from Pali into Hindi and Sanskrit included *Maha Satipatthana Sutta*, *Anatta Lakkhana Sutta* and *Sangiti Sutta*. He spent most of his time translating other Buddhist books, documents and journals into Hindi and Sanskrit so that Indians would become interested in Buddhism and understand it better.

8.4 Passing Away of Venerable Mahawira

Ven. Mahawira, who was of Arakanese-Indian parentage, was the first Hindu in modern times to become a Buddhist monk. He was formerly a wrestler and while in Sri Lanka, he became interested in Buddhism. In 1890, he was ordained as a monk. In 1891, he returned to India and took up abode in Kushinagar. At that time, Kushinagar was a deserted place. Through the generosity of the merchant U Kyi Zayi and his wife Daw Mi Chan Mra, Ven. Mahawira was able to purchase a 5-acre plot of land near the Mahaparinibbana Temple and construct a Rest House in 1901, followed by a Buddha Vihara in 1902. It was in that monastery he passed away in March 1919, at a ripe old age of 85. Sayadaw U Chandramani was left to make the funeral arrangements in consultation with his local devotees and friends, and upon hearing the sad news U Kyi Zayi donated one thousand rupees towards the funeral expenses. The body of Ven. Mahawira was cremated and his ashes were enshrined in a small brick *stupa* within the grounds of the Mahaparinibbana Temple. Sayadaw U Chandramani then continued his mission as Abbot of the Burmese Buddhist Monastery in Kushinagar.

8.5 Establishing a Monastery in Sarnath

After the demise of Ven. Mahawira, Sayadaw U Chandramani worked even harder to revive the Buddha Sasana in India. In 1908, he established a small monastery in Migadarwoon (Deer Park) forest in Sarnath where the Lord Buddha had preached the First Sermon. Later, his nephew **Ashin U Kittima** came to stay in the Migadarwoon forest (Isipatana) and was trained in the local languages and Buddhist literature. Thereafter he was put in charge of the monastery and Sayadaw U Chandramani returned to Kushinagar. The weather at Migadarwoon Forest was bad and food was scarce. Some devotees from the Andaman Islands built a brick building in Varanasi at a cost of some thirty thousand rupees and donated it to Ashin Kittima. The Forest Monastery at Migadarwoon had no permanent resident monk at that time; however, a watchman was employed to look after the Monastery and the pilgrims.

8.6 Confirming Kushinagar as Site of Mahaparinibbana

In 1901 Sayadaw U Chandramani and the merchant U Kyi Zayi applied to the English Governor of India in Calcutta seeking his permission to allow pilgrims to worship the historic reclining Buddha image inside the Mahaparinibbana temple. The Governor in turn referred their application to the Indian Law Department in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The Lucknow Law Department replied that it had not been officially established that Kushinagar was the site of **Lord Buddha's Mahaparinibbana** although the minister-in-charge of the Antiquities Department had stated that it was so but others had disputed it. Further excavations of the Mahaparinibbana site revealed the presence of several copper blocks containing Brahmi characters.

As the Indian Stone Inscription Research Department was unable to decipher them, the copper blocks were sent to London for verification. After two years, the British experts deciphered the Brahmi script to read as follows: “**The Lord Buddha passed away here on this site.**” Only then did the Indian Government officially recognize Kushinagar as the site of the Buddha's Mahaparinibbana. Thus the ancient Mahaparinibbana Temple once again became a living shrine. Its possession by Sayadaw U Chandramani in 1904 was a significant step in the Buddhist revival movement. It has made Kushinagar one of the most sacred Buddhist shrines for pilgrims to visit and worship.

8.7 Acquisition of land to support Sasana growth

To support the growth of the Buddha Sasana in poverty-stricken rural India, it was necessary for the Burmese Buddhist Temple to be self-sufficient. Before long, fourteen acres of bush situated thirty miles from Kushinagar were acquired. Volunteers cut down the trees and the local villagers who rented the land prepared it for cultivation and planted various crops. The villagers had prepared the deed of the rented land in the name of U Chandramani. This was followed by the acquisition of ten acres situated at the front of the Kushinagar Temple, and another ten acres at the back of the Temple at a total

cost of two hundred fifty rupees. These twenty acres of land were contracted out to a supporter at a nearby village for cultivation. Gradually, this land became very important to Sayadaw U Chandramani and a vital aspect of his Sasana promotional work.

Twelve years passed by. One day an Englishman named **Nicol Masaye, District Commissioner of Deoria** came to Kushinagar to pay his respects first to the Mahaparinibbana Buddha statue and then to Sayadaw U Chandramani. Mr. Masaye mentioned that he had travelled to many countries and had seen many large and attractive images but had never seen one as life-like and capable of arousing the emotions as this Mahaparinibbana Buddha image. In his opinion it was the most original and most beautiful object in the world. Mr. Nicol Masaye further enquired how a foreign Bhikkhu like Sayadaw could survive in Kushinagar; whether he had any friends there to rely upon, and how many acres of land he had to survive on. Surprised to find out that Sayadaw only owned 34 acres he suggested that Sayadaw should look for more land and make an application to him. He added that as the Indian Government was then in the process of drawing up legislation to nationalize the country's farmland, Sayadaw should act quickly and he would help. Before he returned to Deoria he also asked Sayadaw to inform him if he ever was in need of urgent help as Sayadaw was a foreigner.

Accepting the District Commissioner's offer, Sayadaw selected a plot of bush measuring about fifty acres situated about 2½ km from Kushinagar. The application was submitted in the name of Sayadaw U Chandramani to the District Commissioner's Office in Deoria. When news of the application leaked out, people from five nearby villages protested strongly and filed an objection as follows:

- U Chandramani was a foreigner and as such he should not be given the right to hold the deeds of any Indian land;
- The fifty acres was not bush but pasture used for grazing cattle and oxen and belonged to the five villages;
- There was a Mahashiva Cave, a religious cave respected by all races living in the land (Note: the Cave was installed overnight as soon as the news of Sayadaw's application leaked out and spread to the villagers);

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- If it were to be given away as agricultural land, only the surrounding villagers should share it.

Not only did the villagers protest against Sayadaw's application, they also boycotted the five families who supported Sayadaw. The Land Office came to investigate and found that the land actually was bush and the Cave was a new one hastily put up overnight. However, a District Officer examined the case and decided that U Chandramani should not be given all fifty acres but only ten acres.

Sayadaw U Chandramani was not satisfied with the District Officer's decision and hired a lawyer to lodge an appeal. The District Commissioner, Mr Nicol Masaye, advised Sayadaw not to send the appeal in his name alone because the law did not permit sole ownership of fifty acres or more of Government land. He suggested that Sayadaw should form an association and apply for ownership in the name of the association. Sayadaw therefore invited bhikkhus from Kushinagar and Varanasi, and together they formed an association called '**Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association**', headed by Sayadaw U Chandramani as President. The Committee members were **Ashin Dhammarakkhita** of Kushinagar, and **U Kittima**, **U Ezzutananda** and **U Pyinna Wontha** of Varanasi.

Not long after that, the Deoria DC invited Sayadaw and the leaders of the five villages to his Office and tried to mediate an amicable settlement. Mr. Masaye explained that even though U Chandramani was a foreigner, the Bhikkhu himself had been living amongst them and struggling to survive in that land, and therefore he thought the Bhikkhu deserved the fifty acres. The village leaders disagreed and continued to strongly protest against the Bhikkhus' application. Mr. Masaye gave up trying to mediate between the Bhikkhus and the villagers. Using his authority, and in line with the prevailing law of the country, he finally made a decision and granted ownership of the fifty-acres of land to the Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association

8.8 Decision of Indian High Court

The villagers were very unhappy with the Deoria DC's decision and appealed to the **High Court in Allahabad**. While the case was in progress, Sayadaw instructed his workers to prepare the land for cultivation. Immediately, the villagers armed with sticks and swords tried to stop the workers. Sayadaw, convinced that having won the DC's decision he had the right to cultivate the land, instructed his men to continue working. The Government then sent fifty policemen to guard the workers and stop any untoward incident. After three months, the Allahabad High Court decided in Sayadaw's favor. The villagers had to pay court costs as well. Dissatisfied with the outcome, they appealed to the **Supreme Court in New Delhi**.

While awaiting a decision from the Supreme Court and with the policemen still there guarding the land, Sayadaw continued to fell the trees. The villagers came out to buy the timber and the Association made about 2500 rupees in the first instance and altogether 5000 rupees. Using that money Sayadaw had transformed a wild bush into cultivated farmland in spite of opposition by the protesting villagers.

After one and a half years, the decision from the Supreme Court in New Delhi came. Sayadaw had again won the case and the villagers had lost including the court costs. Only then did they accept the verdict and give up their fight. But they made so much trouble for Sayadaw's supporters, that the five families were afraid to continue living in the village. The police were doing their best to protect Sayadaw as well as his supporters. Such were the hostile circumstances in which Sayadaw had to face to promote the Buddha Sasana, always urging his supporters to work hard and transform idle bush into arable farmland.

Five more village families came over to support Sayadaw, making a total of ten families. However, there was still no peace, since the protesters from the five villages continually sought every possible opportunity to create trouble for them. It took seven years to transform the bush into arable farmland. In the meantime, the Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association decided to insert into the Land Title that whatever produce obtained out of those fifty acres of

land, the resident Bhikkhus of the Kushinagar Temple would have sole responsibility to manage and benefit from it. Sayadaw then had over fifty acres of farmland, including the thirty-four acres bought previously in his own name. That farmland was rented out to the villagers and every year he collected about twenty wooden bowls (one hundred kilos) of rice in place of rent.

There was a five-acre plot of land on which Sayadaw had planted fruit trees and these trees were growing to form a beautiful garden. The rest of the land produced other crops and vegetables according to the season. Sayadaw appointed five of his Indian supporters from the village to oversee the work in the fields and the security of the workers. Slowly but surely the situation with the surrounding villagers improved and peace was restored. The villagers could buy the seasonal produce cheaply from Sayadaw's fields including rice, fruits and vegetables; they could also rent plots of land from Sayadaw to raise farm animals such as cows, pigs and chickens. The situation therefore improved so much that the people from the five villages, except a minority of the stubborn leaders, happily greeted Sayadaw as their '**Chandramani Baba**' and respectfully touched his feet in Indian custom whenever they met him in the street. **Hence through his untiring efforts, patience, determination and goodwill, he earned their respect.**

Not long after peace had been completely restored with the villagers, Sayadaw received a letter from his childhood friend, the **former Shin Thuriya**, who first came to India with him. Thuriya was now a layman and he had established himself in Akyab as a prosperous rice merchant. Sayadaw was very happy to receive his friend's letter and reminisced about his long past as he replied to his friend. Sayadaw then allowed Maung Pho Yin who had accompanied him to Kushinagar to go on leave to his native village. As for Sayadaw, he was quite content to remain in Kushinagar looking after the pilgrims, monks and lay people alike. He made sure his guests had the things they needed and supported them morally and physically in any way he could. He was always looking forward to the revival of Buddha Sasana and better days to come in **Majjhimadesa** or India

8.9 Facing problems even with a Puja Ceremony

Once, Ven. Mahawira and Sayadaw U Chandramani organized a Puja ceremony to commemorate the Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha by burning a 25-foot long paper model of the Mahaparinibbana statue at the Cremation Stupa. The celebration was conducted on the full moon day of Wesakha. It was organized by the DC of Deoria and was very well attended. In order to include the Hindus in the celebration, a Hindu Sadhu was invited to light up the paper figure of the Buddha. His act drew protests from the crowd who declared that the Sadhu had become their enemy. By putting a torch to the effigy of the Gautama Buddha who was their enemy and who had different views from their own, the Sadhu had sinned. They screamed and shouted at the Sadhu and boycotted him. He suffered so much abuse in his village that he could bear it no longer. Therefore, he applied to DC's Court in Deoria seeking to prevent discrimination against him. The District Commissioner invited all the Hindu leaders from Kushinagar and Deoria District to a meeting. Among those attending the meeting were Ven. Mahawira and Sayadaw U Chandramani, the representative from the Antiquities Dept. and many Hindu Sadhus. The DC who chaired the meeting asked the Hindu leaders why the person in question should be ostracized. They unanimously replied that the Buddha was their enemy and because the Sadhu had put a torch to the effigy of the Buddha, he had sinned.

The DC then quoted from the **Ramayana Epic** citing the abduction of King Rama's wife, Sita, by the wicked King Dasagiri and asked if Dasagiri was a foe or a friend of Rama whom they all worshipped. They replied that King Dasagiri was the foe of King Rama. The DC asked if it was true that they made an effigy of King Dasagiri their enemy, and put a torch to the effigy each year. They agreed and said that as Hindu sages they took turns to burn the effigy. When asked if that person was sinning against their belief they agreed that was not the case. The DC then concluded that if a Hindu sage were to put a torch to their enemy Buddha's effigy, he was not committing a sin by the same reason. The DC warned that there were laws to prevent discrimination and victimization and he had no choice but to take appropriate action. The Hindu leaders were reluctant to press on with their argument and agreed to take the Hindu Sage back into their

association. Satisfied with this, The DC compensated the Sadhu one hundred rupees, with an instruction that he should invite all the Hindu sages to celebrate the occasion with a big feast.

8.10 No Drinking from a Well Belonging to a Low Caste

Ven. Mahawira and Ashin U Chandramani organized the digging of a well in the grounds of the Kushinagar Temple; its water was pure and very clear. Everyone including the surrounding villagers were allowed to use the well, in view of the scarcity and difficulty of obtaining potable water in that area. However, a few Hindu Sages started to spread rumours that U Mahawira and U Chandramani were of low caste and hence the well dug by them should not be used for drinking or washing. It had not gone through a purification ceremony as required by Hindu custom; therefore, Hindus must not drink or use that water and rumours were spread throughout the villages and surrounding district.

Sayadaw Mahawira and U Chandramani explained that as Buddhist monks, they were sons of the Buddha and as such, they had no high or low caste system. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, the people did not perform any purification ceremony when they dug a well as there were no such instructions in the Buddhist texts. The villagers had been given permission to drink or make use of the water from the well and it was up to them to use it or not. Some villagers decided to drink and make full use of the water and some did not; even today, the situation remains as before, although some present day villagers are changing and are not bothered by this matter.

8.11 Opening of Free Schools And Colleges

In attempting to promote Buddha Sasana, it is acknowledged that young people are more acceptable to change than their elders. Keeping that in mind and in consultation with a visitor from Sri Lanka named **Anagarika Nuhawkawdar**, Sayadaw U Chandramani

had a bamboo-shed built within the compounds of the Kushinagar Temple and opened it as a non-fee paying Primary School. That was an opportunity for his antagonists to arouse the surrounding villagers and to cause some resentment. They declared that if the children were to go to that school, all of them would become Buddhists and lose their Hindu belief. At a meeting they decided that none of their children would be allowed to attend the Chandramani School. However, the poorer families could not afford to take their children elsewhere; they had no choice but to educate them at a free school. As a result the Chandramani School had a first intake of five students secretly sent by their parents. A full-time teacher who was very dedicated and hard working was available to teach the five children. After failing to persuade the parents against sending their children to the school, the antagonists now abused and threatened the children on their way to the school and even harmed them. In spite of all this mistreatment, the antagonists' attempts failed; the number of students increased to forty within the first year.

In order to accommodate the increased intake, it was decided to erect a new brick building. Soon donors came forward to pay for the cost of the one-storey brick building named “**Chandramani Primary School**”; the name was carved in stone and a signpost proudly displayed. The Chandramani Primary School gradually grew and enrolment reached 350 students and 3 full-time teachers. The children were very disciplined and their education improved. In consultation with the School Committee, Sayadaw U Chandramani then organized and built a Secondary School and handed it over to the Government. Again Sayadaw worked very hard to build a ‘**New High School**’ to his own taste and specifications; he organized and planned it with the help of the School Committee and was very successful. Sayadaw completely furnished the New High School and handed it over to the Government to run it. Not content with just building high schools, Sayadaw also built the ‘**Kushinagar Degree College**’ with an intake capacity of over five hundred students. This was made possible with the help of a rich man who owned a sugar mill, together with city dignitaries and parents of Gorakhpur town, who had great respect and regard for the Most Venerable Ashin U Chandra. The famous Kushinagar Degree College still stands today, as a symbol of the Sayadaw's love and affection for his people.

Many pupils graduated from the Chandramani Primary, Secondary and High Schools and, even today, are working all over India, all of them occupying responsible positions. They were very grateful to Sayadaw and deeply respected him for his good deeds. Daily, between 100-150 pilgrims visit Sayadaw to pay their respects. Sayadaw was like a college professor and very highly regarded for his intimate knowledge of Hindu languages and local dialects and also for the appropriate use of them.

8.12 Sayadaw U Chandramani becomes an Indian Citizen

The promotion of the Buddha Sasana by Sayadaw U Chandramani alone could only achieved satisfactory results. In order to expand the Dhammaduta activities, Sayadaw invited all the Buddhist monks to a meeting. During the meeting, they agreed to form an organization called '**Majjhimadesa Maha Sangha Organization**'. (Note: In Buddhist texts, Majjhimadesa is defined as the districts where the Lord Buddha was enlightened, traveled and preached His Dhamma.) The Majjhimadesa Maha Sangha Organization (MMSO) was headed by Kushinagar Sayadaw U Chandramani as President and Sravasti Jetavana Temple Sayadaw U Mahinda as Second President. Other members of the Committee were Varanasi Temple Sayadaw U Sandimar who was famous for his patience, and Sayadaw U Kittima, an expert in Myanmar and Pali literature, English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu languages, as well as stone inscriptions. All the rest of the participating Sangha became members of MMSO.

Because the Indian Government did not recognize an organization formed by non-nationals, Saradaw U Chandramani and Saradaw U Sandimar decided to become naturalized Indian citizens. After that they could register MMSO officially. To fulfill the Organization's aims, two Suttas, namely; **Mangala Sutta** and **Parabhava Sutta** were translated from Pali to Hindi and distributed countrywide. This was followed by translations & distributions of the **Anattalakkhana Sutta** and **Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta**.

With the formation of an officially recognized **Bhikkhu Sangha** organization, the Buddha Sasana is now set to grow just as a giant tree can only grow if its main root is firmly established. By becoming Indian citizens, Sayadaw U Chandramani and Sayadaw U Sandimar had permanently planted their roots in India. The main person, who enthusiastically carried out the duties of the MMSO, was Ashin U Sandimar.

8.13 Revival of the Buddha Sasana in Nepal

According to history, Buddhism was a dominant religion until the time of **King Jayasthiti Malla** who ruled Nepal during medieval times (around 1382 C.E.). He imposed the Hindu caste system in Nepal and banned Buddhist culture and tradition forcing the celibate monks to disrobe and return to lay life.

Suppression of Buddhism by the Hindu rulers is seen by the fact that after Nepal came under British rule around 1816, Brian Hodgson went there as Assisant to the Resident in a new office. He obtained many manuscripts from Buddhist pundits such as **Amrutananda** and sent the collection to Asiatic Society of Bengal and to India House in Paris and other libraries. Once, **Minister Rana Bahadur Jang of Nepal** seized a Buddhist Vihara and threw away all the books on the street. **Dr. Wrights**, who was the Physician to the British Resident salvaged them and presented them to Cambridge University. It was from these sources that Burnuff and his disciple Max Muller compiled the early history of Buddhism. (Ref. 46, Chapter 15)

The situation worsened during the **Rana regime**, which ruled Nepal from 1846 to 1953 reducing the Shah monarch to a figurehead and making the Prime Minister and other government positions hereditary. That was the age when Buddhism was totally forgotten by the people of Nepal. The **Rana regime** banned all Buddhist activities and forbade people from converting to Buddhism but traditional Buddhists were allowed to become Hindus.

8. 14 Ordination of Nepalese Bhikkhus

Sayadaw U Chandramani played a dominant role in reviving the Buddha Sasana in Nepal by ordaining Nepalese into the Sangha and guiding them in the Dhamma and Vinaya. At that time there was no Bhikkhu Sangha in Nepal. For centuries Nepalese were aware of only Buddhist priests (*Vajracharya*) from *Newar* Buddhism (*Vajrayana*) and Tibetan Lamas. They were unaware of Theravada Buddhist monks and nuns. Vajracharyas are household monks. They lead domestic lives and are not celibate. Not all Tibetan monks are celibate. It depends on the school they belong to.

The first Nepalese to take ordination was **Ven. Mahapragna**, a Khattiya by birth. He was initially ordained as a ‘**Gelung**’ (Tibetan monk) in 1926. Later, he was arrested for his conversion from Hindu to Buddhist monk and exiled to India. There he met Sayadaw U Chandramani in Kusinagara. Impressed by Sayadaw, he ordained as a Bhikkhu paving the way for Theravada ordination once again in the history of modern Nepal after almost 600 years. Another Nepalese who converted from Gelung to bhikkhu under Sayadaw U Chandramani was **Ven. Pragyananda**. He was the first yellow-robed monk to appear in the streets of Kathmandu valley at the end of 1930’s. He stayed at **Kindol Vihara** at the invitation of **Dasaratna Shahu** (later Ven. Dhammaloka) and gave discourses. The attendance at his discourses increased day by day and it worried the Rana government, which arrested all the members of Vihara all of whom were imprisoned, fined and later released. Fortunately, Ven. Pragananda was away at that time on pilgrimage in India.

Soon after his release from prison, **Dasaratna Shahu**, came to Kusinagar and ordained under Sayadaw U Chandramani as a novice under the name of **Dhammaloka** in 1932. He returned to Nepal as a monk but was arrested immediately on his arrival in Kathmandu and was imprisoned once again for six days and on the seventh day was taken to Court. When questioned by the Judge, he told him that he was a Kathmandu resident and a Buddhist. The Judge asked why he was wearing such clothing; he replied that in India there were two kinds of Buddhists, one ‘Gahatta’ and the other, ‘Anagariya’; the Anagariya Bhikkhus wore the kind of clothing he was wearing.

The Judge then asked the police why such an obviously innocent person had been arrested. The police said that if all Nepalese were to dress like that there would be all kinds of problems for the country, and that was the reason Dhammaloka was arrested. The Judge said that not every Nepalese would act like that; only those who truly wished to reach Nirvana. The Judge therefore ruled that Ashin Dhammaloka was completely innocent and ordered him to be freed. Following his release from prison, he went to stay at Kindol Vihara and continued his religious activities. He was finally able to carry out religious activities freely in Nepal. He succeeded in propagating Theravada Buddhism in the streets of Kathmandu valley.

Ven. Ammitananda was another well-known Buddhist scholar and pioneer who ordained in 1936 under Sayadaw U Chandramani in Kusinagara but was imprisoned along with Ven. Mahapragna at Bhojpur in 1937. In 1942, he came back to Nepal from abroad after completing his study and gave discourses at the request of Ven. Dhammaloka in Swayambhu during *vassa*. His public discourses impressed many people who came to listen to him. Other bhikkhus, samaneras and nuns of Nepal studying abroad also returned to join him and gave public discourses in different places of Kathmandu valley. This was a great breakthrough during the repressive Rana government. The Rana government had banned all public assembly for fear of political unrest and demand for political reform in Nepal.

Because of their religious activities, the monks were arrested on 30 July 1944 and brought before the then **Prime Minister Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana**. He made new rules to curtail the Buddhist activities. Those who didn't follow these rules were asked either to leave the country or return to worldly life. All the venerable monks, who were active in revival of Theravada in Nepal refused to obey the order and were exiled once again from Nepal. The exiled monks this time included Ven. Pragnananda, Ven. Dhammaloka and many other monks. The exiled monks formed '**Dharmodaya Sabha**', Nepal's first Buddhist organization on 30th November 1944 in India with **Sayadaw U Chandramani** as chairman and **Ven. Amittananda** as its general secretary.

When World War II ended in 1945, a Nepalese Bhikkhu returned home to test the situation; he found no one was giving him any trouble. Before long, some Nepalese Bhikkhus and Nuns in Kushinagar, bearing the powers of Triple Gems foremost in their minds, left for their homeland to carry on with the promotion of Theravada Buddhism. **Sayadaw U Chandramani** arranged to send some Bhikkhus to Myanmar and some to Sri Lanka to improve their education and knowledge of the scriptures. In Kathmandu, Ven. Dhammaloka took charge of building a Theravada Buddhist temple. Another temple ‘Yanmangala Vihara’ was built in the same city where **Ven. Buddhaghosa** took charge as the Head Bhikkhu.

The King of Nepal donated one hundred thousand rupees to the **Dharmodaya Sabha** to build more Buddhist rest houses for the Theravada Buddhists. Ven. Dhammaloka and Ven. Amittananda, both Nepalese nationals, played leading roles in the building programme. Thus, Theravada Buddhism came to thrive in Nepal and Buddha Sasana was once again firmly established.

Thanks to Sayadaw U Chandramani, the Buddha Sasana has been revived in the land of Lord Buddha’s birth. Today there are 96 Theravada Viharas in the country, 303 Bhikkhus and Samaneras and 135 Anagarikas. Some are resident in Nepal and others are either studying or practising Dhamma overseas. (Source: The Ananda Bhoomi; year 33; issues 32 and 33).

8.15 Passing Away of Sayadaw U Chandramani

The **Most Venerable Kushinagar Sayadaw Ashin Chandramani** possessed all the necessary qualities, such as **patience, courage, stamina** and **untiring effort** to rebuild the Buddha Sasana in India, and to develop it in Nepal, and to carry on teaching and practising both Vipassana and Loving Kindness meditation. In addition to his Dhammaduta activities, he took a keen interest in the education of the young people of Kushinagar because he knew that any change of mindset would have to come from the younger generation. As Kushinagar is world famous as the final resting place of the Buddha,

many pilgrims as well as tourists make it a point to visit the Burmese Temple to pay their respects to Sayadaw, who was always concerned about the welfare of the pilgrims. While doing all that, he passed away in the Kushinagar Burmese Temple on **8 May 1972 at the age of 97, having lived nearly 80 years as a Bhikkhu in India** serving the cause of the Sasana with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships he faced including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment.

To all of Sayadaw's devotees, especially in India and Nepal, the news of his death was a great blow. He could never be replaced and they could never again find such a great missionary. **He was truly the Hero of the Sasana in India.** His death was a great loss to everyone, especially his devotees in Kushinagar. A total of thirty-two countries mourned his death and hundreds of messages expressing deep sorrow were received. Devotees of his native town of **Akyab (Sittwe)** made a bronze statue of him and installed it in the local monastery in 1973. A Burmese writer, U Tha Doe Hla of Mizan Quarter, Akyab wrote the book entitled "**The Life Story of Sri Bhaddanta Chandramani of Kushinagar**" which was published in 1975 and translated into English in 1999. This article is extracted from the book. (Ref. 18)

As a tribute to his life-long service to the Buddha Sasana in India, the **U Chandramani Foundation Trust** was established in 2000 AD to continue his noble task. In 2004, a devotee of Nagpur in Maharashtra State donated 13 acres of land with two old buildings at **Bhanegaon Village near Nagpur** to the Foundation with the objective of starting a Buddhist center to propagate the Buddha's Teaching among the local villagers who are mostly **Dalits**. The present Bhikkhu-in-charge of this centre is **Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma**, a Myanmar monk closely associated with the author since 1996 in Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon. Presently, Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma has a busy schedule teaching the local villagers about the Buddha Dhamma and conducting Vipassana and Metta meditation classes. Each year, he holds a novitiate programme for the local youths and leads them on alms round to the surrounding villages to acquaint them with Buddhist traditions.

9. The Life of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar^{20, 21, 22}

No article on the Revival of Buddhism in modern India is complete without the mention of **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** the **Undisputed Champion** of the **Untouchables** and the most gifted and qualified Untouchable ever born in India. Fondly addressed as ‘**Babasaheb**’ or ‘father-boss’ by his followers, he embraced Buddhism in 1956 and following his clarion call, millions of followers have converted to Buddhism, swelling the Buddhist population in India to about **50 million today**. The *Illustrated Weekly* (Nov 18–24, 1979) describes him as the **Greatest Indian after the Buddha**. “What about Gandhi?” many asked. “We have nothing against anybody including the Mahatma. Anybody reading this book with an unbiased mind will certainly agree with our assessment of Babasaheb”, says V. T. Rajshekar in his Foreword to “**Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi**” by B. R. Ambedkar M.A., Ph.D. (London); L.L.D. (Columbia); D.Sc. D.Litt. (Osmania); Barrister-at-Law

9.1 Babasaheb’s Education

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in a **Mahar** family on 14 April 1891 in the town of **Mhow** near **Indore** in **Madhya Pradesh**. The Mahars form the single largest Untouchable community in Maharashtra and are found in every village living outside the village wall, performing the duty of watch and ward on behalf of the village. Because of their background as village watchmen, a large number of Mahars were recruited in the armies during the **British Raj**. Dr. Ambedkar’s father **Ramji Sakpal** was serving as Headmaster in the Army school at the time of his birth but retired two years later. When he was five years old, his mother died. Later his father found another job at Satara where **Bhim** (as Bhimrao is fondly called) completed his primary education and began his secondary education.

Being an ‘**Untouchable**’ by birth, Bhim was subjected to all sorts of indignities and injustices throughout his life. At school he had to go

without water regularly because he was forbidden to drink from the common water source lest he “**contaminate**” the water source. In class, Bhim and his brother Anandrao were made to sit on the floor on a gunny sack which they carried to school. Some of the teachers would not touch their note books nor put questions to them for fear of being **polluted**. The Sanskrit teacher even refused to teach them Sanskrit so Bhim had to take Persian as the second language in high school. The attitude of his classmates was no different He could not mix or play games with them. Once when the teacher called upon Bhim to solve a Maths problem on the blackboard, the whole class protested, with the caste-Hindu children crying out that his touch would pollute their tiffins kept behind the board. Only after the tiffins were removed was Bhim allowed to use the blackboard.

In 1904 the family moved to Bombay (Mumbai) where Bhim completed his secondary education. He secured a scholarship from the **Maharaja of Baroda** to join the Bombay University graduating in 1912. In 1913, barely a month after he joined the Baroda State Forces as a Lieutenant, his father died. That same year he received a scholarship for higher studies in America from the Maharaja. In July 1913, Dr. Ambedkar joined Columbia University, New York where he studied Economics, Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, History and Political Science. In 1916 he graduated with **M.A. and Ph.D.** degrees. From America, he went to London and joined the London School of Economics and Political Science for the degrees of **M. Sc. and D.Sc.** (Economics) as well as Gray’s Inn for **Barrister-at-Law**. However, after one year, he had to suspend his studies as the duration of his scholarship was over. Upon his return to Baroda state in August 1917, he was appointed **Military Secretary** to the Maharaja, whose intention was to promote him to Finance Minister after some experience.

At work, he was still subjected to the same inhuman treatment by the caste-ridden society and **treated like the plague** despite his official status and qualifications. Even the peons, fearful of pollution, threw files and papers on to his desk from a distance and the carpet had to be rolled back lest the higher castes stood on the same material as he stood on. No one in Baroda was willing to rent him a room to stay but he managed to rent one in the local Parsi boarding house under

an assumed name. When the Parsis discovered his identity, they besieged his house and threatened to beat him. Eventually, the owner expelled him and he had to leave Baroda in disgust as he could not find any accommodation despite his complaints to the Maharaja.

Returning to Bombay in November 1917, he did odd jobs for a year before getting an appointment as Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College. Even in this institution of higher learning, the caste-based mentality still prevailed and he was **treated as a pariah** by the caste-Hindu professors and forbidden to drink water from the pot kept in the staff common room. As he was keen to complete his unfinished studies in London, he saved some money and with some financial assistance from the Maharaja of Kolhapur, proceeded to London to continue his studies on his own. In September 1920, he rejoined the London School of Economics and also Gray's Inn for Law. In June 1921, he obtained the **M. Sc. (Economics)** and in October 1922, he qualified as **Barrister-at-Law** at Gray's Inn. At the same time, he submitted his Doctorate thesis to the London School of Economics and went to Germany for further studies in Economics at the University of Bonn. Four months later, he was awarded **D. Sc. (Economics)** by the University of London.

9.2 The Fight against Untouchability

Returning to India in April 1923, Dr. Ambedkar started his own legal practice in Bombay but even among the legal profession, the prejudices against Untouchables still prevailed and according to Dr. Ambedkar: "*The solicitors would not condescend to have any business dealings with him on account of untouchability.*" He was now 32 years old and easily the **most qualified man** in the country. The constant humiliations he suffered as an Untouchable convinced him that nothing would change unless the Untouchables themselves were awakened from their disabilities. Accordingly in July 1924 he founded the **Depressed Classes Welfare Association** (*Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha*), with the aim of promoting education and culture, improving their economic condition, and providing a voice for the grievances of Untouchables and low caste persons. Their motto was:

“**Educate, Agitate and Organise**” and in order to reach the masses, he started a Marathi weekly paper “*Bahishkit Bharat*”. In 1926, he also founded a militant organisation called “*Samta Sanik Dal*” or **Social Equality Army**. Between 1927 and 1932, Ambedkar led his followers in a series of non-violent campaigns or **Satyagraha** to assert the right of Untouchables to enter Hindu places of worship and to drink water from public tanks and wells, denied from them by caste-Hindus for centuries. The most notable were the campaigns against the exclusion of Untouchables from the **Kalaram Temple** in Nashik and from the **Chowdar Tank** in Mahad. Both of these involved tens of thousands of Untouchables. Higher caste Hindus responded by beating them up. The Chowdar Tank campaign, after years of litigation, ended in a legal victory for the low caste activists. The Chowdar Tank campaign also saw the **ceremonial burning** of the *Manu Smriti* or ‘Institutes of Manu’, the ancient Hindu law book that Ambedkar viewed as the symbol of injustice against Untouchables by preaching inequality and directing caste-Hindus to punish any low-caste Hindu who dares to hear or read the Vedas.

Dr. Ambedkar’s ardent and relentless pursuit of justice on behalf of the depressed and suppressed attracted the attention of the Governor of Bombay who nominated him to the **Bombay Legislative Council** in 1927. Thus began the parliamentary career of the man, who two decades later would become **Minister of Law and Chief Architect** of the Constitution when India became independent in 1947. In fact, he was instrumental in legally abolishing the curse of Untouchability and incorporating safeguards for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. He was also chiefly responsible for the adoption of Buddhist symbols as National symbols of India, namely: **Wheel of Law** in the Indian flag and **Sarnath Lion Capital** in the Indian currency note.

9.3 Babasaheb’s Clash with Gandhi

In the course of his mission to secure greater political rights of the Untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar clashed with Gandhi, who denied the independent political rights of Untouchables by deliberately trying to keep them in the fold of Hinduism. At the first **Round Table**

Conference held in 12 Nov 1930, Dr. Ambedkar demanded separate political rights for the Untouchables from the Colonial Government. Impressed by his arguments, the Conference decided in principle to treat the Untouchables as a separate unit and give them special representation in the future set-up of India. But the matter could not be finalized as the Congress Party led by Gandhi had not participated in the first session of the R.T.C. Gandhi participated in the second session of the R.T.C. on 15 Sep 1931 and opposed the special treatment of the Untouchables although he had no objection for special treatment to Muslims and Sikhs. However, all efforts of Gandhi failed because the British Prime Minister Mr. Ramsay MacDonald granted separate electorate to the Untouchables in the Communal Award published by him in August 1932. Having failed across the Table, Gandhi resorted to his **favorite weapon**, i.e., ‘**fast unto death**’ in order to have the Award suitably amended. The Communal Award had therefore to be modified and replaced by the Poona Pact on 25 Sep 1932, which Dr. Ambedkar had no choice but to sign in order to **save the life of Gandhi**. Under the Poona Pact, a joint electorate with ‘reservation of seats’ for the Depressed Classes replaced the separate electorate for the Untouchables. Thus although Gandhi outwardly showed his commitment to the Untouchables, his real purpose appeared to have been political. He wanted to ensure **numerical power** to Hindus (i.e. high-caste Hindus) vis-à-vis Muslims because in terms of numbers, the Depressed Classes constitute a quarter of India’s population.

In the Preface of his book “**What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables**”, Dr. Ambedkar tells us what really transpired at the Round Table Conference: “*Gandhi claimed to be the sole champion of the Untouchables and was not even prepared to share the honour with anyone else. I remember what a scene he created when his claim was contested. Mr. Gandhi does not merely claim for himself the championship of the Untouchables. He claims similar championship for the Congress. The Congress, he says, is fully pledged to redress the wrongs done to the Untouchables and argues that any attempt to give political safeguards to the Untouchables is unnecessary and harmful. It is therefore a great pity that no detailed study of these claims by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress has been undertaken so far.*”

9.4 Babasaheb's Spiritual Quest

Dr. Ambedkar's experience with the orthodox Hindus including Gandhi convinced him that they were not willing to change the caste doctrines, as demonstrated by **Gandhi's opposition** to separate electorates for the Untouchables and their **continued exclusion from some Hindu temples**. So he started exhorting his followers to concentrate on raising their living standards and gaining political power. The failure of the Kalaram Temple Entry campaign to bend the caste-Hindus convinced him that there was no future for Untouchables by remaining in Hinduism and he seriously began to consider changing his religion. At a mammoth gathering on 13 October 1935 at **Yeola**, he recounted the **sorrowful plight** of Untouchables under the aegis of Hinduism and advised his followers to decide if it was not better for them to discard Hinduism and embrace some other faith that would give them **equal status, secure position and just treatment**. Speaking about himself, he said: "Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but I solemnly assure you that **I will not die a Hindu.**"

When Dr. Ambedkar announced his intention to discard the Hindu faith, there were **tempting offers** by Christians, Muslims and Sikhs to attract him to their religions. But he scoffed at these offers and rejected them without hesitation. On 30-31 May 1936 at Dadar in Mumbai, he delivered a speech entitled "**What way Liberty?**" In this historic speech, he detailed the path leading towards liberty and gave a call to conversion. He did not say which religion he was going to embrace. However, at the end of this speech, he exhorted the vast audience to remember the **last words of Buddha** to Ananda in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, "*Be ye an island unto yourselves, a refuge unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Teaching as your island, the Teaching as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.*" This gave an indication of the direction he was taking.

After studying the various religions, Dr. Ambedkar concluded that **Buddhism** was the religion that could ensure the **dignity** of his downtrodden people. He realized that in order to develop an awakened society, a **change of mindset** among his people was necessary in tandem with the social and political battle for equal

rights for them. This mental revolution he found in the act of conversion from the **subservience** of an Untouchable in Hinduism to the **independence** of a **Buddhist** identity and complete development as a human being. Special emphasis was laid on the Buddha's teachings on **social equality**, particularly his **rejection of the caste system** and the Buddhist teaching that the '**true Brahman**' is one who engages in ethical behavior, regardless of birth, as expounded in the **Discourse on the Outcaste** (*Vasala Sutta, Suttanipata 1.7*)

At an open air ceremony on a 14-acre plot of vacant Government land now called **Diksha Bhumi** in **Nagpur**, Maharashtra on 14th October 1956, Dr. Ambedkar received **Diksha or Initiation** as a Buddhist lay disciple from **Venerable Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar. He then called upon those in the mammoth gathering to stand up who wished to embrace Buddhism. The entire crowd of over **380,000** rose as one man and repeated the Three Refuges and Five Precepts after Babasaheb, enacting the **single biggest religious conversion** in world history. An important part of the ceremony was **22 vows** to all new converts after taking the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. As many people arrived after the ceremony, a second ceremony was performed the next day bringing the total number of converts to **half million**. On 16th October 1956 he repeated another mass conversion ceremony at Chanda involving **300,000** followers where he gave only 22 vows to the gathering.

9.5 Twenty-Two Vows Administered to Buddhist Converts

The first eight vows require the new convert to stop worshipping all the Hindu deities, stop regarding the Buddha as a reincarnation of Vishnu, stop performing Hindu funeral rites and stop employing Brahmins for ceremonies. The next two vows stress on equality of all men. Vows 11-18 require the convert to practise the Noble Eightfold Path, develop the ten Paramis, compassion and loving kindness, and keep the Five Precepts. The last four vows reaffirm their **anti-Hindu** and **pro-Buddhist** stances. These 22 vows are:

1. I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall have no faith in 'Gauri', Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them.
4. I do not believe in the incarnation of God.
5. I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda.
6. I shall not perform 'Shraddha' nor shall I give 'pind-dan'.
7. I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha.
8. I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.
9. I shall believe in the equality of man.
10. I shall endeavor to establish equality.
11. I shall follow the 'noble eightfold path' of the Buddha.
12. I shall follow the ten 'paramitas' prescribed by the Buddha.
13. I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them.
14. I shall not steal.
15. I shall not tell lies.
16. I shall not commit carnal sins.
17. I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc.
18. I shall endeavor to follow the noble eightfold path and practice compassion and loving kindness in every day life.
19. I renounce Hinduism, which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
20. I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true religion.
21. I believe that I am having a re-birth.
22. I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

9.6 Myth of the Caste System Shattered by Babasaheb

Although the Indian constitution makes caste discrimination illegal, the caste system or *Chaturvarnya* is still recognized and practised by the majority of Hindus. According to **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**, the social order prescribed by the caste system is criminal in intent and anti-social in its results by perpetuating an illegal gain obtained by one class and an unjust wrong inflicted on another. This infamous charter has its origin in the 90th Hymn of the 10th Mandala of the **Rig Veda** known as “**Purusha Sukta**”, a Hindu theory of the Origin of the Universe, which states that when the gods divided the primeval being Purusha to form the human society, “the **Brahmana** (priest) was his mouth, the **Kshatriya** (soldier) was made his arms; the being called the **Vaishya** (trader), he was his thighs; the **Shudra** (menial) sprang from his feet.”

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Purusha Sukta concerns itself with the origin of the classes by saying that they were created by God – a doctrine that **no theology has thought fit to propound!** What is more astonishing is the plan of equating different classes to different parts of the body of the Creator. It is a deliberate plan to solve two problems, one of fixing function and the other of fixing hierarchy. The **Brahmin is equated to the mouth** of the Creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the Brahmin becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is noblest in the scale, he is given the noblest function, that of custodian of knowledge and learning. The **Kshatriya is equated to the arms** of the Creator. Among the limbs, arms are next below the mouth. So Kshatriya is given an order of precedence next below the Brahmin and is given a function, which is second only to knowledge, namely, fighting. The **Vaishya is equated to the thighs**, which are next below the arms in the gradation of limbs. Consequently, the Vaishya is given an order of precedence next below the Kshatriya and is assigned a function of trade and industry, which ranked in ancient times next below the warrior. The **Shudra is equated to the feet** of the Creator. The feet form the lowest and most ignoble part of the human frame. So the Shudra is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely to serve as a menial.

In his book “**Who were the Shudras**”, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar revealed that the Purusha Sukta **contradicts** the Creation theories expounded in many other chapters of the **Rig Veda**, where no reference at all is made to the separation of humans into the classes described. From the texts, it is beyond question that the **Rishis** who were the authors of the hymns of the Rig Veda regarded **Manu** as the progenitor of the Indo-Aryans, who formed **five tribes and not four classes!** There is no doubt that Purusha Sukta was **fabricated by Brahmins** with the objective of perpetuating the caste system by giving it a religious sanction to favour Brahmins at the expense of the other classes, in particular the Shudras, who form half of the Hindu population.

The social order prescribed by Purushka Sukta has never been questioned by anyone except the Buddha. Although the Buddha succeeded in annihilating caste within the **Monastic Order** as well as among the **Buddhist laity**, he was unable to effect a change in the Indian society because the caste system is so **firmly entrenched** in the Hindu mentality that it has never run short of protagonists. Even Gandhi defended the caste system by writing the following in the **Gujarati journal Nava-Jivan** in 1921-22:

- *“I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.”*
- *“To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation, which is the soul of the caste system. The hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder.”*
- *“The caste system is a natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. Other countries not having understood the utility of the caste system, it existed only in a loose condition and consequently those countries have not derived from caste system the same degree of advantage that India has derived. These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system.”*

In contrast, **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**, Champion of Untouchables had this to say about the caste system: *“There will be outcastes as long as there are castes, and nothing can emancipate the outcaste except **the destruction of the caste system.**”*

9.7 Atrocities against the Untouchables (Dalits)

In the Hindu caste system, a **Dalit**, formerly called **Untouchable**, is a person outside the four castes (*achuta* or outcaste) and considered below them. Untouchability is completely different from Impurity. Defilement as observed by primitive society was of a temporary duration such as in times of childbirth, death, menstruation, etc. After the period of defilement was over and purification ceremonies performed, the person becomes cleansed and associable. But there is nothing that can make the Untouchables pure. They are born impure, they are impure while they live, they die the death of the impure, and they give birth to children who are born with the stigma of Untouchability affixed to them. It is a case of permanent, **hereditary stain** that nothing can cleanse.

According to **Raja Sekhar Vundru** (The Pioneer, Dalit Millennium Issue, 30 Jan. 2000), “When Vasco da Gama landed in India in 1498, he witnessed a living hell for the Dalits. **Dalits feeding on carcasses**, lurking like animals in the day with a status worse than an animal and conditions of life worse than the millions of genocide victims of Adolf Hitler. The greatness of Dalits lies in their ability to survive in the ultra sub-human existence in Indian society and breed dasyus, menials, slave, asuras, chandalas and untouchables: **unparalleled and unrecorded in the history of world civilizations.**”

The tyranny against untouchables was horrific! They were barred from acquiring education and knowledge, property and even wearing shirts. Even their shadows would pollute the high caste. They would be punished according to the inhuman laws of **Manusmriti** invented by Brahmins to suppress the lower castes: “*If a shudra recites Vedic texts, his tongue shall be cut out. If he is insolent enough to give lessons regarding the duty of the Brahmins, the king shall order hot oil to be poured into his mouth and ears. With whatever limb a man of low caste offends against a Brahmin, that very limb of him shall be cut off; such shall be the atonement of his crime.*”

Although Untouchability has been abolished in India, **atrocities** against Untouchables continue and in extremely traditional villages, Dalits are still forbidden to let their shadows fall upon Brahmins for

fear of ritually contaminating them; and they are still required to sweep the ground where they walk to remove the “**contamination**” of their footfalls. In some of these villages, rural Dalits are forbidden to worship in temples or draw water from the same wells as caste-Hindus, and they usually live in **segregated** neighborhoods outside the main village.

In view of the fact that Dalits are considered as **outcastes** in by fellow Hindus and **forbidden** to enter Hindu places of worship, questions have been raised as to **whether they are in fact Hindus?**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the **Greatest Leader** of the Untouchables of India coined the term ‘**Dalit**’. In the **Marathi** language it means “*crushed*”, “*stepped on*” or “*oppressed*”, and effectively describes the real situation of the Untouchables. **Harijan** was the name coined by Gandhi which means “Children of God” (Hari is another name for the Hindu deity Vishnu), a form of **lip service** but many Dalits consider this term **condescending** (If they are children of God, why are they considered as outcastes by fellow Hindus?). Today people rarely use this term because it **sounds so hollow!**

9.8 Babasaheb Traces the Origin of Untouchability

In his book “**The Untouchables – Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?**” published by the Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra, India, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar traced the origin of the Untouchables to “**Broken-men**” or displaced tribes-men whose tribes were defeated and broken up by others in primitive times when inter-tribal wars were common. In the course of wandering, the **Broken-men** found shelter outside settled villages where they undertook the duty of watch and ward in return for food and shelter. As tribal organization was based primarily on **blood and kinship**, the **Broken-men** were treated as aliens and were not permitted to live in the midst of the settled tribe. From the strategic point of view, it was desirable that they should live on the border of the settlement to meet the raids of hostile tribes. Both considerations dictate placing their **quarters outside the village**.

With the arrival of the **Aryans around 1500 BC**, further segregation was established through the caste system, with the locals integrated as **Shudras** (labourers). The Brahmins could only penetrate into the tribe and exercise their **control through religion**. If they had attempted to integrate the Broken-men into the tribes, it would have created conflicts between themselves and the Aryanised tribes, which did not admit the Broken-men within their ranks. So the Brahmins had no choice but to leave the Broken-men in their original condition. Later, when the Brahmins as a religious group reoriented their techniques of social control, this attitude became stiff and exclusive, so that the Broken-men who remained outside the pale of caste system came to be labelled as **Untouchables**. The attitude became one of downright **hostility** when the Broken-men entered the fold of Buddhism, the tenets of which went against the caste system.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, there is **no racial difference** between the Hindus and Untouchables. Before the advent of Untouchability, the distinction was between **Tribesmen and Broken-men**. It is the Broken-men who came to be treated as Untouchables. There are **two roots** from which Untouchability arose: (a) contempt and hatred by Brahmins of Broken-men, especially those who embraced Buddhism (b) continuation of **beef-eating** by Broken-men after it had been given up by the Brahmins, who became staunch vegetarians in order to regain their lost prestige to Buddhists who practiced non-killing. Previously Brahmins ate beef and practised **sacrificial killing** of horses and cattle. The Book of Kindred Sayings (*Samyutta Nikaya*) Part I, Chapter III-9 mentions a great sacrifice arranged for King Pasenadi in which 500 bulls, 500 bullocks and as many heifers, goats and rams, were led to the pillars by weeping slaves and workers, who were forced to make the preparations for the sacrifice.

Dr. Ambedkar believed the period from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. to be most momentous period in history of India. It was during this period that Buddhism was founded and spread rapidly among the people eroding the supremacy of the Brahmins. He interprets the murder of last Maurya king by Pushyamitra Shunga in 2nd century B.C. as the beginning of **Brahmanic counter-revolution** against Buddhism, leading to the branding of Broken-men and **Buddhists as Untouchables** during the **Gupta Period** around 400AD.

9.9 Branding Buddhists as Outcastes by the Brahmins

The branding of Buddhists as outcastes began even during the Buddha's time. **Discourse on Outcaste** (*Vasala Sutta, Suttanipata* 1.7) describes an incident while the Buddha was going on alms-round in Savatthi. The Brahmin Aggikabharadvaja while attending to the sacrificial fire saw the Blessed One coming from afar off and shouted at him: "Stop there, shaveling; stop there, wretched monk; stop there, **miserable outcaste**." In response to this abuse, the Buddha answered: "Do you know O Brahmin, who an outcaste is, or the things that make an outcaste?" The calm reply surprised the Brahmin. He stopped the abuse and wanting to know the answer, asked the Buddha to explain **who an outcaste is and what makes an outcaste**. So the Buddha preached the *Vasala Sutta* that defined an outcaste by his ethical behavior, irrespective of birth, namely:

"By birth one is not an outcaste, by birth one is not a Brahmana. By deeds one is an outcaste, by deeds one is a Brahmana."

From this incident, it may be inferred that the Brahmins in general **disliked** Buddhist monks (including the Buddha who belonged to the warrior caste, which was the most respected caste during his time) and treated Brahmins with disrespect because Buddhism **preached against the caste system** that favored the Brahmins while the Buddhist laity did not respect Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure. In fact, this particular incident lends credence to the theory of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar that the **contempt and hatred** of Buddhist by the Brahmins was the root cause of Untouchability.

9.10 Why Dalits Convert to Buddhism

On 12 May 1956 **Dr. Ambedkar** spoke on the BBC explaining why he chose Buddhism out of the prevalent religions of the world. According to him, Buddhism offers three principles in combination that no other religion does. All the other religions are concerned with 'God' and 'Life after Death or Soul'. Buddhism teaches *panna*

(understanding against superstition and supernaturalism), *karuna* (love between people against a slave and master relationship) and *samata* (equality against the caste system). This is what man wants for a good and happy life on earth. Neither God nor the Soul can do that. These three principles of Buddhism appealed to him and should also appeal to the world.

Thanks to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Dalits have returned to the religion of their forefathers who were Buddhists in the past and were condemned as Untouchables during the Gupta Period around 400 AD. To illustrate the sheer influence of Dr. Ambedkar in shaping the **Revival of Buddhism** in India, from the time Anagarika Dharmapala launched the Movement in 1891 to 1951 (60 years), the number of Buddhists in India increased marginally from 50,000 to **180,823**. After Dr. Ambedkar led his followers into the fold of Buddhism just 50 years ago in Nagpur, the Buddhist population in India has increased to about **50 million** today. Thus the **credit** for making Buddhism once again a living religion in India goes to Dr. Ambedkar. (According to an internet article on the “Resurgence of Buddhism in India” by **Cyrus Shaoul**, the Japanese writer **Motoo Yamagiwa**, an authority on Indian Buddhism estimates the Buddhist population of India in 1996 at over **50 million people**.)

9.11 Greet Followers of Dr. Ambedkar with “Jhai Bhim”

Nowadays it is quite common to meet many Indian Buddhists from Maharashtra (state in India that has the most number of Buddhists), performing the pilgrimage at the various Holy Places. If you happen to meet such groups, just greet them by raising your hand and cheer loudly: “*Jhai Bhim* (Long live Bhim)”. This will surely warm their hearts, because to them, Bhim (as Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is fondly remembered) restored their dignity by **debunking the caste system** and blazing the way for them to **return to the fold of Buddhism**, the religion of their forefathers. In return you will receive an enthusiastic response of “*Jhai Bhim*” from many happy faces that will add joy to your pilgrimage too.

10. Notes to Part I

Note 1, page 10, Small Vehicle: One hundred years after the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, during the reign of the Nanda king Kalasoka (reigned 396-360 BC), the Second Buddhist Council was held at Vesali to discuss ten points or practices of the Vajjian monks, which were ruled to be unlawful by the Council. In 349 BC about forty years after the Second Council, another event happened that would polarize the *Sangha*. According to the tradition of the Sammitiya School recorded by Bhavya, a monk named Bhadra (or Mahadeva) proposed Five Heresies questioning the nature of the Arahant. A great assembly of ten thousand, consisting of monks and laity called '*Mahasangiti*' was convened in Pataliputta with the support of the king and the majority voted in favour of these heretical views. This resulted in a schism of the *Sangha* and the secession of the *Mahasanghika*, believed to be the forerunners of the *Mahayana*. From then on further schisms led to the formation of different sub-sects until **Eighteen Schools of Buddhism** arose.

Later on, the followers of *Mahayana* tradition, which developed sometime immediately prior to the Christian era in Andhra Pradesh coined the term '*Hinayana*' to describe these early schools. The name reflected the *Mahayanist* evaluation of their own tradition as a new superior method and was aimed at disparaging the accomplishments of the earlier schools of Buddhism. This name, however, was not accepted by the conservative schools, which considered it as degrading because the term '*Hinayana*' actually denotes 'mean or degraded vehicle' and not Small Vehicle (*Cullayana*). The modern upholders of the ancient Buddhist tradition are the *Theravadins* (followers of the Way of the Elders), who are but one of the 18 ancient schools or *Nikayas*. Due to its derogatory nature, the term '*Hinayana*' should be avoided when referring to the *Nikayas* or Early Schools of Buddhism.

Note 2, page 11: Ts'ung-ling or Onion Mountain is the ancient Chinese designation for the great snowy range, which connects the T'ien-shan in the north with the K'un-lun and Hindukush in the south, and forms the mighty eastern rim of the Pamirs. The Chinese called the Pamirs, Onion Mountains, because they thought it was the local onions that made them sick. Actually it was the altitude that caused the sickness.

Note 3, page 11, Buddha Shadow: According to a popular legend among the Chinese pilgrims, the Buddha left his shadow in a cave on the

mountainside in Nagarahara (old capital of the Jalalabad district). This cavern was the abode of a destructive dragon, Naga Gopala, who was planning to destroy the kingdom for a slight offence against him when he was a shepherd in a former life. Out of compassion for the inhabitants, the Buddha came to Nagarahara from mid India and after taming the dragon, left his shadow on the wall of the Naga Gopala cave. The Buddha advised the dragon to look at his shadow whenever evil intentions arose in his mind and by its power of love and virtue, the evil purpose would be stopped. In later days, the shadow was not visible anymore.

Note 4, page 11, Alms Bowl Relic: According to Fa Hsien, it was at a place 12 *yojanas* southeast of Kusinara that Lord Buddha had donated his alms-bowl to the Licchavis. Earlier at Vaishali, he had announced his impending death or *Parinibbana*. The Licchavis having become overwhelmed with emotions at this news kept following him and did not want to leave him. Lord Buddha then created the illusion of a large and deeply scarped river separating them and donating his alms-bowl to the Licchavis, he exhorted them to return to their homes. To commemorate this event the Licchavis erected a pillar at Vesali.

Kesariya, 55 kilometres northwest of Vesali, is believed to be present day location of that event (see Part IV of this book). Fa Hsien says nothing about how the alms-bowl ended up in Gandhara. But the Tibetan historian Taranatha observes that: “the king of the Yueh-chih (Kushan) invaded Magadha and carried off the bowl of Buddha and Asvaghosa.” Cunningham is of the opinion that it was either the Kushana king Kanishka (ruled 78-102 AD) or his successor Huvishka. As there is no evidence that Huvishka ever invaded Magadha, it was probably Kanishka who took the alms bowl to Peshawar around the 1st century AD. While in Varanasi, the philosopher Asvaghosa saw the city conquered by the Kushana emperor Kanishka. A huge war indemnity was demanded and to appease the Buddhist conqueror, the ruler of Varanasi handed over the alms bowl of the Buddha as a symbolic gesture. Asvaghosa probably accompanied Kanishka back to Peshawar to serve as spiritual counsellor in his court. For an account of the whereabouts of the alms bowl after that, please refer to article ‘The Journey of the Buddha’s Alms Bowl’ on page 153.

Note 5, page 25,: The **Hephthalites**, also called White Huns because of their white bodies, were a group of nomadic tribesmen who originally lived in the Altai mountain region of Mongolia and are known as Huna in Indian records and Ye-tha in Chinese records. According to Western records

written in the 6th century, the Hephthalites were of Hunnish stock but they did not mingle with other Hun tribes. They were different from the Huns led by Attila who invaded the Roman Empire. In the 5th century AD, they began their westward expansion and by the year 500 AD, the Hephthalites controlled an area stretching south from Samarkand to the Arabian Sea, and as far west as Khurasan (Iran) and all of northern India to the east.

After the death of Gupta ruler Skandagupta (455-470 AD), the Hephthalites entered India from the Kabul valley which they had wrested control from the Kushans earlier. They plundered every town and village along the Ganges and eventually conquered the capital Pataliputta. They persecuted Buddhists and burned all the monasteries. Their conquest was accomplished with extreme ferocity and according to the Chinese pilgrim Sung Yun, the disposition of this king (Mihirakula?) was cruel and vindictive and he practised the most barbarous atrocities. For thirty years the Hephthalite kings ruled over northwestern India. According to Hsuan Tsang, the inhuman cruelties perpetrated by the Hun king Mihirakula were checked by Baladitya of Magadha, but there was no one to stop his barbaric acts of destroying *stupas* and monasteries and even exterminating the Buddhist laity in Kashmir until his complete defeat by Yasodharman. The Huna rule beginning with Toramana did not end with the defeat of his son Mihirakula. Their hold on Kashmir lasted longer. Mihirakula's son Baka is said to have atoned for the guilt of his father by erecting many monasteries and *stupas* for the Buddhists in Kashmir.

Eventually the Huns, like the earlier invaders such as Sakas, Kushans and Gurjaras settled in Rajputana (Rajasthan) where they became known as 'Rajputs' after the Brahmins elevated their status to 'kshatriyas'. One version of their origin is that four warriors, Agnikul, Yadaukul, Suryakul and Odak, whose names the Rajput clans took, sprang from the sacred fire in a ceremony performed by the sage Vashishtha at Mount Abu. Henceforth they became known as 'Agnikula kshatriyas' or fire-born warriors. Dr. Ambedkar is of the view that the objective was to use them as a means to intimidate the Buddhists and suppress Buddhism in India. (Ref. 46: Decline and Fall of Buddhism by Dr. K. Jamanadas Chapter 8)

Note 6, page 28, Turuskas or Khaliji Turks: The first wave of invasion of India was by the Turks under **Mahmud of Ghazni** of the Ghaznavid dynasty (977-1186), which defeated the Indian forces in 991 AD. Peshawar and Kurram valley came under Muslim domination. During the second half of the 12th century, the Ghaznavid Empire fell to the Ghurs of Persia and Afghanistan came under the rule of **Mohammad Ghori**. Mohammad Ghori

is said to have invaded India seven times beginning from 1175 AD. From 1192 to 1194 he conquered Delhi, Kannauj and Benares. He appointed **Qutabuddin Aibek**, a former slave from Turkistan to be in charge of Indian affairs. Aibek's general, **Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji**, successfully plundered and conquered the fort of Bihar in 1193 and in 1199-1202, Bengal came under his authority. Emboldened by these easy victories, four years later he led an expedition to conquer Tibet. After suffering heavy losses at Assam and retreating back to Bengal he fell seriously ill. When he was hovering between life and death, Ali Mardan Khalji, his appointed governor stabbed him to death. A native of Garamsir (Dasht-i-Marg) in northern Afghanistan, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji belonged to the Khaliji tribe. The Khalijis were of Turkish origin but had settled in Khalj, the land lying on either side of the **Helmand River in Afghanistan** for so long that they had become different from the Turks in terms of customs and manners. In Indian records, they are known as 'Turuskas'.

Note 7, page 29, Hindu Opposition: To counter the threat posed by the popularity of Buddhism and maintain their dominant position in the *Chaturvarna* or caste system, the Brahmins had come out with several *puranas* (mythology) sometime during the 8th century AD declaring the Buddha to be the ninth *avatara* (reincarnation) of Vishnu as a verse to this effect from 'Matsya Purana' is engraved in a monument at Mahabalipuram near Madras. The process was complete by the time of the Bengali poet Jayadeva's writing of his 'Gita Govind' and including Buddha's name in it as an '*Avatara*' in the 12th century AD. According to *Puranic* tradition in the Mahabharata, the **ninth avatar is Balarama not Buddha**. It was a ploy by the Brahmins to **subvert the religion** by creating confusion in the minds of the people and portray Buddhism as a branch of Brahmanism. Their objective was to win over the hearts of the people to Brahmanism and perpetuate the caste system. However the caste system is so unjust to lower caste Hindus that millions of Dalits or 'Untouchables' have converted to Buddhism making them the largest group of Buddhists in India today.

Note 8, page 29: The extermination of Buddhism in India was hastened by the large-scale vandalization and appropriation of Buddhist temples by the Hindus. In 1590 AD, the Mahabodhi Temple in Buddhagaya was taken over by a Hindu Mahant Gosain Giri, who converted it into a Shaivite temple. His successors kept expanding the Math by illegally occupying all the land around the Mahabodhi Temple. Although Anagarika Dharmapala fought several legal battles for the return of the Temple to Buddhists, the Bihar Government favored the Hindus by enacting the Buddha Gaya Temple

Management Act in 1949, which effectively ensured that the Hindus remained in control. The Makutabandhana Stupa or cremation stupa in Kushinagar was changed into a Hindu temple dedicated to an obscure deity named Rambhar Bhavani when Cunningham discovered it in 1860. The locals still call it 'Rambhar' after the deity. Even today, pilgrims who visit the Ananda Stupa in Hajipur will see a dilapidated Hindu temple on top of it. The place is called Ramchaura Mandir after the temple.

Note 9, page 38: Court Hearing of Dispute over Ownership of King Mindon's Kuthodaw Rest House in Bodhgaya

In 1908 Anagarika Dhammapala filed a suit at the local court to have the building returned to the Buddhist Community for the use intended by King Mindon but the Mahant submitted that King Mindon had given the deeds of the building to him and he was able to produce them in court. Dhammapala explained that King Mindon had donated the building to provide facilities to Buddhist monks and laity who would come to Buddhagaya on a pilgrimage. The Mahant was not a Buddhist and he had nothing at all to do with the building. As the King only deposited the deeds with the Mahant for safekeeping as a temporary measure, he should therefore hand them back to the Buddhist Community. Both sides were able to produce evidence. Even after a year, the case was still undecided.

In order to obtain further evidence to strengthen his case, Anagarika Dhammapala decided to visit King Mindon's son King Thibaw, who was in exile in Ratanagiri, a coastal town 355 km south of Bombay. Accompanied by Sayadaw U Chandramani, his disciple U Sandawbatha and Kappiya Maung Pho Yin, the team left for Calcutta, and then went by train to Bombay where they stayed the night at the house of a friend. From there they informed the King's Palace about their visit and then proceeded on their journey by ship arriving at Ratanagiri at night. Next morning, they had an audience with the king. The meeting, however, turned out to be futile because King Thibaw could not produce any documentary evidence to support their case. In the end, the Judge decided in favour of the Mahant simply because the deeds of the building happened to be in his hands. No matter what other reasons were produced by Dhammapala, they were not good enough. Dhammapala had lost. The losing of the court case meant that the highly valued Kuthodaw Rest House built by King Mindon for the benefit of Buddhist monks and pilgrims coming to Buddhagaya, was forever lost to the Mahant and his descendants who did not care about the Buddhists; the Pilgrim's Rest House henceforth became a grand dwelling place for the Hindu-Brahmins to this day.

PART II

Four Holy Places of Pilgrimage

Contents

1. Lumbini, Birthplace of the Buddha
- 1.5 Kapilavatthu, Kingdom of the Sakyas
- 1.6 Ramagama and Devadaha, Kingdom of the Koliyas
2. Bodhgaya, Place of the Buddha's Enlightenment
3. Sarnath, Place of the Buddha's First Sermon
4. Kusinara, Place of the Buddha's Passing Away

1. Lumbini, Birthplace of the Buddha

1.1 How to reach there

Lumbini is located in Nepal, near the Indian border town of **Sonauli**. Nowadays one can apply for a Nepalese visa in Kuala Lumpur in order to enter the country. From the border, a good road leads to Lumbini, about 20 km away. All distances are approximate.

3, 25, 26

1.2 Religious Significance

After fulfilling the practice of the Ten Perfections (*Paramis*) for four incalculables (*asankheyya*) and a hundred thousand world cycles (*kappa*), the *Bodhisatta* or Future Gotama Buddha took conception in the womb of **Maya Devi**, the queen of **Suddhodana**, chief of a small **Sakyan** republic, just across the present Indo-Nepalese border. On the full-moon day of May in 623 BC, Maya Devi was travelling in state from the Sakyan capital of **Kapilavatthu**, to **Devadaha**, her parents' home to deliver her first child in keeping with the ancient tradition of her people. Along the way she passed through **Lumbini Garden**, a pleasure grove of Sala trees which were then in full bloom. Stopping to admire the flowering trees and plants, she began to feel the pangs of childbirth. Quickly she summoned her female attendants to put up a curtain around her. Holding the branch of a Sala tree to support herself, she gave birth to the *Bodhisatta* while standing up. According to *Majjhima Sutta* No. 123, as soon as the *Bodhisatta* was born, he took seven steps to the North and declared his position in the world with these words:

<i>Aggo' ham asmi lokassa --</i>	I am the chief in the world.
<i>Jetto' ham asmi lokassa --</i>	I am the highest in the world.
<i>Setto' ham asmi lokassa --</i>	I am the noblest in the world.
<i>Ayam antima jati --</i>	This is my last birth.
<i>Natthi dani punabbhavo --</i>	There is no more becoming for me.

As soon as the *Bodhisatta* was born, a great immeasurable light surpassing the radiance of the gods appeared, penetrating even those abysmal world inter-spaces of darkness where the sun and moon cannot make their light prevail. The ten thousand-fold world system shook, quaked and trembled and there too a great immeasurable light appeared to herald the birth of the *Bodhisatta*.

1.3 Historical Background ^{5, 27}

In 249 BC, the great Mauryan emperor Asoka, who ruled nearly the whole of India from 273 to 236 BC, visited Lumbini as part of his pilgrimage to the sacred Buddhist places and worshipped in person the sacred spot where the Buddha was born. To commemorate his visit, he built a stone pillar, which bears an inscription in Brahmi script to record the event for posterity. The inscription engraved on the pillar in five lines reads (**Translation**):

“Twenty years after his coronation, King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, visited this spot in person and worshipped at this place because here Buddha Sakyamuni was born. He caused to make a stone (capital) representing a horse and he caused this stone pillar to be erected. Because the Buddha was born here, he made the village of Lumbini free from taxes and subject to pay only one-eighth of the produce as land revenue instead of the usual rate.”

(**Note:** The coronation of Asoka took place in 269 BC, four years after his reign.)

After the devastation of Buddhist shrines in India by the Muslims in the 13th century AD, Lumbini was deserted and eventually engulfed by the tarai forests. In 1896, the German archeologist **Dr. Alois A. Fuhrer**, while wandering in the Nepalese tarai in search of the legendary site, came across a stone pillar and ascertained beyond doubt it was indeed the birthplace of the Lord Buddha. The Lumbini pillar (also known as the Rummindei pillar) stands today majestically proclaiming that here the Buddha was born.

27, 28

1.4 Objects of Interest

a) Asokan Pillar

Upon entering Lumbini Garden, the most visible landmark is a tall pillar surrounded by an iron fence. This is the famous Lumbini Pillar erected by King Asoka in 249 BC. Originally it had a horse capital on top but afterwards it was struck by lightning and broken in the middle leaving 6.7 m standing without the horse capital. It is this pillar with its inscription that confirmed this site as the Buddha's birthplace.

b) Sanctum-Sanctorum: Exact Spot of Buddha's Birthplace

The area just in front of the Asokan column was formerly the site of the old Maya Devi temple, a white box-shaped structure built in 1939 by the local administrator Keshar Shumser (Plate 1). It was dismantled in 1992 for archeological excavations to be carried out underneath the floor. On 4 February 1996, a team of UN-sponsored archeologists announced the discovery of the Buddha's birthplace beneath the temple's foundation. The archeologists excavated 15 chambers to a depth of about 5 m, and found a commemorative stone slab shaped like a womb atop a platform of seven layers of bricks dating back to the 3rd century BC, pinpointing the **exact spot of the Buddha's birthplace**, the Sanctum-Sanctorum. According to ancient Buddhist literature, when King Asoka visited Lumbini in 249 BC, he placed a "**marker stone**" on top of a pile of bricks as a commemorative monument, for himself and posterity to worship.

Since the excavation was completed in 1996, the site has remained closed to the public, and the excavations covered by a tin roof and tarpaulin until 2001 (Plate 2). Today a new temple (Plate 3) has been built to house the ancient Nativity Sculpture, which was consecrated on Wesak Day in 26 May 2003. Inside pilgrims can circumambulate the excavated ruins of the temple complex and the Asokan shrine put up in the 3rd century BC. The historical "marker stone" said to pinpoint the spot where Mayadevi gave birth to Prince Siddhattha, is covered with bulletproof glass to make sure that it is well protected.

c) Nativity Sculpture

In May 2003, the ancient stone sculpture depicting the **Nativity of the Buddha** was placed in the new temple complex built over the exact spot of the Buddha's birthplace. The sculpture dates back to 4th century AD and contains a bas-relief image of Maya Devi, mother of the Lord, holding a branch of the Sala tree with her right hand, her left hand resting on her hips. On her right side supporting her is a woman, presumably her sister Maha Pajapati. Beyond the latter is the slightly bent figure of Sakka Devaraja, who is in the attitude of receiving the newborn child. Below is a small figure of Prince Siddhattha with a halo around his head, standing on a lotus pedestal.

d) Puskarni – the sacred pond

South of the Asokan pillar is the famous sacred pond – **Puskarni**, believed to be the same pond in which Maya Devi washed herself before giving birth to the *Bodhisatta*.

e) Temples & Meditation Centres in Lumbini

The Nepalese *Vihara* is built inside Lumbini Garden. It is a Theravada monastery run by an old Nepalese *bhikkhu*. The Tibetan and Myanmar *viharas* and the Panditarama Meditation Centre are farther away, outside the garden complex. Pilgrims are advised to visit these places to pay their respects to the *Sangha*, whose presence has sanctified the environment of Lumbini.

1.5 Kapilavatthu, Kingdom of the Sakyas^{19, 30}

Kapilavatthu, capital of the country of the Sakyans where the Buddha spent the first 29 years of his life before leaving home in quest of the Deathless, has been a matter of controversy for nearly a century. There are two claimants to the site of **Kapilavastu**, namely: **Piprahwa** in Basti District of Uttar Pradesh, India and **Tilaurakot** 25km west of Lumbini in Nepal. According to Basanta Bidari¹⁹, the Indian claim was based on seals and inscriptions over the lid of a pot from the 2nd century AD that was found during excavations of the so-called palace at Piprahwa. The inscriptions read:

“Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu mahasanghasa” and
“Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu sanghasa”

The title *Devaputra* refers to the **Kushana king Kanishka** who built the biggest *vihara* at Piprahwa and renovated the main *stupa* there. These inscriptions clearly indicate that the monasteries belonged to the community of monks at Kapilavastu and so the site was not that of a palace. While the Indian claim is based on seals, pots and inscriptions, the Nepalese claim appears to be strongly supported by the discovery of important monuments and Asokan pillars at nearby Niglihawa and Gotihawa. In fact, the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang mentioned the nirvana *stupas* of Kanakamuni and Kakusandha Buddhas and the *stupa* of Sakyamuni Buddha at Ramagrama but they did not describe the nirvana *stupa* of Sakyamuni Buddha at or near the city of Kapilavastu, which the Indians claimed to have excavated at Piprahwa!

a) Identification of Tilaurakot as site of ancient Kapilavastu

Located some 27 km west of Lumbini, are the ruins of the ancient Sakyan city of Kapilavatthu. The site has been identified with the archeological mound at Tilaurakot (*‘kot’* or *‘kota’* = fortified area). Excavations of these ruins by the Nepalese Archeology Department

have exposed mounds of old *stupas* and monasteries, made of kiln-burnt bricks and clay-mortar. The remains are surrounded by a moat and the walls of the city are made of bricks. The fortified area of the site is 518 m running north to south and 396 m from east to west, roughly 20.5 hectares. On the basis of the archeological findings, the outer city of common citizens is very extensive and fits the reported size of Kapilavatthu as narrated by Hsüan Tsang in the Si-yü-ki.

These excavations were successively carried out by Fuhrer (1895); Mukherji (1899); Devala Mitra (1962); Mishra (1967-72); and a Japanese team led by Nakamura (1970-71). The general consensus among most scholars today is that Tilaurakot in Nepal is the site of old Kapilavatthu while Piprahwa in India is the site of the new Kapilavatthu established after the destruction of the old one by Vidudabha. (See **Note 10**, page 86 for an account of the destruction of Kapilavatthu by Vidudabha).

Pilgrims visiting Lumbini should spend an extra day to visit Tilaurakot where they can still see the site of the **Eastern Gate** called the *Mahabhinnikkhamanam Dvara* (Great Renunciation Gate). It was from here that the *Bodhisatta* set out on his quest for Enlightenment on the night of the fullmoon of *Asalha* (July) in 594 BC when he was twenty-nine years old. In the vicinity of Tilaurakot, there are several Buddhist sites of significance, notably:

b) Niglihawa, Birthplace of Kanakamuni Buddha

Niglihawa, 3 km northeast of Tilaurakot, is believed to be the ancient town of Sobhavati, birthplace of **Kanakamuni Buddha**. At the time of his birth, a heavy shower of gold fell over the whole of Jambudipa. Taking this “coming down of gold” as an omen, he was named **Kanakagamana** (*kanaka* = gold, *agamana* = coming). Over time, the original name Kanakagamana has taken the corrupt form of **Konagamana**. Emperor Asoka visited this place in 249 B.C. during his pilgrimage and erected a pillar to commemorate the event.

Today, the Asokan pillar can still be seen but it is broken into two pieces. The upper portion is 4.6 m long while nearly 1.5 m of the lower portion stands above ground slightly tilted. The inscription in Brahmi script on the pillar reads: *“King Piyadassi, Beloved of Gods, having been crowned king fourteen years, increased the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni to double its original size. Twenty years after his coronation, he came himself and worshipped it.”*

c) Gotihawa, Birthplace of Kakusandha Buddha

Gotihawa, 7 km southwest of Tilaurakot, is believed to be the site of the ancient city of Khemavati, birthplace of **Kakusandha Buddha**. Emperor Asoka visited it too at the same time and erected a pillar to record his visit. The pillar is broken and only the lower portion of about 3 m still stands in situ, but below ground level. Hsüan Tsang in the Si-yü-ki mentioned both the Asokan pillars described when he visited Kapilavatthu in 637 AD. At that time, each had a lion-head capital at the top.

d) Kudan, Site of Nigrodharama (Banyan Grove)

At Kudan is a site, which scholars believe to be the *Nigrodharama* or Banyan Grove, which King Suddhodana offered to the Buddha when he visited Kapilavastu. It was here that **Ven. Rahula** was ordained when he came to ask for his inheritance from the Buddha. The remains of a brick foundation wall of an ancient monastery, believed to be built during Buddha's time, still stands at the site.

e) Sagarhawa, Site of Massacre of the Sakyans

Sagarhawa, situated near Niglihawa is believed to be the site where Vidudabha massacred the Sakyans. The locals call it Lambu Sagar or 'Long Pond' because of the presence of a huge rectangular pond.

From Niglihawa, one can be easily reach Sagarhawa by passing through Niglihawa village and crossing the canal bridge.

Note 10 Vidudabha's attack of Kapilavatthu and the massacre of the Sakyans took place about a year prior to the Buddha's *Parinibbana*. The whole episode is narrated in Dhammapada Commentary iv.3: 29.30.

King Pasenadi of Kosala was a great admirer of the Buddha. His army chief was Dighakarayana, a nephew of his former commander-in-chief General Bandhula whom King Pasenadi had betrayed and put to death. Thus Dighakarayana bore a deep hatred against King Pasenadi for the death of his uncle. One day while King Pasenadi was visiting the Buddha in the Sakyan village of Ulumpa, he handed the royal insignia to Dighakarayana for safekeeping. Instead the latter rode off and handed them to Pasenadi's son Prince Vidudabha, effectively making the latter the new king of Kosala. When King Pasenadi came to know that he had been usurped, he decided to turn to his nephew Ajatasattu of Magadha for help. On the long journey to Rajagaha, he fell sick and died outside the city gates. When Ajatasattu came to know of the death of his uncle, he gave him a royal burial. In a show of indignation, he ordered an attack on his cousin Vidudabha but soon allowed his ministers to dissuade him because with the old king dead, such a move would not be beneficial to both parties.

Now Vidudabha was the result of a union between King Pasenadi and Vasabhakhattiya, daughter born of the slave-woman of Sakyan chief Mahanama. Earlier King Pasenadi, wishing to marry into the Sakyan clan so that he could become the Buddha's relative, had sent emissaries to Kapilavatthu with the request for the hand of a Sakyan princess. Although the Sakyans did not like the idea, they did not wish to offend him. They replied that they would comply but instead of a Sakyan princess, they sent a beautiful girl born of Mahanama and a slave-woman. King Pasenadi made that girl one of his chief queens and subsequently, she bore him a son Vidudabha. When Vidudabha was sixteen, he decided to pay a visit to his maternal grandparents in Kapilavatthu. Hearing of his visit, the Sakyans sent all the princes junior to him away to a neighbouring village to avoid paying respects to him but they accorded him all the hospitality.

After staying a few days in Kapilavatthu, Vidudabha and his entourage left for home. A servant used milk to wash the seat that Vidudabha had sat

upon in the resthouse. As she was washing, she remarked contemptuously: *“This is the seat on which sat the son of the slave girl Vasabhakhattiya.”*

One of Vidudabha’s aides, who had returned to fetch the sword he left behind, heard the remark and enquired into the matter. Learning that Vasabhakhattiya was the daughter of a slave-woman of Mahanama, he spread the news among the army. When Vidudabha heard the news, he was filled with rage and vowed to kill the Sakyans when he became king. When the party returned to Savatthi, the ministers informed King Pasenadi about the incident. The king was very angry at being deceived, cut off the royal honours, which had been bestowed on Vasabhakhattiya and her son, and degraded them to the condition of slaves. Thus Vidudabha bore a deep grudge against the Sakyans.

When the Buddha heard about the matter, he pointed out to King Pasenadi that Vasabhakhattiya was the daughter of a king. Although her mother was a slave-woman, it was not important because her status was determined by the status of her father not her mother. The king was pleased with the reasoning and restored both mother and son to their former honours.

When Vidudabha became king, he remembered the humiliation he had suffered on account of the Sakyans and assembled an army to attack them. Although the Buddha tried to intervene three times, he could not avert the disaster. The Buddha realized that his kinsmen had to face the consequence of the evil deed that they had committed in their past lives by throwing poison into the river. Finally Vidudabha marched on the Sakyan clan and massacred them all except the followers of Mahanama and others who had escaped. Vidudabha died in a flood shortly after attacking Kapilavathu. Later Ajatasattu invaded Kosala and conquered the country during the Buddha’s 44th Vassa. That the Sakyans (probably Mahanama’s followers who were spared by Vidudabha and other survivors) continued to occupy Kapilavathu is shown by the fact that when Buddha passed away in Kushinagar a year later, the Sakyans of Kapilavathu came with an army to claim a share of his relics over which they erected a stupa.

1.6 Ramagama & Devadaha, Kingdom of Koliyas

a) How to reach there

Ramagama lies 4 km south of the town of Parasi in Nawalparasi district about 20 km from Bhairawa. The journey from Bhairawa passes the scenic **Rohini River** that separates the kingdoms of the Sakyas and the Koliyas. These two tribes almost went to war over its waters but the Buddha intervened to end the quarrel. From Parasi, the all weather road to Ramagama is mostly unpaved and bumpy but passes through scenic rural villages.

b) Religious Significance

The Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana* at Kusinara on the full-moon day of Wesak 543 BC. After the cremation, his relics were divided into eight equal portions by the brahmin **Dona**, who distributed them to eight clans, namely: King **Ajatasattu** of Magadha, the **Licchavis** of Vesali, the **Sakyas** of Kapilavatthu, the **Bulians** of Allakappa, the **Koliyas** of Ramagama, the brahman of **Vethadipa**, the **Mallas** of Pava and the **Mallas** of Kushinagar.

Dona himself kept the urn used for dividing the relics. When the **Moriyas** of Pipphalavana arrived, it was too late as all the relics had been distributed, so they took from there the ashes. Returning home, these men raised *stupas* to honour them. So it came about that there were eight *stupas* for the relics, a ninth for the urn, and a tenth for the ashes.

According to the ‘**Thupavamsa**’ written during the 12th century AD, **Ven. Mahakassapa**, realizing the risk involved in keeping the bone relics scattered about in several places, implored **King Ajatasattu** to have them securely preserved. Accordingly, the king took out the relics from seven *stupas*, leaving behind what little was required for worship. All the relics collected were taken to Rajagaha and buried underground, whereon was erected a *stupa*. During the 3rd century

BC, **Emperor Asoka** again removed a portion of the relics from all the *stupas* to distribute them in 84,000 new *stupas* he built all over his empire. When he came to **Ramagama** to remove its relics, the **Naga** (serpent) from a nearby lake, apprehending the desecration of the place, appeared in the form of a Brahman and asked him not to do so as he wanted to worship it. So Asoka left empty-handed.

The Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang** visited **Ramagama or Lan-Mo** in 636-7 AD. It was desolate and sparsely populated. There was a big lake, a *stupa* and a monastery with a novice (*samanera*) as its abbot. To the east of the city was a brick *stupa* more than 100 feet high. After the *Parinibbana* of the *Tathagata*, the king of this country, having obtained a share of his bone relics built the *stupa*. The *stupa* often issued a bright light. Beside it was a naga's (serpent) pool. A naga at certain periods comes forth and walks here, and changing his form and snake-like exterior and circum-ambulates the *stupa* keeping it to the right in honour. Wild elephants come in herds, gather flowers, and scatter them here. Impressed with this incident a visiting monk decided to stay behind to take care of the *stupa*. He gave up his monk-hood to become a *samanera*, built a house and tilled the land to plant flowers and fruit trees. The people of the neighbouring countries heard about this and donated money to build a monastery and invited the *Samanera* to be its abbot. Since that time, there has been no interruption in the original appointment and a *samanera* has always been abbot of the monastery.

c) Ramagama Stupa

The remains of a *stupa* and monastery lie on the banks of the **Jahari River** near **Kerwani village**. The large *stupa* mound is about 9 metres high by 21 metres in diameter. In Buddhist Scriptures, the Koliyas of Ramagama are listed among the eight tribes that received a share of the corporeal relics of the Buddha at Kusinara.

The *Stupa* at Ramagama is believed to be the only original undisturbed *dhatu stupa* still standing that contains relics of Lord

Buddha. A research recently carried out by the Nepal Department of Archaeology showed that the different artifacts and antiquities were found near the *stupa*. A Japanese funded memorial is located just to the west of the oxbow lake and a monastery is also planned.

d) Devadaha, Home of Buddha's mother Maya Devi

Devadaha, capital of the Koliya republic, was the native village of Prince Siddhattha's mother Maya Devi as well as his aunt Maha Pajapati. It is 35km east of Lumbini and lies at the foothills of the Chure Mountain just south of the Main Himalayan Range. In the Scriptures, it is mentioned in *Devadaha Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, as the place where the Buddha censured the Niganthas for their wrong views.

In 2003, the Nepal Archaeology Department reported the discovery of Devdaha at **Panditpur, Baljiria** Village in **Nawalparasi District** after carrying out excavations there for five years. In the course of excavations, the archaeologists found a variety of ancient artifacts belonging to various dynasties of Maurya, Kushan and Gupta, which used to rule over territories on the banks of the Rohini River that demarcates the kingdoms of the Sakyas and Koliyas. The discovery of an ancient 700-metre perimeter wall and a canal for channeling the water from the Rohini River established the fact that the place was the ancient capital city of the Koliya republic.

However an organization called **Devdaha Conservation Academy** states in its website that Devadaha is located in **Bhabanipur**, 1 km south of **Barimai** and **Kanyamai** in the eastern tarai of **Rupandehi District**. It mentioned the presence of a broken Asokan Pillar beside a stone figure of the Sun God, to support its claim.

It is quite likely that the area of Devadaha is very large and occupies an area overlapping both Nawal Parasi and Rupandehi Districts as stated in the above two reports. Since 2007, the political situation in Nepal has returned to calm and it is now possible to visit Devadaha after visiting the Ramagama Stupa in Nawal Parasi District.

2. Bodhgaya, Place of the Buddha's Enlightenment

2.1 How to reach there

Bodhgaya is located in Bihar state, 105 km by road south of Patna or 230 km by road east of Varanasi. All distances are approximate.

3, 16, 26

2.2 Religious Significance

After the Great Renunciation, the *Bodhisatta* approached two ascetics named **Alara Kalama** and **Udakkā Ramaputta** who taught him to attain the Formless *Jhanas*. Although they were the highest attainments at that time, still he was dissatisfied because they did not lead to *Nibbana*. Leaving them, he arrived at an isolated cave on a hill now known as **Dhongra** hill, where he underwent painful and profitless practices for six years until his body became skeleton-like and he nearly died. Realizing the futility of self-mortification, he adopted the Middle Path and started eating again to regain his strength. His five companions, thinking that he had given up the struggle and reverted to luxury, left him. The *Bodhisatta* was now alone in his struggle. One day on the eve of *Wesak*, while waiting to go on alms-round under a Banyan tree, the *Bodhisatta* was offered milk rice in a golden dish by the **Lady Sujata**, daughter of the chieftain of the nearby village of **Senanigama**. After the meal, the *Bodhisatta* took the dish and went to the **Neranjara** river and saying: “*If I am to succeed in becoming a Buddha to-day, let this dish go upstream; but if not, let it go downstream*”, he threw it into the water. There it floated to the middle of the river and raced upstream for eighty cubits (37 m) before it sank in a whirlpool.

In the evening, on the way to the *Bodhi* tree, the *Bodhisatta* was offered eight handfuls of grass by the grass-cutter **Sotthiya**, which he placed on his seat under the *Bodhi* tree. Sitting cross-legged, facing the east, the *Bodhisatta* made a resolution, saying: “*Let my skin, sinews and bones become dry. Let my flesh and blood dry up. Never from this seat will I stir until I have attained Buddhahood.*”

This was the culmination of his Perfections developed over countless eons that no being, not even Mara and his dreaded army, could unseat the *Bodhisatta* from the *Aparajita* throne. When challenged by Mara, the *Bodhisatta* called upon the earth to bear witness to his Thirty Perfections, by touching the ground with his right hand. Instantly, the earth responded with a great quake that shook and scattered Mara and his forces until they fled in defeat. Before the sun had set, the *Bodhisatta* had vanquished Mara and his forces. Then with mind tranquilized and purified, in the first watch of night, he developed the Knowledge of Past Lives; in the middle watch, the Divine Eye; and in the last watch, he developed the Knowledge of Destruction of Taints and attained Supreme Enlightenment. A **Supreme Buddha** (*Samma-sambuddho*) had arisen in the world on the full moon day of *Wesak* in 588 BC.

2.3 Historical Background ^{9, 127}

Bodhgaya, the scene of the Buddha's Supreme Enlightenment, is the most hallowed place on earth to Buddhists. During the Buddha's time, this place by the banks of the River Neranjara was known as Uruvela. King Asoka was the first to build a temple at this sacred spot. A portrayal of the Asokan temple and other buildings at Bodhgaya has been found in a bas-relief on the **Bharhut Stupa** in Madhya Pradesh. Beginning with Asoka's first visit in 259 BC, countless pilgrims have gravitated to this **cradle of Buddhism** without intermission for more than 1500 years. The devastation of Buddhist *viharas* and shrines by Muslim hordes in the 13th century abruptly halted the flow of pilgrims to Bodhgaya. **Dharmasvamin**, a Tibetan pilgrim, visited Bodhgaya in 1234 AD. He found the place deserted and wrote:

“Only four monks were found staying (in the vihara). One said, ‘It is not good. All have fled in fear of the Turushka soldiery.’ They blocked up the door in front of the Mahabodhi image with bricks and plastered it. Near it they placed another image as a substitute.”

When Buddhism declined in India, the Burmese came to the rescue of the decaying Mahabodhi Temple by undertaking repairs during the 14th & 15th centuries. Thereafter, Bodhgaya was forgotten by the Buddhists and the Great Temple fell into ruins. A wandering Hindu ascetic, Mahant Gosain Giri, taking advantage of the situation, established his Math (temple) at Bodhgaya and took control of the Mahabodhi and environment in 1590 AD. Thereafter, the holy Buddhist shrine passed into the hands of successive Mahants (abbot) who used the place for sacrilegious practices. In 1861, Cunningham found the Mahant and his followers indulging in all sorts of non-Buddhist ceremonies at the main shrine. **Sir Edwin Arnold**, author of the “Light of Asia” visited the Mahabodhi Temple in 1885 and reported this observation in the Daily Telegraph in London:

“The Buddhist world had, indeed, well-nigh forgotten this hallowed and most interesting centre of their faith – the Mecca, the Jerusalem, of million Oriental congregations when I sojourned in Buddhagaya a few years ago. I was so grieved to see Maharatta peasants performing ‘Sharaddh (or Shrada)’ in such a place, and thousands of precious ancient relics of carved stone inscribed with Sanskrit lying in piles around.”

(**Note:** *Shrada* is a Hindu funereal offering ceremony.)

2.4 Anagarika Dharmapala and Maha Bodhi Society 5, 23

The battle to regain control of the Mahabodhi Temple by Buddhists began in January 22, 1891 when **Anagarika Dharmapala** visited Bodhgaya. Visibly moved by the neglect and sacrilege of this most sacred shrine, he took the vow, “*I will work on to make this sacred spot to be cared for by our own Bhikkhus.*” As a first step, he founded the **Maha Bodhi Society** of Buddhagaya in May 31, 1891 to garner support for this noble objective. Next, he invited four Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka to come and stay at Bodhgaya, namely: Ven. **Chandajoti**, Ven. **Sumangala**, Ven. **Pemmananda** and Ven. **Sudassana**. They arrived at Bodhgaya in July 1891 and

took up residence in the Burmese Rest House. As the Mahant had property rights to the land in Bodhgaya, he objected to their presence and in February 1893, two of the monks were severely beaten up by his men. Two years later in 1895, when Anagarika Dharmapala attempted to install a Buddha image presented to him by the people of Japan on the upper floor of the Temple, he was assaulted and prevented to do so by the Mahant's men. So the image was kept in the Burmese Rest House. Still the Mahant and some Hindu organizations were not satisfied and tried to get the image removed from the Rest House but the Government did not yield.

In 1906, the Mahant filed a suit seeking to eject the Buddhist monks from the Rest House. Thereafter a long legal battle ensued between the Mahant and the Buddhists, which continued till 1949, when the State of Bihar enacted the Buddha Gaya Temple Management Act, which effectively transferred control of the Temple land and other property to a Management Committee. Two things of the Bill were objectionable; one that the nine-man Management Committee of the Temple would have a Hindu majority, and the other that Buddhist members should be of Indian nationality. In spite of protests by the Maha Bodhi Society, the Bill was passed with an amendment for provision of an Advisory Board in which the majority should be Buddhists and not necessarily all of Indian nationality. This means that Buddhists can only advise on the management of the Mahabodhi Temple but the control and final say belongs to the Hindus!

To the Maha Bodhi Society, there is no justification for the Mahabodhi Temple to be controlled by non-Buddhists just as a Muslim mosque, a Christian church or a Hindu temple were to be controlled by persons of different faiths. Even Indian Noble laureate **Rabindra Nath Tagore** objected by expressing his views as follows: *“I am sure, it will be admitted by all Hindus who are true to their own ideals, that it is an intolerable wrong to allow the Temple raised on the spot where Lord Buddha attained His Enlightenment, to remain under the control of a rival sect, which can neither have an intimate knowledge of, nor sympathy for, the Buddhist religion and its rites of worship.”*

In his article entitled “The Vow Still Remains” in Sambodhi 1996, the **late Ven. Pannarama Mahathera**, *Bhikkhu*-in-charge of Buddhagaya Maha Bodhi Society, revealed the irony that even the Advisory Board which was supposed to be controlled by Buddhists, has only 11 Buddhist members but 14 non-Buddhist members! It is time that these non-Buddhist members should be replaced by representatives from Buddhist organizations, which are really concerned about the development of Bodhgaya, the place of Buddha’s Enlightenment. Thus, Dharmapala’s vow is not fulfilled and it still remains.

26, 27, 31, 32

2.5 Objects of Interest

a) Mahabodhi Temple

The Mahabodhi Temple has a long history. Excavations by Cunningham in 1872 suggested three periods in its construction. The first phase of construction by King Asoka during the 3rd century BC was the *Bodhi Shrine*, represented in the bas-relief on the 2nd century BC Bharhut *Stupa*. The second phase of construction during the 1st century AD, involved renovation of the original *Bodhi Shrine* by two pious ladies, **Surangi** and **Nagadevi**, wives of **Sunga** kings. **Huviska**, the Kusana king of the 2nd century AD undertook the third phase of construction. The images of the Buddha originated during this period. Therefore shrines were erected for their installation. Cunningham suggested that the entire Mahabodhi Temple, as seen today, was mainly the structure of the Huviska period (111-138 AD). As it was built over the remains of Asoka’s shrine, the Vajrasana Throne retains its original position of the Seat of Enlightenment. In the 7th century AD, renovations were carried out which included placing a new basalt slab over the older plaster throne at the Vajrasana. In the late 19th century, massive renovations were carried out under the able supervision of Cunningham, Beglar and R. L. Mitra to restore the Maha Bodhi Temple, which had fallen into ruins after centuries of vandalism and neglect by its squatter-occupants,

the successor Mahants of Gosain Giri. The magnificent building we see today is the result of the rare devotion and dedication of **Cunningham**, **Beglar** and **Mitra**.

The Mahabodhi Temple is undoubtedly the most exquisite-looking building in Bodhgaya. Standing 52 m high with a base of 15.2 m square, it consists of a straight pyramidal tower surmounted by a *stupa*. At the corners of the base, there arise four smaller towers – miniature replicas of the main spire. The main door faces east and in front of it, there is an imposing ancient gateway decorated with carvings. The niches on the walls of both sides of the Temple contain images of the Buddha. The main shrine hall or Sanctum on the ground floor is reached after passing through a vaulted passage, on both sides of which are stone staircases leading up to a smaller shrine hall on the first floor.

On entering the Sanctum, one comes face-to-face with the great gilded image of the Buddha seated in the earth-touching posture (*bhumi-phassa-mudra*). Just gazing at this magnificent image of our Lord will certainly evoke feelings of joy and reverence in the heart of the pilgrim! This is the result of the faith and devotion in heeding the Buddha's exhortation to "*visit the holy places and look upon them with feelings of reverence*".

The colossal gilded image is from the 10th century AD. Here the Buddha is depicted as sitting on a patterned cushion instead of a lotus. It is supported by a pedestal, decorated with figures of lions alternating with elephants. The patterned cushion is a common feature found in other Buddha images from Eastern India, which was probably copied from this image. Most people are not aware of the fact that this image was not in the temple when archeological explorations were going on in and around Buddhagaya by the then British government. According to an article on "Buddhagaya Sculptures" in the Sambodhi 1993, R. L. Mitra noted that it was in the Mahant's compound. Later on, at the request of **Cunningham** and **Beglar**, it was moved to its present location at the main shrine. If not for the timely intervention of these two gentlemen, this inspiring image would still be wasting in the Mahant's compound instead of its present rightful place for pilgrims to worship!

b) Bodhi Tree (*Bodhidruma*)

The *Bodhi* tree under which the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment is situated behind the Temple. It is a Pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), also known in Pali as ‘*assattha*’. It is said to have sprung up at the same time when the Buddha was born, i.e., his co-natal (*sahajata*). According to the commentaries, different Buddhas attained Enlightenment seated under different trees of their choice and each of them became the ‘**Bodhi tree**’ of the particular Buddha during his dispensation. In the present dispensation, only the *Bodhi* tree of Gotama Buddha is revered. The site of the *Bodhi* tree is the same for all Buddhas. It is believed that no place on earth can support the weight of the Buddha’s Enlightenment. The ground is so firm that it remained unmoved, even as a violent earthquake shook the world and scattered Mara and his army who had come to challenge the *Bodhisatta* for the Seat of Enlightenment. Even Sakka *Devaraja* is unable to travel in the air immediately above it.

From earliest times, kings and commoners have come here to honor it. Being the object of veneration of Buddhists, it naturally became the target of destruction by the enemies of Buddhism. According to Hsüan Tsang, the *Bodhi* tree was first cut down by **Asoka** before his conversion but later out of remorse, he revived the tree by bathing the roots with scented water and milk. Asoka paid homage to the tree so earnestly that his queen, **Tissarakkha**, was filled with jealousy and had it destroyed secretly. Again Asoka had it revived. Thereafter, he built a wall over 3 m high to surround it for protection. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire in the 2nd century BC, the Sunga king **Pusyamitra**, a persecutor of Buddhism, also destroyed the *Bodhi* tree but a sapling of the tree from Sri Lanka was brought back and replanted in the same spot. During the 6th century AD, **Sasanka**, a Hindu king cut down the *Bodhi* tree but sometime later it was replanted with a sapling from the *Bodhi* tree in Sri Lanka by King **Purvavarma** of Magadha, who then built a wall 7.3 m high to surround it. Its remains were 6.1 m high when Hsüan Tsang visited it. In 1876, the old decaying *Bodhi* tree fell down during a storm. **Cunningham** replanted a sapling from it on the same spot. The present *Bodhi* tree is over 130 years old now.

c) *Vajrasana* or Diamond Throne where Buddha sat facing east

The *Vajrasana* is located between the *Bodhi* tree and the Temple. It marks the actual spot where the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment. It is said that the **Buddha sat facing east** with his back to the trunk of the Bodhi tree. According to legend, when the *Bodhisatta* tried sitting on the other three sides of the tree, the ground on which he sat sank down. Only the eastern side held firm, capable of supporting his enlightenment. A more practical reason why the Buddha chose the eastern side was to avoid the afternoon sun from the west, which is quite strong during the month of May. A red sandstone slab measuring 2.3 meters long by 1.3m wide by 0.9m high now marks the site Enlightenment. Pilgrims who visit this spot should spend some time in this conducive place to reflect on the virtues of the Buddha, to attain fullness of faith and calm, followed by mindfulness meditation to develop spiritual insight.

d) The Buddha's Stay at Seven Places after Enlightenment

After attaining Buddhahood on the full-moon night of *Wesak*, as dawn broke, the Buddha uttered a paean of joy (*udana*). While sitting on the *Vajrasana*, he decided to continue sitting on the undefeated throne on which he overcame Mara and fulfilled all his wishes, including the one to become a Buddha.

• **First Week on the Throne (*Pallanka Sattaha*)**

The Buddha sat on the Diamond Throne for seven days in meditation absorbed in the bliss of emancipation (*Arahantship* Fruition). At the end of seven days, he emerged from the absorption and contemplated on the Doctrine of **Dependent Origination** (*Paticca Samuppada*) the whole night.

• **Second Week of the Unblinking Gaze (*Animisa Sattaha*)**

Throughout the second week, as a mark of gratitude to the *Bodhi* Tree for providing him shelter, the Buddha stood gazing at it without

closing his eyes. On the spot where the Buddha stood a shrine was erected by King Asoka. Called the *Animisilocana Cetiya* or 'Unblenching Gaze' shrine, it is located on elevated ground within the courtyard in front of the Temple.

- **Third Week on the Walk (*Cankama Sattaha*)**

The third week was spent on walking meditation along a 'jewelled promenade or *Cankama*' running from east to west between the Diamond throne and the *Animisilocana Cetiya*.

- **Fourth Week in Jewelled House (*Ratanaghara Sattaha*)**

The Buddha spent the fourth week in the 'Jewelled House', reflecting on the *Abhidhamma*, which deals with absolute truths concerning mental and material processes. As he contemplated on the deep and profound doctrine of the *Patthana* or **Conditional Relations**, there arose great rapture in the Omniscient mind, which activated material processes in the body to emit rays of six colours – blue, gold, white, red, pink and a massive brightness of all these assorted colours. This spot is now marked by a small shrine within the compound to the north of the *Cankama*.

- **Fifth Week at Ajapala Nigrodha Tree (*Ajapala Sattaha*)**

During the fifth week, the Buddha sat at the root of the *Ajapala* Banyan tree reflecting on the *Dhamma* and absorbed in the bliss of *Phalasamapatti* (Fruition of *Arahantship*). This Banyan tree was called *Ajapala* because goatherds came for shelter under its shade. Here the Buddha declared the qualities of a true Brahman in reply to a question by a conceited *brahmin*. This site is indicated by a signboard within the courtyard, directly in front of the Temple.

- **Sixth Week at Mucalinda (*Mucalinda Sattaha*)**

After seven days at the *Ajapala* Banyan tree, the Buddha moved to the Mucalinda (*Barringtonia acutangula*) tree, a short distance south of the Temple. There he sat for seven days at the root of the

Mucalinda tree, absorbed in the bliss of *Arahantship*. At that time, there arose an untimely rainstorm and gloom for seven days. Mucalinda, serpent king of the lake, came out and used its coils to encircle the Buddha's body and its hood to cover the Buddha's head thereby protecting the Lord. The site of this episode is at the Mucalinda pond, a short distance south of the Temple.

• **Seventh Week at Rajayatana Tree (*Rajayatana Sattaha*)**

After seven days at the Mucalinda tree, the Buddha moved to the Rajayatana tree (*Buchanania latifolia*) near the Temple. Here he sat at the foot of the tree absorbed in the bliss of *Arahantship* for seven days. At that time, two merchant brothers, **Tapussa** and **Bhallika**, from **Ukkala** in **Myanmar** met the Buddha and offered him rice cakes and honey. They became the first lay disciples and asked the Buddha for an object of worship. Thereupon the Buddha rubbed his head and presented them with eight hairs. The brothers return to their native Myanmar with the precious hair relics, which were later enshrined by the king in **Shwedagon Pagoda** in Yangon. The site of this episode is marked by a signboard just south of the Temple.

e) Sujata Kuti, Site of Lady Sujata's Milk Rice Offering

Just across the new bridge over the river Neranjara is the village of **Bakraur**. Pilgrims visiting this place will come across a grassy mound that is fenced up. This site is popularly known as **Sujata Kuti or Sujatagarh** while the village was known as **Senanigama** during the Buddha's time. In 1973-74, the Archeological Society of India (ASI) undertook excavations of the mound to reveal the remains of an extensive brick *stupa* 65.5m in diameter and 11m high, indicating the religious importance of the place.

According to the ASI Report by Navin Kumar³⁴, the *stupa* was built in three stages. The last phase of the *stupa* can be assigned to a date between the 8th and 9th century AD, on the basis of terracotta sealing and plaques. It is quite likely that the religious zeal of the Pala Kings

was responsible for the enclosure wall, railing and the gateway. The earliest occupation of the site may be placed in the 1st-2nd century BC, on the basis of fragments of dark grey polished ware found in a partially exposed monastery-like structure towards the northeast of the *stupa*. The presence of this large *stupa* appears to indicate that it is probably the place where the **Lady Sujata offered milk rice** to the *Bodhisatta* prior to Enlightenment since the selection of sites for *stupas* were not arbitrary. Such memorials were erected at places that were traditionally connected with important events in the Buddha's life.

f) Uruvela Forest

The area, which was once a forest, is now a wooded area some distance from *Sujata Kuti*. Here one can find an old building with a dry well in the centre. This site is believed to be the fire-chamber of the **Kassapa brothers**, three matted-hair *Jatilas*, who had a following of one thousand disciples. Here the Buddha tamed the serpent, which inhabited the fire chamber. The taming of the elder Kassapa brother **Uruvela** took a longer time. The Buddha had to employ his psychic powers to convert the misguided *Jatila*. After Uruvela Kassapa became the Buddha's disciple, his brothers, **Nadi** and **Gaya**, followed suit together with their followers. After hearing the **Fire Sermon** preached by the Buddha, the thousand newly ordained *bhikkhus* became *Arahants*.

g) Pragbodhi, the Place where the Bodhisatta practised Severe Austerities for six years

Prior to Enlightenment, the *Bodhisatta* was staying on the right bank of the river Neranjara in a thickly forested area near **Pragbodhi** (i.e. before Bodhi hill). Tradition says that he sheltered in the small cave now known as **Dungeswari**, halfway up this hill. After undergoing painful and profitless austerity practices for six years, he decided to adopt the Middle Path and moved to the Uruvela forest near the

village of Senanigama, which is the present day village of Bakraur. A short climb up a steep path leads to a small temple near the cave run by Tibetan monks. Inside the **Dungeswari cave** is a skeleton-like statue of the *Bodhisatta* illustrating the result of his six years' practice of self-mortification. The Pragbodhi hill is now known as **Dhongra hill**, which rising about a mile north-east of Bakraur, is about 30 minutes drive on the road towards Rajgir.

h) Temples and Monasteries in Bodhgaya

Bodhgaya is the **fountain of Buddhism**. It occupies an area of only 15 square km, but within this small area are found over thirty monasteries and institutions representing every country in the world with a sizeable Buddhist community. A visit to some of these temples can help one to understand how the religion is practised in different countries according to local culture that does not run counter to the Buddha *Dhamma*. There are also a few *Vipassana* meditation centres, such as the Burmese *Vihara* and the International Meditation Centre and lately the Mahabodhi Meditation Centre, to cater for yogis who wish to spend a meditation retreat at Bodhgaya. The names of Buddhist temples, monasteries and institutions listed in the Buddha Mahotsav 1999 Souvenir Programme are shown below, in alphabetical order:

All India Bhikkhu Sangha, Asian Buddhist Culture Centre, Bangladesh Temple, Buddhagaya Temple Management Committee, Burmese Vihar, Chinese Temple, Daijokyo Japanese Buddhist Temple, Dhamma Bodhi Meditation Centre, Drikyug Charitable Trust, Druk Nawag Thupten Choeling, Indosan Nipponjee Japanese Temple, International Meditation Centre, Jambunad Vihar, Karma Temple, Korea Temple, Maha Bodhi Society, Maha Bhumi Vihara, Maitreya Project, Nav Bauddha Vihar, Panch Sheela Vihar, Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Royal Bhutan Temple, Sakya Monastery, Sambodhi Welfare and Cultural Society, Shechen Monastery, Taiwan Temple, Tamang Nepal Temple, Thai Bharat Society, Thai Bodhi Kam, Tibetan Temple, Trailokya Centre, Vietnam Temple and Wat Thai Temple.

3. Sarnath, Place of the Buddha's First Sermon

3.1 How to reach there

Sarnath is located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, 30 km from the city of Varanasi (Benares). From Bodhgaya, the distance is 250 km. All distances are approximate.

3.2 Religious Significance ^{3, 25, 26}

After spending seven weeks at the seven places in Bodhgaya following his Enlightenment, the Buddha was undecided about teaching the *Dhamma* to others as He realized that it was profound and hard to discover, and others would not understand Him. **Brahma Sahampati** who became aware of the Buddha's thoughts pleaded with Him to teach the *Dhamma* otherwise the world would be lost. The Blessed One listened to Brahma Sahampati's pleading and out of compassion decided to go to Benares to preach to the Five Ascetics, namely: **Kondanna, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahanama** and **Assaji**, who had served him for 6 years, but left after he abandoned the path of self-mortification.

Travelling on foot, he arrived at **Deer Park** or **Isipatana** in modern day Sarnath on the full-moon day of *Asalha*, exactly two months after *Wesak*. When they saw the Buddha coming in the distance, they decided not to welcome him, but as soon as the Buddha approached, they found themselves unable to keep their pact and began to serve him. The Buddha was able to convince them of his Attainment. That very night, the Buddha delivered the historic **First Sermon**, the ***Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*** or Discourse on Turning the Wheel of *Dhamma*, which led to Kondanna attaining the first stage of sainthood at the end of the discourse. The remaining four ascetics attained the first stage of sainthood successively over the next four days. Later, the Buddha preached to them the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* or Discourse on the Characteristics of Non-Self, hearing which they attained *Arahantship* or final sainthood.

In Sarnath too, the Buddha converted the rich man **Yasa** and his 54 friends, who also became *Arahants*. Later, the Buddha dispatched them in various directions to propagate the *Dhamma*, with each to go a separate way. Thus Sarnath became famous as the place of the **First Sermon**, as well as the **founding of the Sangha** (Monkhood).

3.3 Historical Background ^{5, 27}

King Asoka visited Sarnath in 249 BC and erected several monuments to mark his pilgrimage, notably; the ***Dhamek stupa***, ***Dharmarajika stupa*** and the Asokan pillar surmounted by the famous **Lion Capital**, which is now the crest of India. During the reign of King Kaniska (78 AD), Sarnath was a centre of religious activity and the famous colossal ***Bodhisatta*** image with a large parasol was installed by the *bhikkhu* **Bala** of Mathura. During the Gupta period (4th-6th century AD), the *Dhamek Stupa* was encased with carved stones, the **Mulagandhakuti** main shrine was enlarged and the famous Preaching Buddha image, a gift of King Kumaragupta, was added. In 520 AD, Sarnath had its share of destruction during the invasion of the Huns under the barbarian Mihirakula. But after the Huns were defeated, Sarnath again flourished under the Buddhist king, **Harsa Vardharna** (606-647 AD) and continued to be a living shrine under the **Pala kings** (8th-12th century AD). The last known patron of Sarnath was **Queen Kumaradevi**, the pious Buddhist wife of King Govindachandra of Benares (1114-1154). She built a large monastery at Sarnath named Dhammacakka Jina Vihara, the ruins of which were exposed during excavations in the early 20th century. Things took a turn for the worst when Muslim hordes overran India at the close of the 12th century AD and started their trail of destruction.

After the Diaspora of the ***Sangha*** in India, Sarnath became deserted and was forgotten for about 600 years. Archeological excavations at the site in the 1800's by **Major Kittoe** revealed evidence of a tragic period of massive and sudden destruction by fire. The discoveries of remains of ready-made wheaten cakes and wheat and other grain in some of the cells suggest that the conflagration had been so sudden

and rapid, as to force the monks to abandon their very food. In short, the evidence would indicate that the destruction was caused by fire applied by the hands of an **exterminating adversary** rather than by any ordinary conflagration! According to Cunningham, so vividly was the **impression of a great final catastrophe** by fire fixed in Major Kittoe's mind that he summed his conclusion as follows: "*All have been sacked and burnt, priests, temples, idols, all together. In some places, bones, iron, timber, idols, etc., are all fused into huge heaps; and this has happened more than once.*"

In 1794, Sarnath came to the notice of the world under tragic circumstances. **Jagat Singh**, a minister in Benares, dismantled the famous Dharmarajika *stupa* as a convenient way of collecting bricks and stones for building a housing colony, which he named Jagatjanj, after himself. When the *stupa* was pulled down, workmen found at a depth of 8.3 m, a stone box containing a green marble casket. Inside it were human relics, presumably those of the Buddha enshrined there by King Asoka. Following Hindu rites, Jagat Singh consigned them into the Ganges River, where they were lost forever.

This act of vandalism would have gone unnoticed but for a report about the said discovery by **Jonathan Duncan**, Commissioner of Benares, which appeared in the 'Asiatic Researches'. Soon public attention was attracted to the ruins of Sarnath and in 1815 **Col. C. Mackenzie** began explorations and discovered some sculptures, which are now kept at the Calcutta Museum. In 1835-36, Cunningham carried out excavations and recovered over forty sculptures and carved stones. Another tragedy struck when they were carted away in his absence together with sixty cartloads of stones from the shrines as construction material for two bridges and some buildings in Benares. Further excavations were continued on and off from 1851 to 1922, which exposed the **Dhamek stupa**, the **Dharmarajika stupa**, **Mulagandhakuti** shrine, **Asokan** pillar and the ruins of several monasteries. The first four monuments are considered **sacred** because of their association with the Buddha. The fifth sacred spot is probably the sunken shrine of **Pancayatana**, which is believed by some monk teachers to be the site where the Buddha preached to the rich man **Yasa**.

3.4 Objects of Interest ^{5, 27}

a) Dhamek *Stupa*

Dhamek *stupa*, the most imposing structure in Sarnath, is cylindrical in shape, 28.5 m in basal diameter and 43.6 m tall. During the Gupta period, the lower portion was encased in stone, having beautiful carvings all round. The design consists of a broad band of *Swastikas* worked into different geometrical patterns, with a chiselled lotus wreath running above and below the *Swastikas*. Cunningham who explored Sarnath in 1835-36 recorded the following:

“On the authority of the work-people, the dilapidated state of the lower part of the Dhamek stupa is due entirely to the meanness of Jagat Singh, who, to save a few rupees in the purchase of new stones, deliberately destroyed the beautiful facing of this ancient tower. As each stone was slowly detached from the monument by cutting out all the iron cramps, the actual saving to Jagat Singh could have been but little; but the defacement to the tower was very great, and, as the stones were removed at once, the damage done to the tower is quite irreparable!” (ASI Report 1862-63-64-65, Vol. I)

While boring a shaft in the centre of the *stupa* in search of relics, Cunningham found remains of an earlier *stupa* of Mauryan bricks. It was probably the *stupa* raised by Asoka when he visited Sarnath. No bodily relics were found inside this *stupa*, but a slab with Buddha's creed ‘*ye dhamma hetuppabhava, etc.*’ in the characters of the 6th and 7th century was discovered. This appears to suggest its close association with the Buddha's teachings. According to an inscription of the Pala king Mahipala I (1026 AD), its original name was Dhammacakka *stupa*. The Archeological Survey of India used this finding to support its claim that this spot marks the site of the First Sermon but it is not convincing enough. Burmese monks believe that **Dhammarajika Stupa**, the **relic stupa** raised by King Asoka, is the site of the **First Sermon**. According to them, **Dhamek Stupa** is a memorial *stupa* raised by King Asoka to mark the site where the Buddha preached the second sermon ‘*Anattalakkhana Sutta*’, hearing which the Five Ascetics attained Arahantship.

b) Dharmarajika *Stupa*

The ruins of the Dharmarajika *stupa* is a short distance north of the Dhamek *stupa*, and consists of a circular base of what remained after the wanton act of **destruction by Jagat Singh**. The original *stupa* built by King Asoka was 13.4 m in diameter but was enlarged twice during the Gupta period so that the base we see today is larger. The Dharmarajika *stupa* as its name indicates, was believed to be built by King Asoka to enshrine the **bodily relics** of the Buddha at the time of his re-distributing the relics from the seven original *stupas* and enshrining them in a number of other *stupas* at different places. It is the only relic *stupa* in Deer Park, the Dhamek *stupa* being only a memorial *stupa*. This fact supports the view that the site must have been the venue of a very significant event such as the First Sermon. The Burmese are of the opinion that the Dharmarajika *stupa* marks the site of the First Sermon while the Dhamek *stupa* marks the site of the preaching of the second sermon, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*.

Seeing the vestige of this once-glorious *stupa* reduced to ground zero at the site where Buddha preached the First Sermon will surely arouse apprehension among the pious disciples and spur them to practise the Buddha's Teachings in earnest.

c) *Mulagandhakuti* (Main Shrine)

North of the *Dharmarajika stupa* are the ruins of the Main Shrine, site of the **Mulagandhakuti** or First Perfumed Chamber where the Buddha spent the first rains-retreat. According to the Dhammapada Commentary, the rich man **Nandiya** was the donor and as soon as the Buddha accepted the gift, a celestial mansion arose in Tavatimsa Heaven awaiting its owner, Nandiya. The main shrine was a square building, 18.3 m on each side, with the entrance facing east. The area between the ruins of the Main Shrine and the Dharmarajika *stupa* is believed to be the site of the *Cankama*, the promenade where the Buddha did his walking meditation. This belief is supported by the discovery of the famous colossal *Bodhisatta* image installed at this site by **Bhikkhu Bala** of Mathura.

d) Asokan Pillar

A short distance to the west of Mulagandhakuti under a flat roof and enclosed by railings stands the 2 m high base of the Asokan pillar. The original pillar was 15 m high and surmounted by the famous **Lion Capital**, which can be seen in Sarnath Museum. This pillar is believed to mark the site where the Buddha assembled the *Sangha* comprising sixty *Arahants* and exhorted them to go in different directions to spread the Teaching. On the pillar is an inscription, which says: “*Let no one cause a division in the Sangha.*” During Asoka’s time, *bhikkhus* from many sects lived in Sarnath and it is believed that he issued this ***Sanghabhedaka*** (Cause a Schism in the Order) Edict to promote harmony among the various Buddhist sects.

e) Sunken Shrine of *Pancayatana*

To the east of the Dhammarajika *stupa*, is a sunken shrine under a concrete platform. It is made of terra cotta bricks and modelled to resemble one of the four-squares temples of the Gupta period, called ‘*pancayatana*’ or ‘five bases’. The site of this sunken shrine of *Pancayatana* is believed by the Burmese to be the place where the Buddha preached to the rich man Yasa. Being not as well known as the four main monuments of Sarnath, it has fewer visitors. As a result, it is a quieter and more conducive place for meditation.

f) Mulagandha Kutty Vihara³⁸

About 500m east of the Dhamek *stupa* stands the Mulagandha Kutty *Vihara*, built by the Maha Bodhi Society of India in 1931 under the untiring efforts of **Anagarika Dharmapala** with the financial assistance of his chief benefactor **Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Foster** of Hawaii. On the day of opening, the sacred relics of the Buddha unearthed in Taxila in 1913-14, were presented by the Director General of Archeology representing the Government to the Maha Bodhi Society. In 1913, British archaeologist **Sir John Marshall**

(1876-1958) made a significant discovery in the ancient city of **Taxila** in northern India. While excavating the ruins near the **Dhammarajika Stupa** in the **Chir Tope** mound at Taxila, 40km from Islamabad in Pakistan, he found the bone relics of the Buddha that had been enshrined during the Kushana period in 2nd century AD. Sixteen years later, **A. H. Longhurst** discovered another set of bone relics in **Nagarjunakonda** South India.

These two sets of relics are presently enshrined in an underground chamber under the Preaching Buddha image and are taken out every year during *Kathina* for worship. A famous Japanese artist, Kosetsu Nosu spent three years from 1932-35 painting the beautiful Ajanta style frescoes on both walls of the *vihara*. A British Buddhist, **B L Broughton** was the chief donor for this splendid work of beautifying the *vihara*. A short distance outside the *vihara* is a newly constructed shrine with life-size images, depicting Buddha's First Sermon to the Five Ascetics.

g) Sarnath Archeological Museum (Closed on Monday)

The museum houses antiquities recovered from the ruins at Deer Park during excavations from 1905 onwards. Inside the museum, numerous sculptures of the Buddha and *Bodhisatta*, mostly of the Gupta period (4th-5th centuries AD) are displayed. The four most important sculptures on display are described as follows:

- **Lion Capital**

On entering the main hall, one sees the most magnificent sculpture of **Mauryan art** – the Lion Capital, which once crowned the Asokan Pillar at Deer Park. This polished sandstone sculpture is 2.3 m tall and consists of four lions sitting back to back on a circular abacus about 0.3 m high. The abacus has four running animals, each separated by a *Dhammacakka* wheel on its side, namely: Bull representing the Buddha's birth sign; Elephant representing his conception as Maya Devi dreamt that an elephant entered her womb;

Horse representing the *Bodhisatta*'s renunciation as he left home on his horse Kanthaka; Lion representing his First Sermon. The four lions that surmount the Capital represent the roar of the Buddha in the four directions. The Lion Capital is the **crest of India** and the *Dhammacakka* Wheel is the emblem of its **national flag**.

- **Colossal Bodhisatta Image**

This colossal standing image is of red sandstone donated by the *bhikkhu* Bala in AD 81 during the reign of King Kaniska and represents the best tradition of Mathuran art. Behind the statue is a stone shaft, which once supported a beautifully carved umbrella. The stone umbrella can also be seen in the main hall.

- **Buddha's Life Panels**

There is a sculptured panel showing the four principal events, namely: Birth, Enlightenment, First Sermon and *Mahaparinibbana* of the Lord Buddha. Another panel illustrates the eight events in the life of the Buddha, namely, the four principal events and the four miracles - the great miracle at **Sravasti**, the descent from Heaven at **Sankasya**, the taming of the drunken elephant Nalagiri at **Rajagaha** and the offering of honey to the Buddha by the monkeys at **Vesali**.

- **Preaching Buddha Image**

The seated Buddha image in *Dhammacakka mudra* or Preaching posture is one of the most beautiful creations of Gupta art. This famous sculpture was a gift of **King Kumaragupta** who ruled from AD 414-455. The halo around the head is carved with floral designs and has two celestial figures on both upper corners. Inset at the bottom are seven figures, representing the Five Ascetics plus the Queen and her son in kneeling position, paying homage to the *Dhammacakka* wheel. A picture of this sculpture can be seen on the cover of Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda's book, "The *Dhammapada*".

h) Mahabodhi Society

The credit for restoring Sarnath into a living shrine goes to **Anagarika Dharmapala**, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. He established the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath located on the left of the **Mulagandhakuti Vihara**, which it oversees, in addition to the Mahabodhi schools, college, library and training school for monks and nuns. Inside the Society building is a museum displaying photos and various paraphernalia belonging to the late Anagarika Dharmapala. Lately the Society has constructed a hospital to cater for the poor patients around Sarnath.

i) Chaukhandi

This is the first monument to be seen as one enters Sarnath. This mass of brickwork with an octagonal tower on top is what remains of an ancient *stupa*. The tower was constructed to commemorate the visit of Hamuyan, father of Akbar Khan to Sarnath in 1588 AD. This site is believed to be the place where the Buddha stopped to let the Five Ascetics see him and welcome him as he entered the Deer Park.

j) Temples and Monasteries in Sarnath

There are several modern temples and monasteries for the pilgrim to visit in Sarnath, namely: the Burmese *vihara*, Chinese temple, Japanese temple, Korean temple, Thai temple and three Tibetan monasteries. The Burmese monastery is called the Dhammacakka Vihara and was established by **Ven. Chandramani** of Kushinagar. The present abbot is **Ven. U Wannadhaza**, a Burmese Sayadaw, who has been in Sarnath for many years. Lately, the *vihara* has added a new wing to accommodate pilgrims visiting Sarnath. In 2008, the monastery celebrated the centenary of its founding.

4. Kusinara, Place of the Buddha's Passing Away

4.1 How to reach there

Kusinara or Kushinagar is in the village of **Kasia** in Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh. The nearest town is **Gorakhpur**, 55 km away. By road, Kushinagar is 130 km south of Lumbini, 250 km east of Sravasti and 250 km north of Patna. All distances are approximate. There are now good hotels for pilgrims to stay at Kushinagar.

3, 4, 25

4.2 Religious Significance

Three months before he reached the age of eighty, the Buddha renounced his will to live at the Capala Shrine in **Vesali**. Travelling in stages via **Pava** where he ate his last meal offered by the smith **Cunda**, he reached the final resting-place at the *Sala* grove of the Mallas by the bank of the **Hirannavati** River in **Kushinagar**. There on the full-moon day of *Wesak* in 543 BC, the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana*, the passing away into *Nibbana* wherein the elements of clinging do not arise (i.e. no more rebirth). His last convert was the wandering ascetic **Subhadda** and his last words to the *bhikkhus* were: “*Handa ‘dani bhikkhave amantayami vo: Vaya-dhamma sankhara. Appamadena sampadetha.*” (**Translation:** “Indeed, *bhikkhus*, I declare this to you: It is the nature of all conditioned things to perish. Accomplish all your duties with mindfulness.”)

The Buddha was lying on his right side between two *Sala* trees with his head to the north when he breathed his last. After his *Mahaparinibbana*, his body was taken into the town by the northern gate and out through the eastern gate to the consecration ground of the Mallas called **Makutabandhana**. They were unable to light the funeral pyre until Ven. **Maha Kassapa** came and paid his respects. After the cremation, the relics were divided into eight equal portions by the brahmin **Dona**, who distributed them to eight clans, namely:

- King **Ajatasattu** of Magadha,
- **Licchavis** of Vesali,
- **Sakyans** of Kapilavatthu,
- **Bulians** of Allakappa,
- **Koliyans** of Ramagama,
- Brahman of **Vethadipa**,
- **Mallas** of Pava and
- **Mallas** of Kushinagar.

Dona himself kept the urn used for dividing the relics. When the **Moriyas** of Pippalavana arrived, it was too late as all the relics had been distributed, so they took from there the ashes. Returning home, these men raised *stupas* to honour them. So it came about that there were eight *stupas* for the relics, a ninth for the urn, and a tenth for the ashes.

5, 27, 35

4.3 Historical Background

During the Buddha's time, Kushinagar was described by Ven. Ananda as "*this little mud-walled town, this back-woods town, this branch township*". After the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha, it became an important religious centre as Buddhism spread in India. As one of the four pilgrimage places mentioned by the Buddha, it attracted devout Buddhists from all over India and abroad. King Asoka visited Kushinagar in 249 BC and raised several *stupas* and pillars at the site. But by the time Hsüan Tsang visited Kushinagar in 637 AD, the place was in ruins and its towns and villages waste and desolate with few inhabitants. He saw the *Sala* trees under which the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana*, the *vihara* containing the Reclining Buddha image and beside it the 61 m tall *stupa* built by Asoka-rajā, in a ruinous state with a stone pillar in front. Further to the north, after crossing the Hirannavati river was a *stupa* marking the cremation site. Yet Kushinagar continued to be a living shrine until the 12th century AD but after the Muslim conquest of India, it became deserted and eventually fell into ruins and was forgotten.

After a silence of more than half a millennium, **Dr. H. Buchanan**, an officer of the East India Company visited it in the course of his survey-work early in 1811-12. He mentions it by the name of **Kasia**, as consisting of hardly a hundred huts with a police station. He saw the ruins and described them, but, like the local people, he was little aware of their identity and their possible significance to the Buddhist world. In 1854, H. H. Wilson casually suggested the identity of Kushinagar and Kasia, but it was only **Alexander Cunningham**, the Archaeological Surveyor who had the deep insight into Buddhist geography to place the identification on solid grounds in the course of his visit in **1861-62**. The village-name was pronounced to him variously as Kusia or Kasia, instead of the 'Kesiya' of Buchanan. The local names of the ruins and mounds engaged his attention. The main site was called **Matha-kuar-ka-kot** (instead of **Matakumar** of Buchanan) or the fort of Matha-kuar, who according to local belief was represented in the large stone image of a seated Buddha image lying unsheltered on a low mound near by. A kilometre and a half to the east stood the large hillock of brick ruins locally known by the name of **Ramabhar Tila** (or mound).

It was difficult for Cunningham to read the correct historical significance behind these names, though he tried to interpret the name **Mathakuar** to mean the 'dead prince', thus referring by implication to Buddha who belonged to the princely family of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu and died at the place. Fifteen years later Cunningham's assistant **Carlleyle** carried out extensive digging at the site and completely exposed the great central stupa and, most important of all, discovered, right at its front, the famous reclining statue of Buddha, the Nirvana statue buried in the debris of the ruins of an oblong shrine.

Though the location of ancient Kushinagar thus appeared to be quite certain, doubts were still raised about its accuracy. Better-planned excavations were therefore, undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1904-07 under **J. P. R. Vogel** and in 1910-12 by **Hirananda Shastri**. As a result numerous brick buildings were discovered clustering round the great central monuments and representing monasteries and secondary stupas and shrines. These excavations yielded irrefutable proofs of the identity of Kushinagar

and of the monuments in numerous inscriptions in the form of seals and a copper plate, the former referring to the Mahaparinibbana Vihara and the latter to the Mahaparinibbana Stupa itself. Although none of these records makes any direct mention of the name of Kushinagar, Brahmi writings on the copper plate stated that: “The Lord Buddha passed away here on this site” thereby confirming it as the place of the Buddha’s *Mahaparinibbana*.

4.4 Management of Mahaparinibbana Temple

In recent times, the first Buddhist to occupy Kushinagar was the **Ven. Mahavira**, an Indian national who was ordained as a monk in Sri Lanka, in 1890. He was responsible for restoring Kushinagar back to its rightful place as a sacred shrine. Ven. Mahavira repaired the main temple and built a *vihara* and *Dhamma* hall in 1902-03. After him came the **Ven. U Chandramani** from **Akyab (Sittwe)** in Arakan (Rakkhine State), Myanmar. He met Ven. Mahavira in 1895 while studying in Calcutta. Impressed by the keenness of the young monk, Ven. Mahavira made arrangements to sponsor his studies in India and Burma. Upon completion he returned to Kushinagar to assist Ven. Mahavira.

After the demise of his predecessor, Ven. U Chandramani continued the noble work. He succeeded in taking over the management of the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple from the Government after it was confirmed to be the site of the Buddha’s *Parinibbana*. Later he started educational institutions for the local people and reviving the tradition of ***Buddha Jayanti***, which was celebrated for the first time in Kushinagar in 1924. Ven. U Chandramani passed away in 1972 and was succeeded by his disciple, **Ven. U Gyaneshwar (U Nyanissara)**, a Myanmar monk who continues the noble task of taking care of the holy site. In 2002, the Myanmar Government awarded **Bhaddanta Gyaneshwar** the title ‘*Aggamahapandita*’ in recognition his distinguished services and in November 2005, he was conferred the title ‘*Aggamaha Sadhamma Jotikadhaja*’ on the occasion of his 70th birthday anniversary.

4.5 Objects of Interest

a) Mahaparinibbana Temple and Nirvana Buddha

The present Temple was built by the Indian Government in 1956 as part of the Commemoration of the 2500th year of *Mahaparinibbana* or 2500 BE (Buddhist Era). The old temple restored by **Carlleyle** was too small to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims visiting it. Inside this temple, one can see the famous Reclining Buddha image lying on its right side with the head to the north.

The statue of Buddha entering Nirvana is 6.1 m long and rests on a 7.3 m long stone couch. On the front side of the couch are three sculptures, believed to represent Ven. **Ananda** near the feet and **Ven. Subhadda** at the middle. The figure with long hair near the face of the Buddha is believed to represent a Malla chief.

At the centre is an inscription of the 5th century AD, which states the statue was, “*a gift of the monk Haribala to the Mahavihara and that it was fashioned by Dinna*”. This 1500-year old Reclining Buddha image was executed out of one block of red sandstone brought in from Mathura during the Gupta period. It was Carlleyle who discovered it in 1876 in a dilapidated shattered condition and successfully pieced together the numberless fragments found scattered about. This statue bears the 32 marks of the Great Man (*Mahapurisa*) and can evoke different feelings in one’s mind, depending on where one stands to look at it.

- In front of the face, one can discern a calm and serene mood in the face. At a certain angle above the head, one can even discern a smile in the lips of the figure.
- Near the middle part of the body, one can discern a mood of suffering in the face.
- At the feet, one can discern the scene of the Buddha passing away, without any pain in mind or body..

b) Mahaparinibbana or Nirvana Stupa

This *stupa* beside the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple is a restoration of the Main *stupa* exposed during excavations by Carlleyle in 1876. When examined to a depth of 4.3 m, it revealed a copper plate and other objects from the Gupta period. The inscription on the plate in Sanskrit mentioned that the monk **Haribala** deposited these objects in the Nirvana *stupa*. Hsüan Tsang, who visited Kusinara in 637 AD, mentioned that the Nirvana *stupa* was built by King Asoka. He also saw in front of it, a stone pillar to record the *Nirvana of Tathagata* but it bore no date. The Nirvana *stupa*, is believed to be erected originally by the Mallas, to enshrine the Buddha's relics, and subsequently enlarged by **King Asoka** and later during the Gupta period. The *Mahaparinibbana stupa* was renovated in 1927 with donations of a Myanmar devotee, **U Po Kyo**, and is 23 m tall.

c) Origin and Meaning of Matha Kuar Shrine

In the previous edition of this book, the author identified the Matha Kuar shrine as the place where the Buddha asked Ven. Ananda three times before the latter would go to the nearby stream to fetch him some water to drink. **This is incorrect.** The abovementioned event happened near Pava (see page 167). According to the Venerable **Pimbure Samitha Thero** of the Japan-Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple in Kushinagar, Lord Buddha took a brief rest at the site of the Matha Kuar shrine before proceeding to the Upavattana Sala Grove where he entered *Mahaparinibbana*. Here he preached the *Dhamma* to his disciples and said that he too was a human being subject to old age and various kinds of diseases in this world in order to arouse urgency in them. But he reminded that he had gained supreme knowledge and wisdom surpassing any other being in this world.

This place is called **Matha Kuar** and a shrine has been erected and installed with a colossal Buddha image in earth-touching posture (*bhumiphasa mudra*). This 3.05-m tall statue is carved out of one block of blue stone from the Gaya region and is about 1,000 years

old. The early chapel, which originally housed the Buddha image, formed part of a large quadrangular monastery (no trace of it is now visible). According to an inscription, it was constructed in the tenth century AD during the reign of a local Kalachuri chief. In 1927 Ven. U Chandramani built the present temple by out of donations of two Myanmar devotees, **U Po Kyo** and **U Po Hlaing**. It is located 0.4 km southwest of the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple.

Regarding the meaning of the name ‘**Matha Kuar**’ (or Matakumar according to Buchanan), Cunningham was probably correct when he interpreted it as ‘**Dead Prince**’ in reference to the colossal seated image in blue stone representing the Buddha. H. B. W. Garrick, an assistant of Cunningham, who visited the place in 1880-81 reported as follows: “This statue is set up lately by the local authorities at a distance of about 400 yards from the Main Temple and is called by the villagers ‘Matha Kuar’. It is now very devoutly worshipped by many sects of Hindus, who bring offerings of ghee and betel with which they besmear the face and sprinkle the figure; there is also to be seen, occasionally, a profuse supply of flower garlands about it. The Nirvana figure is also an object of worship, but there are iron gates to the chamber where it is enshrined, which can only be opened to worshippers on the payment of a fee; and that being an expensive luxury, it is indulged in by few amongst the wealthier classes, and the ascetic Buddha’s popularity is chiefly owing to its being situated in the open air, unguarded by priests and accessible without payment.”

d) Cremation Stupa or Makutabandhana Cetiya

After paying homage to the body of the Buddha for six days, the Mallas carried it to the **Makuta-bandhana**, the traditional place for crowning their chieftains, where they cremated it. The cremation ceremony is described in Part VI of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, which also describes the partitioning of the Buddha’s relics by the brahmin Dona. The Cremation *stupa* was raised by the Mallas some time after the Buddha’s cremation and repaired in the 3rd century BC

by Asoka and again in the 5th century AD during the reign of Gupta King Kumaragupta.

When Cunningham visited the site in 1861-62, it was just a big mound called **Ramabhar Tila** built of large bricks and stood about 15m above the fields. (Note: When Cunningham discovered the place, the Hindus had erected a temple dedicated to the Hindu deity **Ramabhar Bhavani** at the site. Although the temple was removed later, the *stupa* is still known as ‘**Ramabhar**’ to the locals).

The *stupa* consists of a circular drum 34m in diameter resting on a 47m-diameter platform. The mound had been thoroughly excavated 9 years earlier by someone. This very extensive excavation consisted of a circular well over 3m in diameter and about 15m deep, sunk in the centre of the mound, also three trenches cut through it; one of these trenches extended nearly to the ground level, the other two were smaller. During later excavations, a large number of clay seals inscribed with Buddhist verses were discovered which confirmed that it was the cremation site. It is about 1.6 km east of the Matha Kuar Shrine along the main road. In recent times, the area around the Cremation *stupa* has been planted with grass and is well maintained for the benefit of pilgrims.

e) Memorial *Stupa* of Ven. Mahavira, founder of Kushinagar

Ven. Mahavira was the **first Hindu** in modern times to become a **Buddhist monk**. Prior to this, he was a wrestler and while traveling in Sri Lanka he was attracted to Buddhism and ordained as a monk in 1890. In 1891 he returned to India and took up permanent residence in Kushinagar, which was then deserted after archeological excavations in 1876 by Carlleyle. He repaired the Mahaparinibbana Temple, which was in a neglected condition and turned it into a **pilgrimage site**, attracting many pilgrims, particularly the **Burmese** Buddhists. With the financial assistance of the Burmese, he bought the plot of land beside the Mahaparinibbana Temple and constructed a Rest House for the convenience of pilgrims in 1902 followed by a *Vihara* in 1903, which was the first modern *Vihara* to be erected anywhere in India. Ven. Mahavira died in March 1919 and his ashes

are buried in a small brick *stupa* located at a corner of the land behind the Mahaparinibbana Temple.

f) Shrine Depicting the Conversion of Dr. Ambedkar into Buddhism by Sayadaw U Chandramani on 14 Oct 1956

The most memorable event in the Buddhist world in modern times was the conversion of **380,000 Dalits** (Untouchables) into Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This historic event took place on 14 October 1956 at a 14-acre vacant plot of land now known as '**Diksha Bhumi**' in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The person chosen by Dr. Ambedkar to be his *Dhamma* Guru and administer the Three Refuges and Five Precepts was none other than **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar, whom Dr. Ambedkar regarded as his **true mentor**. The Nagpur conversion was the **greatest peaceful conversion in mankind** because never in the history of any religion in the world has so many people at one time and at the instance of one man, voluntarily changed their religion. To commemorate this historic event, a shrine was built at the Kushinagar Burmese Temple where Sayadaw U Chandramani was Abbot. Inside the shrine, one sees a statue of Dr. Ambedkar prostrating in front of a statue of his *Dhamma* Guru Sayadaw U Chandramani, **depicting his initiation** as a lay disciple. Two months later, Dr. Ambedkar passed away in New Delhi. Sayadaw U Chandramani continued his untiring efforts to rebuild the Buddha *Sasana* in India as well as in neighboring Nepal. He passed away in the Kushinagar Burmese Temple on 8 May 1972 at the age of 97, having lived nearly 80 years as a *bhikkhu* in India **servicing the cause of the *Sasana*** with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships he faced including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment.

g) Buddhist Monasteries in Kushinagar

In recent times there have been some developments in Kushinagar with the construction of several monasteries and other modern facilities for pilgrims. While in Kushinagar, pilgrims should visit the *viharas*, namely: Myanmar *Vihara*, Japan-Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, Chinese Monastery, Wat Thai and Tibetan Monastery, to

pay their respects and seek assistance from the monks there to learn more about the holy site.

PART III

Four Places of Principal Miracles

Contents

1. Savatthi, Place of the Twin Miracle
2. Sankasia, Place of Descent from Heaven
3. Rajagaha, Place of Taming the Drunken Elephant Nalagiri
4. Vesali, Place of Offering of Honey by a Band of Monkey
5. Journey of the Buddha's Alms Bowl

1. Savatthi, Place of the Twin Miracle

1.1 How to reach there

Savatthi or Sravasti is located in the Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh, 160 km east of the capital Lucknow. The site is 21 km west of **Balrampur**, a station on the Gorakhpur-Gonda line of the North-Eastern Railway. All distances are approximate.

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1.2 Religious Significance

Sravasti was the ancient capital of the Kingdom of **Kosala** ruled by **King Pasenadi**, a lay disciple and great admirer of the Buddha. It owes its fame to its long and close association with the Buddha's ministry. Of the 45 years of his ministry, the Buddha spent as many as 25 rains-retreats, 24 of them continuously (21st- 44th) at Sravasti. It was here that the millionaire **Sudatta**, popularly known as **Anathapindika** or "Feeder of the Poor", donated the famous **Jetavana** or **Jeta's Grove** to the Buddha after he had bought it at an exorbitant price, which was "as many gold coins as would cover it". Since the Buddha spent a major part of his missionary life in Sravasti, the majority of sermons in the scriptures were delivered while staying in Jetavana. Another important monastery at Sravasti was the **Pubbarama**, donated by **Lady Visakha**, chief benefactress of the Buddha.

The story of how Anathapindika came to meet the Buddha is narrated in *Vinaya Cullavagga Kh.* IV, 4. It was after the third rainy season that Anathapindika visited his brother-in-law while on business in Rajagaha. Instead of the usual hearty welcome, he found the latter busy in the backyard making preparations for a feast. On enquiring, he was told that the preparations were for entertaining the Buddha and *Sangha* the next day. Just hearing the word 'Buddha' aroused great joy in Anathapindika and he longed to see the Buddha. As he was told that the Buddha was staying in the Sitavana forest in the neighbourhood and that he could see the Buddha the next day, he

went to sleep. His thoughts were so bent upon the Buddha that thrice that night he arose thinking that it was dawn. It seems that owing to his great faith in the Buddha, light emanated from his body making him think that it was dawn. He went to the Sivaka gate and as soon as he was out of the city, the light left him. It was pitched dark and fear arose in him. He thought of turning back but the Yakkha Sivaka himself invisible, urged him on. His fear vanished, light appeared again and he continued his journey. For a second and third time the same thing happened and the Yakkha likewise encouraged him on. Then he arrived at the Cool Grove where the Buddha was. At that time, the Buddha had risen at early dawn and was pacing up and down in the open. When he saw Anathapindika coming, the Buddha addressed him by his family name 'Sudatta', and called him to his presence. Anathapindika was pleased to hear the Buddha address him by this name as no one other than his family members knew it. After paying obeisance to the Buddha and hearing the *Dhamma*, he became a *Sotapanna*. Thereupon he invited the Buddha to spend the rainy season in Savatthi.

Sravasti became an important place of pilgrimage because here the Buddha performed the greatest miracle of all, the Twin Miracle (*Yamaka Pathihariya*), in order to dispel the heretics. In a series of miraculous episodes, the Buddha created multiple representations of Himself, seated and standing on lotuses, causing fire and water to emanate from his body. This marvelous event, called the **Miracle of Sravasti**, is a favourite subject of Buddhist sculptures.

1.3 Historical Background ^{5, 27}

King Asoka visited Sravasti in 249 BC as part of his pilgrimage to the holy Buddhist shrines and erected two pillars, each 70 feet high, on both sides of the eastern gate of Jetavana, as well as some *stupas* to enshrine the relics of the Buddha. During the time of the Kusana kings, **Kaniska** and **Huviska**, in the 1st- 2nd century AD, new shrines were installed to enshrine Buddha images which were becoming popular at the time.

When Fa Hsien visited Sravasti in 407 AD, Buddhism had declined in the city but Jetavana was still occupied by monks. He saw the two Asokan pillars still standing but the *stupas* of Angulimala and Sudatta were in ruins. By the time Hsüan Tsang came to Sravasti in 637 AD, the main city was in ruins and there were several hundreds of *sangharamas*, mostly in ruin with very few religious followers. Jetavana was decayed and deserted. He also saw both columns erected by Asoka, the ruins of *stupas*, *sangharamas* and the well from which the Buddha used to draw water for his use. After Hsüan Tsang's visit, Jetavana was again occupied, as evidenced by the recovery of seals and images of Mahayanist pantheons such as Lokanatha, Avalokitesvara and others belonging to the 8th and 9th centuries AD. The last patrons of Jetavana were **King Govindachandra** and his devout Buddhist wife **Kumaradevi** of Kanauj and Benares (1130 AD). Records of their gift of six villages to the *Sangha* of Jetavana monastery were found in a copper charter discovered during excavation of the ruins. With the downfall of Buddhism in India in the 13th century AD, the Jetavana shrines became deserted and fell into oblivion.

In 1863, **Cunningham** identified a vast collection of twin ruins called **Sahet-Mahet** with the ancient city of Sravasti. He excavated the ruins at Sahet covering 13 hectares, identified with Jetavana and exposed the remains of several *stupas*, temples and monasteries, including the site of the famous **Gandha-kuti** or Perfumed Chamber as well as the **Kosambi kuti**, both used by the Buddha. Most of the ruins exposed in Jetavana were from the Kusana period (1st- 2nd century AD). The ruins at Mahet are very extensive, spreading over 162 hectares. Only a few ruins have been identified while most parts of it are still unexplored.

In recent times, the first monastery to be built in Sravasti was the Burmese *Vihara*, at the initiative of Ven. **Chandramani** of Kushinagar. Ven. **Ren Chen** followed his example and founded the Chinese Buddhist Temple. In 1969, the Maha Bodhi Society of India became directly involved with Sravasti with the arrival of Ven. **Sangharatana** of Sarnath, who initiated the construction of the Nava Jetavana Vihara just outside the old Jetavana. In 1982, the Thais too, established a *vihara* in Sravasti.

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1.4 Objects of Interest

a) Jetavana Park

During the Buddha's time, the place was called *Jetavana Anathapindika Arama* or Anathapindika's Garden of Jeta Grove. Today most of the ruins are the remains of temples and *stupas* from the Kusana period (1st-2nd century AD). There are several stupas built in memory of the Great Disciples of the Buddha such as the Venerables Sariputta, Mogallana, Sivali, Ananda and Rahula scattered all over Jetavana. The important shrines are:

- **Temple No. 2**

The ruins here mark the site of the *Gandha-kuti* (Perfumed Chamber) built by Anathapindika for the Buddha's use. According to the commentaries, the site of the Buddha's bed in it is the same for all Buddhas, irrespective of the size of the *Gandha-kuti*. The original *Gandha-kuti* was wooden but by the time the Chinese pilgrims saw it, the structure was a two-storied brick building in a ruinous condition. Now only the low walls and stone platform are extant. This is a favourite site for pilgrims to pay homage to the Triple Gem (*puja*) and meditate.

- **Temple No. 3**

This temple is believed to be the site of the original *Kosambi kuti*, also built by Anathapindika earlier for the Buddha's use as a meditation room. Just in front of it is a long plinth, made of bricks, marking the site of the original promenade (*cankama*) used by the Buddha for walking meditation.

- **Stupa H**

This *stupa* is believed to mark the place where the Buddha used to preach to the monks and laity. It was erected in front of the *Gandha-kuti* Temple and was rebuilt several times, pointing to its importance as a sacred shrine.

b) Ananda Bodhi Tree

The Ananda *Bodhi* tree is located near the entrance of Jetavana. It was planted at the request of Anathapindika so that the laity would have an object to worship during the Buddha's absence from Savatthi to propagate the *Dhamma* after each *vassa*. When Ven. Ananda reported the matter to the Buddha, the latter replied that there were **three types of objects of veneration**, namely: the corporeal relic deposited in a *stupa* after the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, an object used by the Buddha such as his alms-bowl, etc., and a visible symbol such as a *Dhammacakka* wheel.

The first was not possible while the Buddha was alive, while the third object was not appropriate for those who were not content with a mere symbol or picture. So only the second remained and the Buddha suggested the *Bodhi* tree as the best object to venerate in his absence. So it was decided to plant a small shoot of the *Bodhi* tree from Bodhgaya and Ven. Moggallana, foremost in psychic ability, was assigned the task of obtaining the sapling. When it arrived, the young shoot was ceremoniously planted at the gate of Jetavana by Anathapindika. The tree grew and became an object of veneration to the laity. At the request of Ven Ananda, the Buddha spent one night meditating under it, adding sanctity to the tree. The present tree looks very old from its hoary appearance but it is not possible to confirm whether it is the original tree or a descendant of it.

c) Sudatta Stupa

North of Jetavana, in the ruins of Mahet (old Sravasti) stands the **Sudatta stupa**, the most imposing monument in the area. According to Fa Hsien, this *stupa* was built on the foundations of the house of Sudatta, popularly known as Anathapindika. The ruins show structural remains from the 1st to the 12th centuries AD. From the road, one has to climb up several flights of steps to reach the plinth, where one can see the sunken basements of two circular *stupas*.

d) Angulimala Stupa

Near the Sudatta *stupa* in Mahet, is a mass of bricks with a tunnel in the middle, identified by Cunningham as the **Angulimala stupa** seen by the Chinese pilgrims. The tunnel was cut through the whole mound at the base by the Archaeological Survey of India to serve as a drain for floodwaters during the rainy season, helping to preserve the monument. According to Fa Hsien, the *stupa* marks the site where Angulimala was cremated. Locals often mistake the tunnel for a cave and will tell visitors that it is Angulimala's cave.

e) Stupa of the Great Miracle

According to the commentaries, the Buddha ascended to *Tavatimsa* Heaven to preach to his mother during the seventh rains-retreat. Prior to his ascent, he had performed the **Twin Miracle** and other miraculous feats to silence the heretics at a place where the gardener **Ganda** had planted a mango tree. This place is believed to be at the top of a hillock near the Nikko Lotus Hotel as one enters Sravasti.

When the author first visited the place in 1991, it appeared like a natural hill covered with trees, creepers and bushes. At that time, Sayadaw U Awbatha, abbot of the Burmese Vihara mentioned that it was an important stupa. In the year 2000, excavations were carried out on this hillock, which revealed the remains of a brick *stupa* believed to be erected by King Asoka. The area has now been fenced up to protect the ruins of the Miracle *stupa* on top of the hillock. This *stupa* is known locally as '**Orajhar**'.

f) Place where Devadatta Sank into the Earth

According to the *Dhammapada* commentary, after Devadatta created a schism in the *Sangha*, he left to form his own faction. Thereafter his fortune took a turn for the worst and eventually he fell sick for nine months. Knowing his end was near, he instructed his disciples

to carry him to Jetavana to see the Buddha for the last time. When the Buddha heard about this, he predicted that Devadatta would not succeed in seeing him at all. As Devadatta was being carried in a litter, they passed a lotus pond outside Jetavana. Putting the litter down, his disciples went into the lotus pond to bathe. Devadatta arose from his litter and sat down, resting both feet on the ground whereupon his feet sank into the earth. By degrees he sank into the earth, first to his ankles, then to the knees, then to the hips, then to the chest and then to the neck. Before he was completely swallowed by the earth, he managed to verbally take refuge in the Buddha. Thereafter he was reborn in *Avici* Hell to suffer for his bad *kamma*. The place where Devadatta sank into the earth is believed to be the swampy area behind the old Burmese *Vihara*.

g) Burmese and Sri Lankan Monasteries

Pilgrims visiting Sravasti should visit both monasteries to pay their respects to the monks and find out more about the monuments from them. The Sri Lankan monastery is named **Nava (New) Jetavana Vihara** and inside it one can see beautiful murals on its walls depicting important events in the Buddha's life. The monastery also possesses some Buddha relics, which it keeps in a *stupa*-shaped vessel to show to visiting pilgrims. The Burmese *vihara* is named the Burmese Buddhist Temple and the abbot is the Venerable **Sayadaw U Awbatha**. According to the Sayadaw, although the temple is situated outside the fenced-up Jetavana Park, its precincts were once part of the old Jetavana grove and no construction is allowed there. So a new Burmese *vihara* has been recently constructed at another site and now offers free accommodation to pilgrims who visit Sravasti.

2. Sankasia, Place of Descent from Heaven^{3, 16, 25, 26}

2.1 How to reach there

Sankasia is located in the village of **Sankisa-Basantapur** in district of Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. From Agra, Sankasia is 175km via the Firozabad-Shikohabad-Mainpuri-Bewar-Pakhna route

2.1 Religious Significance

According to *Dhammapada* Commentary XIV, 2, after the Buddha had completed the rains-retreat in **Tavatimsa Heaven**, he informed Sakka Devaraja of his intention to return to earth. Thereupon, Sakka created three ladders; one of gold, one of jewels and one of silver, the tops of which rested on the summit of Mt. Sumeru and the feet of which rested against the gate of the city of Sankasia. On the right side was the golden ladder for *devas*, on the left side was the silver ladder for *Brahma* and his train, and in the middle was the jewelled ladder for the Buddha. As the Buddha descended upon the jewelled ladder, *devas* and *Brahmas* honored him by accompanying him on each side. With this retinue the Buddha descended and set foot on earth at the gate of the city of Sankasia. Because of this miraculous event, which was witnessed by a great multitude, Sankasia became an important Buddhist shrine and several *stupas* and *viharas* were erected there.

2.3 Historical Background^{5, 16, 27}

King Asoka visited Sankasia as part of his itinerary of pilgrimage in 249 BC. According to Fa Hsien, Asoka built a shrine over the spot where the Buddha set foot on earth. Behind the shrine, he raised a stone column 18.3 m high with a lion capital on top and on its four sides, placed Buddha images.

Fa Hsien reported that there were about a thousand monks and nuns who all received their food from the common store, and belonged, some to the greater vehicle and some of the lesser one. He spent one *vassa* in Sankasia and described the presence of many Buddhist structures and monasteries including a *sangharama* containing 600-700 monks. When Hsüan Tsang arrived in 636 AD, there were four *sangharamas* with about 1000 priests of the Sammitiya sect. To the east of the city 20 li or so, he saw the great *sangharama* of beautiful construction, wherein lived 100 monks and religious laymen. He also saw the Asoka column 21 m high with carved figures on the four sides and around it, and mentioned the presence of some *stupas*.

Other than these accounts of the Chinese pilgrims, the history of Sankasia remained blank for the next 1200 years until **Cunningham** identified it with the village of **Sankisa-Basantapur** in Farrukhabad District of Uttar Pradesh. The present site of Sankasia is situated on a high mound and there is a chain of other mounds spread outside the village. These mounds have yielded numerous silver and copper punch marked coins during excavations, mostly tribal coins of the Panchala kings and copper coins of the Kushan rulers. Large bricks measuring 28 cm by 15 cm bearing Brahmi inscriptions of 2nd century BC were also discovered.

2.4 The Pristine Environment of Sankasia

Today Sankasia is the one of the most remote and undeveloped Buddhist shrines in India, a far cry from the Buddha's time when it was called 'City of Sankasia'. When India's **Prime Minister Nehru** was asked by some Japanese visitors in 1961, which was the poorest Buddhist shrine in India, he promptly replied: "Sankasia!" The situation has improved slightly since **Ms Mayawati**, a Buddhist laywoman became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in May 2007 again after a brief term in 2002-03. Now the roads are getting better and a new hotel is being built to accommodate tourists in Sankasia.

The author first visited Sankasia ten years ago. Impressed by its **pristine environment**, he decided to lead Malaysian pilgrims there

every pilgrimage despite initial objections from certain members. In the beginning, the trip would take the whole day and we would leave Sankasia by evening and travel to Kanpur or Lucknow arriving at the hotel well after midnight. When the pilgrims' hostel in the Burmese Temple was completed in 2004, **Sayadaw U Nanda** invited us to stay overnight there instead of leaving in the evening. It proved to be very pleasant as we got the opportunity to know Sayadaw U Nanda and benefit from his vast knowledge of the history of Sankasia. Now more pilgrims will get to know the rich heritage of Sankasia.

5, 16, 27

2.5 Objects of Interest

a) Broken Asoka Column with Elephant Capital

The Elephant Capital that once surmounted the Asoka column is an important relic of the 3rd century BC. It is kept in a fenced up pavilion. Nearby under a tree, is a small shrine with a standing image of Lord Buddha, flanked by Brahma and Sakka to depict the Buddha's descent from Heaven.

b) Site where the Buddha Descended from Heaven

About 20 metres to the south of the Asokan pillar is a high mound composed of solid brickwork, which was once a Buddhist structure. This mound is 6 metres high and 49 metres in diameter at its base. Cunningham identified it with the position of the three flights of ladders by which the Buddha descended from Heaven attended by Brahma and Sakka. According to Hsüan Tsang, when the ladders by which the Buddha descended from Heaven had disappeared, the neighbouring princes built up new triple stairs of bricks and chased stones ornamented with jewels on the ancient foundation (three ladders) resembling the old ones. There was a *vihara* on the foundation and close by its side was a stone column 21m high, which was erected by Asoka-rajā. After the disappearance of

Buddhism from India, the *vihara* probably followed the same fate of many other Buddhist establishments and fell into ruins. On top of the foundation now is a small shrine dedicated to a Hindu goddess Bisari Devi, built by a Hindu priest who has taken over the place sometime ago. This Hindu shrine on top of a Buddhist structure is a bone of contention between the Buddhists and Hindus in Sankasia.

According to the Press Trust of India News, during the *Pavarana* in November 2001, at least 18 people including three policemen were injured in clashes involving people from the two communities during a religious procession in Sankasia. The trouble began when the Hindus started to attack a group of Buddhists in the *Dhamma Yatra* (religious procession) who were chanting for the return of the site to Buddhists. The Buddhists and Hindus have always been at loggerheads over the issue of the possession of Bisari Devi temple. During the past three years, the tussle has often assumed violent overtones. Because of this incident, the Government has banned the yearly procession around the Buddhist pilgrimage site at Sankasia.

When the author visited Sankasia in November 2003, the brickworks around the mound had fallen off due to heavy rains during the last monsoon, revealing the bare earth (Plate 31) According to **Sayadaw U Nanda**, the resident monk of the Burmese *vihara*, this event may turn out to be a blessing for Buddhists because there are plans by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to carry out excavations of this ancient Buddhist site and develop it for more pilgrims to visit Sankasia. It will be interesting to see what ancient relics will be unearthed by the archaeologist's spade. For a long time, Sankasia has been by-passed by most present-day pilgrims in spite of its religious significance and the fact that it was an important shrine to the great pilgrims of the past like Asoka, Fa Hsien and Hsüan Tsang.

d) Burmese and Sri Lankan Viharas

The first Buddhist monk to reside in Sankasia was the Late Ven. **Vijaya Soma** from Sri Lanka who established a school there. It is indeed heartening to see two Buddhist monasteries now in Sankasia

in spite of its remote location. The Burmese monastery was opened in the year 2000 while the Sri Lankan monastery was built a few years earlier. Pilgrims visiting Sankasia should visit these monasteries to pay their respects to the *bhikkhus*, whose presence have enhanced the sanctity of this rural environment. They will be able to obtain more information about the history of Sankasia from the monks who have lived there for many years.

2.6 Buddhist Population around Sankasia

According to **Sayadaw U Nanda**, the resident monk of the Burmese *vihara*, when Lord Buddha descended from Heaven at the gate of Sankasia city after his 7th Vassa (about 2600 years ago) a group of Sakyans nobles came to witness the miracle and settled in Sankasia. After **Vidhadabu** attacked Kapilavatthu and massacred the Sakyans, many escaped to India and became immigrants of Sankasia (**Note 11**). Today there are over one quarter million of their descendants living in the districts around Sankasia. Every year during **Pavarana** on the full-moon day of October a great congregation of local Buddhists gather at Sankasia to commemorate this important event.

In the early 5th century AD when Fa Hsien was at Sankasia, he heard of a dispute between the Brahmins and the *Sramanas* (*Bhikkhus*) over land rights in Sankasia. According to him, the latter were losing the argument. Then both sides took an oath that if the place did indeed belong to the *Sramanas*, there should be some supernatural proof of it. When these words had been spoken, the stone lion on top of the nearby Asoka pillar gave a great roar. Witnessing this, their opponents were frightened, bowed to the decision, and withdrew. Eventually the Brahmins appeared to have succeeded in ousting the Buddhists from their lands, because by the time of Hsüan Tsang's visit, he reported: "*There were only four viharas with about one thousand monks of the Sammitiya School. There were ten Deva temples, where sectarians of all beliefs lived. They all honour and sacrifice to Mahesvara.*"

So it is very likely that at some early period, perhaps before Hsüan Tsang's visit, the Buddhists of Sankasia, many of which were immigrant Sakyans deserted their native place and settled in the surrounding villages. Many of them join the October full-moon celebration as another traditional festival of their ancestors. They are ignorant of their historical ties with the Buddhism. Sayadaw U Nanda, who is fluent in Hindi, has started a Sunday school to educate the younger generation about their roots by teaching them the history of their ancestral religion.

Note 11: Immigration of Sakyans to India

During Vidudabha's attack of Kapilavatthu, many Sakyans fled south, avoiding Kosala country, to **Sankasia** (in Uttar Pradesh) where an earlier group of their countrymen had settled after witnessing the Buddha's Descent from Heaven. This new group of refugees increased the Sakyan population in Sankasia significantly.

However, these Sakyans were not the only ones who had moved out of Kapilavatthu. According to the Mahavamsa viii, 18, soothsayers had foretold the future destruction of Kapilavatthu to **Sakka Pandu**, a cousin of the Buddha and son of **Amitodana**. With a group of followers, he went to another tract of land on the further side of the Ganges and founded a city there and ruled as king. He had seven sons and one daughter named **Baddhakaccana**. She later married the Pandyan prince **Panduvadeva** who succeeded his uncle **King Vijaya** to the throne of Sri Lanka.

Another famous Sakyan was **Devi**, the first wife of King Asoka and mother of **Ven. Mahinda** and **Ven. Sanghamitta**. Asoka married her when he was the viceroy of Ujjayini (Ujjain). She was a devotee of the Buddha and a descendant of a Sakyan family who migrated to **Vedisa** after escaping the destruction of Kapilavatthu by Vidudabha

3. Rajgir, Place of Taming the Drunken Elephant Nalagiri

3.1 How to reach there

Rajgir is situated in the Nalanda district of Bihar, 70 km northeast of Bodhgaya and 102 km south of Patna. All distances are approximate.

3, 25, 26

3.2 Religious Significance

Rajgir is the modern name of **Rajagaha** or “royal abode”, an appropriate designation for a place that had remained as the capital of the powerful kingdom of **Magadha** for centuries. In the Buddha’s time, the ruler was King **Bimbisara**, who was later usurped by his parricidal son, **Ajatasattu**. In his first meeting with the **Bodhisatta**, Bimbisara was so impressed by his royal bearing that he offered to share his kingdom with him. The **Bodhisatta**, who had just renounced his Sakyan kingdom in search of the Deathless, declined the offer but promised to return to visit Rajgir after he had attained his goal. Soon after dispatching the *Sangha* to spread the *Dhamma* from Sarnath, the Buddha traveled to Uruvela, where he converted the Kassapa brothers and their matted-hair disciples, who all attained *Arahantship*. With this retinue of a thousand *Arahants*, the Buddha entered Rajgir where he received a warm welcome from the King. Thereupon he preached a sermon to King Bimbisara who became a Sotapanna. Next day he invited the Buddha to a meal and offered the **Bamboo Garden** (*Veluvana*) to the Buddha and the *Sangha*.

As the capital of a powerful state, Rajgir was a hive of secular and religious activities. According to the *Samannaphala Sutta*, many heretical teachers operated in Rajgir, namely: Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccayana, Nigantha Nattaputta and Sanjaya Belatthaputta. Among the disciples of

Sanjaya were two rich brahmins, **Upatissa** and **Kolita**, popularly known as **Sariputta** and **Moggallana** respectively. Both joined the *Sangha* after their conversion by the *Arahant Assaji*, and became the Buddha's first and second Chief Disciples. Following their conversion, many *paribbajakas* or wandering ascetics also became followers of the Buddha. Among the laity, the most notable disciples were the royal physician **Jivaka**, adopted son of Prince Abhaya; and the millionaire **Upali**, a follower of Nigantha Nattaputta, who was sent to convert the Buddha but ended up as a lay disciple instead. Thus Rajgir became an important centre of Buddhism as the fame of the Buddha spread throughout Magadha.

Rajgir was also the scene of many attempts by **Devadatta** to kill the Buddha over the leadership of the *Sangha*. First he hired archers to assassinate the Buddha, but they ended up by becoming disciples of the Buddha instead. Next, as the Buddha was walking up the slopes of Gijjhakuta (Vulture Peak) one day, Devadatta hurled a rock from the summit at the Buddha but it missed and a splinter wounded the Buddha's foot. Finally, he caused the elephant **Nalagiri** to be intoxicated with liquor and sent the ferocious beast to charge at the Buddha. But the Buddha subdued the animal with his loving kindness. Because of this miracle, Rajgir became sanctified as an important pilgrimage site. While Devadatta was plotting against the Buddha, **Ajatasattu**, at his instigation, usurped the throne and imprisoned his father in order to starve him to death. He regretted his actions too late, as his father had died before he could release him. Ajatasattu, later at the suggestion of Jivaka, sought the Buddha's advice and became a lay disciple. After the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*, he led an army to Kusinara to claim a share of the Buddha's relics. He was the patron of the **First Sangiti** or Council held at **Sattapanni Cave** in Rajgir.

3.3 Historical Background ^{5, 27, 36}

Rajgir lost its political status after Ajatasattu's son, Udayibhadda, slew his father and transferred the capital to Pataliputta. But the fact

that Asoka erected a *stupa* and a stone pillar with an elephant capital during his pilgrimage to Rajgir shows that the place remained as an important Buddhist centre for centuries. When Fa Hsien came during the fifth century, he found the old city desolate but outside the hills at Veluvana, he found a group of monks living in the monastery. When Hsüan Tsang visited Rajgir in 637-638 AD, it was practically deserted. Of the ancient monasteries and *stupas*, he found only foundation walls and ruins standing. He saw the Asoka *stupa* which was 18.3 m high and by the side of it, the Asokan pillar about 15.2 m high with an elephant capital, the Pippala stone house said to be the cave of Mahakassapa and the Sattapanni caves. He also visited Gijjhakuta and saw a brick *vihara* at the western end of the hill and several *stupas* in the vicinity.

Although there is no record of Rajgir after Hsüan Tsang's visit, the antiquities recovered from Rajgir during archaeological excavations in 1905-06 showed that it continued to be a popular Buddhist shrine up to the 12th century AD. According to Fa Hsien, Ajatasattu built a new citadel outside the circle of five hills, namely: **Vebhara, Pandava, Vepulla, Gijjhakuta** and **Isigili**; that encircled the old Rajagaha city. The modern village of Rajgir encloses a part of this 'New Rajagaha', which was protected by a massive wall of earth resembling an irregular pentagon in shape, with a circuit of 5 km. On the south, towards the hills, one can still see the stone fortifications that once protected the old city. The wall is 4.6 m to 5.5 m thick and rises to a height of 3.4 m at some places.

5, 27, 36

3.4 Objects of Interest

a) Veluvana (Bamboo Grove) and Karanda Tank

When King Bimbisara heard that the Buddha had come to Rajgir with a retinue of one thousand *Arahants*, he went to the Sapling Grove to meet the Buddha and was converted by the Buddha, attaining the First Stage of Sainthood. Thereafter, he invited the Buddha to his palace for the following day's meal, after which he

donated the famous Bamboo Grove or *Veluvana*, the first donation of a park (*arama*), to the Buddha and *Sangha*.

When the writer first visited Veluvana in 1991, the place was slightly overgrown with bushes and on the south side towards the hot springs, a number of Muslim tombs could be seen on a large mound to the left of the main entrance. The cemetery is believed to be the site of the **Veluvana Vihara** built by Bimbisara for the Buddha's residence. The whole area has been cleaned up and Veluvana now looks like a pleasant park, planted with shade trees, bamboo and flowers, reflecting its original status as the royal park of King Bimbisara. In the vicinity of Veluvana is a large pond with a Buddha image at the centre. This pond is believed to be the site of the **Karanda tank** mentioned in Buddhist text as the ***Karanda kanivapa*** where the Buddha used to take his bath.

b) Pippali House

A short distance from Veluvana at the foot of **Vebhara** hill, are the hot springs of Rajgir, a popular picnic spot for bathing. A little above the hot springs, on the right side of the path uphill, is a remarkable stone structure known locally as the "**machan**" (watch tower). The structure is roughly cube-shaped with dimensions of 26 m feet long by 25 m wide by 7 m high and is built of unhewn blocks of stone set on the rock. According to **Sir John Marshall** who excavated the site in 1905-06, the structure was originally a watch-tower and "in after times, when no longer required for defensive purposes, they would afford convenient cells for ascetics to meditate in". This structure is believed to be the **Pippali stone house**, residence of **Ven. Maha Kassapa**, Convenor of the First Council. The name 'Pippali' probably refers to the name of Mahakassapa before he became a monk. According to *Samyutta* V, 78, the Buddha visited Maha Kassapa on one occasion when the latter was ill and expounded the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, upon hearing which, Maha Kassapa recovered from the illness. According to *Samyutta* iii, 124, **Ven. Assaji** once stayed at Pippali House when he was sick.

c) Sattapanni caves

The **Sattapanni** caves, site of the **First Buddhist Council** held three months after the *Mahaparinibbana* in 543 BC is situated on top of **Vebhara** hill, beyond the largest Jains temple. There a narrow footpath descends some 30 m to a long artificial terrace in front of a line of six caves (might have been seven originally). The caves have been sealed off to ensure the safety of visitors. The terrace in front of the caves is about 36.6 m long and 10.4 m at the widest point and part of the retaining wall of large unhewn stones on the outer edge can still be seen. This place agrees with the description of Sattapanni found in the Pali texts where five hundred *Arahants* convened to codify the Buddha's Teaching. Over the last 2500 years, a lot of erosion would have taken place so the terrace was probably bigger in those days, to accommodate so many *Arahants*.

d) Bimbisara Jail

About 2½ km south of Veluvana beside the main road, is an area about 60 m square enclosed by the remains of a stone wall 2 m thick. This area has been identified as the prison in which Bimbisara was jailed by his son Ajatasattu, who usurped the throne. It is said that from this prison, the king could see the Buddha up in Gijjhakuta, the sight of whom provided great joy to the prisoner.

e) Jivaka's mango garden (*Jivaka ambavana*)

According to Pali sources, Jivaka's mango garden is situated between the city's East Gate and Gijjhakuta, and the site has been identified a short distance from the foot of Gijjhakuta. According to the Vinaya Texts, **Jivaka Komarabhacca** was the adopted son of **Prince Abhaya**, who found him alive (*jivati*) in a dust heap when he was an infant and raised him up. When he was old enough, he set out for Taxila to study medicine for seven years. To test his knowledge, his teacher asked him to go all round Taxila to search for any plant,

which was not medicinal and bring it back. Jivaka proved to be so proficient in medicinal plants that he returned after a long search and declared that he had not seen any plant that was not medicinal within a *yojana* (13 km) of Taxila.

Returning to Rajgir, he cured many people suffering from serious ailments and even performed surgery, something unheard of in those days. He became the leading physician and surgeon of Rajgir and earned great wealth through his medical practice. At some point in his career, he became a lay disciple and used to attend on the Buddha three times a day. When the Buddha's foot was injured by a splinter from a rock hurled by Devadatta, it was Jivaka who attended on him and healed the wound. Realizing the advantages of having a monastery near his home, Jivaka built one on his extensive mango garden and donated it to the Buddha. The site of this monastery was excavated recently, which exposed the buried foundations of elliptical buildings, possibly of monastic nature, of an early date.

f) Gijjhakuta (Vulture Peak)

Gijjhakuta hill was the favourite resort of the Buddha and the scene of many important discourses while he was in Rajgir. To reach the top, one has to climb up a long stone stairway, 6.1 m to 7.3 m wide, called the **Bimbisara road**, built by the King to enable him to reach the summit to see the Buddha. The rocky path ends near the top of the hill where one can see two natural caves, which were probably used by the **Buddha** and **Ven. Ananda**. At the summit, one can see the huge granite rock formation resembling a vulture standing with folded wing, from which the hill derived its name. Recently, a cement staircase has been constructed to facilitate the pilgrim's climb to the top, which is a flat terrace surrounded by a low retaining wall with a shrine near the precipice. This spot offers a commanding view of the valley below. It is a favourite place for pilgrims to perform puja or circumambulate while reciting the virtues of the Buddha. Near the bottom of the cement staircase are two smaller caves believed to be used by **Ven. Sariputta** and **Ven. Moggallana**.

g) Maddakucchi (Rub belly)

The Pali name *maddakucchi*, which means “**rub belly**”, was derived from a story that at this place, the queen of Bimbisara knowing that she was carrying a patricide, tried to abort the foetus by a forcible massage of her belly. Maddakucchi, which finds mention in the Pali scriptures, is situated at the base of Gijjhakuta. It is believed to be the place where the Buddha was brought by stretcher after being wounded on the leg by a splinter of a big rock hurled by Devadatta from the summit of Gijjhakuta hill. Formerly, this place contained a deer park and a monastery.

h) Burmese Monastery

The Burmese monastery standing on top of a hillock in New Rajgir was the first modern monastery established in Rajgir in 1958. Its founder was an old Theravada monk, **Sayadaw U Zayanta** who has passed away. Recently it has built a new shrine hall to enshrine a sacred Buddha relic.

3.5 Ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara

The ruins of **Nalanda Mahavihara** were first excavated in 1871 by Sir Alexander Cunningham who identified its site at the modern village of Bargaon on the basis of the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan Tsang. Located only 12 km from Rajgir, the ruins extend over a vast area. The structures exposed represent only a part of the vast establishment and consist of monastic sites, *stupa* sites and temple sites. Lengthwise, they extend from south to north, the monasteries on the eastern flank and temples on the west. The monasteries were all built on more or less the same plan and to-date, at least eleven monastic sites and five main temple sites have been identified. The most prominent standing structure at Nalanda is the **Sariputta stupa**, erected in honour of the Chief Disciple, who was born and passed away in the nearby village of **Nalaka**.

4. Vesali, Place where Monkeys Offered Honey to the Buddha

4.1 How to reach there

Vesali or Vaishali is located around the village of Basarh in the Muzaffapur district of Bihar, 55 km north of Patna across the Ganges River. All distances are approximate.

4.2 Religious Significance ^{3, 4, 25}

Vesali or **Vaishali**, capital of the **Licchavis** or **Vajjis**, was the headquarters of the powerful Vajjian confederacy of eight clans, of whom the Licchavis and Videhans were the most important. It was the first republic in the world modelled on the *Aparihaniya Dhamma* or the seven conditions leading to welfare, which the Buddha taught to the Vajjians when he was dwelling at the Saranda shrine in Vaishali. Thus united, they became so powerful that **Ajatasattu** of Magadha had to resort to treachery by sending the brahmin **Vassakara** to sow discord among the Vajjian princes for three years in order to weaken them. By then, they were too disunited to defend their country and Ajatasattu conquered them.

The Buddha visited Vaishali several times, spending his 5th and 44th *vassas* there and many Licchavi nobles became his disciples. When Vaishali was plagued with famine, disease, and evil spirits, the Buddha was invited by the Licchavi nobles to help them alleviate the plagues. Buddha then preached the *Ratana Sutta* (Jewel Discourse) and instructed Ven. Ananda to go round the city walls reciting it as a Protection. Thereafter, the Buddha recited it for seven days and all the plagues then abated. But the event that elevated the status of Vaishali to an important pilgrimage site was the offering of a bowl of honey by a band of monkeys to the Blessed One, an incident mentioned among the Four Great Miracles in the Buddha's life.

At Vaishali, the Buddha allowed women to be admitted to the *Sangha* after **Ven. Ananda** successfully pleaded to the Buddha for the ordination of **Maha Pajapati Gotami** and several Sakyan ladies. The Buddha then decreed the Eight Chief Rules, in addition to the Disciplinary Code observed by monks, which *bhikkhunis* or nuns “should revere, reverence, honour and respect for life and which should not be transgressed”. Thus the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* came to be established in Vaishali.

Once the Buddha was staying in a mango grove of **Ambapali**, the chief courtesan of Vaishali who invited him to a house *dana*, forestalling the Licchavi nobles who then offered her money in exchange for the invitation. But she politely declined their offer for she valued the *dana* more and after the meals, even donated her mango grove to the Buddha and *Sangha*. The Buddha spent the last *vassa* in Vesali where he relinquished the will to live at the Capala shrine. After the *Mahaparinibbana*, the Licchavis obtained a share of the Buddha’s relics from Kusinara and erected a grand *stupa* over the holy relics in Vaishali.

Vaishali is celebrated to possess the **Buddha’s alms bowl**, which he donated to them before his *Parinibbana*. An account of its journey to various places is described in the **next section (Part III, 5)**.

5, 27, 37, 38

4.3 Historical Background

After the *Mahaparinibbana*, the Vajjian confederacy was defeated by Ajatasattu, whose son Udayibhadda slew his father and moved the capital from Rajgir to Pataliputta, across the Ganges river from Vaishali. According to the Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle of Ceylon), the dynasty of Udayibhadda was succeeded by three generations of parricidal kings, namely: Anuruddha, Munda and Nagadasa who each slew his own father to take over the throne. By then, the people could not tolerate this dynasty of parricides. In the end, the minister Sisunaga, son of a Licchavi prince deposed Nagadasa. Sisunnaga was succeeded by his son, Kalasoka, and by then a hundred years had passed since the *Mahaparinibbana*.

At that time in Vaishali, many shameless *bhikkhus* of the Vajji clan were practising the **Ten Points**, which were not in conformity with the *Vinaya* or monastic rules. **Venerable Yasa** of Kosambi, while in Vaishali noticed the deviations and strongly protested against them, resulting in his expulsion by the Vajji monks. Ven. Yasa, together with other monks appealed to **Ven. Revata** of Soreyya, the chief of the *Sangha* to settle the dispute. Thereupon, the **Second Council** was convened at **Valukarama** monastery in Vaishali during the reign of King **Kalasoka** and attended by 700 *Arahants*. **Venerable Sabbakami**, the most senior *Arahant*, questioned by Ven. Revata, adjudged the Ten Points as unlawful according to the *Vinaya*.

Forty years after the Second Council, another controversy arose that would polarize the *Sangha*. According to the tradition of the Sammitiya School recorded by Bhavya, a monk named Bhadra (or Mahadeva) proposed Five Heresies questioning the nature of the *Arahant*. A great assembly of ten thousand, consisting of monks and laity called '*Mahasangiti*' was convened in Pataliputta with the support of the king and the majority voted in favour of these heretical views. This resulted in a schism in the *Sangha* and the secession of the *Mahasanghika*, who held a great assembly of theirs called the *Mahasangiti*, from which the sect derived its name and decided matters according to their own light. From then on, further schisms led to the formation of different sub-sects, and in the course of time, eleven sub-sects arose out of the *Theravada* while seven issued from the *Mahasanghika*, leading to the well-known **Eighteen Schools of Buddhism**.

Asoka, the Mauryan emperor who had his capital in Pataliputta near Vaishali raised a *stupa* in which he enshrined some of the Buddha's relics and erected beside it an Asokan column with a lion capital when he visited Vaishali during his pilgrimage to the holy places in 249 BC. Fa Hsien visited Vaishali around 400 AD and mentioned about the *stupas* built in its vicinity in honour of the Buddha.

According to a story in the Dhammapada Commentary, when **Ven. Ananda** reached the age of 120 years, he knew that his end was near and went from Rajgir to Vaishali, following the Buddha's example. Hearing of his intention, the citizens of Magadha and Vaishali

hurried from both directions to bid him farewell. To do justice to both sides, Ven. Ananda levitated in the air and entered into the **Samadhi of the Fire Element**, whereby the body was consumed by spontaneous combustion and reduced to ashes, which fell on both sides. So the people of each city taking half the relics returned and erected *stupas* over them.

Hsüan Tsang who came in 630 AD, described Vaishali as covering an area of 26-31 sq km but it was in ruins. He saw the *stupa* built by the Licchavi princes over their portion of the Buddha's relics from Kusinara, the Asoka *stupa* and stone pillar surmounted by a lion capital and nearby the pond dug by a band of monkeys (*Markatahrada*) for the Buddha's use. Not far to the south were two more *stupas*; one at the site where the monkeys taking the Buddha's alms-bowl, climbed up a tree to gather honey and another at the site where the monkeys offered honey to the Blessed One. Hsüan Tsang wrote that both within and without, and all around the city of Vaishali, the sacred monuments were so numerous that it was difficult to remember them all.

After Hsüan Tsang's visit, the history of Vaishali remained blank for over twelve centuries. It lay in ruins, unknown and unheard of until the late 19th century, when Cunningham identified the ruins at and around **Basarh** in Muzaffapur district of Bihar with ancient Vaishali. Today, most of the principal ruins are located in the village of **Kolhua**, about 55 km from Patna.

4.4 Objects of Interest in Vaishali^{5, 24, 27}

a) Raj Vishal ka Garh, site of ancient Vesali

Basarh, 35 km southwest of Muzaffarpur, has been identified as the site of the ancient city of Vaishali. The site of the Raj Vishal ka Garh is believed to represent the citadel of Vaishali where the 7707 rajas or representatives of the Vajjian confederacy used to meet and discuss the problems of the day. The ruins consist of a large brick-

covered mound 2.5 m above the surrounding level and 1500 m in circumference with a 42.7 m moat surrounding it. Beside it is a pond, used by the Licchavi princes to take their bath. It is located about 3.2 kilometres southwest of the Asokan pillar at Kolhua.

b) Relic *Stupa* of the Licchavis

About a kilometre to the northwest of the Raj Vishal ka Garh, stands an open shelter with a dome-shaped roof. Inside it, are the remains of a *stupa*, which was originally a mud structure 25 feet in diameter with thin layers of cloddy clay. It appeared to have undergone enlargement and repairs four times, in which burnt bricks were used. The third enlargement increased its diameter to 40 feet and the fourth being in the form of a buttress supporting the third. The original mud *stupa* was a very old one, believed to be pre-Mauryan. From its primitive features and from the fact that a 2'6" trench had been driven into its core in olden times it is believed that this *stupa* is none other than the one **erected by the Licchavis** over their share of the relics of the Buddha. The trench was probably excavated by Asoka to reach the relics, some of which according to Hsüan Tsang, were left in their original position by Asoka.

In the centre of the original mud *stupa*, lying in the lowest layer of soil anciently disturbed by the trench, archaeologists in 1958 found a relic **casket of soapstone** (steatite) cracked from the pressure above. It contained one-fourth full of ashy earth, a piece of gold leaf, two glass beads, a small conch and a copper punch-marked coin. Based on the archaeological, literary and traditional evidence available, the archaeologists are of the opinion that this mud *stupa* is the one built by the Licchavis and the casket it contained most probably enshrined a portion of the **ashes of the Buddha** mixed with a lot of earth collected at his cremation. That it should be only **one-fourth full** reminds us of the statement made by Hsuan Tsang that: "*Asoka, opening the stupa took away nine-tenths of the relics leaving only one-tenth behind. Afterwards there was a king of the country who wished to open the stupa again but at the moment when he began to do so, the earth trembled, and he dared not proceed to open it.*"

Presently the soapstone relic casket can be viewed at Patna Museum. (Reference: The Corporeal Relics of the Buddha. Dr. A. S. Altekar, 1956. From a brochure of the Patna Museum, Patna)

c) Asokan Pillar

At Kolhua, 3.2 km northeast of the citadel of Vaishali, stands the impressive Asokan Pillar erected by Asoka 2250 years ago. It is a complete monolithic pillar of highly polished sandstone surmounted by a lion capital. The height is 6.7 m above the ground with a considerable portion sunk underground over the years. Though devoid of inscription, it appears to be a part of the line of pillars in the Muzaffarpur and Champaran districts – Lauriya Areraj, Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurva – that Asoka erected along his pilgrimage route from Pataliputta to Lumbini during 249-250 BC. Around the Asokan Pillar at Kolhua are the ruins of many smaller brick *stupas*.

d) Asoka Stupa

Just near the Asokan pillar are the ruins of the Asoka *Stupa* seen by Hsüan Tsang. The dome-shaped mound is 4.6 m high and has a diameter of 20 m. During excavation by Cunningham, a stone casket containing some relics of the Buddha was found enshrined beneath it. This site is a conducive place to offer *puja* followed by walking or sitting meditation at the *stupa*. Most Indian tourist guides mistake this *stupa* for the Ananda *stupa* located at Hajipur. For the record all the *stupas* built by King Asoka were dedicated to the Buddha, either as relic or commemorative *stupas*.

e) Monkey's Tank (Markata-hrada)

Near the stone pillar is a tank (pond) called **Rama-kunda**, identified by Cunningham with the ancient monkey's tank dug by a colony of monkeys for the Buddha's use. It has been enlarged considerably.

4.5 Pataliputta (Patna), Venue of the Third Council ^{5, 38, 39}

a) Kumhrar, Site of Asokarama Park

The Kumhrar Park is located 5 km from Patna Railway Station on Kankarbagh Road in Patna, Bihar. There one can see a large pool, where 32 ancient pillars of polished sandstone were found, a specimen of which is exhibited at a nearby pavilion. Within the vicinity of the park is the site of a *vihara* of Asoka's time. This park in Patna is believed to be the venue of the **Third Buddhist Council** held in Pataliputta in the 17th year of King Asoka's reign, in around 250 BC. It was attended by one thousand *Arahants* and presided by the Venerable **Moggaliputta Tissa**. At this Council, the *Kathavatthu* or Points of Controversy, one of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma*, was compiled wherein the heretical doctrines were thoroughly examined and refuted.

The Third Council marked a turning point for Buddhism, which prior to this, was confined mainly to Magadha and neighbouring states. With King Asoka of the Mauryan Empire reigning supreme over the whole Indian sub-continent as its chief patron, the time was now ripe for expansion. Accordingly, it was decided to send competent *Arahants* to propagate the Buddha's Teachings all over India as well as **Sri Lanka** in the south, **Kashmir Gandhara** in the north, **Bengal** and **Burma** in the east and **Yonaka** and countries in the west. Each team was headed by an Elder and consisted of five monks, the quorum required to confer higher ordination in remote regions. The names of the Elders and the nine places where they were deputed are given in the **Mahavamsa**³⁸.

Although certain scholars have disputed the authenticity of the council by claiming that it is unrecognized and unknown to all Buddhist sources outside of the Theravada school, archeology has confirmed the **historicity** of these missions. In *Stupa* No. 2 at Sanchi near Bhopal, were found two relic caskets from the 2nd or 1st century BC, inscribed with the names of some of the missionaries. In this

way the Buddha's Teachings spread in the four directions as a result of the Dhamma missions after the Third Council shown below.

<u>MISSIONARIES</u>	<u>PLACES</u>
1. Majjhantika Thera	Kasmira & Gandhara ¹
2. Mahadeva Thera	Mahimsamandala ²
3. Rakkhita Thera	Vanavasi ³
4. Yonaka Dhammarakkhita Thera	Aparantaka ⁴
5. Maha Dhammarakkhita Thera	Maharattha ⁵
6. Maha Rakkhita Thera	Yonaka ⁶
7. Majjhima Thera	Himavantapadesa ⁷
8. Sonaka and Uttara Theras	Suvannabhumi ⁸
9. Mahinda, Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala Theras	Tambapannidipa ⁹

¹**Gandhara** comprises the districts of Peshawar & Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Kasmira is modern Kashmir.

²**Mahimsamandala** is generally taken as modern Mysore.

³**Vanavasi** was composed of coastal regions such as Kerala and Malabar.

⁴**Aparantaka** or the 'western ends' comprise the Mumbai (Bombay) region, northern Gujarat, Kachchh and Sind.

⁵**Mararattha** is modern Maharashtra.

⁶**Yonaka** (Sanskrit Yavana) together with the Kambojas means clans of foreign race in the northwest frontier included in Asoka's empire.

⁷**Himavantapadesa** is the Himalayan country.

⁸**Suvannabhumi** or 'golden land' is Bago (Pegu) and Mawlamyine (Moulmein) district in Mon state of Myanmar (Burma).

⁹**Tambapannidipa** is the island of Sri Lanka.

b) Prophecy of the Elders of the Second Council

Interestingly, an account in the **Mahavamsa** written during the sixth century AD says that Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was a Brahmagod called Tissa in his previous existence. At the time of the Second Council, the *Arahants*, foreseeing danger to the religion in the future, approached him for help as his lifespan in the Brahma realm was coming to an end. He consented to be born in the world of men in order to prevent the downfall of the Buddha's religion.

Subsequently he was born as the son of Moggali of Pataliputta, as a Brahmin named Tissa. At a young age, he showed great intelligence by thoroughly mastering the Vedas. The Venerables Siggava and Candavajji, who were assigned to convert him, frequented his house on their alms round. For seven years they got nothing, not even a word asking them to move on. But on the eighth year, Ven. Siggava heard someone in the house saying to him: 'Go further on.' When Tissa's father Moggali saw him and asked whether he had received anything from his house, Ven. Siggava answered 'Yes'. Later when Moggali learnt what had happened, he scolded the monk for lying when the latter came on the second day.

Actually, when Ven. Siggava said that he had received something, it was true. For the last seven years no one in the house had offered him anything, not even one word. Now someone had said something to him. Impressed by his humility and patience, Moggali developed faith and became his almsfood supporter (*dayaka*). When Tissa was sixteen, Ven. Siggava intentionally sat on his seat in the house. When the angry Tissa berated him, Ven. Siggava responded by asking Tissa a question about the *Cittayamaka* from the Abhidhamma. The latter could not answer and expressed a desire to learn the Dhamma converting to Buddhism. After obtaining the consent of his parents, he joined the Sangha as Ven. Siggava's disciple, who taught him the Vinaya while Ven. Candavajji taught the Abhidhamma. He later attained Arahantship and became an acknowledged leader of the monks at Pataliputta. He became known as Moggaliputta Tissa and was instrumental in convening the Third Council and despatching Dhamma missions to various parts of the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka and Burma to propagate the Buddha Sasana. Subsequent events appear to confirm the **prophecy** of the *Arahants* of the Second Council.

c) Patna Museum (Closed on Mondays)

The museum at Patna, capital of Bihar where Buddhism originated, houses one of the largest collections of ancient Buddhist antiquities

in the world. The sculptures of stone and bronze on display can be divided into a few distinct periods, namely:

- **Mauryan Sculptures (4th-3rd century BC)**

On display here are Indian stone sculptures of highly polished sandstone in magnificent forms of animals such as the lion, bull and elephant capitals, fashioned for placing atop Asokan pillars. Besides these refined courtly art, an archaic religious art based on the widespread cult of tutelary deities are on display featuring the gigantic Patna yaksa (*yakkha*) and yaksi (female *yakkha*).

- **Gandhara and Mathura Buddha Images**

Prior to the beginning of the Christian era, the Buddha was never represented in human form but only by symbols. The demand for Buddha images started when the movement of 'Bhakti' or devotion gained strength among the Buddhist laity due to Mahayana influence. Buddha images came into existence in the first century AD, when two ancient schools of sculpture emerged separately – **Gandhara** (Afghanistan) in the far northwest of India and **Mathura** (Muttra) in the east. In **Gandhara**, the Buddha-image is represented in **Grecian style**, almost **Apollo-like** in physical beauty and even the robe is sculpted with folds characteristic of Greco-Roman sculpture. The contours are not rounded off and great pains are taken to model the human form to display the physical perfection through sharp, elegant features. In **Mathura**, the sculptures are indigenous, in the *Mahapurisa* style, large and rounded. A typical example is *Bhikkhu* Bala's image of the *Bodhisatta* in Sarnath. The treatment of the Buddha's robe is schematic and clinging, so no folds are shown and the body is revealed as though it were nude. In Patna Museum, one is able to see some rare specimens of Buddha and *Bodhisatta* images from Gandhara that survived destruction by Muslim fanatics when they conquered Northern India.

- **Gupta Period (AD 300-550)**

The Gupta period was the golden age of Indian art and the great Buddha images of Mathura, Sarnath, Ajanta and Bihar are magnificent specimens from this age. The Buddha images from Mathura during this period underwent some modifications by the Indo-Grecian art mode. There is a large collection of Buddha-images from the Gupta period in this museum for one to admire.

- **Pala Period (9th—12th century AD)**

During the Pala period, metal images became increasing popular and elegant bronze Buddha images were produced in Bihar. For stone sculptures, Nalanda in Bihar state was famous for its distinctive black slate Buddha images. In Patna Museum, there is a section showing black slate and bronze images of the Buddha and some bronze images of Tantric deities as the cult of Tantrayana, a decadent and perverse form of worship of deities unrelated to the Buddha's Teaching emerged during the Pala Period.

5. Journey of the Buddha's Alms Bowl ^{8, 16, 38, 42}

Vaishali is celebrated to possess the **Buddha's alms bowl**, which he donated to the Licchavis before his *Parinibbana*. According to a legend by the 5th century AD Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien, it was at a place twelve *yojanas* (1 *yojana* = 12.8 km) southeast of Kusinara that Lord Buddha had donated his alms-bowl to the Licchavis. Earlier at Vaishali, he had announced his impending death or *Parinibbana*. The Licchavis having become overwhelmed with emotions at this news kept following him and did not want to leave him. Lord Buddha then created the illusion of a large and deeply scarped river separating them and donating his alms-bowl to them as a memorial, he exhorted them to return to their houses. On this they went back and erected a stone pillar, on which this account is engraved (Fo-Kwo-Ki, Ch. XXIV). A *stupa* was built later to commemorate that emotional event. **Kesariya**, 55 kilometres northwest of Vesali, is believed to be present day location of that event. At Kesariya, the Archeological Survey of India has recently excavated what is believed to be the tallest *stupa* in the world.

With regard to the whereabouts of the Buddha's alms bowl after Kesariya, two accounts are available, namely: that of the Chinese pilgrims who visited India from the 5th to 7th centuries AD and the other from the Mahavamsa, a Pali chronicle of Ceylon. From these accounts, several bowls have emerged, namely: the **Peshawar Bowl**, the **Kashgar Bowl**, the **Kandahar Bowl**, the **Ceylon Bowl** and the **Chinese Bowl**, the last according to **Marco Polo** was taken by **Kublai Khan** from Ceylon to China in 1284 AD.

5.1 The Peshawar Bowl and the Kashgar Bowl

The Chinese pilgrims' account of the Buddha's alms bowl begins in **Peshawar**, when Fa Hsien (Fo-Kwo-Ki Ch. XII) reported seeing the bowl when he visited **Gandhara** around **401 AD**. He related that formerly, a king of the Yue-chi after having conquered Gandhara wanted to carry off the alms bowl. He set it on an elephant, but the

elephant fell under its weight. Then he built a carriage and harnessed in it eight elephants, but the car stood fast. The time for moving the bowl had not come, so the king repented by building a *stupa* and *vihara* for ceremonial worship of the relic. This *vihara* had 700 priests who would bring out the alms bowl every day at lunchtime for devotees to make offerings.

Fa Hsien described that it was of mixed colour but chiefly black, capable of holding **two pecks or more** ('peck' is a dry measure of 10 pints or 5.7 litres). The four divisions were clear, each being about a fifth inch thick. (**Note:** According to Vinaya Mv. Kh. I, when the merchants **Tapussa** and **Bhallika** offered rice cake and honey to the Buddha at the foot of the Rajayattana tree at the end of the seventh week after Enlightenment, the Buddha thought: "*Perfect Ones do not accept in their hands. In what should I receive the rice cake and honey?*" Then the Four Heavenly Kings of *Catumaharajika*, aware of the Blessed One's thought, brought four crystal bowls from the four quarters. These four bowls were moulded together to form a new crystal bowl with four divisions at the rim.)

Fa Hsien says nothing about how the alms-bowl ended up in Gandhara. But the Tibetan historian **Taranatha** observes that: "the king of the **Yueh-chih** (Kushana) invaded Magadha and carried off the alms bowl and **Asvaghosa**." **Cunningham** is of the opinion that it was the Kushan king **Kanishka** (ruled 78-102 AD) who invaded Magadha and took the alms-bowl to **Peshawar** around the 1st or 2nd century AD. While in Varanasi, the philosopher Asvaghosa saw the city conquered by the Kushan emperor Kanishka. A huge war indemnity was demanded and to appease the Buddhist conqueror, the **ruler of Varanasi** handed over the alms bowl of the Buddha as a symbolic gesture. Asvaghosa probably accompanied Kanishka back to Peshawar to serve as spiritual advisor in his court.

Mention is made here about later accounts that place the location of Buddha's alms bowl at **Kashgar around AD 400**. The biography of **Kumarajiva** records a visit of this Buddhist savant to Kashgar about AD 400 and specially mentions that he placed on his head the Buddha's alms bowl (*patra*), which is believed to possess the miraculous quality of changing its weight. Another Chinese monk

Chih Meng who went to India via Lop Nor and Khotan in **AD 404** witnessed the same miracle when handling the Buddha's alms bowl, which was shown to him at Kashgar where he also saw the Buddha's **spittoon** made of stone of variegated colour (see Ref. 42 & 43).

However, Fa Hsien who visited Kashgar around AD 400 to attend the great five-yearly assembly mentioned only the **spittoon but not the alms bowl**, which he saw in Peshawar later. While we thus find Fa Hsien's account of the sacred spittoon in full accord with Chih-meng's above-quoted description, there yet arises the question why Fa Hsien at Kashgar did not mention the alms-bowl, which both Chih Meng and Kumarajiva, within a few years of his visit, had seen at Kashgar.

There are two possibilities: (1) Fa-hsien, too, may well have seen the alms bowl shown at Kashgar. But as he later at Peshawar saw that sacred relic in a specimen which, from the antiquity of the legends attaching to it and the magnificence of the enshrining monastery, must have appeared to him the only authentic one, he probably chose to remain silent about the Kashgar bowl, raising the possibility that **there were two bowls which claimed to be the Buddha's alms bowl** at that time. (2) The second possibility is that the same alms bowl that Fa Hsien saw in Peshawar was transferred to Kashgar around the time of Kumarajiva and Chih Meng. This seems unlikely, as no monastery would wish to part with such a sacred object.

In 520 AD, the Chinese pilgrims **Sun Yung** and **Hui Seng** visited Gandhara but did not mention anything about the alms bowl indicating that it had been removed from Gandhara before their visit. This removal probably took place before the whole region fell to the Yethas or Hephthalites under **Laelih** (Kitolo) around **AD 425-450**. Sun Yung who crossed the Pamirs at **Tashkurgan** into Wakhan found the Hephthalites to be in unbroken power and states that two generations had passed since **Laelih**, the persecutor of Buddhism, had been set up as the king of Gandhara. The bowl was probably carried off by the people of Gandhara who emigrated west and settled by the banks of the **Arghanadab River** in ancient **Arachosia (Afghanistan)** where they founded a city named after their old country Gandhara, which still exists today as **Kandahar**.

5.2 The Kandahar Bowl

Mention is made of the alms bowl again when Hsüan Tsang visited Gandhara around AD 640. He saw the ruins of the *stupa* of the *patra* of Buddha and stated that: “*in traversing different countries, the alms bowl has now come to Persia.*” Cunningham (Ancient Geography of India, 17 note 2) identifies this Persian bowl with the Kandahar bowl. He explains Hsüan Tsang's statement by the fact that in his time Kandahar belonged to Persia.

The Kandahar bowl has long been a famous object of worship. It was seen in a thick clump of ash and mulberry trees to the east of old Kandahar in an obscure little Mahammadan shrine. The trunk of the tree under which the bowl stood was studded with hundreds of iron nails and twigs representing cures for toothache. In 1878-1880, the Kandahar bowl was seen and described by **Dr. Bellew** and **Major Le Messurier** (Dr. Bellew's *Indus to the Tigris*, 143; Major Le Messurier's *Kandahar in 1879*, 223, 225). According to them the bowl is of hard compact black porphyry, which rings when struck. It is round, about four feet wide and two feet deep, with sides about four inches thick. The lip has twenty-four facets each about seven inches wide. From the bottom of the bowl scrolls radiate to near the rim, where, on the inside, is a Persian inscription and on the outside are four lines in **Arabic characters**.

The capacity of the bowl is **eighty gallons** and its weight about three-quarter ton. Major LeMessurier's detailed measurements (outer diameter 4' 2", inner diameter 3' 7¼", inside depth 2' 3") so closely correspond with General Cunningham's measurements (4½' in diameter and 2½' deep) of a stone bowl at **Bhilsa** (Vedisa near Sanchi), as to suggest that like the Bhilsa bowl the Kandahar bowl may originally have been a tree pot. Sir **Olaf Caroe** the Governor of the North West Frontier Province from 1946 to 1947 reported it to be at Kabul Museum. The present status of this bowl is unknown. The great difference of size between the **Peshawar bowl** (2.5 gals.) and the **Kandahar bowl** (80 gals.) means that they are not the same bowl. Both bowls are obviously too big for a human being to use and may be ruled out as the Buddha's alms bowl.

5.3 The Ceylon Bowl

Another account of Buddha's alms bowl is given in the Mahavamsa, a 6th century AD chronicle of Ceylon written by Ven. Mahanama. After Ven. Mahinda had converted the Ceylonese king Devanampiya Tissa to Buddhism, he made known to the king his wish for a *stupa* to be built for the worship of the Buddha's relics. According to Mahavamsa Ch. XVII, the samanera Sumana was sent to Pataliputta in India to ask for the **Buddha's corporeal relics and alms bowl** from King Asoka. Thereafter the alms bowl with the corporeal relics was brought to Sri Lanka. The relics were enshrined in *stupas* at Anuradhapura but the alms-bowl of the Buddha or *Pātradhātu* was kept within the palace itself.

During the reign of **Vattagamini Abhaya** (104-88BC) a young brahman named Tissa started a rebellion. This was followed by the invasion of seven Tamil warriors who defeated the king and ruled the country for fifteen years. Of the seven Tamils, one married a local princess and returned home. Another took the alms bowl that was in Anuradhapura and also returned to India 'well contented'.

The fate of the alms bowl remained unknown for 500 years until the reign of **King Upatissa** (365-406 AD) who exhibited it in public for the purpose of warding off misfortune that had struck the country. According to Mahavamsa (19.ch. 37. v. 189-198):

*“He made an image wholly of gold of the departed Buddha, laid the **stone alms bowl of the Master** (filled) with water in the hollow of its hands and placed this figure on a great chariot He took upon himself and duties of a moral life and made the people also take them on themselves, he instituted a great almsgiving and established security (of life) for all living creatures. Then the bhikkhus who gathered there reciting the Ratana-Sutta and pouring out water, walked about the street, not far from the royal palace, near the wall, round which they walked with their right side towards it in the three watches of the night. When morning dawned a great cloud poured rain on the earth and all who had suffered from disease, held refreshed, high festival.”*

From the beginning of the twelfth century down to the reign **Parakramabahu IV** at the very end of 13th century AD, the alms bowl was always mentioned together with the **Sacred Tooth Relic** because they were the symbols of state, the possession of which were vital to the kings. After Parakramabahu IV, who reigned about A.D.1300, no further mention is made of the alms bowl. Apparently towards the end of the 13th century AD, it was taken from Ceylon to China at the request of the great Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan.

5.4 Kublai Khan and the Chinese Bowl

According to Marco Polo, in **1284 AD** Kublai Khan sent a mission to Ceylon to negotiate the purchase of the **Sacred Tooth, Hair and Bowl Relics**. As the Mongols were reputed to be fierce warriors (Tibet had succumbed while the Burmese were defeated in Pagan earlier in AD 1277), the Ceylonese king was faced with the dilemma of parting with the state treasures or earning the displeasure of the Great Khan. It is said that in order to please the Chinese Emperor, he dispatched two fake tooth relics, which were graciously received by the Emperor who established ritual worship of the objects. The **Ceylon alms bowl** was taken to China and Marco Polo (1290) who saw the bowl describes as of very **beautiful green porphyry** (rock with crystals embedded) while a Chinese writer **Wang Ta-Yuan** (1349) noted that it rang like glass when struck.

The whole episode is narrated in the Travels of Marco Polo, Volume 2 by **Marco Polo** and **Rustichello of Pisa** and reproduced below:

*“Now it befell that the Great Kaan heard how on that mountain there was the sepulchre of our first father Adam, and that some of his hair and of his teeth, and the dish from which he used to eat, were still preserved there. So he thought he would get hold of them somehow or another, and despatched a great embassy for the purpose, in the year of Christ, **1284**. The ambassadors, with a great company, travelled on by sea and by land until they arrived at the island of Seilan (Ceylon), and presented themselves before the king.*

*And they were so urgent with him that they succeeded in getting **two of the grinder teeth (molars)**, which were passing great and thick; and they also got some of the **hair**, and the **dish** from which that personage used to eat, which is of a **very beautiful green porphyry**. And when the Great Kaan's ambassadors had attained the object for which they had come they were greatly rejoiced, and returned to their lord. And when they drew near to the great city of **Cambaluc (Kaanbalik – City of the Kaan or Beijing)**, where the Great Kaan was staying, they sent him word that they had brought back that for which he had sent them. On learning this, the Great Kaan was passing glad, and ordered all the ecclesiastics and others to go forth to meet these reliques, which he was led to believe were those of Adam. And why should I make a long story of it? In sooth, the whole population of Cambaluc went forth to meet those reliques, and the ecclesiastics took them over and carried them to the Great Kaan, who received them with **great joy and reverence**. And they find it written in their Scriptures that the virtue of that dish is such that if **food for one man be put therein it shall become enough for five men**: and the Great Kaan averred that he had proved the thing and found that it was really true.”*

This account of Marco Polo provides the last known whereabouts of the alms bowl. It is corroborated by a Chinese record entitled “**Tao-i-chih-lueh** (A Description of the Barbarian Islands) written in **1349** by **Wang Ta-Yuan** who mentions the dispatch of ambassadors to Ceylon under the Yuan dynasty on three occasions to negotiate the purchase of Buddha’s sacred alms bowl, which was part of Ceylon’s collection of relics. However as the transfer of the alms bowl took place 65 years earlier, his description of it was **probably based on what he saw in Beijing** rather than in Ceylon itself.

*“Opposite the altar of the Buddha was placed a great alms bowl made of a substance that was neither jade nor copper nor iron. It was crimson in colour and luminous, and **when struck it rang like glass**. So at the beginning of this dynasty (Yuan) ambassadors were dispatched on three separate occasions to bring it back. The bowl placed before statues of Buddha contained an offering of food or water. There was one in front of each statue and they were not considered relics.”*

Coming to present times, situated at No.171, Fuchengmennei Street in Beijing's Xicheng District is the **Miaoying Temple**. First built in 1096 during the Liao Dynasty, it was considerably expanded and elaborately redecorated in 1271 during the reign of Emperor Shizu (**Kublai Khan**) of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). In order to strengthen his relationship with the Lamaist rulers of Tibet and to gain the support of Tibetan Buddhists among his Yuan officials, Kublai Khan granted imperial permission to build the **White Dagoba** in the temple grounds in 1279. Simultaneously he renovated and renamed the temple '**The Emperor's Longevity and Peace Temple**' (*Dashengshou Wan'an Si*). Significantly the timing of these construction works coincided with the acquisition of the relics from Ceylon. So it is very likely that they were done to provide an **imperial shrine** for the worship of these sacred objects.

The temple was burnt to the ground in 1368, the year the Chinese under **Zhu Yuanzhang** drove the Mongols out of China. Amazingly only the White Dagoba remained standing. Zhu Yuanzhang founded the **Ming Dynasty** (1368-1644) and moved his capital to **Nanjing**. In 1420 the third Ming emperor **Yongle** moved the capital back to Beijing and in 1457, Emperor **Tianshun** rebuilt the temple, giving it the present name **Miaoying Si** (Divine Retribution Temple).

The **Tangshan** earthquake in 1976 caused severe damage to the temple buildings. The top of the **White Dagoba** tilted to one side, bricks and mortar in the neck supporting the cupola crumbled off, and the main trunk cracked in several places. Four boxes containing numerous Buddhist artifacts hidden inside the roof of the Dagoba were discovered, which are now displayed at the Temple. (**Ref:** Miaoying Monastery in www.china.org.cn/english/features/Beijing/31155.htm). Unfortunately nothing is said or known about the whereabouts of the Buddha's **alms bowl** and other relics, which **Kublai Khan** brought from Ceylon. They were **probably lost or destroyed** in the 1368 fire during the fierce fighting between the Mongols and Ming forces.

PART IV

Notable Shrines along the Pilgrimage Route

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1. The Evolution of the *Stupa* as an Object of Veneration^{4, 24}

1.1 Objects of Reverence in Buddhism

While the Buddha was staying at Jetavana *vihara* in Savatthi, devout followers would bring flowers and garlands to pay their respects to him. In his absence, they would lay the flowers and garlands at the entrance to the Fragrant Chamber (*gandhakuti*) and depart happily. Hearing of this, Anathapindika requested Ven. Ananda to find out from the Buddha of a way the laity could pay respects to him when he was away on preaching tours. According to the Buddha, there are three objects of reverence (*cetiyanī*), namely:

- (a) Objects of reverence appertaining to the **body** (*saririka*)
- (b) Objects of reverence appertaining to **personal use** (*paribhogika*)
- (c) Objects of reverence **reminiscent of the Buddha** (*uddesika*)

The Buddha said that erecting an object of reverence appertaining to his body was not proper while he was alive but proper after his *Parinibbana*. An object of reverence reminiscent of the Buddha is purely mental and has no physical basis. But the great Bodhi tree used by the Buddha whether he is alive or dead is an object of reverence. As a result of the Buddha's advice, Ven. Ananda made arrangements for a sapling of the Bodhi tree from Buddhagaya to be planted at the entrance of Jetavana monastery to provide the lay disciples with a place to pay respects to the Buddha in his absence. The tree that grew from this sapling is called the Ananda-Bodhi.

1.2 Devotion in Buddhism⁴⁴

This incident from the Scriptures demonstrates the laity's adoration of the Buddha. Their devotion was so great that they needed an object of reverence to venerate him in his absence. Such devotion or *bhatti* (Sanskrit: *bhakti*) is common in all religions. The Buddha repeatedly

discouraged any **excessive blind veneration** paid to him personally because he knew that too much emotional devotion would obstruct mental development in the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

In the Scriptures, there is a story of the monk **Vakkali** who was full of devotion and love for the Buddha. Even when he was gravely ill, all he wanted was to see the Buddha, as he was ever so desirous to behold him bodily. To him the Buddha said: “*What good will it be to see this foul body? Vakkali, he who sees the Dhamma (Teaching) sees me. Indeed, Vakkali, seeing the Dhamma is seeing me, seeing me is seeing the Dhamma.*” (*Khanda Samyutta, Vakkali Sutta*).

In another incident shortly before his *Parinibbana*, the twin Sala trees broke out in full bloom and their blossoms rained upon his body together with celestial flowers and scented powder from the sky while the sound of heavenly music and voices filled the air out of reverence for him, the **Buddha advised**: “*Yet not thus, Ananda is the Tathagata respected, venerated, esteemed, worshipped and honoured in the highest degree. But, Ananda, whatsoever bhikkhu or bhikkhini, layman or laywoman abides by the Teaching, lives uprightly in the Teaching, walks in the way of the Teaching, it is by him that the Tathagata is respected, venerated, esteemed, worshipped and honoured in the highest degree.*” (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta, V, 6*).

These two teachings appear to convey the message of the Master that a true and deep understanding of the *Dhamma* through practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is vastly superior to any external homage or mere emotional devotion. However, we should not conclude that the Buddha disparaged a reverential and devotional attitude of mind stemming from a true understanding and deep admiration of what is great and noble. It should also be emphasized that “**Seeing the Dhamma**” is not mere intellectual knowledge through study or logic but the experiential knowledge (*bhavanamaya ñāna*) through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the **saddha** that affirms that no system wherein the Noble Eightfold Path is absent can claim to lead to Emancipation.

The Buddha refused to be made an object of a ‘personality cult’. (Note: No Buddha images appeared during his lifetime and the first

five centuries after *Parinibbana*). But he knew that respect and homage paid to those worthy of it is a great blessing, which he preached in the *Mangala Sutta*. This is because when one assumes a respectful attitude, one develops humility and is able to recognize the superior qualities of others and learn from them. This is one of the factors necessary for progress, whether spiritual or worldly.

Devotion is a natural expression of confidence (*saddha*) and plays a vital role in the **balance of the faculties** (*indriya samata*) with its complement faculty of *panna* (wisdom). A one-sided development of the intellectual faculties (intelligence, insight, wisdom) tends to make one skeptical while a one-sided development of faith or devotion tends to make one gullible. Hence both faculties must be 'balanced' in order to lead to mental and spiritual progress.

For the laity, the routine acts of devotion like the offering of flowers, lights, incense and worship (*puja*) are a means to connect with the Triple Gem in their daily life. More important and of greater validity than these outward forms of devotion is the capacity to turn them to the practice of devotional mental culture such as the contemplation of the Virtues of the Buddha that will lead to great benefits, namely:

- i) Acquires **abundant faith**, which purifies the mind so that **mindfulness** and **concentration** is easily established.
- ii) Productive of **joy** which is helpful in difficult times e.g. sickness, loss or facing hardships.
- iii) Instills **confidence** in oneself thereby dispelling fear, anxiety, doubt and restlessness.

Devotional meditation such as the Recollection of the Buddha can serve as an invaluable aid in attaining mental concentration, which is the basis of liberating insight. This function of devotional meditation cannot be better described than in the words of the Master himself: "*When a noble disciple recollects the Tathagata thus, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by greed, hatred or delusion; his mind is straight, with the Tathagata as its object. A noble disciple whose mind is straight becomes zealous of the goal, zealous of the Dhamma, gains gladness (pamojja) connected with the Dhamma. When he is gladdened, rapture (piti) arises; for one uplifted by rapture, the whole body becomes calm (passadhi); one calm in body*

feels happy (sukha); for one who is happy, the mind becomes concentrated (samadhi). Such a one is called a noble disciple who amidst a humanity gone wrong, has attained to what is right; who amidst an afflicted humanity dwells un-afflicted; who has entered upon the stream of the Dhamma and develops recollection of the Buddha.” (Anguttara, Book of Sixes, 10)

1.3 The Rise of the *Stupa* after the Buddha’s *Parinibbana*

The word *stupa* (Pali ‘*thupa*’, Anglo-Indian ‘*tope*’) derived from the root ‘*stup*’ (to heap) is a mound or tumulus. Originally they were associated with funerals, being mounds containing the ashes and charred remains of the dead collected from the funeral pyre. The practice of erecting *stupas* over corporeal relics was pre-Buddhistic.

The Buddha realized the significance of devotion among the laity by sanctioning the worship of his corporeal relics. In answer to Ven. Ananda’s question of what should be done with the Buddha’s body after His *Parinibbana*, the Buddha said that it should be cremated like the body of a Universal monarch and the corporeal remains from the cremation should be honoured by *stupas* erected over them at the crossroads. For the monks, he realized that too much time spent on such devotional rites could hinder their practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. So he advised them **“not to hinder themselves by honoring his body but leave it to the laymen who are devoted to the *Tathagata* and will render due honor to his body.”**

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha further mentioned that there are **four persons worthy of a *stupa***, namely: a Supremely Enlightened Buddha, a *Pacceka* Buddha, an *Ariyan* disciple and a Universal monarch. ‘And why is each worthy of a *stupa*? Because at the thought: “*This is a stupa of the Supremely Enlightened One, of a Pacceka Buddha, of an Ariyan disciple, of a Universal monarch*”, people’s hearts are made peaceful and at the breaking-up of the body after death, they are reborn in happy states (*sugati*). That is the reason and those are the four who are worthy of a *stupa*.’

This is how the Buddha sanctified the *stupa* from an ordinary grave-mound to its present position as a supreme object of **veneration** and **sanctity** to Buddhists. *Stupa* worship took a new dimension when Asoka converted to Buddhism and built 84,000 *stupas* all over his empire. In the course of time, *stupas* evolved from simple mounds of earth into ostentatious structures of architectural beauty and magnificence and became the chief emblem of the Buddhist faith.

As the body-relics enshrined within a *stupa* stood as a symbol of the presence of the Buddha, prayers were normally offered and rites of worship performed, such as offering of lights, flowers, garlands, incense, buntings and cloth wrapped round the mound. An ancient custom in India is to pass round a person of reverence or a holy object, keeping him or the object on the right side. This is called '*padakkhina*' (Sanskrit: '*pradaksina*'). In the Scriptures, a visitor always behaves thus when about to take leave of the Buddha. This custom became a ceremonial rite in *stupa*-worship and a path for circumambulation was usually provided in a *stupa*.

For the skilful pilgrim, the circumambulation around the *stupa* may be turned into **walking meditation** exercise to develop mindfulness or loving-kindness. Those who are more inclined towards devotional practices should consider the Recollections of Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* at the *stupas* to develop faith and attain the purity of mind.

1.4 Four Types of *Stupas*

Buddhist *stupas* may be divided into four categories, namely:

(a) *Saririka* or Relic *Stupa*

These *stupas* contain the **corporeal relics** of the Buddha, the Chief Disciples, Buddhist teachers and saints. *Stupas* containing the relics of the Buddha, which are considered the most sacred objects of worship, are usually very large and grand, as they have been enlarged and renovated several times by successive Buddhist kings of India. According to legend, Emperor Asoka broke into seven of

the original eight relic *stupas* (*Ramagama stupa* was left intact), took a major portion of the Buddha's relics and distributed them in 84,000 *stupas* all over his empire. As a result, one can still see many of these *stupas* in India as well as in Pakistan, e.g., *Dhammarajika stupa* in Sarnath, India and its namesake in Taxila, Pakistan.

(b) *Paribhogika Stupa*

These *stupas* are built over **sacred objects used** by Buddha, e.g., his robe, water-pot, razor and needle-case.

(c) *Uddesika or Memorial Stupa*

These *stupas* were built to commemorate important incidents in the Buddha's life, including those of his previous births or spot hallowed by his presence. Thus Hsüan Tsang gives us an account of fourteen *stupas* at Vesali, of which twelve were commemorative ones and only two were relic *stupas*.

(d) *Votive Stupas*

These are usually small *stupas* erected at sacred sites by devotees mainly as an **offering** for attaining religious merit. The most number of votive *stupas* can be seen at the four places of pilgrimage, namely: (i) Lumbini, surrounding the site where the Buddha was born; (ii) Bodhgaya, surrounding the Bodhi tree where the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment; (iii) Deer Park in Sarnath, where the Buddha preached the First Sermon; (iv) Kusinara surrounding the Mahaparinibbana Temple where the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana*. Besides these places, votive *stupas* are also erected around relic *stupas*, as the latter are considered supreme objects of worship.

Pilgrims who visit the Eight Great Places will have the rare opportunity to view the various types of *stupas*, starting from the most ancient prototype earthen *stupa* at **Vesali** to the most elaborate Dhamek Stupa in **Sarnath**. Those who undertake the journey to Bhopal will have the opportunity to see the **Stupa of Sanchi** where the relics of the Chief Disciples were discovered.

2. Pava, where the Buddha had his Last Meal

2.1 How to reach there

Pava is located about 15 km east of Kushinagar, near the present-day village of **Padruana**. On the way, one crosses the Kosi River which was known as the Kakudha River during the Buddha's time.

2.2 Religious Significance

According to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, after leaving Bhoganagara (present-day Kesariya) the Buddha travelled to Pava with a company of monks and stayed at the mango grove of his lay disciple the **metal-smith Cunda**. On learning this, Cunda visited the Buddha to pay respects, and after listening to a *Dhamma* talk, invited the Buddha and *Sangha* to his house for the next day's meal where he served '*sukara maddava*' (*sukara* = boar or pig; *maddava* = soft, tender or delicate) translated as '**pig's delicacy**'. Two renderings of this term are possible, namely: (1) tender pork flesh or (2) something enjoyed by boars or pigs, which has been thought to refer to a mushroom or truffle, or a shoot or tuber. It is stated that the Buddha did not allow the monks to eat it, but he himself consumed the '*sukara maddava*'.

After consuming the last meal, Buddha suffered from severe pains and dysentery, yet he continued his final journey to Kusinara, a distance of three *gavutas* (about 15 km). Due to the severity of the illness, he had to stop twenty-five times to rest. In order to dispel any remorse arising in the mind of Cunda that his meal offering was the cause of his death, the Buddha asked Ananda to dispel the **remorse of Cunda** by explaining that of all food offerings, only two offerings of food, both equal in fruition, exceed all others in greatness of results. **Which two?** One partaken of by the Buddha on becoming Fully Enlightened (**Sujata's milk rice**), and the other partaken of by the Buddha before his *Parinibbana* (**Cunda's meal**). According to the Buddha, by his deed Cunda had gained great merits that lead to long life, beauty, good health, glory, heavenly birth and sovereignty.

2.3 Miracle of the Clearing of the Waters

Near Pava is a river called the **Kosi River**, which is identified with the **Kakudha River** during the Buddha's time. Before reaching the Kakudha River, the Buddha who was very tired and thirsty (probably due to dehydration from the diarrhoea) had to stop to quench his thirst. According to *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* IV, 24-32, the Buddha asked Ven. Ananda to fetch water from the nearby stream for him to drink. The latter did not go at first because many carts had passed over it earlier causing the water to become soiled and muddy. Instead Ven. Ananda said that the Kakudha River was close by and its waters were clear, cool and pleasant and suggested that the Buddha could quench his thirst and refresh his limbs there. However the Buddha still insisted that he wanted a drink. After the Buddha's third request, Ven. Ananda went to the stream and witnessed a miracle. The shallow water, which had been disturbed by many cartwheels so that it flowed turbid and soiled, became clear and settled down, making it pure and pleasant for consumption.

2.4 *Stupa* of the Mallas of Pava

After the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, the **Mallas of Pava** claimed a share of his relics and erected a *stupa* over the relics. Recently the ASI has excavated a huge mound revealing the presence of a brick *stupa* at a site said to be **Cunda's mango grove** and is probably the *stupa* built by the Mallas of Pava. When Hsuan Tsang visited Kusinara during the 7th century AD, he mentioned the presence of a *stupa* built by King Asoka at Cunda's old house, northeast of the city. Pilgrims after visiting Kushinagar should travel to Pava and visit this *stupa* where one should arouse urgency by recalling to mind Buddha's last meal and how he finally succumbed to sickness and death. Reflecting on this one becomes truly apprehensive, and this **arouses religious urgency** to practise the Noble Eightfold Path to end suffering.

3. Kesariya, site of the World's Tallest *Stupa* ^{8, 16, 24}

3.1 How to reach there

From Kushinagar, travel southwards by National Highway NH 28 to **Gopalganj** and continue across the Gandak River to Piprajoti. Take the road towards Motihari and turn off at **Pipra**. Don't take the Chakia road, it looks shorter but is virtually impassable. If you leave Kushinagar around 4 a.m., you will be able to arrive at Kesariya by 10a.m. and then continue onwards to Vaishali in the afternoon. From Patna, travel 70km to Muzaffarpur and drive north another 60km until you come to Pipra. All distances are approximate.

3.2 Historical Background

According to Dr. K K Mohd, superintendent of the ASI Patna Circle, authentic references about Kesariya include the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, which deals with the last journey of Lord Buddha from Rajgir to Kushinagar in which there is a mention of **Bhoganagara**, presently known as Kesariya. This is very likely as Kesariya falls on a well-known route from Vaishali to Kushinagar and marks the border of the Licchavis with the Mallas of Kusinara. The place is believed to be associated with Alara Kalama, an ascetic of Buddha's time, and has been identified as **Kesaputta** of Buddhist texts, where the Buddha preached the famous *Kesaputta Sutta* to the Kalamas.

3.3 Religious Significance

According to the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien, going from Kusinara to the southeast for twelve *yojanas* (1 *yojana* = 7 miles), is the place where the Licchavis wished to follow Buddha to (the place of) his *Parinibbana*. Earlier at Vaishali he had announced that his *Parinibbana* would take place in Kusinara and as he walked with a company of monks to the final resting place, the Licchavis,

overcome by great sorrow, kept following him, unwilling to go away. Finally as they reached the border with the Mallas of Kosala, he created the illusion of a large and deep ditch, which compelled them to go back. He then gave them his **alms-bowl** as a memorial and exhorted them to return to their houses. On this they went back and erected a stone pillar on which this account is engraved.

According to the Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang**, about 200 li (56 km) to the northwest of the city of Vaishali, is an old and long deserted city. In it is a *stupa*. This is the place where the Buddha delivered the *Makhadeva Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikaya*, concerning his previous life when he was a *Bodhisatta* named **King Makhadeva**. At that time he was living at **Mithila** in the **Makhadeva Grove**, which is identified as the site of the Kesariya Stupa. (**Note:** The location of Kesariya given by Fa Hsien was 12 *yojanas* or 154 km southeast from Kushinagar while that given by Hsuan Tsang was 200 li or 56 km northwest of Vaishali. Both point to Kesariya.)

Later on probably after *Parinibbana*, the Licchavis built a mud *stupa* at Kesariya to commemorate that emotional event. In the course of time, during the **Maurya**, **Sunga** and **Kushana** period, it became a brick *stupa* with several additions and enlargements. In the 6th century AD, during the Gupta period, it was further enlarged and embellished with hundreds of sculptures. The latest ASI dating puts the *stupa* to the 8th century Pala period.

Although some quarters would have us believe that the Kesariya *stupa* once enshrined the alms-bowl of the Buddha it does not agree with the observations of the Chinese pilgrims. Both would have mentioned such an important relic if it had been enshrined at Kesariya. Secondly, before the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, the practice of enshrining objects used by him was unknown.

Cunningham is of the opinion that the Licchavis took the alms bowl back to Vaishali as directed by the Buddha and that the Kesariya *stupa* was simply a memorial *stupa* built by the Licchavis to mark the spot where they had taken leave of Buddha (For an account of the alms-bowl relic, see page 150)

3.4 Objects of Interest

The main attraction at Kesariya is a tall mound of brick and earthen debris 62 feet high and 1400 feet in circumference, locally known as ‘**Deora**’, located 3km to the south of the village. The fame of this ancient structure is associated with **Raja Ben or Vena**. According to the **Padma Purana** (mythology), Raja Ben was a Buddhist and the title of Chakravarti was conferred upon him because of his great deeds and generosity. The people praised him as a landlord since he did not impose any tax. Unfortunately, one day Raja Ben announced that he was going to impose tax in the form of a grain of gold. Thereafter Raja Ben fell victim to ominous consequences of this policy of greed. His divine powers abruptly disappeared and his wife drowned while bathing. This incident brought despair to Raja Ben. On the advice of the court Pandits, he built the Deora or a *Stupa* and entered it with his family whereupon he was never seen again!

In 1861-62, Cunningham excavated a part of this mound and exposed traces of walls of cells of a Buddhist monastery and a temple enshrining inside a colossal Buddha image, which was later reported stolen and lost.

According to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team that carried out excavations in 2002, the *stupa* rises to a height of 104 feet and is one foot taller than the famous **Borobodur Stupa** in Java. It was 123-feet tall before the 1934 earthquake in Bihar. In the glorious days when Buddhism thrived in India, the Kesariya *Stupa* was 150-feet and Borobodur *stupa* 138-feet tall.

Pilgrims visiting Kesariya will be able to see the dilapidated conditions of this once glorious monument, which is overgrown with bushes and trees. At the front main terrace are found several stucco figures of Lord Buddha in *Bhumiphassa* posture in brick cells provided all over the terraces. All the Buddha images have been mutilated, indicating the vandalism that took place at this monument after Buddhism disappeared from India after the 12th century AD. Reflecting on the impermanent nature (*anicca*) of all conditioned things, one is filled with a deep sense of religious urgency (*samvega*) and urgent desire to practise the Buddha’s Teaching.

4. Lauriya Nandangarh, site of an elegant Asokan Pillar and the Nandangarh *Stupa*²⁴

4.1 How to reach there

From Kushinagar, travel southwards by National Highway NH 28 to **Gopalganj** and continue across the Gandak River to Piprajoti. Take the road northwards to **Motihari** and **Bettiah** until you arrive at Lauriya Nandangarh. Distance from Kushinagar to Motihari is 115km and from Motihari to Lauriya Nandangarh is 71km. From Patna, travel 70km to Muzaffarpur and drive north another 155km passing Motihari and Bettiah until you arrive at Lauriya Nandangarh.

4.2 Asokan Pillar with Lion Capital

The village of Lauriya Nandangarh in West Champaran district derives its name from the presence of an inscribed Asokan pillar (called ‘**Laur**’ in local parlance) and the ruins of a 25m high colossal *stupa* known as **Nandangarh**, about 2km south west of the Asokan pillar. Of all the Asokan pillars still standing today in India, the one at Lauriya Nandangarh is the most beautiful and regal looking. The column is well proportioned and elegant in appearance in contrast to the clumsily executed pillars at Lumbini or Vaishali. It is inscribed with the Edicts I-VI of Asoka in clear, beautifully cut Brahmi characters. In spite of exposure to sun, rain, wind and dust for over 2300 years, it still maintains the original polished appearance.

The pillar (estimated weight 18 tons) is cut from a single block of polished sandstone 10m in height and with diameter of 0.9m at the base and 0.67m at the top. The capital, which is 1.9m tall, is bell shaped with a circular abacus ornamented with a row of pecking geese, and supporting the statue of a single lion. Its head had been

slightly damaged by indiscriminate gunshots in the past while the lower portion of the pillar is covered with graffiti.

4.3 Nandangarh *Stupa*

About 2km southwest of the Asokan pillar is a 25m high mound known as Nandangarh. Excavation of this mound yielded the ruins of a colossal *stupa* that had a circumference of about 457m near the base. The excavations also yielded a large number of stone beads, terracotta figurines, terracotta sealing of about the first century AD, punch marked cast coins, thus proving that the *stupa* was erected during 2nd century AD.

Externally, the *stupa* rises in terraces, the basement and the lower two terraces having a polygonal plan and the upper terraces being circular. The lower terraces form the platform and circular terraces form the moulded base of the drum above the platform. During a later restoration of the *stupa*, new circular walls with three processional paths were constructed around the basement and the first two terraces above it. In the core of the *stupa*, at a depth of 10.7m was exposed a 3.7m tall *stupa* with polygonal base. No relics were found inside but beside it was a tiny copper casket containing a long strip of a birch-bark manuscript of about fourth century AD. The few words, which could be deciphered show that the manuscript represented a Buddhist text, probably the *Paticca Samuppada*. This edifice is the earliest example of a form of terraced *stupa*, which was copied by the builders of **Borobudur** in Java around 800AD.

5. The Ananda Stupa in Hajipur

5.1 How to reach there

Hajipur is located on the northern bank of the Ganges River, 10 km from Patna. The Ananda Stupa is presently situated in the western outskirts of **Hajipur** at a place called **Ramchaura Mandir**, about 1 km south of the **Masjid Chowk**.

5.2 Religious Significance

In ancient times after crossing the Ganges at Patna the first village on the other side was Ukkacala, now called Hajipur. The Buddha is known to have taught only one discourse at this place, the *Cula Goplalaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*.

According to Dhammapada Commentary, when **Ven. Ananda** was one hundred and twenty years old, he knew his lifespan would come to an end in seven days' time. Accordingly he set out from Rajagaha to Vaishali following the route taken by the Buddha. King Ajatasattu heard this and, accompanied by his entourage, went after him with the intention of begging him to stay. Meanwhile the people of Vesali heard that Ananda was coming to their territory and they flocked to the banks of the Ganges to welcome him.

When Ajatasattu caught up with the aged saint on the seventh day, his boat had already reached the middle of the river. The crowds on both banks were imploring him to come to their side. So as not to disappoint either party and to avoid the possibility of conflict Ananda rose into the air and entered into *Parinibbana* by meditating on the fire element and setting his body on fire by spontaneous combustion reducing it to ashes, which fell on both sides of the river. Half his ashes fell on one side of the river, half on the other. So the people of each city taking half the relics returned and erected *stupas* over them.

The *stupa* built on the south (Patna) bank of the Ganges has long ago been washed away by the river's constantly changing course but the one on the northern bank is now a grassy mound with a Hindu temple on it. Archeological excavations were conducted around the area in 1994 to 1997 and revealed the presence of a brick-well having double walls belonging to the Kushana period.

5.3 Present State of Ananda Stupa

When the author visited the Ananda Stupa in November 2008, the whole place appeared to be badly maintained and in a deplorable condition (see Plate 53). There is a dilapidated Hindu temple built on top of the stupa and stray cows were seen wandering in the area. Some locals even used the slope on the stupa to dry cow dung in the sun. Seeing the famous *Stupa* of the *Treasurer of the *Dhamma* in such a dilapidated state today is indeed **disheartening** and will surely **arouse apprehension** among the pious disciples and spur them to practise the Buddha's Teachings in earnest.

***Note:** Venerable Ananda is commonly known as the 'Treasurer of the *Dhamma* or *Dhamma Bhandagarika*'. During the First Council held in Rajagaha three months after *Parinibbana*, Ven. Ananda was chosen by the Arahants to recite all the *suttas* delivered by the Buddha although he was still a Sotapanna. The reason was because he could remember all that he heard directly from Buddha's own mouth when he was the Buddha's personal attendant. In fact the Buddha pronounced him foremost among those of retentive memory.

Although Ananda was not an Arahant as yet, he remembered the Buddha's last advice to him, that should he put forth effort, soon he too will become an Arahant. So Ananda made strenuous efforts and attained Arahantship on the eve of the First Council. The Book of Discipline states that he was the only disciple to attain Arahantship free from the postures of sitting, standing, walking or lying down. At the First Council, Ven. Ananda prefaced each discourse with an account of where and to whom it was spoken, beginning with the words '*Evam me sutam*' — 'thus have I heard'.

6. Kosambi, site of a Quarrel among the *Sangha*²⁴

6.1 How to reach there

Kosambi is 60km from Allahabad and can be reached by road.

6.2 Religious Significance

Kosambi, the capital of the **Vamsa kingdom** was one of the 6 important cities of Northern India during the Buddha's time. Its ruler, **King Udena**, was initially hostile towards the new religion but later became friendly towards the Buddha at the encouragement of one of his queens, **Samavati** who became a *sotapanna* upon hearing a discourse by her maid **Khujjuttara**. She met a tragic end in the hands of the jealous rival queen **Magandiya**, who locked her inside a palace and set it on fire. When the king uncovered Magandiya's crime, he had her burnt alive together with her accomplices as punishment. In connection with this tragic incident, the Buddha uttered the famous Verse 21 of the *Dhammapada*:

Appamado amata padam — Heedfulness is the path to the deathless (*Nibbana*).
Pamado maccuno padam — Heedlessness is the path to death.
Appamatta na miyanti — The heedful never die.
Ye pamatta yatha mata — The heedless are as if dead.

Later on King Udena converted to the religion after hearing a discourse on sense-restraint by the Venerable **Pindola Bharadvaja**.

But it was mainly through the efforts of three leading bankers of the city — **Ghosita** (foster father of Samavati), **Kukkuta** and **Pavarika** that the religion found a strong footing there. On one occasion when Buddha was staying at Jetavana, these three merchants went together to invite the Buddha to their city. When Buddha agreed, each built a

monastery to receive and accommodate the Buddha and his following. Thus came into existence Ghositarama, Kukkutarama and Pavarikambavana (Pavarika's mango grove).

The Buddha spent the ninth retreat at **Ghositarama** and it was during his stay there that a dissension arose among the monks that almost ended in a schism. Unable to settle the dispute between the two parties, the Buddha retired to the forest and spent his tenth retreat at the **Parileyaka Forest** where an elephant and a monkey administered to his needs. When the lay people found out the reasons for the Buddha's departure, they refused to show respect or offer any alms food to the monks. This jolted the quarrelsome monks to their senses and they reconciled with each other. Still the laity would not treat them respectfully until they had made amends with the Buddha, who was now in Jetavana monastery. So the disputing parties had to travel to Savatthi to settle their litigation in the Buddha's presence. The story of the monks of Kosambi is given in the *Dhammapada* Commentary.

The Buddha delivered several discourses at Kosambi and several *Arahants* including Ven Sariputta and Ven. Ananda spent some time in Ghositarama. The *Vinaya* records that after the First Council Ven. Ananda went to Ghositarama to inform Ven. Channa of the imposition of the higher penalty amounting to complete ostracism, which the Buddha had pronounced on the latter before His *Mahaparinibbana*.

6.3 Historical Background

Emperor Asoka visited Kosambi during the 3rd century BC and raised two pillars to commemorate his visit. In time the establishment swelled in numbers. The Mahavamsa records that 30,000 monks headed by Ven. Urudhammarakkhita of Ghositarama attended the raising of the Great Stupa at Anuradhapura by King Dutthagamini (1st century BC). Ghositarama continued to flourish during the Kushana, Magha and Gupta periods.

During Fa Hsien's time (399-414 AD) the monastery was inhabited by monks but 200 years later, Hsuan Tsang found the place in ruins but still inhabited by 300 monks. Kosambi must have suffered the same fate as other Buddhist centres following the Muslim conquest of Northern India during the 12th century AD, after which all the Buddhist centres fell into oblivion.

Cunningham was the first to identify Kausambi in the village of **Kausam** during the 19th century. Located on the left bank of the Yamuna, it consists of extensive ruins of a large brick monastery, identified on the basis of an inscribed slab of the 1st century AD with the Ghositarama monastery, the base of an impressive *stupa* and some small *stupas*. The coins and terracotta figurines found scattered there are now on display in the **Allahabad Museum** and the Kausambi Museum. The remains of a dilapidated Asokan pillar, an old fort and the ruins of Ghositarama are of archeological interest here. Another Asokan pillar of better condition was removed by the Mughals to Allahabad fort where it still stands. The archaeological excavations here have yielded a large number of sculptures and figurines, coins, punch-marked and cast coins and terracotta sculptures which show the reverence the city was held by the devout, in times gone by. All these religious finds can be viewed at the Allahabad Museum.

6.4 Allahabad Museum

Allahabad Museum located at Kamala Nehru Road inside Chandra Shekhar Azad Park, has 18 galleries containing a wide range of stone sculptures. The sculptures include 2nd century BC pieces from Bharhut and Kausambi, 1st Century AD Kushana from Mathura, 4th-6th century Gupta and 11th century carvings from Khajuraho. The exhibit also has terracotta figurines from Kausambi, Rajasthani Miniatures, coins and paintings by Nicholas Roerich and artifacts donated by the Nehru family. The museum opens daily from 10:30 am to 4:30 pm except Mondays.

7. Delhi Asoka Rock Edict⁴¹

Sandwiched between Srinivaspuri and East of Kailash in South Delhi is the **Asoka Park** where the centre of attraction is a rocky outcrop. Few people know that there is a minor rock edict of Asoka, here in Delhi. It was a chance discovery in 1966 by a contractor who was about to blast away the rocks for the development of a colony. This edict is engraved on a tilted rock face where children used to slide for fun. It consists of 10 lines of Brahmi script in Prakrit dialect. The text of the **Delhi Rock Edict** reads as follows:

“Thus saith the Beloved of the Gods:

A little more than two years and half have passed since I am avowed a lay follower of the Buddha. But I am not vigorously exerting myself in cause of Dhamma for the first one year. However, it is a little more than a year that I am devoutly attached to the Sangha and exerting myself vigorously.

The gods who are unmingled with the people inhabiting Jambudvipa during the ages down to the present time, have now been made by me mingled with them. This is indeed the result of my exertion in the cause of Dhamma.

And this result is not to be achieved only by the people of superior position like myself; but even a poor man is as well able to attain the great heaven if he is zealous in the cause of Dhamma.

Now, this proclamation has been issued for the following purpose, viz. that the poor and rich may exert themselves; that even the people residing in the territories outside the borders of my dominions may realize this, and that this exertion on the part of the people may be of long duration. This cause will be made by me to progress more or less to one and half times”.

This edict right in the heart of the Indian capital engraved in circa 263 BC leaves no room for doubt that Asoka embraced Buddhism and that Delhi was an important centre of Buddhism during his time.

7.1 Delhi during the Buddha's Time

Delhi stands on the site of the celebrated **Indapatta** (Sanskrit: Indraprastha), which Hindus believe was founded by the Pandavas of the Mahabharata legends. During the Buddha's time, it was a flourishing town in **Kuru country**. Delhi appears to be associated with Buddhism from the earliest period, for according to the Account of the Distribution of Relics in *Buddhavamsa*, the Buddha's razor and needle-case were enshrined at Indapatta.

In the *Janavasabha Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya*, Kuru is mentioned along with the other *Janapadas* or countries where the Lord Buddha delivered a number of discourses. According to the *Jatakas*, Kuru was 300 leagues in extent and Indapatta (near modern Delhi) was its capital. Lord Buddha during his visits to the Kuru country generally stayed at **Kammasadhamma**, a market town of the Kuru people.

The name of Kammasadhamma occurs frequently in the Pali scriptures because the Buddha delivered several discourses there, the most well known being the '*Maha-Satipatthana Sutta*' and '*Maha-Nidana Sutta*' of the *Digha Nikaya*. It is said that the Buddha taught these *suttas* to the people of Kammasadhamma because of their intelligence. The commentary states that every household in Kammasadhamma had an *ariya* disciple and the villagers were always mindful in their daily activities.

The site of Kammasadhamma has not been identified by anyone as yet. It may be possible that the area around the Asoka Park in South Delhi could be the site of this celebrated village in view of the fact that Asoka had chosen this area to declare his faith and exertion in rock edict for posterity.

8. The Great *Stupa* of Sanchi^{27, 40}

8.1 How to reach there

Sanchi is about 50 km by road from **Bhopal**, the capital of Madhya Pradesh. For the pilgrim who has completed the pilgrimage at Varanasi, the best way to visit Sanchi is to take the overnight train from Varanasi to Bhopal. After touring Sanchi and other places around Bhopal, one can return by train to New Delhi to fly home.

8.2 Historical Background

Although **Sanchi** was not hallowed by the Buddha's visit during his ministry, **King Asoka** built a brick *stupa* together with an Asokan pillar on the flattened top of the **Vedisagiri** hill for local Buddhists to worship. This was due his happy association with **Vedisa**, birthplace of **Devi**, his first wife whom he married when he was the viceroy of Ujjayini (Ujjain). This queen of Asoka was a devotee of the Buddha and a Sakyan, descended from a Sakyan family who migrated to Vedisa after escaping the destruction of Kapilavatthu by Vidudabha (see Note 10 on page 85). Of Devi were born a son **Mahinda** and daughter **Sanghamitta**. Devi did not follow Asoka to Pataliputta but stayed behind in Vedisa. She is stated to have constructed a monastery on Vidisagiri hill, generally identified with the hill of Sanchi. According to the **Mahavamsa**, the **Arahant Mahinda** visited his mother at Vedisa, and the latter took him up to the beautiful monastery of Vedisagiri where he stayed for a month before he set out for Sri Lanka.

The original *stupa* of Sanchi was 60 feet in diameter at the base and hemispherical in shape with a raised terrace surrounding its base and a crowning pinnacle. It was extensively damaged by the opponents of Buddhism following the fall of the Mauryan Empire in 185 BC but was soon rebuilt by devout Buddhists of Vidisa and elsewhere. In the course of reconstruction, it was enlarged to twice its previous

size. The elaborately carved four gateways (**torana**), were donated by the chief artisan of a **Satahavana** king in the 1st century BC. The last addition to the Great Stupa was made during the Gupta period (450 AD) when four images of the Buddha, each seated under a pillared canopy were installed against the walls of the *stupa* facing the four entrances. Around the Great Stupa grew a grand complex of *stupas*, temples, pillars and monasteries covering a period of about 1500 years from the 3rd century BC to the 12th century AD.

After the Muslim conquest of Northern India in the 13th century AD, the Sanchi shrines became neglected and fell into ruins. They were eventually engulfed by jungle and completely forgotten until their discovery by **General Taylor** in 1818. In the following years, these monuments were damaged to a large extent by archeologists, treasure-hunters and local vandals. Even the Asokan pillar was broken into pieces by a local landlord to be utilized as a sugar-cane press. In 1881, **Major Cole** started to carry out repairs but the major part of the exploration and restoration work was done by **Sir John Marshal**, Director General of Archeology of India from 1912 to 1919 who undertook large-scale exploration, restoration, reconstruction and also cataloging the monuments.

8.3 Objects of Interest

a) The Great *Stupa*

The present dimension of the Great *Stupa* is 120 feet in diameter and 50 feet in height excluding the railing and umbrella. It consists of a hemispherical dome, truncated near the top and crowned by a triple umbrella set at the centre of a heavy masonry pedestal, within a square railing. At its south gateway is a double stairway leading up to a circular terrace (meant for circumambulation) built against the base. The whole *stupa* is enclosed by a stone balustrade and can be accessed from the four cardinal directions through four gateways.

The elaborately carved **four gateways (torana)** were all built during the 1st century BC. Each gateway consists of **two square pillars**

crowned by a set of four lions or elephants or pot-bellied dwarfs, supporting a superstructure of **three curviform architraves** (cross beams) with spirally rolled ends, the overall height being about 28 feet (excluding crowning elements). The architraves are separated from each other by **four pieces of square blocks** and **six carved uprights** inserted between the architraves. The interspaces are filled with statues of elephant- and horse-riders facing both ways. On the summit of the gateway stands the emblem of Buddhism, viz., the *Dhammacakka* or Wheel of *Dhamma*, supported on elephants flanked on either side by a guardian *yakkha* and at the end by *Tiratanas*, symbolizing the Buddhist trinity — the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. The entire surface of the gateways is covered with bas-reliefs, which can be classified into five groups, namely:

- Scenes from the life of the Buddha,
- The Jatakas,
- Historical events such as the Division of Relics, the Stupa of Ramagama and Asoka's visit to the Bodhi tree,
- The Manushi or Previous Buddhas and
- Miscellaneous Scenes and Decoration.

b) *Stupas 2 & 3*

Besides the Great *Stupa*, there are many others, the well-known being *Stupas 2* and *3*. *Stupa 3* of the 2nd century BC and modeled after the Main *Stupa 1*, is located by its side. The relic content of *Stupa 3* is of great sanctity as the inscriptions on the stone boxes indicate that the caskets contained the **bodily relics of the Chief Disciples**, the Most Ven. Sariputta and the Most Ven Moggallana.

Stupa 2, on a lower ledge is without any gateway but its ground-balustrade is remarkable for its ornamental relief framed inside medallions. It is also of the 2nd century BC and of great sanctity for inside was found four small relic-caskets of steatite containing the **ashes of ten Buddhist saints**, namely: (1) Kasapagota, (2) Majjhima, (3) Haritiputa, (4) Vachhiya-Suvijayata, pupil of Gota, (5)

Mahavanaya, (6) Apagira, (7) Kodiniputa, (8) Kosikiputa, (9) Gotiputa, (10) Mogaliputa. That all the teachers were not contemporary is proved by the fact that Mogaliputa is mentioned in the Andher and Sonari relic caskets as a pupil of Gotiputa, himself one generation after Kasapagota and Majjhima. Thus in *Stupa 2* were entombed the relics of at least three generations of Buddhist teachers.

c) New Chetiyagiri Vihara

The new Chetiyagiri Vihara, which is perched on the northern face of the Sanchi hill near the main entrance was built by the Maha Bodhi Society of India in 1952. Inside this *vihara* are enshrined the bodily relics of the **two Chief Disciples of the Buddha** — Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Moggallana, which were discovered in *Stupa 3* by Cunningham in 1851, taken to London for safekeeping and then returned to India in 1949 upon the request of the Maha Bodhi Society. The relics of ten Buddhist saints recovered from *Stupa 2* and kept in the British Museum were also returned to India in 1956. Of these, the first casket containing the ashes of the Arahants Mogaliputa, Kosikiputa and Gotiputa were presented to Sri Lanka while the relics of the other saints were also enshrined in this *vihara*.

d) *Stupas* Sites Near Sanchi

The relics of the Chief Disciples were also found in the contemporary *Stupa 2* of **Satdhara**, about 11km southwest of Sanchi. In fact, areas around Sanchi are full of relic *stupas* such as **Sonari**, 10 km south west of Sanchi, Satdhara as mentioned and **Andher**, 15 km east south east of Vidisa, where portions of relics of most of the ten saints identified in *Stupa 2* of Sanchi were also found. The evidence from these *stupas* proves that even by the 2nd century BC, the practice of distribution of relics extended from the Buddha and His direct disciples to the later dignitaries of the *Sangha*.

PART V

Organizing a Buddhist Pilgrimage to India

Contents

1. Travelling to the Pilgrimage Places in India
2. Performing Dana or Offerings to the *Sangha*
3. Travel Tips and Information
4. Distances between the Pilgrimage Places
5. Maps showing Locations of the Pilgrimage Places
6. Pilgrimage Groups and Itinerary 1991-2008
7. Bibliography

1. Travelling to the Pilgrimage Places in India

1.1 Minimum Time Required

When organizing a pilgrimage, it is strongly advised to exclude side trips to other countries that might divert one's attention from the objectives of the pilgrimage. The temptation to take the opportunity to visit other countries along the way, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal or Myanmar, will arise but one should not cut down the duration of the pilgrimage to accommodate these side trips. If the duration is shortened, one tends to rush from place to place, giving rise to impatience and dissatisfaction, which is exactly the opposite of what one wishes to cultivate on a pilgrimage. In order to visit all the principal shrines in the Eight Great Places at a comfortable pace, it is advised that a **minimum of 2 weeks** be reserved for the pilgrimage.

1.2 Travelling by Air-Conditioned Coach

All the pilgrimage places described in this book are located in the Northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, except Lumbini, which is in Nepal. In ancient times, this area was called **Majjhima Desa** or Middle Country but today it is known as the **Buddhist Circuit**. The majority of the Buddhist shrines are in remote places where taxi service and public transport are poor, making it difficult to get there, unless one travels in a group by chartered bus. The capacity of the tour bus is normally 35 seats. The suggested group size is around 25 persons, so that it is not too crowded. Lately, the Indian transporters have introduced coaches with 42 seats so that a bigger group of 30 plus is still comfortable. For a smaller group, an 18-seater air-conditioned coach is also available.

All tour buses are air-conditioned but the air-conditioners and fans have no controls so it can **become very cold inside the bus**. So it is advisable to wear a shawl or jacket to keep warm. Secondly the seats at the back are very bumpy and uncomfortable due to the poor road

conditions. It is better to leave the last two rows at the back empty to put all the hand luggage there.

(Precaution: One should always travel during the daytime for safety reasons, as the rural roads are narrow and not lighted. In case of breakdown, it is easier to do repairs in the daytime).

For the first-time pilgrim, travelling in a group is the best way to visit the Eight Great Places for several reasons. First is the convenience since all the travelling arrangements and itinerary, would have been made by someone who has experience in the pilgrimage. Secondly, **group travel provides safety especially for female pilgrims**. Lastly, and probably the most important is the spirit of Buddhist fellowship among pilgrims travelling together, especially in the company of a venerable monk to act as a spiritual advisor, making the journey more pleasant and meaningful. A minor disadvantage of a group tour is that the itinerary is less flexible.

If the pilgrimage group is travelling with a venerable monk, it is advisable to carry packed lunches always when leaving the hotel in the morning. This will enable the venerable monk to have his meal before noon while on the road. Secondly, it will save a lot of time if members of the group eat at the same time as the venerable monk. Try as far as possible not to have lunch in the hotel, as it is usually not ready, and one has to wait for it to be prepared, thereby losing precious time.

1.3 Best Time to Travel in India

India has three seasons, namely: cold season of winter, hot season and rainy season. The best time to travel in Northern India is during the cold season, from **November to February** when the weather is pleasant. From March to June the weather is hot and dusty; while from July to October, the rainy season sets in. By end October, the weather turns dry and cool, the countryside is full of greenery and travelling in Northern India is pleasant because of the general cleanliness of the land after the rains.

2. Performing Dana or Offerings to the *Sangha*

As D-day or departure day approaches, the pilgrim will naturally experience great joy and religious excitement at the prospect of actually journeying to the land where the Buddha and the *Arahants* lived and preached more than 2500 years ago. For Malaysian Buddhists, who are well known for their generosity, the desire to perform *dana* will prompt the pilgrims and their well-wishers to donate generously towards the purchase of monks' requisites for offering to the Buddhist monasteries located in the vicinity of all the holy shrines.

Many of the monks in these monasteries, notably those from **Sri Lanka** and **Myanmar**, have spent the major part of their lives in India. They are dedicated to the safeguarding the holy shrines and reviving the traditions of *Vaisakha Purnima* (*Wesak*) by teaching the local population about Buddhism in the land where it was born but had disappeared for six hundred years after its downfall in the 13th century AD. Their presence at the holy shrines, have helped to keep these shrines 'alive', so that pilgrims who come from far and wide can benefit from their advice and help. By performing *dana* to these *bhikkhus*, one expresses one's gratitude, reverence and loving-kindness to the *Sangha*, for its role in safeguarding these holy places for future generations of Buddhists to come and "look upon them with feelings of reverence", in accordance with the Buddha's advice.

For pilgrims travelling in a group, there is less restriction on luggage weight during group check-in at the airport. This provides them with the opportunity to bring items such as monks' robes, towels, medicines, multi-vitamins, writing materials for student-monks, foodstuffs and other requisites not obtainable in India and offer them to the *Sangha*. Money remaining after the purchase of requisites may be converted into Indian rupees and handed to the monk's attendants or *kappiyas* for safekeeping or placed into the donation boxes of the monasteries during the visits, so that the money may be used for the maintenance of the monasteries and the *bhikkhus*.

3. Information and Tips on Travel in India

3.1 Travel Visas

Pilgrims who intend to visit the Buddhist circuit by flight in and out of India should ensure that they hold a **multiple entry visa** for India. An ordinary tourist visa for single entry will not allow the visitor to re-enter India from Nepal after visiting Lumbini. Nowadays one can apply for both Indian and Nepalese visas in Kuala Lumpur.

3.2 Insurance and Expenses

- Pilgrims are advised to insure themselves against loss/sickness/accident during the journey as well as last minute cancellation in case of sudden illness or other emergencies before departure.
- Pilgrims should exercise care and precaution to safeguard their luggage and belongings. They should not bring jewelry, expensive watches and other valuables on the journey.
- They should keep their passports and cash with them at all times, as loss of passport will cause a lot of inconvenience to everyone.
- *What is the minimum amount of money to bring along?*
As all expenses for the trip such as the tour fare, airport taxes, visa fees, entrance fees and tips have been paid before departure one need not bring a lot of money for the journey. Overall, US\$100-\$200 is sufficient to cover all personal expenses such as purchasing souvenirs and donations to the various temples.

3.3 Health Precautions

- To avoid sickness, one should always drink boiled/mineral water and not consume any uncooked food, not even iced drinks, as the ice is made from tap water. Arrangements may be made with

the travel agent to provide one bottle of mineral water per day to each pilgrim free of charge.

- **Inoculation against Cholera:** Those who wish to inoculate against cholera should do it 2-3 weeks before departure to avoid developing a fever while travelling.
- **Medicines:** A first aid kit containing normal medicines for cuts, sprains, diarrhea, flu, food poisoning, ointment for insect bites, Panadol for fever, etc. should be brought along to cater for emergencies. Costs may be shared by members of the group.

3.4 Things to bring along

Important: In view of the strict security checks when boarding an airplane, please ensure that no sharp objects are carried in your hand carry luggage. The following are useful on a short tour.

- Torchlight in case of emergency/power failure in the hotel.
- Loose light clothing as days are warm like Malaysia. Bring a shawl to keep warm in the bus. Its air conditioner has no control.
- For shoes, wear walking or jogging shoes and socks.
- Umbrella - foldable type for ladies.
- Toilet articles, tissues, shampoo, washing powder.
- Dry foodstuffs e.g. biscuits, sweets, coffee or tea sachets, fast-cooking noodles, etc.
- Good to carry multi-vitamins for personal use.

3.5 Donations to Charity

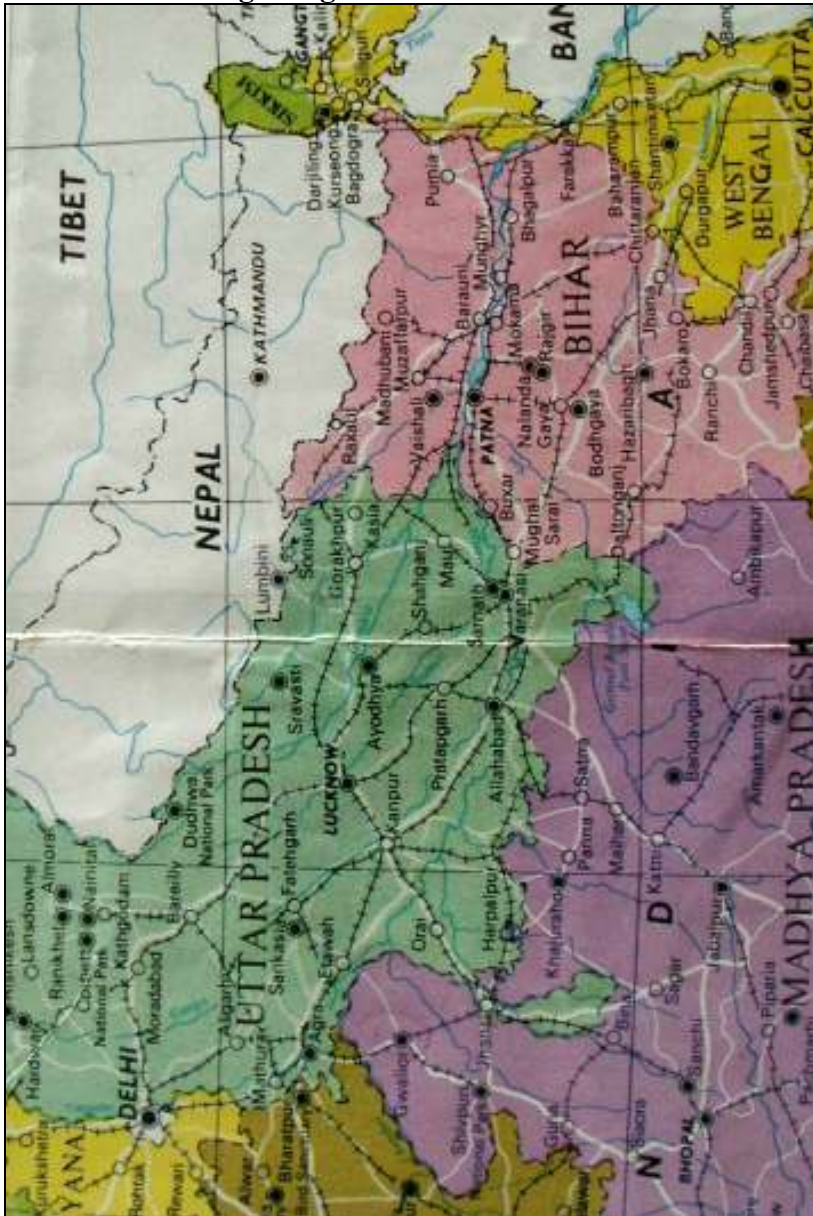
Begging appears to be a profession in India and even village children enjoy begging from visitors at the first opportunity. By giving to one beggar, one will find oneself being swarmed by a crowd of beggars asking for more, and generally making a nuisance of themselves. In giving charity to the poor, it is advisable to give all donations in cash and kind to the monasteries for fair distribution. One may bring ballpoint pens, sweets, old clothes, etc., and donate them to the Maha Bodhi Society branches in Sarnath and Bodhgaya, which provide free education to the poor children in their areas.

4. Distances by road between Pilgrimage Places

<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Distance in km</u>
Delhi	Agra	200
Agra	Lucknow	363
Agra	Sankasia	170
Sankasia	Kanpur	220
Kanpur	Lucknow	88
Lucknow	Sravasti	175
Sravasti	Kushinagar	250
Sravasti	Lumbini	210
Sravasti	Balrampur	15
Balrampur	India Border	200
India Border	Bhairawa	5
Bhairawa	Lumbini	25
Bhairawa	Ramagama	30
Lumbini	Kapilavastu	27
Lumbini	Gorakhpur	125
Lumbini	Kushinagar	180
Gorakhpur	Kushinagar	56
Kushinagar	Sarnath	250
Kushinagar	Vaishali	280
Kushinagar	Patna	350
Sarnath	Bodhgaya	250
Bodhgaya	Rajgir	80
Rajgir	Nalanda	12
Patna	Nalanda	90
Patna	Bodhgaya	125
Patna	Vaishali	70
Bodhgaya	Calcutta	490
Bodhgaya	Varanasi	275
Varanasi	Sarnath	12
Varanasi	Allahabad	130
Allahabad	Kaushambi	54

NOTE: All distances given above are approximate.

Tourist Map of Northern India showing locations of the Buddhist Pilgrimage Places described in this book



6. Pilgrimage Groups and Itinerary 1991-2008

Since 1991, the writer has organised ten pilgrimages to India and many Buddhists in the Klang Valley have undertaken the journey of piety and faith. The names of members who made up the pilgrimage groups are given below to help them remember their fellow pilgrims and happy moments spent together at the holy places. The spirit of Buddhist fellowship prevailed throughout the journeys, thanks to the presence of our venerable monks who accompanied the groups as spiritual advisors. Photos of the pilgrims taken with their spiritual advisors are shown in this book for them to keep as a memento.

6.1) 11 Days Nepal/India Pilgrimage: 15–25 Nov 1991

Day 1: KL/Bangkok/Kathmandu (by TG flight)	O/N Kathmandu
Day 2: Kathmandu/Lumbini (by coach)	O/N Bhairawa
Day 3: Lumbini/Sravasti (by coach)	O/N Balrampur
Day 4: Sravasti/Kushinagar (by coach)	O/N Kushinagar
Day 5: Kushinagar/Patna (by coach)	O/N Patna
Day 6: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya (coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 7: Whole day in Bodhgaya (by coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 8: Bodhgaya/Varanasi (by coach)	O/N Varanasi
Day 9: Varanasi/Sarnath/Kathmandu (flight)	O/N Kathmandu
Day 10: Whole day in Kathmandu	O/N Kathmandu
Day 11: Kathmandu/Bangkok/KL (by TG flight)	Home

Members

1. Ven. Sayadaw U Jnanapurnik (Kathmandu, Nepal)
2. Sister Uppalavanna (Kathmandu, Nepal)
3. Dr. Wong Wai Cheong (SBVMS)
4. Mr. Chan Khoon San (Klang)
5. Mr. Tan Su Hah (Klang)
6. Mr. Lim Boon Hang (SBVMS)
7. Mr. Tan Boon Chhai (SBVMS)
8. Mr. Lim Liang Guan (SBVMS)
9. Mdm. Tan Kooi Chin (SBVMS)
10. Ms. Tan Poh Em (Klang)
11. Mdm. Lim Yew Choo (Klang)
12. Mdm. Yeo Peck Hoon (Klang)
13. Mdm. Teh Swee See/Susan Ng (Klang)
14. Mdm. Ng Kooi Meng (Klang)
15. Mdm. Ler Siew Khwai (SBVMS)

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 16. Mr. Kweh Kim Swee | (SBVMS) |
| 17. Ms. Lye Kwai Ying | (SBVMS) |
| 18. Ms. Saw Hong Poh | (SBVMS) |
| 19. Ms. Hoe Soon Ying | (Penang) |
| 20. Mdm. Wong Yuit Mooi | (Penang) |
| 21. Ms. Dolly Ng Keh Eng | (Klang) |
| 22. Ms. Chuah Chew Hing | (Sentul Temple, KL) |

6.2) 15 Days Sri Lanka/India: 21 Nov - 5 Dec 1997

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| Day 1: KL/Colombo (by Air Lanka flight) | O/N Colombo |
| Day 2: Colombo/Dambulla/Habarana (coach) | O/N Habarana |
| Day 3: Habarana/Mihintala/Anuradhapura (coach) | O/N Habarana |
| Day 4: Habarana/Sigiriya/Habarana (coach) | O/N Habarana |
| Day 5: Sigiriya/Kandy (coach) | O/N Kandy |
| Day 6: Kandy/Colombo/Delhi (by flight) | O/N on plane |
| Day 7: Delhi/Lucknow/Sravasti (coach) | O/N Balrampur |
| Day 8: Balrampur/Lumbini/Gorakhpur (coach) | O/N Gorakhpur |
| Day 9: Gorakhpur/Kushinagar/Patna (coach) | O/N Patna |
| Day 10: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya (coach) | O/N Gaya |
| Day 11: Whole day in Bodhgaya | O/N Gaya |
| Day 12: Bodhgaya/Varanasi/Sarnath | O/N Varanasi |
| Day 13: Varanasi/Agra (flight), Agra/Delhi (train) | |
| Night flight by Air Lanka to Colombo | O/N on plane |
| Day 14: Whole day in Colombo | O/N Colombo |
| Day 15: Colombo/KL | Home |

Members

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ven. B. Saranankara Thero | (Sentul Temple, KL) |
| 2. Ven. Sayadaw U Rewata | (Chanmyay Yeiktha, Yangon) |
| 3. Mr. Chan Khoo San | (Klang) |
| 4. Mr. Chen Kok Chin | (Klang) |
| 5. Mr. Chan Weng Poh | (Klang) |
| 6. Mr. Lee Fan Kiat | (Sentul Temple, KL) |
| 7. Mr. Wu Chee Meng | (Klang) |
| 8. Mr. Tan Su Hah | (Klang) |
| 9. Mr. Loh Kok Yong | (SJBA) |
| 10. Mr. Ooi Chin Chye | (SJBA) |
| 11. Mdm. Tan Lei Hong | (Klang) |
| 12. Mdm. Wong Hee Leong | (Klang) |
| 13. Ms. Loo May Lin | (Klang) |
| 14. Mdm. Lim Eng Lian | (Klang) |
| 15. Mdm. Hong Kim Choo | (Klang) |

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|---------------------------|----------|
| 16. Ms. Tan Kok Yee | (Klang) |
| 17. Mdm. Cheoh Siew Cheng | (Klang) |
| 18. Mdm. Kee Phaik Ean | (SJBA) |
| 19. Mr. Wong Fok Gee | (Klang) |
| 20. Mdm. Tay Seok Im | (Klang) |
| 21. Mr. Too Yewn Hiang | (Klang) |
| 22. Mdm. Tan Ming Tin | (Klang) |
| 23. Mr. Yap Pak Choong | (Klang) |
| 24. Mdm. Goh Siew Khim | (Klang) |
| 25. Mr. Chey Shaw | (Klang) |
| 26. Mdm. Huang Saw Heen | (Klang) |
| 27. Mr. Chiu Sheng Bin | (Penang) |
| 28. Mdm. Tan Lean Cheoh | (Penang) |
| 29. Mr. Lim Peng Lai | (Klang) |
| 30. Mdm. Lian Kai Hong | (Klang) |
| 31. Mr. Lam Cheok Yew | (Klang) |
| 32. Mdm. Tay Mo Lee | (Klang) |
| 33. Mdm. Lam Kwai Eng | (Klang) |
| 34. Ms. Lam Hui Peng | (Klang) |
| 35. Mr. Lam Siew Mun | (Klang) |
| 36. Mr. Khong Kok Keong | (Klang) |

6.3) 12 Days India Pilgrimage: 31 Oct – 11 Nov 1999

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| Day 1: KL/Delhi (by MAS flight) | O/N Agra |
| Day 2: Agra/Sankasia/Lucknow (coach) | O/N Lucknow |
| Day 3: Lucknow/Sravasti (coach) | O/N Balrampur |
| Day 4: Balrampur/Tilaurakot (coach) | O/N Bhairawa |
| Day 5: Lumbini/Kushinagar (coach) | O/N Gorakhpur |
| Day 6: Gorakhpur/Sarnath/Varanasi (coach) | O/N Varanasi |
| Day 7: Varanasi/Bodhgaya (coach) | O/N Bodhgaya |
| Day 8: Whole day in Bodhgaya (coach) | O/N Bodhgaya |
| Day 9: Bodhgaya/Rajgir/Nalanda/Patna (coach) | O/N Patna |
| Day 10: Patna/Vaishali/Patna (coach) | O/N Patna |
| Day 11: Patna/Delhi (local flight) Whole day in
Delhi. Night flight by MAS to KL | O/N on plane |
| Day 12: Arrive KLIA | Home |

Members

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ven. Sayadaw U Rewata | (Chanmyay Yeiktha, Yangon) |
| 2. Mr. Chan Khoon San | (Klang) |
| 3. Mr. Cheong Chee Kwong | (SJBA) |
| 4. Mr. Ng Tom Sing | (SJBA) |

5. Mr. Danny Teh Kok Lai (Klang)
6. Mr. Wong Suk Chin (Klang)
7. Mr. Loh Cheng Kee (Klang)
8. Mr. Tang Hau Seng (Klang)
9. Mr. Tang Weng Yew (Klang)
10. Mdm. Ang Guar Gor (Klang)
11. Mdm. Lim Cheng Suan (Seremban)
12. Mdm. Chou Cheng Phaik (Canada)
13. Ms. Tan Qui Ying (Klang)
14. Mdm. Lim Sook Liew (Klang)
15. Mdm. Irene Foo Choon Sim (Klang)
16. Mdm. Yap Sew Hong (SJBA)
17. Mdm. Wooi Kheng Choo (SJBA)
18. Mdm. Ong Guat Eng (SJBA)
19. Mdm. Cheah Suan Cheng (SJBA)
20. Mdm. Ng Yoke Moy (SJBA)
21. Ms. Kieu Choon Lai (SJBA)
22. Mdm. Cecelia Lim Lai Sun (SJBA)

6.4) 12 Days India Pilgrimage: 27 Oct – 7 Nov 2001

Day 1: KL/Singapore/Delhi (by SIA flight)	O/N Delhi
Day 2: Delhi/Sankasia/Kanpur (coach)	O/N Kanpur
Day 3: Kanpur/Sravasti (coach)	O/N Balrampur
Day 4: Balrampur/Tilaurakot (coach)	O/N Bhairawa
Day 5: Lumbini/Kushinagar (coach)	O/N Kushinagar
Day 6: Kushinagar/Sarnath/Varanasi (coach)	O/N Varanasi
Day 7: Varanasi/Bodhgaya (coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 8: Whole day in Bodhgaya (coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 9: Bodhgaya/Rajgir/Nalanda/Patna (coach)	O/N Patna
Day 10: Patna/Vaishali/Patna (coach)	O/N Patna
Day 11: Patna/Kolkata (overnight train) Whole day in Kolkata. Night flight by SIA to Singapore	O/N on plane
Day 12: Singapore/KLIA	Home

Members

1. Ven. Sayadaw U Rewata (Chanmyay Yeiktha, Yangon)
2. Mr. Chan Khoon San (Klang)
3. Mr. Chiu Sheng Bin (Penang)
4. Mdm. Tan Lei Hong (Klang)
5. Mdm. Tan Jok Hong (Klang)
6. Mr. Ng Swee Aun (SJBA)
7. Mdm. Lee Mee Fong (SJBA)

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8. Ms. Ng Hui Wen (SJBA)
9. Mdm. Lily Lee Suat Yee (SJBA)
10. Mdm. Tan Yew Kim (SJBA)
11. Mr. Soo Khoon York (SJBA)
12. Mdm. Chia Wai Kee (SJBA)

6.5) 14 Days India Pilgrimage: 8-21 Nov 2002

Day 1: KL//Delhi (by MH190)	O/N Delhi
Day 2: Delhi/Agra (Shatabdi)/Sankasia/Lucknow (coach)	O/N Lucknow
Day 3: Lucknow/Sravasti/Balrampur (coach)	O/N Balrampur
Day 4: Balrampur/Tilaurakot/Bhairawa (coach)	O/N Bhairawa
Day 5: Bhairawa/Lumbini/Kushinagar (coach)	O/N Kushinagar
Day 6: Kushinagar/Kesariya/Vaishali/Patna (coach)	O/N Patna
Day 7: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya (coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 8: Whole day Bodhgaya (coach)	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 9: Bodhgaya/Varanasi (coach)	O/N Varanasi
Day 10: Sarnath tour. Night train to Bhopal	O/N on train
Day 11: Morning arrive Bhopal, visit Bhimbetka	O/N Bhopal
Day 12: Sanchi/Satdhara/Udaigiri Caves. After dinner depart Bhopal by night train for Delhi	O/N on train
Day 13: Whole day Delhi. Night flight MH191	O/N on plane
Day 14: Nov 21 Morning arrive KLIA	Home

Members

1. Ashin Rakkhita Dhamma (Chanmyay Yeiktha, Yangon)
2. Mr. Chan Khoon San (Klang)
3. Mr. Chan Weng Poh (Klang)
4. Mr. Cheah Swee Seng (BUBS)
5. Mr. Yong Song Kong (BMS)
6. Mdm. Goh Gim Tin (BUBS)
7. Mdm. Wooi Kheng Choo (SJBA)
8. Mr. Cheng Chong Hua (SJBA)
9. Mr. Chan Toong San (SJBA)
10. Mdm. Loo Ching Pan (Port Dickson)
11. Ms. Tee Chi Juann (SJBA)
12. Ms. Tee Yueh Juann (Port Dickson)
13. Ms. Heng Pow Peng (KL)
14. Mdm. Lin Suh Charn (Port Dickson)
15. Ms. Teo Gim Hwee (KL)
16. Ms. Ong Ewe Chin Uttara (SJBA)
17. Mdm. Fong Ooi Yook Julie (SJBA)
18. Mr. Teh Tian Hong (Port Dickson)

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|---------------------------------|--------|
| 19. Mr. Quah Seng Hai, Tony | (SJBA) |
| 20. Ms. Liang Li Yi | (SJBA) |
| 21. Ms. Thon May Yenn | (SJBA) |
| 22. Mr. Thon Lek | (SJBA) |
| 23. Mdm. Christine Lee Chin Har | (SJBA) |

6.6) 13 Days India Pilgrimage: 3-15 Nov 2003

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| Day 1: KL/Delhi (by MAS flight MH 190) | O/N Delhi |
| Day 2: Delhi/Agra (Shatabdi Express dep.0600hrs, arr. 0800hrs) | |
| Agra/Sankasia/Kanpur (coach) | O/N Kanpur |
| Day 3: Lucknow/Sravasti (coach) | O/N Sravasti |
| Day 4: Sravasti/Lumbini/Bhairawa (coach) | O/N Bhairawa |
| Day 5: Bhairawa/Kushinagar (coach) | O/N Kushinagar |
| Day 6: Kushinagar/Lauriya Nandangarh/Muzaffarpur | O/N Muzaffarpur |
| Day 7: Muzaffarpur/Vaishali//Patna (coach) | O/N Patna |
| Day 8: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya (coach) | O/NBodhgaya |
| Day 9: Bodhgaya and Dhongra Hill (coach) | O/N Bodhgaya |
| Day 10: Bodhgaya/Sarnath/Varanasi (coach) | O/N Varanasi |
| Day 11: Ganges river tour and Sarnath ruins (boat & coach) | |
| Depart Varanasi by overnight train | O/N on train |
| Day 12: Arrive Delhi 0805hrs, tour & visit National Museum | |
| Night flight by MH 191 depart 2300hrs | O/N on plane |
| Day 13: Arrive KLIA 0655hrs | Home |

Members

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Sayadaw Ashin Wa Tha Wa | (Chanmyay Yeiktha, Yangon) |
| 2. Mr. Chan Khoon San | (Klang) |
| 3. Mr. Tan Heng Ghee | (Penang) |
| 4. Mr. Tan Heng Tian | (Penang) |
| 5. Mr. Teh Kok Leng | (Klang) |
| 6. Mdm. Kuan Lai Wah | (Klang) |
| 7. Mdm. Chee Mei Ling | (SJBA) |
| 8. Mdm. Low Choon Chew/Erin Choy | (SJBA) |
| 9. Mdm. Rosie Koay Saik Suan | (SJBA) |
| 10. Mdm. Eileen Chua Geok Lan | (SJBA) |
| 11. Mdm. Lim Kim See | (BUBS) |
| 12. Madam Oon Hong Geok | (BUBS) |
| 13. Mr Boey Kok Soon | (BUBS) |
| 14. Mr. Tan Ho Soon | (Nalanda Buddhist Society) |
| 15. Madam Teoh Lean Gek | (BUBS) |
| 16. Madam Chong MeeYing | (BUBS) |
| 17. Mr Tan Buck Soon | (BUBS) |

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|---------------------------|--------|
| 18. Madam Ooi Siew Swan | (BUBS) |
| 19. Mr Teo Chiang Khai | (BUBS) |
| 20. Madam Ng Soh Hwa | (BUBS) |
| 21. Madam Low Eye Hiang | (BUBS) |
| 22. Madam Chang Yoke Khun | (BUBS) |
| 23. Mr Tan Cheong Hock | (BUBS) |
| 24. Madam Khoo Say Ean | (BUBS) |

6.7) 13 Days India Pilgrimage: 22 Nov – 4 Dec 2004

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| Day 1: KL/Delhi (by MAS flight MH 190) | O/N Delhi |
| Day 2: Delhi/Lucknow (Shatabdi)/Sravasti (coach) | O/N Sravasti |
| Day 3: Sravasti/Lumbini (coach) | O/N Bhairawa |
| Day 4: Whole day Lumbini (coach) | O/N Bhairawa |
| Day 5: Bhairawa/Kushinagar (coach) | O/N Kushinagar |
| Day 6: Kushinagar//Vaishali/Patna | O/N Patna |
| Day 7: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya (coach) | O/N Bodhgaya |
| Day 8: Bodhgaya and Dhongra Hill (coach) | O/N Bodhgaya |
| Day 9: Bodhgaya/Sarnath/Varanasi (coach) | O/N Varanasi |
| Day 10: Morning Sarnath, afternoon Allahabad | O/N Allahabad |
| Day 11: Day tour of Kaushambi and Allahabad. | |
| Board night train to Delhi dep. 2130 | O/N Train |
| Day 12: National Museum, Buddha Vihara, Asoka Park | |
| Night flight by MH 191 depart 2300hrs | O/N Plane |
| Day 13: Arrive KLIA 0655hrs | Home |

Members

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Sayadaw U Indaka | Chanmyay Yeiktha Hmawbi, Myanmar |
| 2. Win Htay | Kappiya to Sayadaw, Myanmar |
| 3. May Myint Oo | Translator to Sayadaw, Myanmar |
| 4. Chan Khoon San | Klang |
| 5. Fam Keat Hong | Ipoh |
| 6. Wong Yhow Shong | KL |
| 7. Low Ming Pow | PJ |
| 8. Daphne Chua | PJ |
| 9. Wong Phoay Lok | Subang Jaya |
| 10. Ng Ngen Hwa | Subang Jaya |
| 11. Ng Poh Hwa | Subang Jaya |
| 12. Sia Cho Hi | Subang Jaya |
| 13. Chim Siew Choon | Subang Jaya |
| 14. Lim Eng Bee | Subang Jaya |
| 15. Chim Xiong Jie | Subang Jaya |
| 16. Lim Eng Lee | Penang |

17. Soon Kooi Lin	Penang
18. Ooi Zhi Yao	Penang
19. Sharon Ooi	Penang
20. Chim Hui Yin	Subang Jaya
21. Chim Hui Qing	Subang Jaya
22. Thon Lek	Subang Jaya
23. Lee Chin Har	Subang Jaya
24. Dennis Tan Guan Swee	Subang Jaya
25. Tan Tiaw Yong	Subang Jaya
26. Teh Siew Kheng	PJ
27. Teh Ah Nya	Taiping
28. Ting Ah Chu	PJ
29. Lim Saw Imm	PJ
30. Sally Tan Ah Kim	PJ
31. Wong Lei Ping	KL
32. Chiong Lin Hi	Subang Jaya
33. Cheah Swee Heah	Subang Jaya
34. Poh Mu Thiang	Subang Jaya
35. Low Gek Cheng	Subang Jaya
36. Saw Gek Hiock	Subang Jaya
37. Saw Geok Moi	Subang Jaya
38. Foo Wan Wah	Subang Jaya
39. Lim Sau Lan	Subang Jaya

6.8) 13 Days India Pilgrimage: 31 Oct – 14 Nov 2006

- Day 1: KL/Delhi flight by Air India, Delhi/Agra by coach. O/N Agra
Day 2: Agra/Sankasia O/N Myanmar Temple Sankasia
Day 3: Sankasia/Lucknow/Sravasti O/N Nikko Lotus Hotel, Sravasti
Day 4: Sravasti/Sonauli/Bhairawa O/N Nirwana Hotel, Bhairawa
Day 5: Bhairawa/Lumbini/Tilaurakot/Bhairawa O/N Nirwana Hotel
Day 6: Bhairawa/Kushinagar O/N Nikko Lotus, Kushinagar
Day 7: Kushinagar/Vaishali/Patna O/N Chanakya Hotel Patna
Day 8: Patna/Naland/Rajgir/Bodhgaya O/N Sujata Hotel, Bodhgaya
Day 9: Whole day in Bodhgaya O/N Sujata Hotel, Bodhgaya
Day 10: Bodhgaya/Sarnath/Varanasi O/N Meraden Hotel, Varanasi
Day 11: Sarnath/Mughal Sarai/Bhusaval by train O/N on train
Day 12: Bhusaval/Ajanta/Aurangabad O/N Rama Int'l Aurangabad
Day 13: Aurangabad/Ellora Caves/Mumbai by train O/N on train
Day 14: Whole day Mumbai, check in airport at 22:55 for Air India
Flight AI 432 dep. 00:55flight O/N on plane
Day 15: Arrive KLIA 11:30hr

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Members

1. Sayadaw U Pannacara (M)	Myanmar
2. Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma (M)	India
3. Venerable U Nyanaramsi (M)	Subang Jaya
4. Chan Khoon San (M)	Klang
5. Soo Chee Keong (M)	Subang Jaya
6. Loh Cheng Kee (M)	Klang
7. Chiu Sheng Bin (M)	Penang
8. Ooi Ling Hoak (M)	Klang
9. Choy Kien Leong (M)	Subang Jaya
10. Chin Hock Soon (M)	PJ
11. Gnoh Saw Ean (F)	PJ
12. Ng Lee Cheng (F)	Klang
13. Lim Phaik Ee (F)	Klang
14. Wong Jiam Heng (F)	KL
15. Tan Guan Swee (M)	Subang Jaya
16. Thon Lek (M)	PJ
17. Ng Swee Kong (M)	Subang Jaya
18. Ng Huang Looi (F)	Subang Jaya
19. Wee Inn Koon (F)	Subang Jaya
20. Yong Oi Mooi (F)	Subang Jaya
21. Ooi Poo Lee (F)	Subang Jaya
22. Wong Keng Lan (F)	Subang Jaya
23. Toh Gaik Sim (F)	Subang Jaya
24. Teoh Chai Choo (F)	Subang Jaya
25. Toh Gaik Hoon (F)	Subang Jaya
26. Toh Gaik Lu (F)	Subang Jaya
27. Teo Chiang Khai (M)	PJ
28. Ng Soh Hwa (F)	PJ
29. Ng Beng Hwa (F)	Singapore
30. Lim Kim See (F)	PJ
31. Tay Mo Lee (F)	Klang
32. Tay Been (F)	Klang

6.9) 17 Days India Pilgrimage: 18 Nov – 4 Dec 2007

Day 1: KL/Delhi by Air Lanka dep. 1440, arr. 2110	O/N Mathura
Day 2: Mathura/Taj Mahal/Sankasia	O/N Sankasia
Day 3: Sankasia/Lucknow/Sravasti	O/N Sravasti
Day 4: Sravasti/Bhairawa	O/N Bhairawa
Day 5: Bhairawa/Ramagrama/Lumbini/Bhairawa	O/N Bhairawa
Day 6: Bhairawa/Kushinagar	O/N Kushinagar

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Day 7: Kushinagar/Vaishali/Patna	O/N Patna
Day 8: Patna/Nalanda/Rajgir/Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 9: Whole day in Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 10: Whole day in Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 11: Bodhgaya/Sarnath/Varanasi (coach)	O/N Varanasi
Day 12: Sarnath/Kamayani Express to Bhopal	O/N on train
Day 13: Bhopal/Sanchi Vidisa/Bhopal	O/N Bhopal
Day 14: Whole day Bhimbetika Train to Delhi	O/N on train
Day 15: Whole day Delhi, at night check-in airport for Air Lanka Delhi/Colombo flight dep. 2200, arr. 0155+1	O/N Plane
Day 16: Stopover & half-day tour in Colombo	O/N Colombo
Day 17: Colombo/KL by Air Lanka UL	

Members

1	U Kittidhaja (M)	Myanmar
2	Chan Khoon San (M)	Klang
3	Tan Tin Lam (M)	Singapore
4	Tan Chor Keng (F)	Singapore
5	Chan Lai Keng (F)	Subang Jaya
6	Lim Chye Hong (F)	KL
7	Tan Xinci (F-Child)	KL
8	Tony Quah Seng Hai (M)	PJ
9	Teh Kuok Ren (M)	Subang Jaya
10	Teh Pio Hian (M)	Subang Jaya
11	Eow Cheng Hwa (F)	Subang Jaya
12	Ng Huang Lean (F)	Subang Jaya
13	Ooi Yinn Shaung (M)	Subang Jaya
14	Chang Lai Ying (Melissa) (F)	PJ
15	Lee Hooi Hong (F)	PJ
16	Lim Siew Hoo (F)	PJ
17	Tan Lian Khar (M)	PJ
18	Lim Siew Eng (F)	PJ
19	James Stewart Mushet (M)	PJ
20	Chin Oy Mei (F)	Penang
21	Gan Ai Geok (F)	Penang
22	Cheah Cheng Hoon (F)	Penang
23	Gan Li Li (F)	Penang
24	Chua Ah Hin (F)	Penang
25	Tan Kheng Ngin (F)	Penang

6.10) 15 Days India Pilgrimage: 4 - 18 Nov 2008

Day 1: KL/Delhi flight by Indian Airlines, travel to Agra	O/N Agra
Day 2: Agra/Sankasia	O/N Sankasia
Day 3: Sankasia/Sravasti	O/N Sravasti
Day 4: Sravasti/Lumbini/Bhairawa	O/N Bhairawa
Day 5: Bhairawa/Ramagrama/Lumbini/Bhairawa	O/N Bhairawa
Day 6: Bhairawa/Kushinagar (coach)	O/N Kushinagar
Day 7: Kushinagar/Lauriya Nandangarh/Muzaffarpur	O/N Muzaffarpur
Day 8: Muzaffarpur/Vaishali/Nalanda/Rajgir	O/N Rajgir
Day 9: Rajgir/Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 10: Whole day in Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 11: Whole day in Bodhgaya	O/N Bodhgaya
Day 12: Bodhgaya/Sarnath	O/N Varanasi
Day 13: Whole day Sarnath, night train to Delhi	O/N Train
Day 14: Arrive Delhi, day tour, night flight home	O/N Plane
Day 15: Arrive KLIA	Home

Members

1. Ashin Nyanodaya (M)	Chanmyay Yeiktha Shwebo, Burma
2. Chan Khoon San (M)	Klang
3. Chan Toong San (M)	Subang Jaya
4. Toh Gaik Sim (F)	Subang Jaya
5. Tan Kiat (M)	Batu Pahat
6. Low Mooi Heang (F)	Batu Pahat
7. Teo Bee Teck (F)	Subang Jaya
8. Wong Mei Lan (F)	Subang Jaya
9. Chang Lai Ching (F)	KL
10. Goh Siew Khim (F)	Klang
11. Liew Kon Tai (F)	Klang
12. Wong Hee Leong (F)	Klang
13. Tan Fong Lan (F)	Klang
14. Too Yewn Hiang (M)	Klang
15. Tan Ming Tin (F)	Klang
16. Doris Koek Siew Ain (F)	Penang
17. Chan Sum Moi (F)	Penang
18. Edward Lim Say Hoe (M)	Penang
19. Tan Choon Sim (M)	Penang
20. Tan Ching Keat (M)	Penang
21. Yap Chin Khoon (M)	Penang
22. Anna Ong Swee Ean (F)	Penang
23. Lai Yoke Wah (M)	Penang
24. Soo Khoon York	Subang Jaya
25. Chia Wai Kee	Subang Jaya

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