

Glimpses of Sacred places Related to the Life of Sākhyaṃuni Gotama the Buddha

Introduction:

The Buddha while living in the Sāla Grove at Kusināra, few hours before He attained Maha Parinibbāna, at the age of eighty, said to Venerable Ānanda, his dutiful and beloved attendant thus:

“There are four places, Ānanda, which the devotees, faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay - followers should visit with feelings of inspiration (Samvega). The places are

- ❖ **“Where the Tathāgata was born” is the first.**
- ❖ **“Where the Tathāgata attained the perfect and supreme Enlightenment” is the second.**
- ❖ **“Where the Tathāgata set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma” is the third.**
- ❖ **“Where the Tathāgata attained the final goal of Mahā Parinibbāna – the deathlessness is the fourth.**

And there will come, Ānanda, to these places, pious Brethren and sisters of the Holy Order, and devout men and women.”

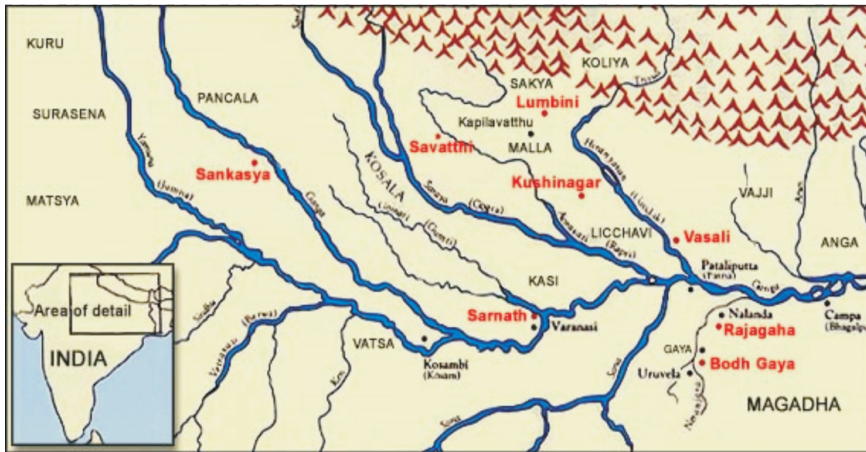
The four most important sacred places are:

1. **Lumbini** – The Birth place of The Buddha
2. **Bodhgaya** – The Place of Enlightenment
3. **Sarnath - Deer park** – The place of First sermon of Lord Buddha
4. **Kusinara** – The place of Mahāparinibbāna

Some other sacred places are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Sāvatti – | 2. Sankissa |
| 3. Vesālī –Vaisal | 4. Rājagaha –(Rajagir) |

Map showing Buddhist sites



Map showing Buddhist sites in Bihar state



Map showing Buddhist sites in Uttar Pradesh



Lumbini

The Sacred place of Buddha's Birth

(Presently in Nepal)

One of the Significant and Sacred places in Buddhist pilgrimage located at the foothills of the Himalayas in modern Nepal. It is known as Lumbini the birth place of Prince Siddhattha Gotama, the Would be Buddha.

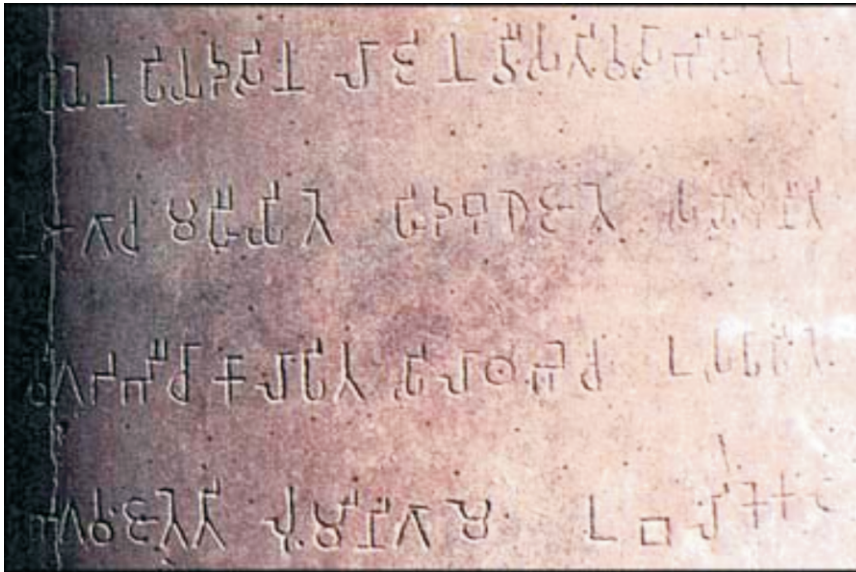
When the queen was travelling from Kapilavattu to her parent's home for her confinement at Devadaha, she ordered the bearers to stop there for a while. As she rested underneath one of the Sala trees, it was an auspicious full moon day of Vesakha in the year 623 BC. Then facing to the east, she leant her right arm on a Sala tree. The Bodhisatta was then born and immediately took seven steps from which lotus flowers sprang up in each step. To each direction he proclaimed as with a lion's roar:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Aggohamasmi Lokassa | - "I am the chief of the world |
| Jeṭṭhohamasmi Lokassa | - "I am the highest in the world |
| Seṭṭhohamasmi Lokassa | - I am supreme |
| Ayamantima jāti | - This is my last birth |
| Natthidāni punabhavo (in pāli) | - No rebirth for me" |

He looked down to predict **the defeat of Mara (The lord of illusion)** and the beings being benefitted in the lower realms through the power of his teachings. He then looked up to indicate that the entire world would come to respect and appreciate his deeds. The gods Brahma and Indra then received him and together with the four guardian protectors bathed him. At the same time two Nagas, Nanda and Upananda, caused water to cascade over him. Later a well was found to have formed there. (from which even in Fa-Hien's time monks continued to draw water to drink) The young prince was next wrapped in fine muslin and carried, with great rejoice to the king's palace in Kapilavattu. It is said that in the same manner of all bodhisattvas in their final birth, he remained sitting cross-legged for the whole time within the womb. Furthermore, all Buddhas are born in a forest grove while their mother remains standing.



This depicts Māya Devi with her right hand holding on to a Sala tree with a newborn child standing upright on a lotus petal, shedding an oval halo, around his head. This nativity scene of the future Buddha was installed by a Malla King of the Naga dynasty



The Asokan pillar with its inscription mentioning that
“Here the Buddha was born”,



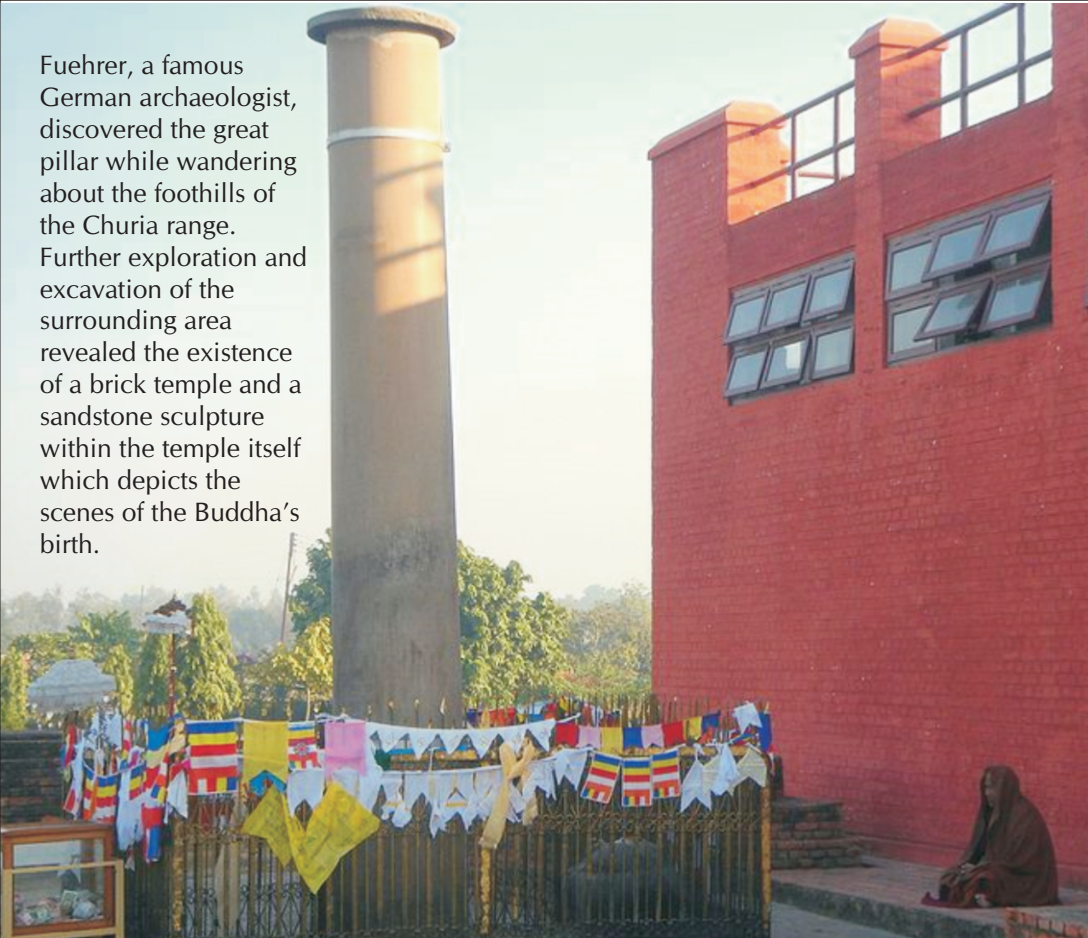
The Exact Birth place of the Siddhatta Gotama’



Asoka Pillar at Lumbini

In 249 BC, when the Emperor Asoka visited Lumbini it was a flourishing village. Asoka constructed four stupas and a stone pillar with a figure of a horse on top. The stone pillar bears an inscription which, in English translation, runs as follows: ‘Twenty years after his coronation, Beloved-of-the-Gods (Devanampiya) King Piyadassi, visited this place and worshiped because here the Buddha, the Sage of the Sakyans (Sakyamuni), was born. He had a stone figure and a pillar set up and because the Lord was born here, the village of Lumbini was exempted from tax and required to pay only one eight (1/8th) of the product’

Fuehrer, a famous German archaeologist, discovered the great pillar while wandering about the foothills of the Churia range. Further exploration and excavation of the surrounding area revealed the existence of a brick temple and a sandstone sculpture within the temple itself which depicts the scenes of the Buddha's birth.



Lumbini Bodhi tree



Old Lumbini



Eternal peace flame at Lumbini



Renovated Lumbini



Renovated Lumbini

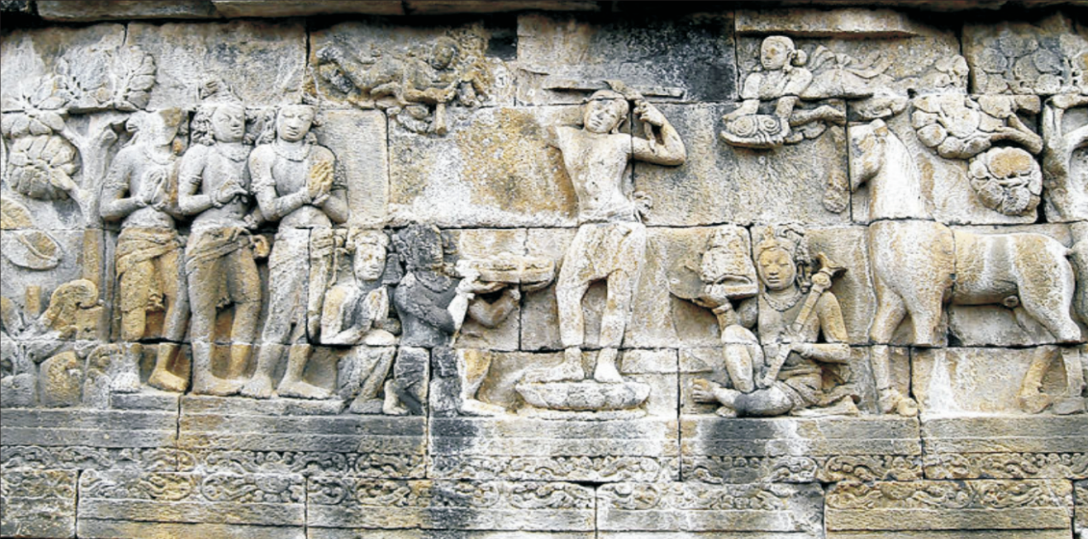


Māya Devi Temple

Lumbini remained neglected for centuries. In 1895, it is pointed out by scholars that the temple of Māya Devi was constructed over the foundations of more than one earlier temple or stupa, and that this temple was probably built on an Asokan stupa itself. On the south of the Māya Devi temple there is the famous sacred bathing pool known as Puskarni. It is believed that Māya Devi took bath in this pool before the delivery. By the side of the Asoka pillar there is a river which flows southeast and is locally called the 'Ol' river. In 1996, an archaeological dig unearthed a "flawless stone" placed there by the Indian Emperor Asoka in 249 BC to mark the precise location of the Buddha's birth more than 2,600 years ago. The find will put Lumbini even more prominently on the map for millions of religious pilgrims.



Māya Devi temple at Lumbini



Prince Siddhattha Gotama shaves the hair off his head as the sign to decline his status as ksatriya (warrior class) and become an ascetic hermit, his servants holds his sword, crown, and princely jewelry while his horse Kanthaka stood on right. Bas-relief panel at Borobudur, Java, Indonesia.



Nigrodhārāma Monastery, close to Kapilavastu and Lumbini, in Nepal, Where Mahāpajāpati Gotamī first asked permission for women to enter the Order. This was refused, and from there the Buddha went on to Vesali

How to reach Lumbini:

Lumbini can be reached via Bhairawa Siddhartha Nagar which is around 26 kms from Sonauli (Indian Side) and the distance from Sonauli to Gorakhpur is around 90 kms, Bhairawa is also connected with Katmandu and Pokhara by air and road.

By Air:

Royal Nepal Airlines, the national flag carrier of Nepal, and other International airlines such as Gulf Air & Oman Aviation operate scheduled flights to

Kathmandu from international destinations, and Kingfisher, Jetlite, Jet airways & Air India operate from Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Varanasi, and several other cities.

By Rail:

There are no trains to Nepal. One can go upto Ghorakpur and proceed by roadways

By Road:

From Kushinagar / Ghorakpur one can hire taxis, Public buses are the main form of transportation and are offeredable. There are also other services between Kathmandu and Pokhara aimed specifically for tourists. Cars with drivers can also be hired

Kapilavasthu

The town where Prince Siddhartha grew up

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has identified Piprahwa, an archaeological site in India as the historic Kapilavastu. Remains of a large stupa and a number of monastic buildings, dating from Buddha's lifetime to the early centuries AD were found by them during excavations from 1975 to 1979, including a relic casket from the earlier period. Also found were a number of sealing referring to Kapilavastu. Prince Siddhattha spent his first thirty years here.

The stupa was built by the Sakyan over their share of the Buddha's ashes and was enlarged on several later occasions. Sit under the trees a little to the west and read the profound Madhupindika Sutta from The Middle Length Discourses which the Buddha taught here. This archeological site contains the remains of a city wall and moat as well as the foundations of a residential compound.



How to reach Kapilavastu:

Road:

Piprahwa is about 15kms south of Lumbini and Lumbini is about 26 kms from Indian Border of Sonauli & Tilaurakot is about 27 kms from Lumbini.

Bodhgaya

(Bihar state)

THE SACRED PLACE OF BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT

Buddhagaya or Bodhgaya is the most significant and sacred place to Buddhists all over the world. For it is here that the Master at the age of thirty-five attained perfect Enlightenment. It was here under the Bodhi Tree that the Enlightened One reflected **Patticca Samuppada (Dependent origination)**, the central doctrine of his teaching. According to the records of the Chinese Buddhist monks Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsiang, Emperor Asoka was in the habit of visiting the Maha Bodhi often. The story of the Bodhi Tree and Asoka's visit is mentioned in the Sanchi scriptures. It is said that King Asoka built a shrine on the spot where the Master attained Enlightenment and later enclosed the Bodhi Tree with a magnificent stone railing. Though we do not see the Asokan temple at present, it is said that Asokan temple got renovated, magnified & reconstructed by subsequent kings and devotees, keeping the Asokan time Vajrasana & the Bodhi Tree as focal points.

The temple is called Mahabodhi Temple. At the back of the Mahabodhi Temple is the Sacred Bodhi Tree. 'Vajrasana - The Diamond Throne' is placed under this tree, which is made up of polished chunar sandstone. The Bodhi tree is descendent of the original Bodhi Tree. Inspite of hostile elements who tried to

destroy it, the sacred tree continued to remain at all times due to the faithful devotees timely protecting it.

Other spots in the Mahabodhi temple premises are:

1, Gateway 2, Buddhapada Temple 3, Vajrasana 4, Stone Footprints 5, Ratanacankama Cetiya 6, Railings 7, Ratanagaha Cetiya 8, Annimesa Catiya 9, South East Shrine 10, Pillar 11, Asoka's Stupa 12, Ven Mahanama's Shrine



Seat of Enlightenment: The Diamond Throne, Vajrasana.

“Bodh Gaya is the place where Gotama the Buddha attained unsurpassed, supreme Enlightenment. It is a place which should be visited or seen by a person of devotion and which would cause awareness and apprehension of the nature of impermanence”. Siddhattha Gotama, the would be Buddha, had been dwelling in the Uruvela forest near the banks of the Niranjana River with five ascetic followers for six years practicing austerities. Realising that austerities could not lead to liberation he abandoned them. His five ascetic companions disgusted at his seeming failure, deserted him and left for Sarnath.

He then moved towards the village of Senanigama where he was offered specially prepared milk- rice by a lady - Sujata belonged to a very wealthy family and was married Yasa, son of wealthy man of Vārānasi after that he accepted from a grass-cutter a gift of kusa grass for sitting. The Bodhisattva took a seat facing towards east under a pipal tree. Here he resolved not to rise again until enlightenment was attained.

“Let my skin, my sinews,
my bones shrivel,
Let my flesh and blood dry up,
I will not leave this meditative posture
Until Enlightenment is attained”.

As Gotama sat in deep meditation, Mara Deva - the Lord of Illusion, perceiving that his power was about to be broken, rushed to distract him from his purpose. The Bodhisattva touched the earth, calling it to bear witness the countless lifetimes of virtue that had led him to this place of Enlightenment.

When the earth shook, confirming the truth of Gotama’s words, Mara Deva – the Lord of illusion unleashed his army of demons. In the epic battle that ensued, Gotama’s wisdom manoeuvred through the illusions and the power of his compassion transformed the demons’ weapons into flowers and Mara and all his forces fled in disarray. Then the Bodhisatta meditated calmly and went through various experiences which transformed his mind and he became Sammāsambuddha as supremely enlightened one.

After the Enlightenment when Buddha was under the foot of Linlun tree, two great wealthy merchant **Taphussa and Bhalika** from Ukkala - the land of lower Myanmar, on hearing a famine in the western land they voyaged across

the sea to India with a ship load of rice in five hundred cart. Thereafter a deva caused the cart to stop. This deva a spirit, revealed it self to them who happens to be the close relative of the two brothers in the previous existence. There upon the brothers also made offering to the deva subsequently, the deva guided and told them that, the Bodhisattva has attained Buddhahood and was residing under Linlun tree, on hearing this the two brothers were much rejoiced made obeisance and paid homage to the Buddha and offered honey cake reverently to him. **Then the two brothers by taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma, become the first lay devotees - the upasakas.** The brothers requested and expressed their desire to have something sacred to keep with them from the enlightened one, and then the Buddha wiped his head with right hand and obtained eight strands of hair and gave to them. This sacred Hair was called Kesa Datu. Then the brothers sought permission from the Buddha to return back to their home with kesadhatu. The Buddha too perceived that, the three preceding Buddhas had also caused their Hairs(Kesa) to be enshrined in a pagoda on Singuttara hill. Accordingly the brothers enshrined the same in the pagoda and stupa was consecrated on the full moon day on Singuttara Hill - The Shwedagon Pagoda



The Shwedagon Pagoda with Kesa Datu - Hair relics (Myanmar)



Mahabodhi Temple
before restoration,
Bodh Gaya, 1870

Mahabodhi Temple
in Bodhgaya after restoration
now called Mahabodhi Mahavihara



Buddhist Sacred Places

Mahabodhi Vihāra

The vihāra stands in the east of the Bodhi Tree. Its architectural effect is superb. The historical place at which the Enlightenment took place became a place of pilgrimage. About 250 years after the Enlightenment, the Buddhist Emperor, Asoka visited the site and is considered the founder of the Mahabodhi vihāra. According to the tradition, Asoka, as well as establishing a monastery, erected a diamond throne shrine at this spot with a canopy supported by four pillars over a stone representation of the Vajrasana, the Seat of Enlightenment.

The vihāra architecture is superb and its history a saga of devotion generation after generation. It was constructed with the main intention of making it a monument for people come and worship. Several shrines were constructed with enshrined images for use as places of worship.

The basement of the present vihara is 15m square; 15m in length as well as in breadth and its height is 52m which rises in the form of a slender pyramid tapering off from a square platform. On its four corners four towers gracefully rise to some height. The whole architectural plan gives pose and balance to the observers.

Inside the vihāra there is a colossal image of the Buddha in the “touching the ground pose”, Bhumisparsa mudra. Facing east exactly at the place where the Buddha in meditation with his back to the Bodhi tree was enlightened.

Diagonal view of
The Mahabodhi Vihara
in Bodhgaya,



Buddhist Sacred Places



Different view of
The Mahābodhi viharā
after renovation



On the north side of the vihar is a platform marking where The Buddha
walked in meditation. It has lotus markings on it which is said to show where
he stepped during his walk

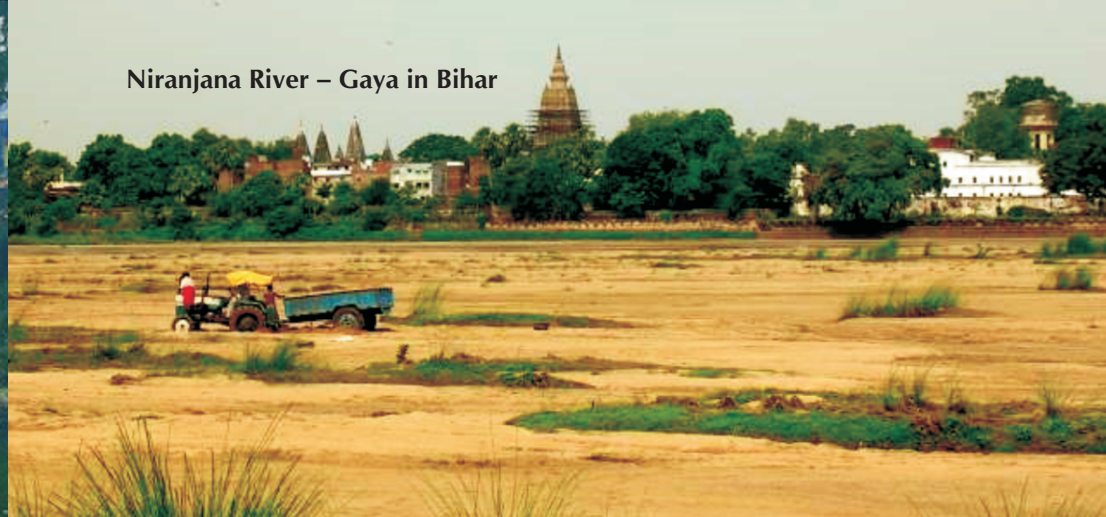


On the southern side of the vihara is a lotus pond with Buddha statue under Naga King. It is pleasant to take some time here and sit under the Bodhi tree or near the lotus pond and meditate on its significance.



Picture of Brahmayoni hill, or Gayasisa, where Buddha preached the Fire Sutta (Adittapariyaya Sutta). Gaya, Bihar - India

Niranjana River – Gaya in Bihar



Foot print of The Lord Buddha



How to reach Bodhgaya:

By Rail:

A whole range of trains are available to reach Bodh Gaya. Gaya is the nearest railhead to Bodh Gaya at the distance of 12 kilometers. Besides ordinary trains, Indian Railway has introduced a Bodh Gaya special 'Buddha Parikrama Express' specifically meant to cater Buddhist spiritual tourists. The train links all the important places relevant to Buddhists.

By Road:

Besides a good network of railway tracks, Bodh Gaya is well connected by roads to various cities. The main bus stand is near Sujata Bridge on the bank of Falgu River on the northeastern edge of the town. Gaya is the nearest transport hub which is connected with Grand Trunk Road and from where you can catch direct buses to reach Patna, Nalanda, Rajgir and Varanasi. Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation also runs buses from Patna- Bodhgaya route twice a day.

By Air:

Gaya is the nearest airport from Bodh Gaya. It is located at a distance of about 17 kilometers. You can also land at Patna and board taxis and buses to reach Bodh Gaya which is around 118 kilometers from Patna.



Sārnath

The Sacred place where Lord Buddha delivered the first discourse - Dhammacakkapavattana sutta

After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya the Buddha went to Sarnath; in search of the five ascetics who had been his companions of earlier austerities. On meeting the enlightened Buddha, all they saw was an ordinary man; they mocked his well-nourished appearance. "Here comes the mendicant Gotama," they said, "who has turned away from asceticism. He is certainly not worthy of our respect." But as the Buddha neared unknowingly received him and treated with respect. However when they reminded him of his former vows, the Buddha replied, "Austerities only confuse the mind. In the exhaustion and mental stupor to which they lead, one can no longer understand the ordinary things of life, still less the truth that lies beyond the senses. I have given up extremes of either luxury or mortification. I have discovered the "Middle path ". Hearing this, five ascetics became the Buddha's disciples and it was here that he preached his first discourse to his five disciple monks . He preached the middle path for attaining Nibbana and set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dhamma' in Deer park. It is situated about 10 km from Varanasi. Realising the sanctity of the site, Emperor Asoka, in the 3rd century B.C. built some of the finest monuments and left legacies.

Gotama Buddha further expounded the teaching not to debate but for the advantage and out of compassion for human beings. He depicted the middle path which avoids extremes, and the Four Noble Truths, and prescribed the Noble Eight-fold path.

The Four Noble Truths:

1. There is Dukkha (Mental and Physical suffering / unsatisfactoriness);
2. Cause of Dukkha (Craving and ignorance);
3. The Cessation of Dukkha (Nibbāna)
4. The path to end Dukkha (Noble eight fold path).

Path : The Noble Eight-fold Path: (Ariya – Atthangika - Magga.)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1) Right understanding - sammā ditthi | } Paññā (Wisdom) |
| 2) Right Thought - sammā sankappa | |

- 3) Right Speech - sammā vācā
 - 4) Right action - sammā kammanta
 - 5) Right livelihood - sammā ajiva
 - 6) Right effort - sammā vāyāma
 - 7) Right mindfulness - sammā sati
 - 8) Right meditative concentration - sammā samādhi
- } Sila (Virtue)
 } Samādhi (Meditative Concentration)

Further, The Noble Eight fold path is grouped in to three segments as:

1. Sila - the moral discipline,
2. Samadhi - the meditative concentration



Noble Eight fold Path



Buddha delivering his first sermon to his five enlightened disciples of buddha (Ven. Kondañña, Ven. Vappa, Ven. Baddiya, Ven. Mahānāma & Ven. Assaji)

The majestic Asoka pillar records visit of Emperor Asoka to Sarnath. It was originally adorned by a capital of four lions, now housed in the Sarnath museum. The capital became the state emblem of modern India.



The first five disciples pay respects to the Wheel of the Dhamma at the deer park of Isipatana.

A Monastic tradition flourished for over 1,500 years on the site of the deer park at Sarnath. The last and largest monastery constructed before the Muslim invasion was Dharma-Chakar-Jina Vihar, erected by Kumardevi, wife of King Govinda Chandra, who ruled over Benares during 1114 to 1154. Sarnath became a forest of debris below which the historical ruins remained buried. Of the two great stupas which adorned the city only the Dhamekha remained which is of the 6th century



View-1 of Asoka pillar at Sarnath



View-2 of Asoka pillar at Sarnath

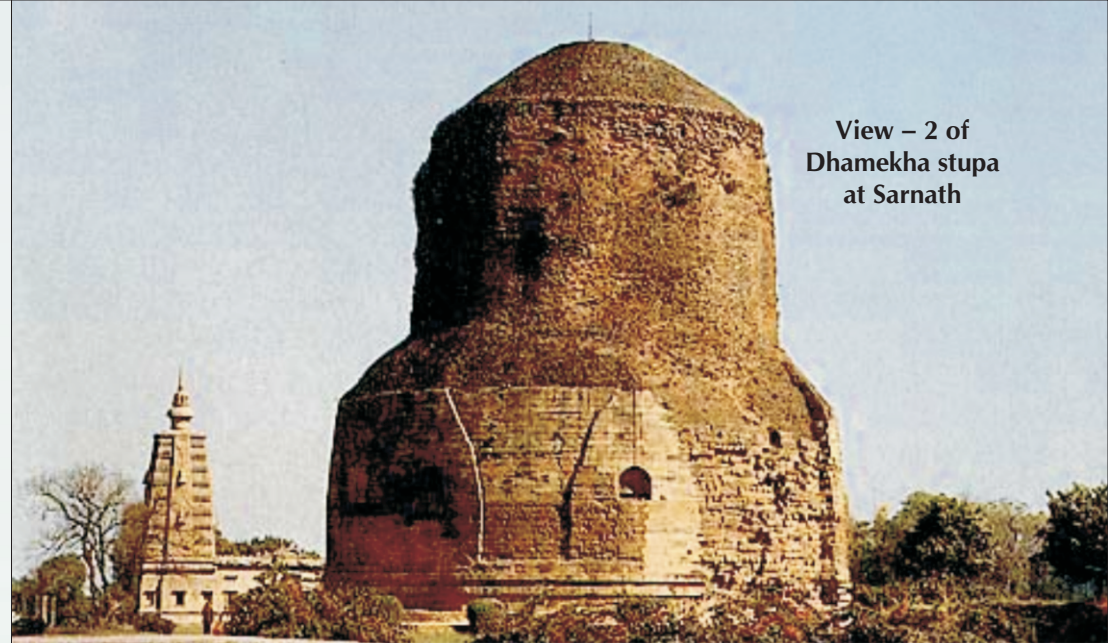
The base of the Asoka pillar in Sarnath which was broken during Turk Islamic invasions, it was originally surmounted by the “Lion Capital of Asoka” which is presently at display at the Sarnath Museum. This particular Lion Capital of Asoka, originally atop this pillar in Sarnath has been adopted as the “National Emblem of India

The place where the Buddha delivered his first discourse

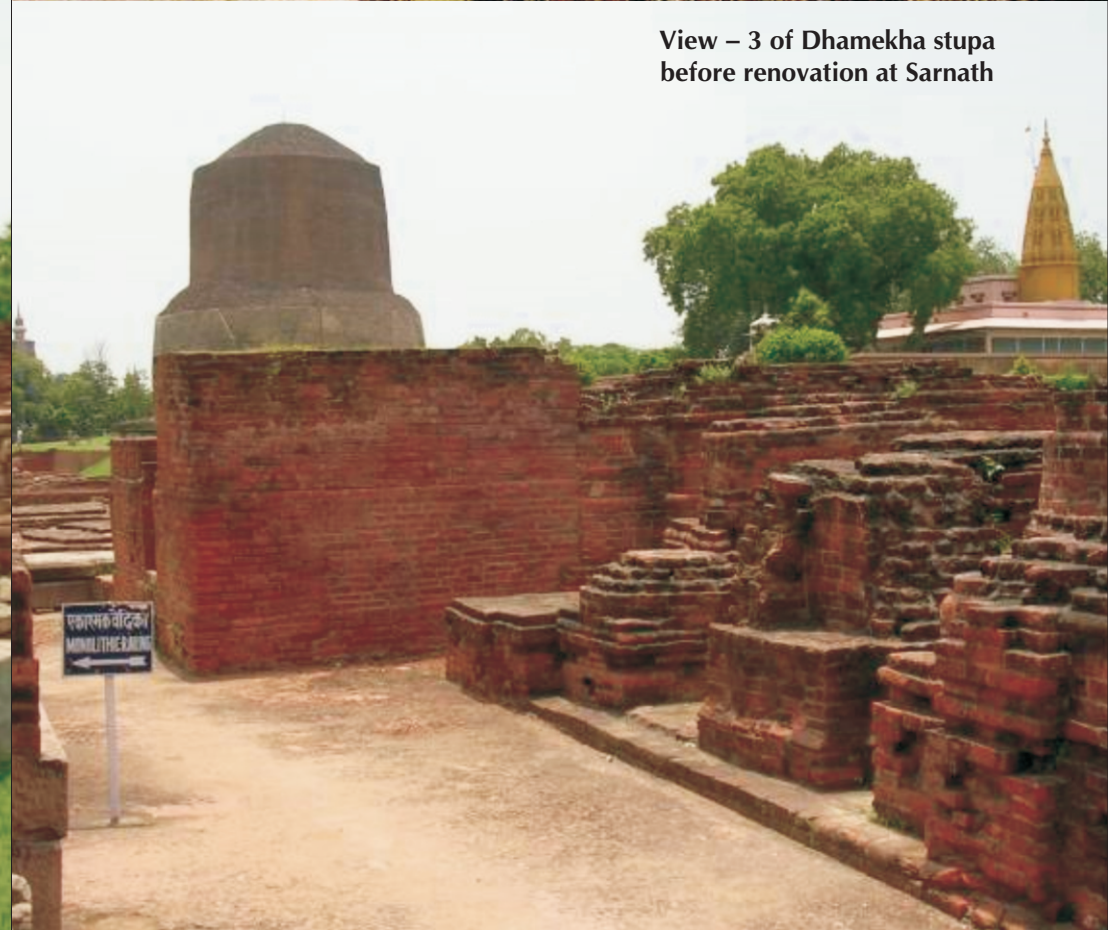


View – 1 of Dhamekha stupa at Sarnath

Buddhist Sacred Places



View – 2 of
Dhamekha stupa
at Sarnath



View – 3 of Dhamekha stupa
before renovation at Sarnath

Buddhist Sacred Places