

The Place of Awakening -The Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient most important and hallowed place on the earth for the Buddhists of the world is “The Great Awakening Mahāvihāra” in Bihar (India) known as Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra. This is highly revered place on the earth for the Buddhist of the world since more than two thousand five hundred years ago where Siddhātṭha Gautama achieved perfect enlightenment or Sambodhī on Veśākha Purnima (Full Moon Day) 528 B.C.E.¹ under Bodhī -Tree, on the bank of river Nirājanā. Bodhagayā is located near the ancient village Uruvelā² on the bank of river Lilājana (or Phalgu or Phaggu) which anciently called Nirājanā in Gayā district of Bihar. Because of such important hallowed association, this locality ultimately came to be known as Buddha Gayā or Bodha-Gayā, That is about 16 Kilometre from the District headquarters as well as from Gayā Railway Station and about 115 kms. south of the state capital Patna, Bihar (Eastern India).

By, the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra- Bodha-Gayā, we are to understand broadly the ancient entire tract of Village Uruvelā or Uruvilvā and the sacred site of the Bodhī-Tree and its neighbourhood as the sacred main Mahāvihāra, the ancient Archaeological Temple situated over Vajrāsana where Siddhātṭha Gautama achieved enlightenment after meditating strongly under Pipal tree (Bodhī-Tree) and the area surrounding of the pious site including many other sacred sites at Gayā. Within the period of more than two and half centuries, the name Uruvilā is not in use and the other names are in used as Sambodhī, Bodhīminda, Mahābodhī from time to time in holy association of perfect enlightenment of Siddattha. The Emperor Aśoka (273-232B.C.E.) a staunch Buddha’s follower made a pilgrimage during the 10th year of his coronation in 260B.C.E. to this sacred place with his delegation and addressed the sacred Temple as Sambodhī.³

In the Mahāparinibbāna sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya (DN-16) of Sutta Pitaka (Pāli Tripitaka), the Buddha mentioned Bodhagayā as one of the four revered shrines which he advised his followers to visit in his life span.

1. **Lumbanivana**-the place where the Siddātṭha Gautama was born,
2. **Bodhagayā**-the place where Siddātṭha Gautama achieved perfect enlightenment (Bodhī) and became Buddha,
3. **Isipattan Mirgadaya, Sarnāth**-the place where Buddha turned the incomparable

¹ (a) 2500 Years of Buddhism :P.V.Bapat

Prince Siddhātṭha was born in the year 623B.C.E. in Lumbanivana, presently in Nepal while queen Mahāmāyā of Kapilvatṭhu, travelling towards her mother’s home Devadāha from Kapilvatṭhu, and achieved enlightenment at the age of 35 years (563-35=528).

(b) Buddha Gayā Through the Ages –by D.C.Ahir

² BuddhaGayā Temple Its History By Dipak K Barua

³ Information Dossier for nomination of Mahabodhi Temple Complex, BodhGayā as a world Heritage Site, Mahabodhi Temple Management committee, BodhGayā

Wheel of Dhamma, Dhammacakkhamkamanapavetn Sutta.

4. **Kushinagar-** the place where Buddha achieved Mahāparinibbāna.

The Emperor Aśoka, a devout Buddhist was the first person to build a temple, the balustrades and memorial column here to commemorate the holy shrine in 256 BCE and he had got constructed 84000 stūpas and monasteries all over his kingdom on relics of Buddha. He recollected Buddha's relics from the eight holy stūpas erected at –Kushinagar, Vesāli, Ramagāma, Rajagriha, Kapilvatthu, Allakappa, Belapaṭhudeepa, and Pavā by their kings over the Buddha's relics which were preserved in stūpas after Mahāparinibbāna. The subsequent evolution of the ancient city with the building of sanctuaries and monasteries by foreign kings over the centuries. The Great Emperor Aśoka, a devout Buddhist, made a pilgrimage to Bodhagayā in year 260 BCE with his delegation led by Revered monk Uggupta.

The present Mahābodhi Mahāvihāra complex, Bodh-Gayā is spread in 4.86 hectares of land and comprises 50 metre high Mahāvihāra (Grand Shrine), Sacred Bodhi Tree (Pipal tree), Vajrāsana (Diamond throne) and other six sacred sites associated with Buddha's enlightenment, surrounded by numerous ancient Votive Stūpas.⁴ The entire complex is beautifully maintained and protected by balustrades. This is also a unique property of archaeological significance in respect of sacred events associated with the time of the Buddha.

Bodhagayā has called by different names as Bodhagayā, Boddh Gayā, Buddha Gyā, and Buddha-Gayā. Within the two and half centuries of the Buddha's enlightenment, the place was named as

1. Sambodhi (meaning “perfect Enlightenment” or complete enlightenment)
2. Bodhiminda (meaning – sacred area around the Bodhi Tree, at root of which Siddhāttha Gautama achieved perfect enlightenment and became the Buddha),
3. Vajrāsana (meaning- the Diamond Throne) and
4. Mahābodhi (meaning-The Supreme Enlightenment).⁵

By the time of The Great Emperor Aśoka, the place was called “Sambodhi”. In 1861 by the time of excavation the place was popularly called Buddha Gayā or Bodh Gayā. Sir Alexander Cunningham records the Bodh Gayā Temple was known as Mahābodhi. Earlier mentioned this place as Uruvelā. The name Buddha Gayā appears in the legendary inscription of Amarādevā but the magnificent temple continued to be called by the name “Mahābodhi” even as late as the year 1877 and also the Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang (629-644 CE) who visited the place during the year 637 C.E. also mentioned as “Mahābodhi”. The name Uruvelā as explained in Pāli literature that this name is derived from the large amount of sand (velā) available in the area. This place of enlightenment of Buddha, later on received its name

⁴ Information Dossier for nomination of Mahabodhi Temple Complex, BodhGayā as a world Heritage Site, Mahabodhi Temple Management committee, BodhGayā

⁵ Information Dossier for nomination of Mahabodhi Temple Complex, BodhGayā as a world Heritage Site, Mahabodhi Temple Management committee, BodhGayā

of Boddhimanda from the Pipal tree (also called Bodhī tree / Bo-Tree) under which the Buddha had attained Bodhī⁶. This village was inhabited by Jaṭilas, the fire worshipers. They are known as Uruvelā- Kassapa with disciples 500, Nadi-Kassapa with disciples 300 and Gayā-Kassapa with disciples 200, all the three brothers later on became disciples of the Buddha with their entire group of 1000 followers⁷. The Gayā name of this place was derived from Gayā- kassapa and the place where Siddhāttha Gautama attained perfect enlightenment is called as Bodhī. There after the sacred place is known as Buddha Gayā.

According to B.M.Barua, (Gayā and Bodha Gayā) the name of Dharmāranya is a jungle tract in Gayākshetra, and it represents a sanctified boundary inside which is enshrined the image of Buddha. Other synonyms such as Sambodhi and Mahābodhi owe their origin to the fact that Siddhāttha Gautam had attained enlightenment under the sacred Bodhī here. The name of Vajrāsana (Diamond Throne) is also used as an alias for the Mahābodhi Temple as Bodhiminda. The name BodhGayā did not come into use until the eighteenth century. The oldest and also the least commonly used of these names was Sambodhi which is mentioned in the Eight Rock Edict of Aśoka, The Great Emperor. The Kalingabodhi Jātaka refers to this place as Bodhīmanda. The next widely used and also the most enduring name of BodhGayā was Mahābodhī. When the sacred shrine at BodhGayā came to know as Mahābodhī is not certain. In the Aśokan inscription, the place is referred as Sambodhi, where as Chinese traveller Faxian (399-414 CE) did not mention the name⁸. Xuanzang calls it Mahābodhī Vihāra. Thereafter this name is mentioned in a number of inscriptions found at BodhGayā.

The Buddha is said to have stayed at Gayā on several times and the Buddha delivered the Adittapariyāya Sutta. Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, was said to have retired to Gayāsisa along with his followers after some differences with the Buddha, and subsequently it was here that chief disciples of the Buddha, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, had to go to get claim back them. Accordingly to the Jātakas, Ajātasattu had built a monastery for Devdatta at Gayāsisa.

History of BodhGayā

The history of BodhGayā is documented in many inscriptions and pilgrimage accounts. Foremost, the Chinese pilgrims Faxian (399-414 CE) and Xuanzang (629-644 CE) described in details among these accounts. BodhGayā was at the first at the heart of a Buddhist civilization for centuries, until the region was conquered by Turkish armies in the thirteen century. (1205CE)⁹

The first temple built at BodhGayā was by The Great Emperor Aśoka. A portrayal of the Aśokan temple and other building around 256 BCE has been in a bas-relief discovered at Bhārhut Stūpa. The present temple appears to have been built in the second century C.E. over the remains of the Aśoka's Temple. The age of the temple is testified by the presence of a

⁶ Buddha Gayā Through the Ages _By D.C.Ahir

⁷ Buddha and His Dhamma by B.R.Ambedkar

⁸ Buddha Gayā Through the Ages by D.C. Ahir

⁹ Buddha Gayā Temple Its History By Dipak K Barua

gold coin of the King Huviska (150-192C.E.) the second Kushān King and son of Kanishka (127-150CE), along with some punch-marked coins, found among the relics deposited in front of the throne. The Indo- Scythian and Gupta inscriptions also record the constructions of the great temple in the reign of Huviska. According to an inscription discovered at Bodhagayā, a big Saṃgharāma was constructed by King Siri Meghavanna, the King of Sri Lanka in 388 CE, contemporary of Samundragupta (335-375C.E.). Some additions to the Mahābodhi temple were also made by the Burmese around 450CE.

Almost for these centuries after the visit of Xuangzng, no major repairs or improvements appears to have been carried out at Bodhagayā. It was only in 1010CE that some minor repairs are reported to have been undertaken by King Mahipāla of Pāla Dynasty. The first major restoration and renovation was carried out by the Burmese in 1070CE. The last Indian Buddhist King who carries out the repairs at Bodhagayā was Aśokachalla of Sapadalaksa (Sayālkote) Punjab. Dharmasvāmin (1234 CE) (char-lo-tsa-ba-chos-rje-dpal) found this place practically deserted because of the fear of Turuṣka Army . He further narrates that the front of the Mahābodhī image was blocked with bricks and plastered and a substitute image placed near it. A Burmese inscription of 1833 records major repairs at the temple between 1295 and 1298. The Burmese again undertook repair at least thrice during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and there after Bodhagayā was forgotten. In 1590 a Brāmanical-Hindu Mahant, Gosain Giri, established his matha here.

Bodhagayā survived the attacks of Turks led by Bhaktiyar Khilji (1196-1206 C.E.) which is evident from the biography of Dharmasvāmin who visited India in 1234-36 CE. He says: - ‘Only four monks were found putting up in the Vihāra and rest of them deserted the monastery in fear of the invaders, the Turks army’. One of them said, ‘*It is not fine! All the monks have left from the monastery out of fear of the Turuṣkis army*’. However, Buchanan Hamilton found the Mahābodhi Mahāvihāra in utter ruins in 1811. Sir Alexender Cunningham found the heretics Mahant and his followers including in all sorts of non-Buddhist ceremonies in the main shrine. Burmese King Mindan Min, in 1875 obtained the permission for undertaking repair of Mahābodhi Mahāvihāra from Government of India as well as the Mahant. Later, due to slow pace of the repair work, the Government of India deputed J.D.Beglar, Sir Allexgender Cunningham along with Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra who painstakingly excavated the site and extensive renovation work was carried out to restore Bodhagayā to its former glory.

The Core Zone at Bodhagayā

The area known as The Mahābodhi Temple Complex including Muchlinda Pond totally covering twelve acres of land including the main temple which occupies 5.5 acres of land and there are two division of the complex : one where the main temple situated and the other one is where muchalinda pond is located.

The Mahābodhī Temple:-- The present grand high Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra of the Gupta period (5th -6th century)is of immense importance being one of the few earliest genius classical unique architectural vihāras existing in the Indian sub-continent made of black

stucco bricks in that era which have survived example in eastern India those were built in the Indian architecture style. The site of the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra provides exceptional records events associated with the life of Buddha. These sites are honoured particularly since the Emperor Aśoka built the vihāra, the balustrade and the memorial pillar in 256 BCE. This has the direct association with the life of Buddha being the place where the lord Buddha achieved perfect enlightenment. The chief monastery of Bodhagayā was called the Bodhīmaṇḍa Vihāra which later became known as the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra. Four different inscriptions in Brāhmī on the railing of the Mahābodhi Vihāra mention various gifts made towards its repair and construction work¹⁰.

The pyramidal stylistic featured main temple includes a central large shikhara made of black stucco bricks in nine storeys, the largest over 50 metre (about 170 feet), high and situated on a sanctum of square of 50 feet each side. All the four faces/sides of the tower are triangularly converge at one point if the tower is extended up to last, having series of niches where golden mages of Buddha were placed. This tower may look like Buddha sitting in the position of stern meditation. The walls of tower having five stripes from top to bottom of the tower. Near the top of the Shikhara, there is amalaka in round shape and a stūpa over that and between the top Harmika and amalaka.

The central tower is surrounded by four similar smaller towers, built at every corners of the sanctum sanctorum. The main Mahāvihāra houses a colossal gilded image of The Tathāgat Buddha in Bhūmi Sparśa Mudra (touching the ground) as witness that He achieved perfect enlightenment and this is positioned as the Buddha was sitting there facing east when he was meditated to attained perfect enlightenment under the Bodhī Tree at Vajrāsana before twenty five thousand years. Both the side of the Mahāvihāra near the entrance stair cases going to the first floor through both frontal towers and the last two towers housed the statues of Buddha. A parikarma path was made around the grand tower and within the four similar towers. There numerous votive stupas on the walls of the Mahābodhī Mahāvihar all around on boundary walls. A similar shikhara stylistic tower based on the main temple was situated in front of the main Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra in the complex.

Near the entrance of the grand Mahāvihāra, the solid silver statues of Buddha were made near the stair cases and in the front of the entrance a colossal splendid Golden Buddha's statue was placed in Bhūmi Sparśa Mudra sanctum spectrum. In the main hall of the Grand Vihāra the place for the worshipers is there. Around the walls of the grand vihāra there are niches where images Buddhas are placed.

Monastic tradition appears to have been strong in Bodhgayā. Faxian saw three monasteries in a flourishing condition. Xuanzang (629-644C.E.) describes the magnificent Mahābodhī Saṃghārāma, founded in the early fourth century by a king of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and makes

¹⁰ Buddha Gayā Temple Its History by Dipak K Barua

special remark of the strict observance of the Vinaya by the monks residing there. The area is enclosed by outer boundary walls¹¹.

An inscription of about the first century BCE carved on the railing is the first evidence from Bodhagayā itself of pilgrims coming here from outside India. “The gift of Bodhirakṣita from Tāmrapaṇṇi (Sri Lanka). The Monks of Bodhagayā and Sri Lanka were in close contact for several centuries. According to the Mahāvamsa, the monk Cittagutta led a delegation from Stūpa at Anurādhapura in 104 BCE, while according to the Rasavāhinī, Culla Tissa and a group of lay people to come Bodhagayā from Sri Lanka at the same time.

SEVEN SITES AT BODH-GAYĀ WHERE BUDDHA SPEND SEVEN WEEKS

First Week

Bodhi Tree :- The Bodhi-Tree, The Pipal Tree (which is known by different names as Bodhī-rukka or *Ficus Religiosa* or *Asvastha* or Bo-tree, Bodhi-Tru, Bodhi -Verkhs , Indian Fig) Which lies to the west (back) of the Temple and at the root of which the Buddha attained perfect enlightenment (Sambodhī) and which is the world famous most sacred piple tree; formed the nucleus of the Mahābodhī Vihāra. This is the only one tree that makes the place most hallowed with association of the Lord Buddha. It is said that it sprung up at the same time when the Buddha was born, i.e., his co-natal (sahjāta).

The Bodhi-Tree has seen many ups and downs since the Buddha achieved enlightenment and attacked by vested interest person who were destroyed this several times. The Bodhi-tree was destroyed during the period of The Great Emperor Asoka. His Queen Tissarakshita who had spell cast upon the tree to destroy it when the Emperor was on pilgrimage to all places associated with Buddha such as Lumbinivana, Buddha Gayā, Sarnath, Kushinagar, Saravasthi, Vaishali, Rajagriha etc. along with his delegation led by Venerable Thera Uggupta, his teacher for Buddhism. She had a calamity which she could not have been averted without some difficulty and she passed her orders to destroy the Bodhi Tree completely in such a way that it cannot grow in future .When she came to know her guilt she was very much in depression and felt regrets. But the tree sprung up and grown up over the roots at the same place where it was already existed with passage of time.

The place again attacked during reign of Pushyamitra Sung (185BCE-236BCE) when he came out against Buddhism and he persecute the Buddhist Monks all over the country .He passed the orders at Sakala for killing of Buddhist monks and passed orders who killed the monks, were rewarded with hundred gold coins. The Bodha Gayā was not an exception and it also attacked by his followers but again the Bodhi-tree escape from being destroyed completely and has a little impact over the Bodhi Tree. The Gaud King of Bengal, Shasank, seventh century C.E. , contemporary of King Harshavardhan of Kanauja (606-647 CE) had put his effort to eradicate the Bodhi-Tree and he passed orders to pour honey to its roots and destroyed it completely , so it cannot grow again in future and their soldiers burn the roots

¹¹ Buddha Gayā Through the Ages By D.C.Ahir

and pour honey to roots of the Boddhi Tree, so the ants destroyed the roots in the process of complete eradication. But this time also its roots have been grown up and The Boddhi Tree was sprung-up, with passage of time. Baktyiar khilji (1196 C.E.) the Turkish invader destroyed all the Buddhist monasteries in India. He put on fire the Nalanda, Vedanta Puri, Vikramshila Universities including Boddh-Gayā monastery and Mahavihar campus in supry of destroying the Buddhism from India. His army killed monks of all these monasteries and some of the monks were escape from there in the nearby jungles. All the time this tree grown up and with passage of several centuries it has flourished and become feeble and revived with help of grafts made by the efforts of devoted followers.

Now, the present Bodhī Tree is not the original tree of Buddha's time: however it is a descendent of that tree which sprang out of the roots of its immediate predecessor which had fallen down in 1876. This tree was brought from Anuradhapura, Ceylon (Tāmrappanni /Sri Lanka). The branches of original Bodhī Tree were planted in Anuradhapura, Ceylon by Theri Sanghmitrā, the daughter of The Emperor Aśoka who dispatched her for teaching the nuns at Tāmrappanni (Sri Lanka) with relics and image of Buddha and other perishables along with the branch of Bodhī Tree for the people. She planted a branch of the original tree at Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka). Thera Mahinda, her brother was already at Anuradhapura who preached Buddhism to the king Devanamapiya Tissa (307BCE -267 BCE) in the capital along with the royal families. The present Bodhī Tree was sowed at the same place where it was already existed with efforts of Sir Allexender Cunnigham in 1880.

Vajrāsana:--Since the Buddha vowed strongly before sitting on the seat under Bodhī-Tree therefore this seat is known as Vajrāsana means seat of cliffs. Bodhī Pallnka or Diamond Throne is made of red sand stone which exists between the temple and Bodhī tree, marks the actual site where Siddāttha Gautam sat over grass offered by Śakra Devendra facing the east with strong determination and he vowed himself, “ my skin, sinew and bone may dry up as they will and my blood may dry up in my body, but without attaining perfect enlightenment I will not leave this seat”. This seat is known as the seat of the Buddha's enlightenment and was built in the third century BCE by The Emperor Aśoka. Aśvaghōṣa in his Buddhacarita calls it the naval of the earth. Faxian (399-414 C.E.) the Chines traveller mentions that all the past Buddhas attained enlightenment here and that the future Buddhas too would attain enlightenment on the same spot. Buddha spends his first week here under the Bodhī tree in profound meditation.

In the night of the day when Sujata provided him rice pudding he had five dreams and he interpreted them that he had to achieve enlightenment definitely in very near future. In the first period of the night of that day Boddisattva observed that he was lying on the ground with his head at Himalaya in the north, legs were touching the Indian Ocean in the south, right hand touching the ocean in the west and left hand touching the ocean in the east. The whole earth was his bed. The Buddha understood that whatever he comes to know through the meditation at this juncture is for the benefit of human race throughout the earth. There after he saw that a lotus flower sprung up from his navel and grown up to the sky .This the Buddha understood that whatever he was going to achieve, is for the benefit of all sentient

beings of the Universe. Third dream was that a number of white living beings with black head were coming his legs up to knee. The Buddha understood that the human race of all kinds is to follow his path that was he going to achieve, is benevolent for all. The next fourth dream he observed that four different coloured birds came all the four directions and came to his legs and turned white. The Buddha understood this dream as human beings from all the four directions were benefited by the way which is being to achieve. The entire human race is benevolent with the path that had to achieve. The fifth dream was seen by the Bodhisattva that he travelled on excrement to and fro unattached. The Buddha understood that he remains unattached with all human weaknesses such as greediness, attachment, craving, grasping etc. (Aguttar Nikaya -5). On the very same night when day had to break the Bodhisattva achieved enlightenment and became Buddha. The Vajrāsana is most sacred seat at Bodhi-Gayā.

Second Week

Animesālocana Caitya: - The second week of Buddha's enlightenment was spent standing directly in front of and to the right of the Bodhī Tree, and He did not remove his eyes for all seven days incessantly, contemplating the Bodhī Tree. He meditated there standing and with open eyes. A cetiya was erected at the site where Lord Buddha stood gazing at the Bodhī Tree out of gratitude to commemorate the immense event with a statue of Buddha in standing position was placed inside the catiya in the north east side to Bodhi Tree.

Third Week

Ratnacamkramana: -The Ratnacamkramana or the Promenade or Jewell walk, marked by a raised platform to the north of the Bodhī Tree contains stone lotus raised on a platform making Buddha's steps taken during the third week as he paced eighteen steps back and forth. It is said that lotus flowers were sprang up under his feet when the Buddha was wandering in meditation there to and fro. This platform is made of red plaster stone about three feet high, three feet and six inches broad and about fifty three feet long beside the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra in open space to commemorate the immense event. Along the side of this platform there are Buddha pad shown as lotus on black sandstone on the ground level parallel to raised platform.

Fourth Week

Ratnaghara Cetiya: - It is a the roofless shrine in the compound to the north of Caṅkarman at which Lord Buddha sat in meditation incessantly and profoundly, marks the spot where Buddha spent the fourth week, receiving the vision of his future mission (Paṭṭhāna), A rays of five colours-blue, yellow, red, white and orange with golden base were said to have emanated from his body during that period and the Buddhists have designed their flag based on these colours. A Buddha's statue was placed in the shrine to commemorate the immense presence of the enlightened one.

Fifth Week

Ajapāla Nigrodha :- It is a spot marked by the pillar where a tree once stood marking the place where Buddha spent the fifth week in meditation profoundly after attainment of Bodhī and He delivered a discourse on the equality of mankind and answering the queries of a Brahmins that only a man become Brahman by his deeds but not by his birth.

Sixth Week

Mucalinda Pond:- It is the spot where the Buddha spent his sixth week in profound meditation and endured a violent storm and He had been protected by the lake's serpent king Mucalinda. This is the place where Buddha resisted the temptation of the Māra. In Bodhagayā Mahābodhi Temple compound there is a pond where Mucalinda encircled in seven coils himself around the body of Lord Buddha and placed his hood over Buddha's head to protect him from storm of Māra. There is a Aśoka pillar at the entrance to the Mucalinda Lake in the complex of Bodhagayā. There is pond in the campus of the Mahavihara towards south of the Bodhi Tree to commemorate of the great event.

Seventh Week

Rajāyātana Tree: - This is the spot where the Buddha spent his seventh week under a giant tree in meditation. The two merchants Tapssu and Bhallika of Orissa or Burmha (Myanmar) were passing through way and they offered honey and rice made meal. Buddha preached both of them his Dhamma. They took refuse in Buddha and Dhamma. It was here that he made his first two disciples Tapassu and Bhallika, who offered him his first meal following his seven weeks of meditation. This is located close to the temple, on its southeast side. The Buddha donated his hair to them and they made stūpa over them in their country to commemorate the great event¹².

The Buddha after enlightenment under the Bodhi tree also meditated at various places nearby in open space (Ratanghar) under the sun of the month of Vasakh, under banyana Rajayatana tree, standing (Animeshlochana) and walking (Ratnacakarmana) position even with open and closed eyes profoundly and also under thunder storm. He observed that the path he achieved was perfect in all conditions of nature and benevolent for all sentient beings. But he was in dilemma that he preaches the path first to those who understands and gets benefits. The new doctrine is too difficult for a common man to understand and practice. It is very much subtle for the wise man. So he thinks about Alara Kalam and Ramputta Udaka both of them pass away recently. Again he was wondering and come to understand that his five colleagues who were now settled at Sarnath, they were best to understand his doctrine and follow. There after he proceeds to Sarnath.

Besides the above mentioned sites a stand stone Vedika (balustrade) cover around the inner complex of Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra, Vajrāsan, Buddhapadas, and Ratnacamakarmna etc. and within the Vedika another vedika which was also encircled around the Bodhī Tree and Vajrāsana to the adjacent of Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra. But only a few pillars are still in situ; the carvings of sculpted humane faces, animals and others were seen over the balustrade.

Bodhagayā: A Monastic Mahāvihāra

At the same time as Nālandā and Vikramasīlā, the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra grew into an important centre of education. Bodhgoṣha wrote the Aṭṭhasālinī as well as the now lost

¹² Information Dossier for nomination of Mahabodhi Temple Complex, BodhGayā as a world Heritage Site, Mahabodhi Temple Management committee, BodhGayā

Ñānodaya here before going the Sri Lanka. In 1011, Dīpaṅkara Srijana (also known as Atīsa). One of the last great Indian Buddhist masters was ordained at Bodhagayā and studied the Vinaya under Sīlarakṣita and left for Sumātrā. On his return to India after 12 years, he went back to Bodhagayā again where he defeated the Tirthikā heretics thrice and hereby maintained the superiority of Buddhism over other religions in Magadha. In 1040 year, Atīsa set off from Bodhagayā on his epoch-making journey to Tibet, where he helped to re-establish Buddhism. One of his works, the Caryāgati, begins with a salutation to the Vajrāsana indicating that Atīsa had a special fondness for the place. Other famous names those were connected with Diamond Throne include the Chinese pilgrims Chin-Hung and Hsuan-Chao, author of the Mādhyamakacatuḥsatik and Dharmapāla, the south Indian monk and the Kashmiri fanatic Siddha Ratnavajra. This is described by Tsmāi Lotsawa Sangye Trak in his an ancient text as ‘the only Tibetan who ever to hold the chair at Vajrāsana, Mahābodhī’ suggesting that he was a Ācārya at the Mahāvihāra monastery. The last Theravādin and Sri Lankan monk Ānandaśrī who later on shifted to Tibet for good and taught there, his name also associated with Mahābodī Monastery. He is eulogized in one Tibet books as *“foremost amongst the many thousands in the Saṃgha of the Island of Simhala, a disciple of Dīpaṅkara, residing at Vajrāsana, a great scholar skilled in two languages, one who seeks the benefit of the Saṃgha, the excellent one”*. It is likely that Ānandaśrī was teaching at Bodhagayā at the end of the thirteenth century which proves that Mahāvihāra continue to flourish around that time. The records show that Bodhagayā continued to function as a centre of Buddhist scholarships and pilgrimage at least till the beginning of the fifteenth century. Dharmasvāmin (1234-1236 CE), the Tibetan monk described that he found about 300 Sri Lankan monks residing in the monastery. King Jayasena after twenty eight years donated a piece of land on the request of Maṅgalasvāmin to his Trust, the abbot of the Sri Lankan monastery at Bodhagayā.

Dungeshwari Cave and Sujātā Sthal

Dungeshwari Caves or Mahākāla caves, is situated about 12KM north east of Bodhagayā Mahāvihāra. There are three ancient main caves containing Buddhist shrines where the Buddha underwent about six years of self-mortification before descending to Bodhagayā. During the period of self-mortification, Buddha became so weak, thin and starved that he could not even stand on own his legs so he rested under a Banayān tree, then a woman of nearby Sanani village named Sujātā who vowed that if she got a male baby child, she donate milk rice made food to the Banayāna deity so offered him milk rice (Pāyas) food to him as she undersood him a Banayāna deity. Buddha accepted her food and consumed the same thereafter his explicit approved and presented him with a divine truth that both extreme self indulgence in neither mortification nor abasement, is the perfect way to attain enlightenment and Buddha attained the knowledge that the middle way is required to attain the perfect supreme enlightenment. Dungeshwari caves stand as a symbol commemorate this event and Buddhas colossal gilded shrunken statues were placed in the caves and as he was there when he was meditated in self mortification in these caves.

Other Important Shrines

There are several other sites present there to commemorate the events relating to Buddha and many others countries made monuments /monasteries and a 80 feet high statue of Buddha in the campus of Bodhagayā.

Present Situation of Bodhagayā

Bodhagayā Temple was in the hands of its followers till early thirteenth century and lost control after its destruction by the Turuṣka invaders. Later on a Śaitvite Hindu Mahant, Ghamandi Giri, arrived at Bodhagayā in 1590 and claimed that he was the legitimate heir of Mahāvihāra. The first attempt to restore the Mahābodhī Mahāvihāra to the Buddhists from the clutches of the Hindu Mahant was made in an appeal to the British-Indian Government by Sir Edwin Arnold though his famous book *The Light of Asia* (1885) in 1890-92. It was in response to this appeal that Anāgārika Dharmapāla formed the Mahābodhi Society of India in 1891 to raise this issue on the national and the international fronts. A compromise proposal put forward by Dr. Rajendra Prasad (1924), who later became the first President of The Republic of India, was thwarted several times but finally became law in 1949 under the provision of the Bodhagayā Temple Act 1949, (under the Bihar Act 17 of 1949) for better management of the Temple. The newly-constituted Bodhagayā Temple Management Committee Comprised of nine members with the District magistrate of Gayā as its ex-officio chairperson, and four members each from the Hindu and the Buddhist communities. This initiative which provide for equal representation of both the communities in the management committee transferred the control of the Temple Land along with other property as well as restored the right to worship to both the communities.

According to UNESCO, the present temple is one of the earliest and most imposing structures built entirely in brick from the late Gupta period. It was declared as UNESCO's World heritage Site in 2002 based upon the criteria that it has "*outstanding universal importance as it is one of the most revered and sanctified place in the world.*"

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