

## **PART III**

### **The Four Places of Miracles**

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# 1. Sravasti, Place of the Twin Miracle

Sravasti (Pali: Savatthi) is located in the Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh, 160 km east of the capital Lucknow.

## 1.1 Religious Significance

Sravasti (Pali: Savatthi) 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, close association with the Buddha's ministry. Of the 45 years of his ministry, the Buddha spent 25 rains-retreats or vassas, 24 of them continuously (21<sup>st</sup>-44<sup>th</sup>) 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, of "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.* VI, 4. It was after the third rainy season that Anathapindika visited his brother-in-law while on business in Rajgir. 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 offerings to 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 Sitavana (Cool Grove) nearby 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.

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 Sitavana where the Buddha was. At that time, the Buddha had risen at early dawn and was engaged in walking meditation in the open. When he saw Anathapindika coming, he called him by his family name ‘Sudatta’, 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 respects to the Buddha and hearing the Dhamma, he became a Sotapanna. Thereupon he invited the Buddha to spend the rainy season in Sravasti.



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 images 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 art.

## 1.2 Historical Background

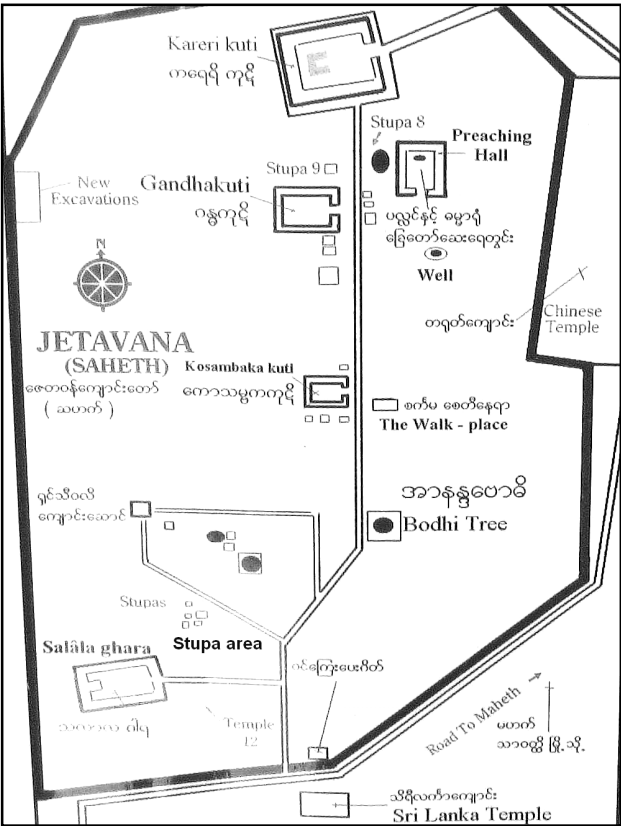
King Asoka visited Sravasti in 249 BC as part of his pilgrimage to the holy Buddhist shrines and erected two pillars, each 70 feet high, on both sides of the eastern gate of Jetavana, as well as some stupas to enshrine the relics of the Buddha. During the time of the Kushan kings, **Kaniska** and **Huviska**,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

When Faxian 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 Xuanzang came to Sravasti in 637 AD, the main city was in ruins and there were several hundreds of Sangharamas, mostly in ruins 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 Xuanzang's visit, Jetavana was re-occupied, as evidenced by the recovery of seals and images of Mahayanist pantheons such as Lokanatha, Avalokitesvara and others belonging to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 Kushan period (1<sup>st</sup>- 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.



Ground Plan of Jetavana. (Photo from the Burmese Monastery, Sravasti)

## 1.3 Objects of Interest

### (i) Jetavana Park

During the Buddha's time, the place was called Jetavana Anathapindika arama or Anathapindika's monastery of Jeta Grove. To-day most of the ruins are the remains of temples and stupas from Kushan period (1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> 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:

- **The 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 Sravasti 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: (1) The corporeal relics deposited in a *stupa* after the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, (2) An object of use by the Buddha such as his alms bowl, etc., (3) 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. Ven. Mogallana, foremost in psychic ability, was assigned the task of obtaining the sapling. When it was obtained, Anathapindika planted the young shoot at the gate of Jetavana. 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.



**Plate 38:** The Ananda Bodhi tree is a favourite shrine of pilgrims when they enter Jetavana. Most pilgrims circumambulate the tree as a mark of respect.



**Plate 39:** On entering the ancient ruins after the Ananda Bodhi tree, the first shrine on the left is believed to mark the very spot where the original Kosambi kuti, built by Anathapindika for the personal use of the Buddha, once stood. Just across it is a raised brick platform to mark the site of the *cankama*, where the Buddha practiced walking meditation.

- **The Kosambi kuti**

This temple is believed to be the site of the original **Kosambi kuti**, first 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.

- **The Gandha kuti**

The ruins here mark the site of the **Gandha kuti** (Perfumed Chamber) built by Anathapindika for the Buddha's residence. According to the Buddhavamsa Commentary, the space covered by the four bedposts of the Buddha's Gandha kuti in Jetavana is one of the four avijahitatthānāni or **places that do not vary** for all Buddhas. 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.



**Plate 40:** The ruins shown above marks the original site of the Gandha kuti built by Anathapindika for the official residence of the Buddha.





**Plate 41:** The Gandha kuti is the most revered shrine in Jetavana. This photo taken on the eve of Kathina 2002 shows some Sri Lankan devotees decorating the shrine with plastic cups filled with rose petals.



**Plate 42:** Photo of the Group of Eight Stupas in the stupa area at Jetavana

## • The Group of Eight Stupas

The area to the east and northeast of the Salala-ghara (where King Pasenadi donated a monastery) seems to have been specially utilized for the erection of stupas. Important stupas such as those of the Arahants Sariputta, Moggallana and Sivali are found here.

### (ii) The Sudatta Stupa

North of Jetavana, in the ruins of Mahet (old Sravasti city) 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 1<sup>st</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> 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.



**Plate 43:** Picture shows the imposing Sudatta Stupa at Mahet, situated about ½ kilometer from Jetavana. This stupa was built over the foundations of the house of the Buddha's chief benefactor Sudatta, popularly known as Anathapindika, or "Feeder of the Destitute."



**Plate 44:** At the top of the Sudatta Stupa is a grand plinth, from which one can see the basements of two circular stupas, furnishing the only evidence that this is a Buddhist structure.



**Plate 45:** The Angulimala Stupa at Mahet showing the opening of a tunnel cut through it to prevent flooding and damage during the rainy season. It is believed that the stupa marks the site where Ven. Angulimala was cremated.

### (iii) The 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.

### (v) The 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** (*Yamaka Pathihariya*) 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**'.





**Plate 46:** This hillock opposite the Nikko Lotus Hotel in Sravasti is believed to be the ‘Miracle Hill’ where the Buddha displayed the Twin Miracle in order to silence the heretics. At the top is a brick stupa believed to be built by Asoka, to commemorate the great miracle. It is named ‘Orajhar’ by the locals.



**Plate 47:** Picture shows the brick structure of the stupa at the top of Miracle Hill in Sravasti.

## 2. Sankasia, Place of Descent from Heaven

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.

### 2.1 Religious Significance

According to the Dhammapada Commentary on Verse 181, after the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle at Sravasti to dispel the challenges of the heretics, he ascended to Tavatimsa heaven. His previous mother, who had been reborn in Tusita heaven as the deva Santusita, also came to Tavatimsa heaven. There the Buddha expounded the Abhidhamma to the devas and brahmas throughout the three months of the vassa. As a result, Santusita deva became a sotapanna, as did numerous other devas and brahmas.

During that period, Venerable Sariputta spent vassa (3 months rains retreat) at Sankasia 30 yojanas (1 yojana = 13 km) away from Sravasti. During his stay there, as regularly instructed by the Buddha, he taught the Abhidhamma to his 500 pupils staying with him and covered the whole course by the end of vassa. Towards the end of vassa, Venerable Maha Moggalana went to Tavatimsa heaven to see the Buddha and was told that the Buddha would return to the human world on the full moon day at the end of vassa to the place where Venerable Sariputta was spending vassa.

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 the Devas, on the left side was the silver ladder for Maha 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 accompanied him on each side, with Maha Brahma holding a parasol in honor. With this retinue, the Buddha descended and set foot on earth at the gate of the city of Sankasia.

A large gathering headed by Venerable Sariputta welcomed the Buddha back to this world and the whole town was lit up. Venerable Sariputta was awed by the grandeur and glory of the whole scene of the Buddha's return. He respectfully approached the Buddha and said, "Venerable Sir! We have never seen or even heard of such magnificent and resplendent glory. Indeed, Venerable Sir, you are loved, respected and revered alike by devas, brahmas and men!" To him the Buddha said, *"My son Sariputta, the Buddhas who are endowed with unique qualities are truly loved by men and devas alike."*

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

The wise who practise jhana concentration and Insight Meditation take delight in the peace of liberation from sensual pleasures and moral defilements. Such wise and mindful ones, who truly comprehend the Four Noble Truths (i.e., Arahants and Buddhas) are held dear also by the devas. (Dhammapada Verse 181)

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.

## 2.2 Historical Background

King Asoka visited Sankasia as part of his itinerary of pilgrimage in 249 BC. According to Faxian (5<sup>th</sup> century AD), 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.

Faxian 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 Xuanzang 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 one thousand two hundred 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 the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC were also discovered.

### 2.3 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 the 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 in 1999. Impressed by its pristine environment, he decided to lead Malaysian pilgrims there regularly. In the beginning, the journey from Delhi would take the whole day. The group would leave Sankasia in the 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 a very pleasant experience. We had the opportunity to know Sayadaw U Nanda well and benefit from his vast knowledge of the history of Sankasia. Now more pilgrims will get to know the rich heritage of Sankasia.

## 2.4 The Buddhist Population around Sankasia

According to **Sayadaw U Nanda**, 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 Kapilavastu and massacred the Sakyans, many escaped to India and migrated to Sankasia. Today there are over one quarter million of their descendants living in the districts around Sankasia. Every year during **Pavarana** (Invitation) on the full-moon day of October, a great congregation of local Buddhists, assemble at Sankasia to commemorate the Buddha’s Descent from Heaven.

In the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD when Faxian 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 were spoken, the stone lion on top of the nearby Asokan 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 Xuanzang'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 Xuanzang's visit, the Buddhists of Sankasia many of whom were Sakyans, might have moved out of Sankasia and settled in the surrounding villages. Many of them join the October full-moon celebration (Pavarana) as another traditional festival of their ancestors. They are ignorant of their historical ties with 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.

## **Objects of Interest**

### **(i) The Broken Asoka Column with Elephant Capital**

The Elephant Capital that once surmounted the Asoka column is an important relic of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

## (ii) The 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 was 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 Xuanzang, 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.

When the author visited Sankasia in November 2003, the brickworks around the mound had fallen off due to heavy rains during the previous monsoon, revealing the bare earth. 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, Faxian and Xuanzang.

### (iii) The 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.



**Plate 48:** The walls in the shrine hall of the Sri Lankan temple in Sankasia are decorated with murals depicting the Buddha's Descent from Heaven. This photo shows Sayadaw U Nanda (third from right), Abbot of the neighboring Burmese Vihara, explaining the details of this miraculous event to a group of Malaysian pilgrims when they visited Sankasia in 2006.



**Plate 49:** Rustic scene in Sankasia showing the shrine commemorating the Buddha’s Descent from Heaven. In the background is a pavilion displaying the famous Elephant Capital from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC



**Plate 50:** Inside the shrine are images depicting the Buddha’s Descent from Heaven, flanked by Sakkadevaraja and Maha Brahma holding a parasol.



**Plate 51:** This famous Elephant Capital dated 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC was discovered by Cunningham during archaeological excavations in Sankasia.



**Plate 52:** A 2002 photo showing the 6m high brick structure that was the remains of a Buddhist temple. Cunningham identified it as the place where the Buddha set foot at Sankasia upon his Descent from Heaven. In 2003, torrential rains during an unusually heavy monsoon completely destroyed the structure.





**Plate 53:** This was what was left of the brick structure in 2003 after torrential rains during an unusually heavy monsoon completely destroyed the structure.



**Plate 54:** By 2007 the brick structure had disappeared, leaving behind a mound of earth to remind us of the impermanent nature of all conditioned things.

### 3. Rajgir, Place of the Taming of the Drunken Elephant Nalagiri

Rajgir (Pali: Rajagaha) is situated in the Nalanda district of Bihar, 70 km northeast of Bodhgaya and 102 km south of Patna.

#### 3.1 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 the world 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 Jain leader 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. When the elephant approached, **Venerable Ananda** stood in front of the Buddha to protect the Master. But the Buddha subdued the animal with his loving kindness.

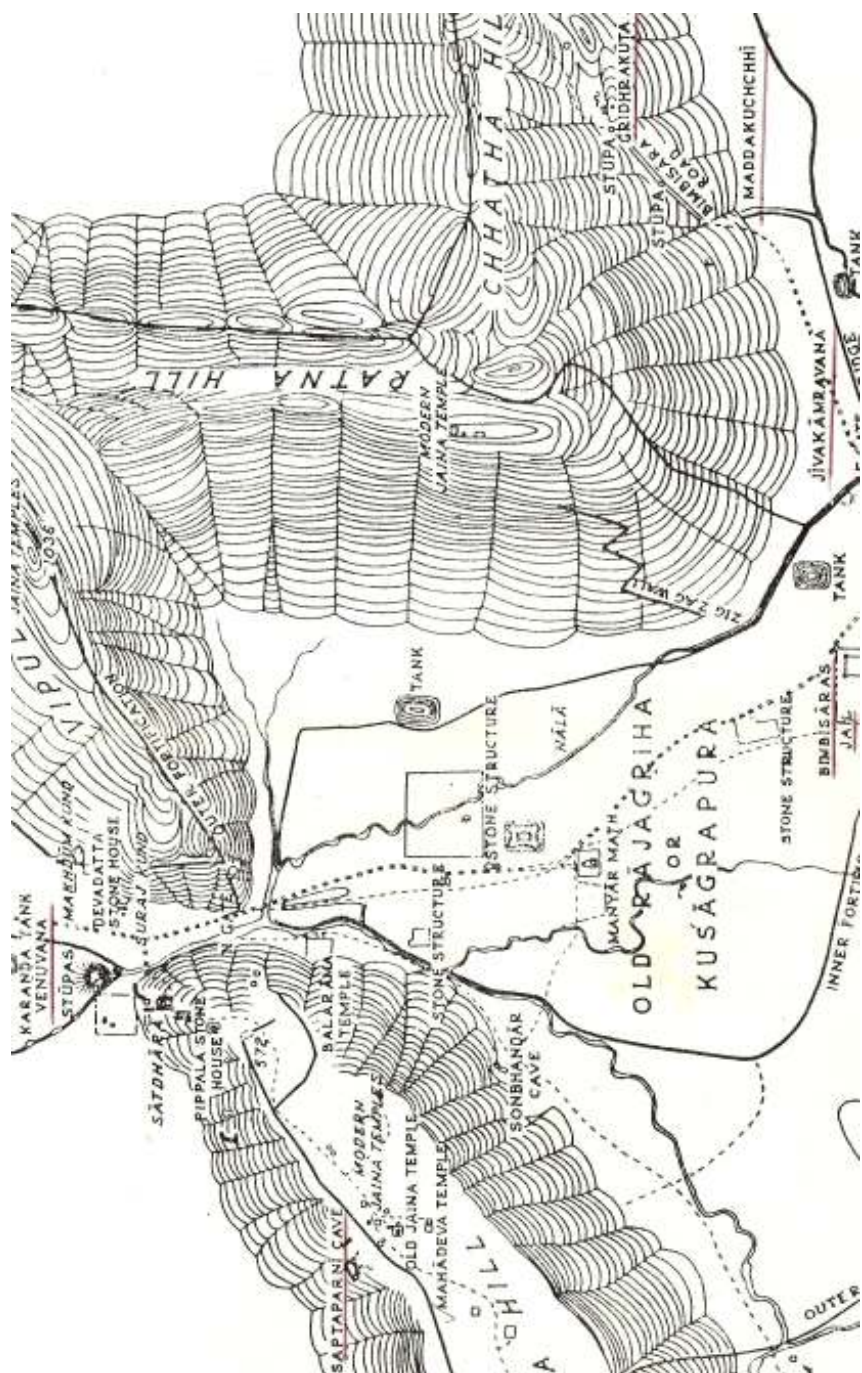
Because of this miracle, Rajgir became sanctified as an important pilgrimage site. While Devadatta was plotting against the Buddha, **Ajatasattu**, at his instigation, usurped the throne and imprisoned his father in order to starve him to death. He regretted his actions too late, as his father had died 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 Kushinagar 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.

### 3.2 Historical Background

Rajgir lost its status after Ajatasattu's son, **Udayibhadda**, slew his father and transferred the capital to **Pataliputta** (modern day **Patna**). 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 Faxian came during 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, he found the old city desolate but outside the hills at Veluvana, he found a group of monks living in the monastery. When Xuanzang 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 Pippali 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 Xuanzang's visit, the antiquities recovered during archaeological excavations in 1905-06 showed that it continued to be a popular Buddhist shrine up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. According to Faxian, Ajatasattu built a new citadel outside the circle of 5 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.

A map of Rajgir extracted from the publication "Rajgir" by the Archaeological Survey of India is shown overleaf in order to assist the reader on the locations of the various places of interest.



### 3.3 Objects of Interest

#### (i) Ajatasattu Stupa

At the entrance of Rajgir is a mound with stone pillars and some white cement graves. This is the Ajatasattu Stupa built by King Ajatasattu to enshrine his portion of the Buddha's relics obtained after the Buddha's Parinibbana in Kusinara. According to legend, Venerable Mahakassapa foresaw danger to the relics and advised Ajatasattu to move the relics to a new secret location. Thereafter it lost its importance and fell into ruins. When the Muslims conquered the area, they turned the site into Muslim graveyard.

#### (ii) 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. 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.



**Plate 55:** The ruins of the abandoned Ajatasattu Stupa at the entrance of Rajgir has been turned into a Muslim cemetery with tombs painted white as shown.



**Plate 56:** Photo of the Squirrel's Feeding Ground of Veluvana. In the middle is a pond identified as the Karanda tank where the Buddha used to bathe in.





**Plate 57:** Pippali stone house as seen from the road at the foot of Vebhara hill



**Plate 58:** Close view of Pippali stone house, which used to be the residence of Ven. Maha Kassapa. Above it is a circular brick structure, probably the base of a stupa built to honor the great arahant known as the “Father of the Sangha”.

### (iii) Pippali Stone 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.

### (iv) 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 Jain 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 much wider in those days, to accommodate so many arahants.

### (v) **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 meters thick. This area has been identified as the prison in which King 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.

### (vi) **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 7 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.

### (vii) 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 have sheltered **Ven. Sariputta** and **Ven. Moggallana**.



**Plate 59:** From Phippali stone house, one has to climb the rocky path till the largest Jains temple is reached. From there a narrow path descend to Sattapanni



**Plate 60:** A long narrow terrace fronts a line of 6 caves (originally might be 7). Four of the caves are all in good conditioned but are sealed for safety reasons



**Plate 61:** Ruins of Bimbisara jail where King Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son Ajatasattu and starved to death. The jail measures 60 meters square with 2-meter thick walls. On the hill beside a white stupa is Gijjhakuta (Vulture Peak).



**Plate 62:** Ruins of monasteries at the Jivaka Mango grove in Rajagaha.



**Plate 63:** View of the Bimbisara road seen from the summit of Vulture Peak.



**Plate 64:** Just before the summit of Vulture Peak, one can see a large cave. It is believed that the Buddha used to meditate in this cave.





**Plate 65:** Near the cave, a staircase built for the convenience of pilgrims, leads to the summit, which has a wide cemented platform to accommodate pilgrims.



**Plate 66:** This shrine at Vulture Peak is the most popular spot in Rajgir where pilgrims perform puja. This is but natural as the place was the favorite resort of the Buddha and the scene of many of his important discourses.

## 4. Vaishali, Place where Buddha Renounced the Will to Live On

Vaishali (Pali: Vesali) is located around the village of Basarh in Hajipur District of Bihar, 55 km north of Patna across the Ganges.

### 4.1 Religious Significance

(i) **Vaishali** (Pali: **Vesali**) was the capital 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 modeled 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 (see AN 7.21). 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.

(ii) The Buddha visited Vaishali several times, spending his 5th and 44th vassas there and many Licchavi nobles became his disciples. His first visit took place just before his 4th Vassa in Rajgir. At that time, Vaishali was plagued by famine, evil spirits and disease. In desperation, the Licchavi nobles went to Rajgir where the Buddha was staying to invite him to Vaishali and save their country from ruin. According to the **Paramatthajotika** (Commentary on the Khuddaka Nikaya), the Buddha traveled by boat up the Ganges to Vaishali. As soon as he crossed the Vaishalian boundary, they came to meet him in the river till the water was up to their necks. Soon after, a sudden torrential rain broke out. It caused a great flood that swept all the dead bodies into the Ganges till the land was cleansed of all the impurities.

Then the Licchavi nobles conducted the Buddha to Vaishali. As soon as the Blessed One arrived at Vaishali, Sakka Devaraja came with a host of devas. With the arrival of devas possessing such great influence, most of the evil spirits fled. Thereupon the Buddha delivered the **Ratana Sutta (Jewel Discourse)** to Venerable Ananda, and gave him instructions as to how he should tour the city with the Licchavi citizens reciting the discourse as a mark of protection to the people of Vaishali.

Ven. Ananda followed the Buddha's instructions, and sprinkled the sanctified water from the Buddha's own almsbowl on the city walls. As a consequence, all the evil spirits were exorcised and the pestilence subsided. Ven. Ananda returned with the citizens of Vaishali to the Public hall where the Buddha and his disciples had assembled awaiting his arrival. There the Buddha recited the same Jewel Discourse to the gathering. Sakka Devaraja who was in attendance with a host of devas, uttered the three final stanzas of the sutta in honor of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Then, keeping the Blessed One on his right, he returned to Tavatimsa heaven with the other devas. But the Buddha continued to preach the Ratana Sutta to the people of Vaishali for seven days.

(iii) 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 five hundred 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.

(iv) 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. Later in her life, Ambapali became a bhikkhuni and attained arahantship.

(v) The Buddha spent the last vassa in Vaishali where he relinquished the will to live on at the Capala shrine. Earlier, Mara had appealed to him to enter Parinibbana as the Sasana had become successful, prosperous, famous and well-proclaimed by gods and men. He reminded the Buddha that it was time for the Blessed One to enter Parinibbana. When this was said, the Buddha answered Mara thus: Don't trouble yourself, Evil One. Before long, the Parinibbana of the Tathagata will come about. Three months hence, the Tathagata will pass away completely."

Thereupon came a **tremendous earthquake** and thunder rolled across the heavens. When Ven. Ananda felt the mighty tremors and rolling thunder, he was astonished and came to the Buddha and asked what was the cause of such a mighty earthquake.

## **Eight Causes of Earthquakes**

The Buddha answered that they were eight causes of earthquakes.

1. "This great earth is established upon liquid, the liquid upon the atmosphere and the atmosphere upon space. When mighty atmospheric disturbances occur, the liquid is agitated. With the agitation of the liquid, tremors of the earth arise. This is the first cause of mighty earthquakes.

2. "When an ascetic or holy man of great power who has developed psychic powers or a mighty and potent deity whose concentration of the earth-element consciousness is weak but his concentration of water-element consciousness is immeasurable, then he makes the earth shudder and shake and violently quake.



3-8. “When the Bodhisatta descends from Tusita Heaven and enters the mother’s womb, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the third reason. When the Bodhisatta emerges from the mother’s womb, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the fourth reason. When the Tathagata gains Supreme Enlightenment, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the fifth reason. When the Tathagata sets in motion the Wheel of the Law, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the sixth reason. When the Tathagata renounces the will to live on, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the seventh reason. When the Tathagata enters Parinibbana wherein no element of clinging remains, the earth shudders and shakes and violently quakes. This is the eighth reason.” (Mahaparinibbana Sutta, 3.10 – 3.20)

When Ven. Ananda realized that the Buddha had renounced the will to live on, he pleaded three times with the Buddha to live on till the end of his lifespan. But the Buddha refused by telling him that the time is past for such entreaty. He had already hinted three times to Ananda that, “whosoever has developed, practiced, employed, strengthened, maintained, scrutinized and brought to perfection the Four Constituents of Psychic Power, could, if he so desired, continue living his full lifespan. The Tathagata has done so and could, if he desired, remain until the end of his lifespan.”

The Buddha put the blame on Ven. Ananda for failing to take the hint although told to him three times. The Buddha could not go back on his word for the sake of living on.

## **Conclusion**

From the Buddha’s explanation of the causes of earthquakes, we can see that his renunciation of the life principle at Vaishali must have been a great event to be able to cause a mighty earthquake! It certainly deserves to be included as one of the miraculous events in the Buddha’s life.

## 4.2 Historical Background

After the Mahaparinibbana, the Licchavis obtained a share of the Buddha's relics from Kushinagar and erected a grand stupa over the holy relics in Vaishali. Eventually, 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 indulging in **Ten Practices** that did not conform with the Vinya 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 Practices as unlawful according to the Vinaya.

Forty years after the Second Council, another controversy arose that would split 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**, 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.

**Faxian**, who visited Vaishali in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD described the vihara (Kutagarasala) of the great forest (Mahavana), which had a two-storied tower but made no mention of a monkey tank.

**Xuanzang** who came two hundred years later saw the stupa built by the Licchavi princes over their portion of the Buddha's relics from Kusinara located at Basarh. At Kolhua, he saw a stupa built by Asoka and the Asokan pillar about 50 or 60 feet high with a lion capital on top. He mentioned a tank dug by a band of monkeys (Markatahrada) for the Buddha's use and related the story of the offering of honey by the monkeys to the Buddha.

After Xuanzang's visit, the history of Vaishali remained blank for over twelve centuries. It lay in ruins, unknown and unheard of until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when **Cunningham** identified the ruins at and around **Basarh** in Vaishali district of Bihar with ancient Vaishali. Today, most of the principal ruins are located in the village of **Kolhua**, 3.2 km northeast of Basarh.

## 4.4 Objects of Interest

### Buddhist Monuments at Basarh

#### (i) Raj Vishal ka Garh, the site of ancient Vaishali

Vaishali derives its name from Raja Vishal of the Mahabharata era. The village of **Basarh** has been identified as the site of the ancient city of Vaishali. The site of the Raj Vishal ka Garh or Fort of Raja Vishal is believed to represent the citadel of Vaishali where the 7707 rajas or representatives of the Vajjian confederacy used to meet and discuss the matters 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. A kilometer northwest, near to the Relic Stupa of the Licchavis is a large pond believed to be the Coronation tank where the Licchavis used to anoint their elected representatives or rajas with its water.



**Plate 67:** This 2001 photo shows the extensive, neglected ruins of the ancient city of Vaishali, located at the present day village of Basarh in Vaishali.



**Plate 68:** Abhishek Puskarni or Coronation tank at Basarh where the Licchavis used to anoint their rajas or elected representatives with its water. The white stupa in the background is the Shanti stupa built by Fuji Guruji of Japan.

## **(ii) The Relic Stupa of the Licchavis**

Next to the Coronation tank is the archaeological park, where an open shelter with a dome-shaped roof stands. Under 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 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 partly full reminds us of the statement made by Xuanzang 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.*” (Reference: The Corporeal Relics of the Buddha. Dr. A. S. Altekar, 1956. Patna Museum, Patna)



**Plate 69:** The original relic stupa of the Licchavis at Basarh was made of mud. At the center of this stupa is an open trench, believed to have been made by King Asoka when he came to collect part of the relics for re-distribution.

## **Buddhist Monuments at Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Park in Kolhua**

### **(iii) The Asokan Pillar**

At Kolhua, 3.2 km northeast of Basarh, 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 northern Bihar 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.

### **(iv) The Asoka Stupa and the ‘Monkey Pond’**

Beside the Asokan pillar is the Asoka Stupa seen by Xuanzang. The dome-shaped mound is 4.6 m high, 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 the place to offer puja, followed by chanting of the Ratana Sutta or by walking/sitting meditation at the stupa. Most Indian tourist guides mistake this stupa for the Ananda stupa located at Hajipur. (Today the Ananda stupa can still be seen at Hajipur. See “Buddhist Pilgrimage, pp.175-176” by Chan Khoon San.)

Beside the Asoka Stupa is a large tank that Xuanzang identified as the tank dug by a band of monkeys (markata-hrada). According to Northern (Mahayana) books, the Kutagarasala was on the banks of the **lake Markata** (Markatahradatire). (Ref. “Kutagarasala” in Dictionary of Pali Proper Names by G P Malalasekera). Xuanzang probably mistook this for the pond in front of the Kutagarasala and named it ‘monkey pond.’



The Chinese monk **Faxian** who visited Vaishali in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD recorded in the 'Fo-Kwo-Ki' as follows: "To the north of the city of Vaishali (Basarh), there is the vihara of the great forest, which has a two-storied tower (Kutagarasala). This chapel was once occupied by Buddha. Here also is the tower built over half the body of Ananda."

**Xuanzang** who visited Vaishali two centuries later mentioned that the Ananda stupa was located 30 li southeast of a Mahayana monastery called Svetapura. "On either (north and south) side of the Ganges River, there is a stupa; this is the spot where Ven. Ananda divided his body between the two kingdoms." It appears that Faxian was mistaken about the location of the Ananda stupa.

### **(v) The Site of Kutagara Sala (Hall with Pointed Roof)**

The great Pali commentator Venerable Buddhaghosa explained the origin of the name Kutagarasala as follows: "In the forest was established a Sangharama or monastery. A pasada or storied building was built on pillars, a pinnacle was put above it and it was made into a Kutagarasala resembling a mansion of devas. From it, all Sangharamas are known as Kutagarasala." (Ref. "The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa, p.104" by B. C. Law)

From the records of the Chinese monks, we may surmise that the Kutagarasala was still standing at the time of Faxian but was gone by the time of Xuanzang. It was probably uninhabited and fell into decay and disappeared over time.

The Buddha spent his 5<sup>th</sup> vassa at the Kutgarasala in Vaishali. He also stayed there on several occasions, and the suttas record various eminent persons who visited him there and of his conversations with them. Among such visitors are mentioned several Licchavi chiefs, such as Mahali and general Siha who came accompanied by 500 chariots.

Once the young Jaina Saccaka came to the Kutagarasala to challenge the Buddha, boasting that the latter would “shake, shiver and tremble, and sweat under the armpits if he were to engage in debate with me.” When confronted by the Buddha after much argumentation in the presence of many Licchavis, he was left speechless and had to agree with the Buddha on every point of debate. The two encounters are described in the Cula- and the Maha-Saccaka Suttas (MN.35 and MN.36).

Sometimes the Buddha would walk from the Kutagarasala to quiet places nearby, e.g., the Saranda shrine and Capala shrine. It was at the Capala shrine that the Buddha renounced the will to live on, three month before the Mahaparinibbana.



**Plate 70:** View of the main monuments at Kolhua from the south showing the famous Asokan Pillar crowned by the Lion Capital. Beside it is the Asoka Stupa erected by King Asoka when he visited Vaishali during his Pilgrimage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Note that the Lion Capital is pointing north, the direction that King Asoka took on his way to Lumbini as part of his Pilgrimage. In the foreground is a large tank that Xuanzang identified as the monkey tank.



**Plate 71:** Another view of the Asoka Stupa on the north side shows a large number of votive stupas, pointing to the great importance of the place



**Plate 72:** . In fact, recent excavations revealed more votive stupas on the other side of the Asoka Stupa as shown in this photo taken in 2011.



**Plate 73:** On the western side of the tank is a cement signboard identifying the site of the Kutagarasala, where the Buddha used to stay when he was in Vaishali



**Plate 74:** Ruins of a monastery from post-Gupta period built on the site of the original Kutagarasala. The post Gupta period is around the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, the time when Xuanzang visited this place. When Faxian came during the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, he described the Kutagarasala as a two storied tower.



**Plate 75:** Nearby is another cement signboard identifying the site of a nunnery.



**Plate 76:** Ruins of a 12-room nunnery constructed during the Gupta period for the residence of nuns. The Gupta period was from 320 to 550 AD and is known as the Golden Age of India in science, mathematics, astronomy, religion and philosophy.