



Dharmarajika Stupa from the pre-Asokan Era

Dhammek Stupa is the most conspicuous structure at Sarnath. Colonel Alexander Cunningham bore a shaft from the top centre of the stupa and discovered a stone tablet on which an inscription is written with the word Dhamekha, and mentions that this is the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. Dhamekha seems to be a distorted form of Dhamma Chakra which means turning the Wheel of the Dhamma. It is in this area the five ascetics who left Gotama Buddha in Bodh Gaya used to live in huts. The original stupa was constructed by Asoka. The present size of the stupa is 31.3 m high and 28.3 m in diameter. The lower portion of the stupa is covered completely with beautifully carved stones. The design consists of a broad band of Swastika carved in different geometrical patterns with a finely chiselled lotus wreath, running over and below the swastikas.

The Dhamekha stupa is considered to be the sacred place where the voice of Buddhism was first heard. Many devotees of Buddhist countries visit this place for circumambulation of this sacred stupa and to worship the Buddha. The first discourse of the Buddha was on the 'Wheel of Law'.

History in Brief

Important Spots of Sarnath:

Asoka's Pillar : as mentioned above.

Mulagandhakuti : This shrine was built at the site of the original hut in which the Buddha resided during his stay at Sarnath, hence its name. 'The Original Fragrant Hut'. In later centuries it evolved into huge structure.

Asoka Railing : On the south side of the Mulagandhakuti is the railing that was originally placed on the top of the Dharmarajika Stupa.

Dharmarajika Stupa : This spot marks the site of the Buddha's First Discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta given to Ven. VenKodāṇṇa, Ven. Vappa, Ven. Baddhiya, Ven Mahānāma & Ven. Assaji, when Huiyen Tsian saw the stupa in 7th century, it was over 30 meters high. Now only the foundations of this great structure can be seen.

Other Temple Remains : Directly to the west of Asoka Pillar are foundations of a small temple dating from the Mauryan period.

Gupta period shrine : On the south side is an ancient shrine now covered with cement shelter. Monastery No. 5, also is from Gupta period.

Dharmachakrajina Monastery : All along the northern extent of the ruins are the remains of the largest monastery ever built at Sarnath.

Chankuhandi : This was once 300 feet high stupa. This is the spot where the five monks decline to receive the Supremely Enlightened Buddha but eventually received him.

Mulagandhakuti Vihara : East of the ruins is this vihara built by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1931.

Fear less Chinese Buddhist monks Fa-Hien (399-414AD):

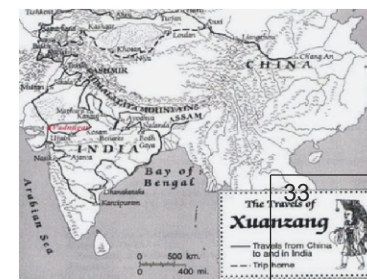
Chinese Buddhist monk, pilgrim traveller, and writer, author of one of the earliest and most valuable Chinese accounts of India, traveled to Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka to acquire Buddhist scriptures between 399 and 412 BCE. His journey is described in his important travelogue, A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms, Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline. He is most known for his pilgrimage to Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

Hiun Tsang (xuanzang) – (603-664 A.D.)

Another Chinese Buddhist monk, pilgrim traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited India around 6th century CE, speaks of the glory of Sarnath and of the structures that existed then.



**Chinese traveler
The Buddhist monk
Hiun Tsang (xuanzang)
(603-664 A.D.)**



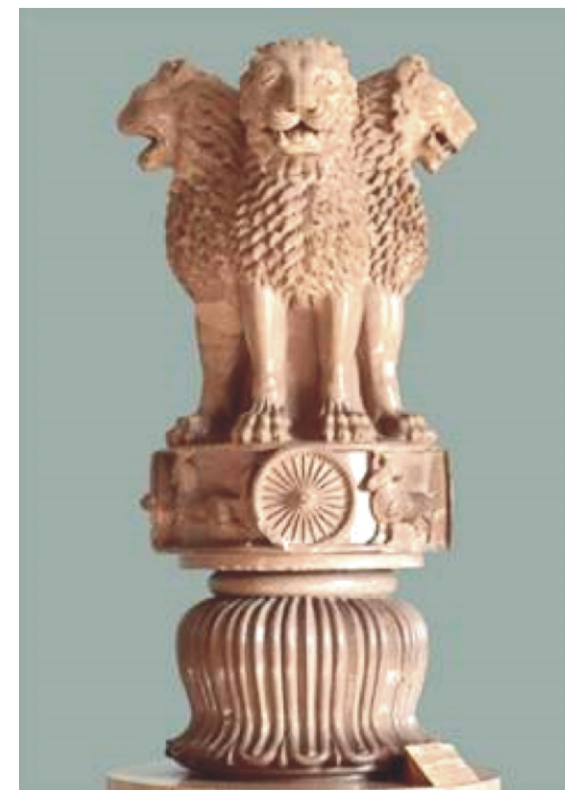


Chinese Traveller the Buddhist monk - Hiuen Tsang (Xuanzang) Memorial Hall at Nalanda

He was born at Ch'in Liu in the province of Hunan. At a young age of thirteen years he was ordained as a Buddhist priest, in the Tsing-tu temple. He traveled extensively, in China, in search of an able teacher and when he failed he decided to visit India. In 630 A.D. at age of twenty six years he commenced his long dreamed journey without bothering, to obtain the permission of the emperor, or for his personal safety during a prolonged and tedious journey. He traveled extensively and passed through Kashmir valley, visited Takshashila, and reached Mathura, where he saw the sacred traces of Lord Buddha at Kashi. He went to Kapilavastu, Kushinagar, Pataliputra, Vaishali, Mahabodhi, and stayed at the famed Nalanda University. Tsang then visited Rajgir and Nepal. He also toured South India and paid a visit to Sri Lanka.

Hiuen Tsang's visit to Nalanda University meant the fulfillment of his life-long wish which brought him to India. There he found profound learning, devotion, warm and cordial hospitality under the able guidance of Shilabhadra and Buddhahadra. After his studies he returned by the same route by which he had come to India. He collected very valuable information and manuscripts. Unfortunately while crossing the Indus River on the way back, his boat capsized and a number of documents were lost. However, some of these he was able to recover from the libraries at Kusha and Kashghar monasteries.

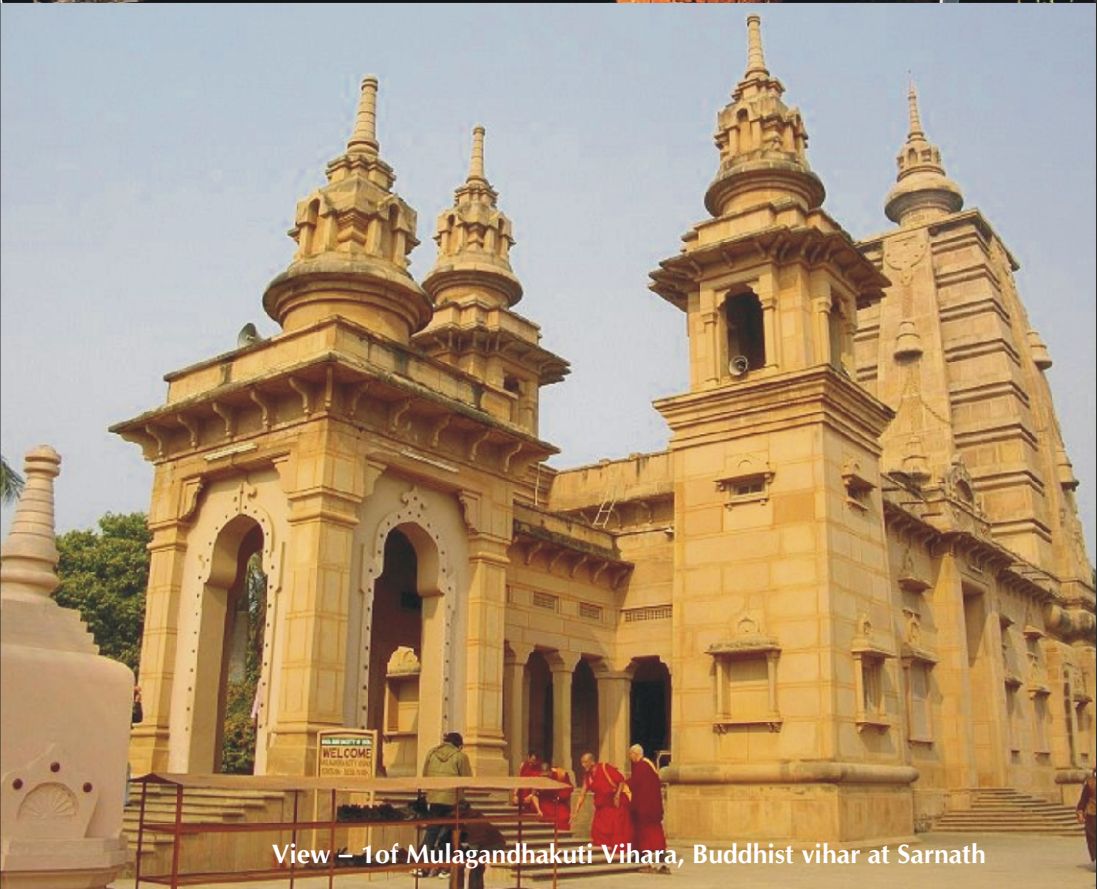
In the year 645 A.D. he was back in China. He had carried with him relics, golden and sandalwood statues of Lord Buddha, 224 books of the sutras, 192 Shastras, 15 works of the Sthavira schools, 67 books of the Sarvastivada school, and 17 works of the Kasyapiya school. The emperor gave him a hero's welcome upon return. The emperor also built a pagoda at the southern gate of the Hogn-Fu temple in Si-gan-fu, in which Hiuen Tsang's entire collection is protected and preserved.



This is the famous original sandstone sculpted Lion Capital of Asoka preserved at Sarnath Museum which was originally erected around 250 BCE atop an Asoka Pillar at Sarnath. The angle from which this picture has been taken, minus the inverted bell-shaped lotus flower, has been adopted as the National Emblem of India showing the Horse on the left and the Bull on the right of the Asoka Chakra in the circular base on which the four Indian lions are standing back to back. On the far side there is an Elephant and a Lion instead. The wheel "Asoka Chakra" from its base has been placed onto the center of the National Flag of India which depicts the Patichha Samuppāda (Dependent Origination) the core teaching of Buddha and 24 qualities of Triple Gem.



Ruins of Sarnath



View - 1 of Mulagandhakuti Vihara, Buddhist vihar at Sarnath

Buddhist vihāra

The Mulagandhakuti Vihara is a modern vihara built by the Mahabodhi Society in 1931. The silver casket in the vihara contains the original relics of the



View - 2 of Mulagandhakuti Vihara, Buddhist vihar at Sarnath

Buddha in it. It was recovered from the ruins of the first century vihara. The vihara has interesting murals depicting the life story of Buddha. The murals were painted by a well-known Japanese artist, Kosetsu Nosu, in 1936. Outside the vihar is a Bodhi tree transplanted from Sri Lanka. It is a descendant of the original tree under which Buddha sat when he attained enlightenment. There is a collection of rare Buddhist literature here.

Japanese vihar – Sarnath



How to reach Sarnath:

Airways

Varanasi (Babatpur) is the nearest airport to reach Sarnath, from where one can hire a taxi or auto- rickshaw or can ride a bus to cover a short journey of 20 minutes.

Railways

One can take a train to Varanasi which is linked to all major cities of India.

Roadways

Taking up roadways is another major way to reach Sarnath, as it is well connected to Varanasi (10 km) and Gorakhpur by National Highway number 29.

In Sarnath, the transports available are autos, taxis and cycle rickshaws to go from one place to another.



Kusinara

(Kusinagar)

The place of Lord Buddha's Mahā Parinibbāna

One of the four major centres of Buddhism along with Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. There are many places of religious importance in Kusinara. When the Lord Buddha and his disciples arrived at Pava, Cunda the son of a wealthy village goldsmith invited and served the meal called sukara-maddava, or "boar's delight" to Gotama the Buddha. Here some scholars believe that, the meal was a special delicious dish prepared out of mushrooms, while others believe it could be a dish of wild boar's flesh. The Buddha advised Cunda to serve him only with the sukara-maddava which he had prepared. The other food that Cunda had prepared could be served to the other monks. After the meals were served Buddha told Cunda, "Cunda, if any sukara-maddava meal is left over, bury it beneath the ground. I do not see anyone in the world other than the Blessed One who could digest the food". This meal has become his Last meal. After this Buddha fell terribly ill and immediately instructed his attendant Ven. Ananda to convince Cunda that the food offered by him had no connection with his passing away and also said that the meal would be considered of greatest merit as it was provided as the last meal to The Buddha.

Rambhar Stupa is the most important landmark of Kusinara. The stupa is said to have been built on the same spot where Lord Buddha was cremated in 543 BC. Mahāparinibbāna vihar is another important attraction in Kusinara with a huge statue of Lord Buddha in reclining position. Mathakuar Shrine is the place where Lord Buddha had given his last sermon. There are many modern viharas, stupas, and shrines in Kusinagar built by various Buddhist countries. A museum here houses objects found during the excavation of Kusinagar.

Kusinara was an important centre under Mauryan King Asoka; Most of the religious structures here were constructed between 3rd century BC and 5th century AD. For a long time Kusinagar remained lost in the jungles and was unknown to the world till 19th century when the British rediscovered it in 1880. Extensive excavations have indicated the presence of a large number of monks here as late as 11th century AD. A majority of tourists come to Kusinara during Buddha Poonima to celebrate the Birthday of Lord Buddha.



The front building is made in a half-barrel design, and has an image of Buddha reclining in the position he took when he passed away from this world. Behind this building is the Mahāparinibbāna Stupa which commemorates the place where the Buddha left his body. It was here that Buddha selected as the place of his passing away after having announced his approaching parinibbāna three months in advance to the Ven. Ananda. The stupa originally dates back to 413-55 B.C. but was rebuilt in 1927 by the Burmese. However, the present structure is a new outer building that houses the older stupa inside it. Around the area you can see the ruins and foundations of a few old monasteries that are being excavated.



Mathakuar shrine and monastery ruin



Mathakuar Shrine Buddha



View – 1 the image of reclining Buddha is carved out of one piece of chunar stone and measures 20 feet in length.



View - 2 about three-quarters of a mile away there is also the old brick Rambhar Tila (or Angara Chaitiya) where the Buddha's body was cremated. It is said that years ago vandals bore into the stupa to steal whatever valuables they could find. Through this passage the bottom of the stupa can now be reached where one can still see the scorched earth, thus confirming that this was where the Buddha was cremated.



Rambhar Stupa: the Buddha's cremation place, Kusinara.

In his eightieth year the Buddha and a group of monks arrived in this small place. Ananda described it as 'a wattle and daub town'. Exhausted and sick the Buddha was unable to go on and he laid down to rest between two sal trees. His final hours and the events that filled it are movingly described in the last part of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta which you will find in the Long Discourses. The Nibbana vihar and stupa later built over the site of the Parinibbana as well as the ruins of several monasteries are set in attractive and well maintained gardens. The tall slender trees on the right of the path as you enter are sal trees.

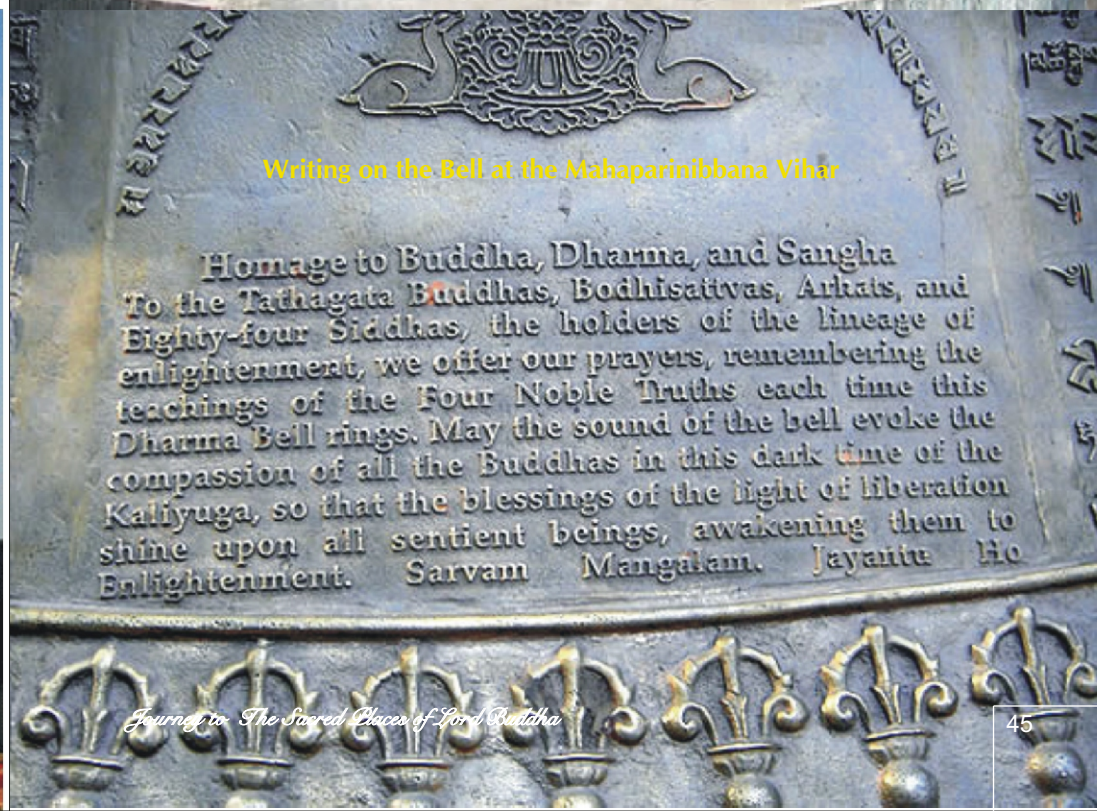


Dhamma Bell at Kusinara



Japanese Vihar at Kusinara,

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Writing on the Bell at the Mahaparinibbana Vihar

Homage to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha
To the Tathagata Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Eighty-four Siddhas, the holders of the lineage of enlightenment, we offer our prayers, remembering the teachings of the Four Noble Truths each time this Dharma Bell rings. May the sound of the bell evoke the compassion of all the Buddhas in this dark time of the Kaliyuga, so that the blessings of the light of liberation shine upon all sentient beings, awakening them to Enlightenment. Sarvam Mangalam. Jayante Ho

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Deoria Buddhist shrine at kusinara

How to reach Kusinara:

Airways

Nearest airport at Kasia, 5kms from Kusinara, Babatpur airport 263 kms.

Railways

Nearest railway station is Deoria 35 kms & Gorakhpur 53 kms.

Roadways

Situated on National Highway No: 28 and connected by local as well as state transport

Sāvatti

(Uttar Pradesh)

Savatti: The city where the Buddha spent his 25 rain retreats

While in Rajgir the wealthy businessman Anāthapindika first met the Buddha and invited him to come to Sāvatti. The Buddha said he would be happy to come. When Anathapindika returned to Savatti he purchased a park near the town and built a large monastery on in. Called Jetavana, this park became the Buddha's favourite resort and he spent 19 rainy season of his life there. The site features ruins of many monasteries and beautiful gardens. The Buddha delivered many discourses here, including Kakacupama Sutta, the Vimamsaka Sutta and the Angulimala Sutta.



Paintings in the main shrine of Mahabodhi Society Temple depicts that, "Those who serve the sick will serve the Buddha"



View of a section of Jetavana Monastery in Savatthi, showing part (the entry) of the Mulagandhakuti, and the Anandabodhi tree in the background



Anandabodhi tree in Jetavana Monastery, Savatthi in Uttar Pradesh. This is one of the 3 most holy Bodhitrees in Buddhism. The original tree was a sapling of the Mahabodhi tree in Bodhgaya



Mulagandhakuti in Jetavana Monastery, Savatthi, Uttar Pradesh. This is the place (or hut) where the Buddha used to stay when he lived in Jetavana Monastery.

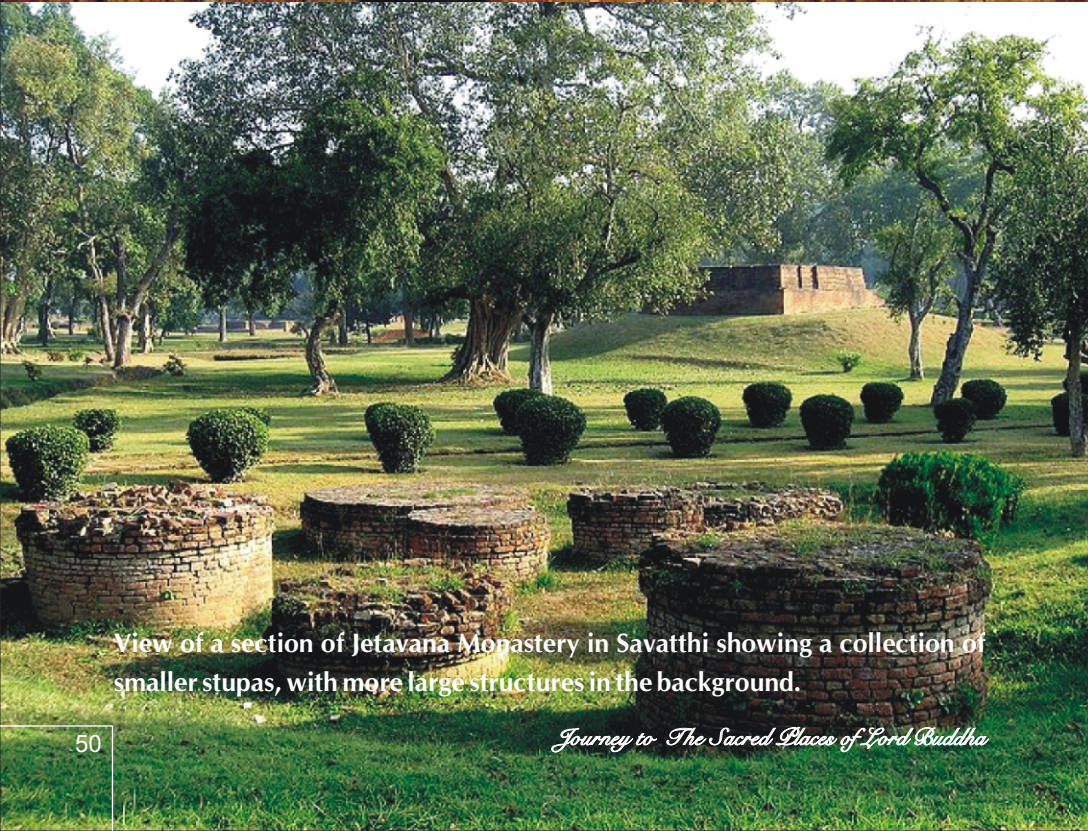
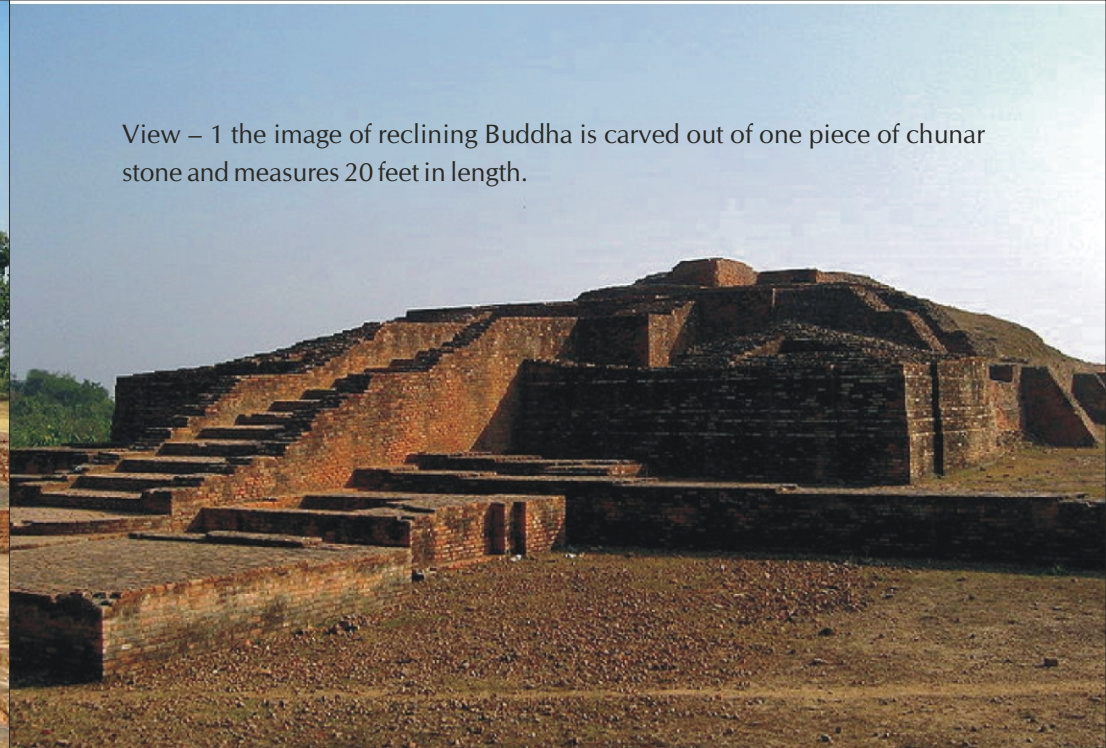
Jetavana was one of the most famous of the Buddhist monasteries in India. It was the second monastery donated to Buddha, after the Veluvana in Rajagaha. Jetavana is located just outside the old city of Savatthi. Jetavana was the place where Buddha gave many teachings and discourses, more than in any other place. Mainly, this is because Buddha spent 19 (out of 45) rainy-seasons (vassa) at Jetavana, more than in any other monastery. It is said that after the Migāramātupāsāda (a second monastery erected by devout upasika Visākha called Pubbarama, close to Savatthi) came into being, the Buddha would dwell alternately in Jetavana and Migāramātupāsāda, often spending the day in one and the night in the other.



Gandhakuti in Jetavana, Savatthi
Uttar Pradesh



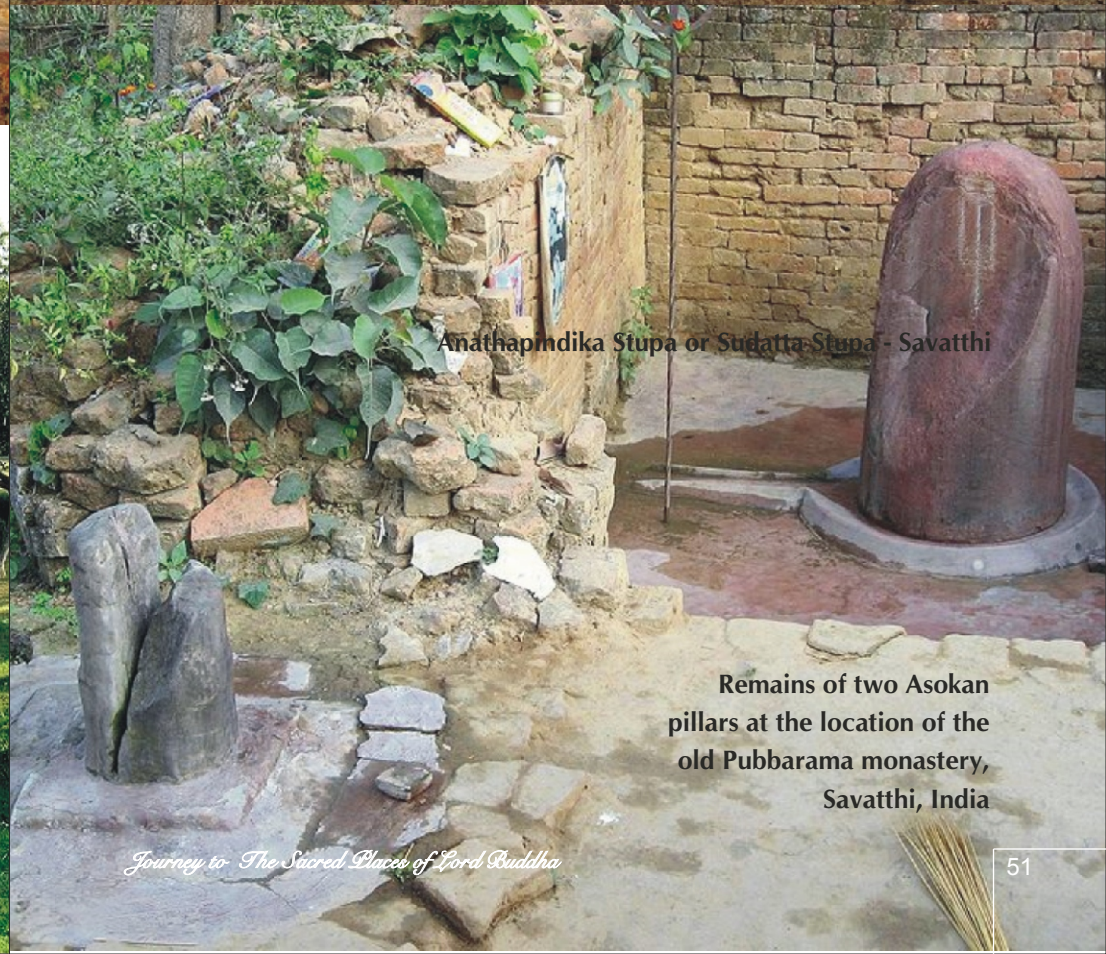
View – 1 the image of reclining Buddha is carved out of one piece of chunar stone and measures 20 feet in length.



View of a section of Jetavana Monastery in Savatthi showing a collection of smaller stupas, with more large structures in the background.

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Anathapindika Stupa or Sudatta Stupa - Savatthi



Remains of two Asokan pillars at the location of the old Pubbarama monastery, Savatthi, India

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Stupa of Angulimala, in Savatthi, It is identified with the remains of the Angulimala Stupa as seen by the Chinese Pilgrim monk, Locally known as Pakki Kuti

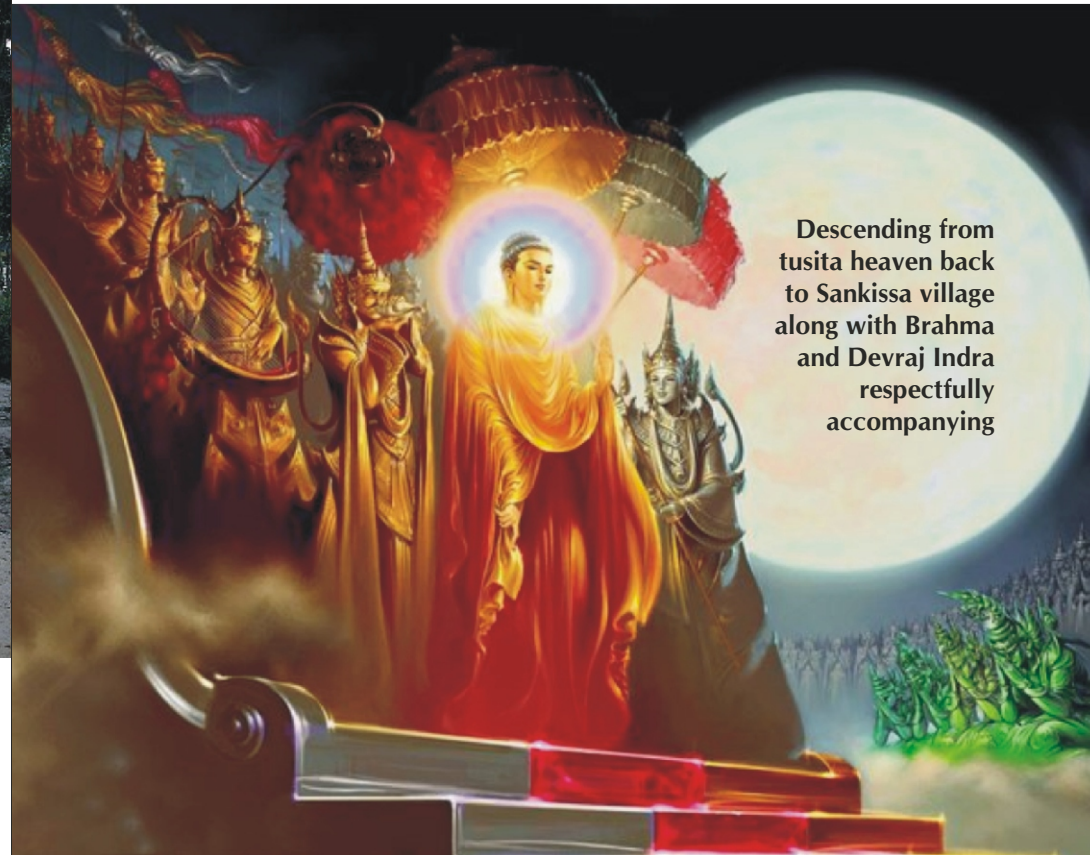


Stupa with the remains of Visākha, the most outstanding Buddhist laywomen-supporter of Gautama Buddha. She lived in Savatthi and her stupa is located very close to the stupa of the 'Twin Miracle' the stupas of Sariputta and Moggallana. Some mud brick building is (newly) built on top of it. The stupa is part of a small Hindu temple.

Sankissa

The Buddha went up to the Tusita Heaven, spent three months there teaching the Abhidhamma to his mother and then descended back to earth at the village of Sankissa along with Brahma and Devraj Indra. The story was very popular in ancient times and is often depicted in Buddhist art. Nonetheless from a very early period the place apparently had a special significance for Buddhists. This is suggested by the fact that King Asoka erected one of his pillars here.

When Hiuen Tsiang came to Sankissa he saw Asoka's pillar but today only the capital remains. It sits in a large pavilion surrounded by an iron fence. Consisting of an elephant with its head now missing, it is a clumsy piece of work lacking the realism and vigour of Asoka's other capitals obviously the remains of a stupa.



Descending from tusita heaven back to Sankissa village along with Brahma and Devraj Indra respectfully accompanying

Vesāli

(Vaishali - Bihar)

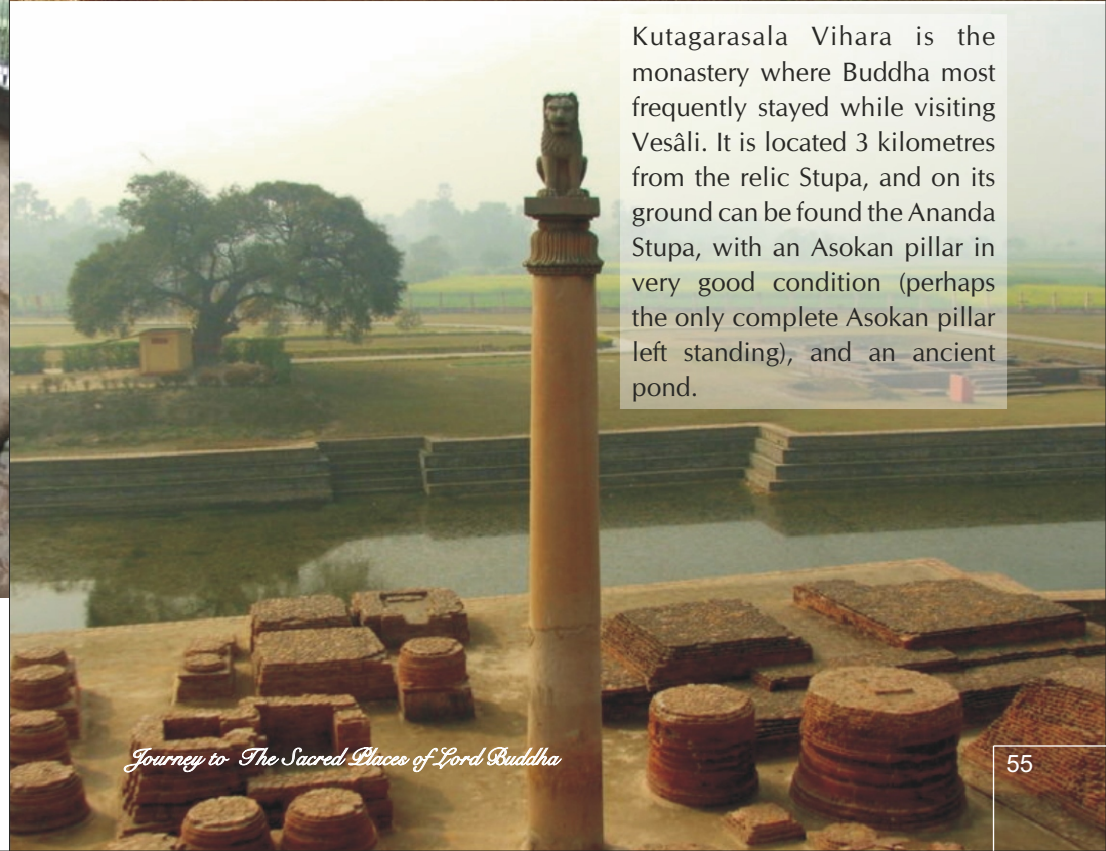
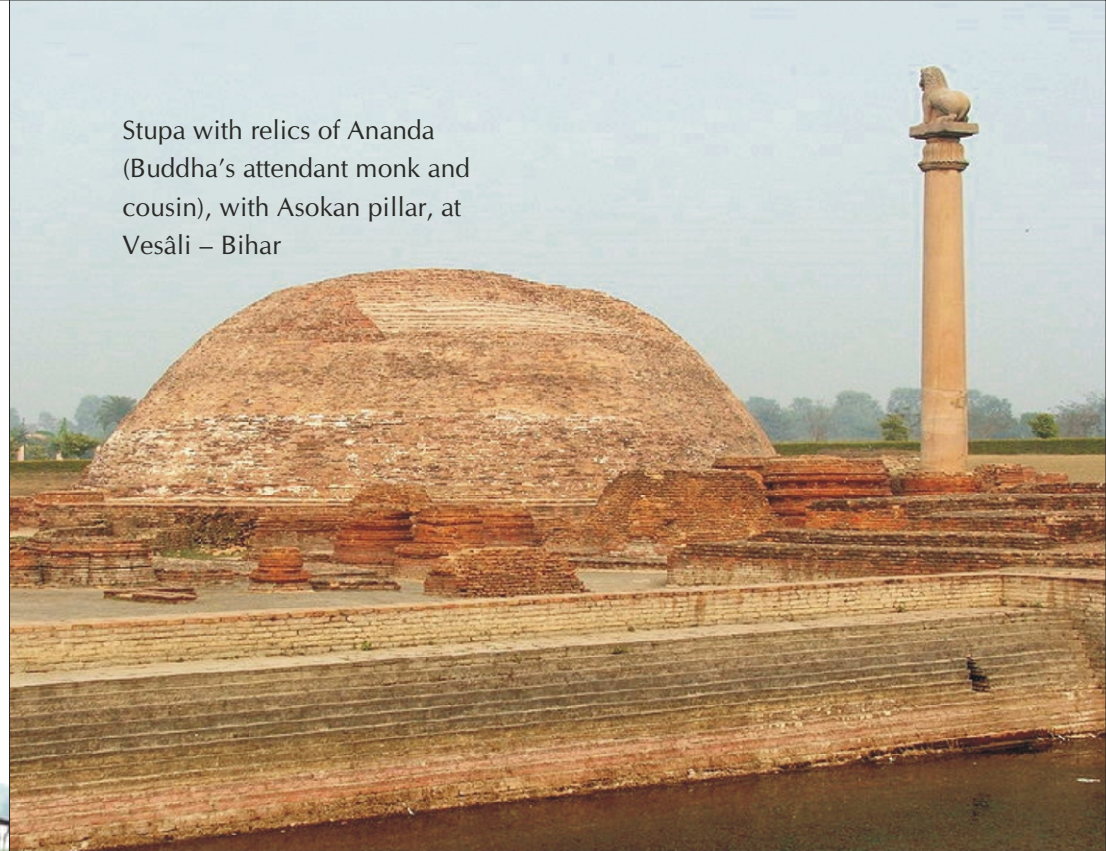
Vesāli was one of the Buddha's favourite places and he visited it on several occasions. It was here that he had his famous encounter with the prostitute Ambapali, the incident is recounted in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta in the Dīgha Nikaya (Long Discourses). Another discourse he delivered here is the long but interesting Mahasihanada Sutta from the majjima Nikaya (Middle Length Discourses).

About a hundred years after the Buddha's Parinibbana the city was the venue for the Second Council where hundreds of monks from all over northern India met together to settle a dispute about Vinaya rules and to chant the suttas together. The main things to see today are the famous lion pillar, the museum, the large Kharauna Lake, the Japanese temple and the stupa built over the Vijjians' one eighth shares of the Buddha's ashes.



The relic Stupa at Vesāli. Here the Buddha's relics were interred by the Licchavis of Vesāli in 483 BC. Currently the relics are kept in the Patna Museum.

Stupa with relics of Ananda (Buddha's attendant monk and cousin), with Asokan pillar, at Vesāli – Bihar



Kutagarasala Vihara is the monastery where Buddha most frequently stayed while visiting Vesāli. It is located 3 kilometres from the relic Stupa, and on its ground can be found the Ananda Stupa, with an Asokan pillar in very good condition (perhaps the only complete Asokan pillar left standing), and an ancient pond.



Alexander Cunningham, one of the first to study the inscriptions on the pillars, remarks that they are written in Prakrits which he calls "the Punjabi or north-western dialect, the Ujjeni or middle dialect, and the Magadhi or eastern dialect." They are written in the Brahmi script.



**Asokan pillar at Vesâli, Bihar, India.
Build by Emperor Asoka in about 250 BC, and still standing.**

Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



Vishwa santhi stupa at Vesâli

**Kesariya
(Where the Buddha taught the famous Kalama Sutta)**



Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha

Kesaria stupa - one of the largest in the world with a height of 104 feet with the broken Buddhas idols

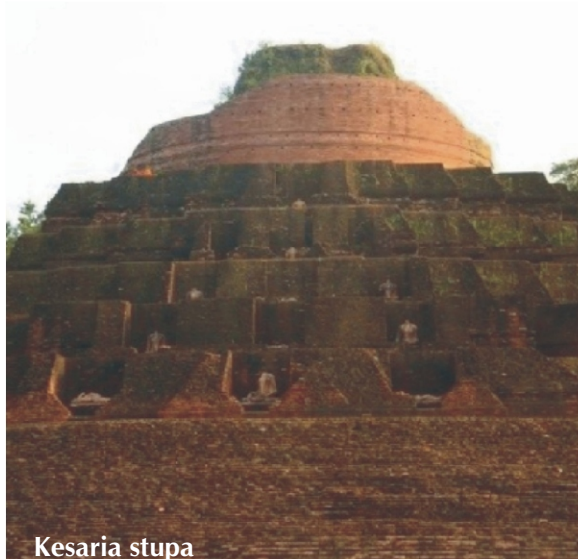
One of the Buddha's most celebrated discourses is the Kalama Sutta in which he advised that his teaching should be accepted only after careful scrutiny, testing, reasoning, examining, reflecting and experiencing. Kalama Sutta, This discourse was delivered to the Kalama people while the Buddha was staying in their chief town, Kesaputta.

In the last year of the Buddha's life when he left Vesali on his way to Kusinara a large group of Vijjians followed him and refused to leave him. When they finally got to Kesaputta the Buddha urged the throng to return to their homes and they reluctantly agreed. To console them he gave them his begging bowl. Later, a stupa was built on the site of this incident and renovated by The Emperor Asoka. The later history of the famous bowl relic is to be found in Middle Land Middle Way. Both Fa-hian and Hiuen Tsiang visited this stupa and left short accounts of it. Today Kesaputta is represented by the small town of Kesariya about 55 kilometres north-west of Vesali. The stupa rises in five huge terraces each of a different shape so that from above it would look like a giant mandala. In each terrace are niches enshrining life size statues of the Buddha.

The stupa is still undergoing excavation and restoration. Cunningham measured it and found it to be 1400 feet in circumference and 104 feet in height. However, it is believed that, initially the height of the stupa was approximately 150 feet. After being subjected to earthquake in 1934 that shook India, the stupa got immersed into the ground and was reduced to 123 feet in height. The aftermath of the earthquake further reduced the height to 104 ft. "The excavations have disclosed the walls of a small temple 10 feet square, and the head and shoulders of a colossal figure of the Buddha, with the usual crisp curly hair".

How to reach Kesariya:

To get to Kesariya from Vesali return to the main Muzaffarpur, small town of Kesariya is about 55 kilometers north-west of Vesali. Chakia is the nearest railway station from Kesaria Stupa, well connected with Kolkata and Delhi.



Kesaria stupa

Nalanda

(Bihar state)

Great place of stupa and university

The importance of this place for Buddhists began with the establishment of the Nalanda Buddhist University (one of the oldest universities in the world) Nalanda was the most renowned university in ancient India. It derived its name from Na-alam-da, meaning Insatiable in Giving, one of the names by which the Lord Buddha was known.

Lord Buddha visited this place several times. The most important aspect of this place is, Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Mahamoggallana hailed from Nalanda. Ven. Sariputta attained parinibbana in the same room where he was born after transforming his mother by giving Dhamma discourse. At the place a grand stupa stood for centuries and even today we see a great brick mound at that place.

Established in the 5th century B.C. it remained a live center of learning till the 12th century A.D. when it was destroyed by the invader Bakhtiar Khilji. Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese traveler (monk) studied here in the 6-7th century A.D. and there is a monument in his memory. He was one amongst many of those from East and Southeast Asia who came here to study Buddhism and also logic, meta-physics, medicine, prose composition and rhetoric. The University of Nalanda offered free educational and residential facilities to as many as 10,000 students and 2000 teachers, for it was supported by a number of villages. Its library, Ratna Sagar, is believed to have contained nine million volumes. Monasteries expanded over kilometers and only few have been excavated so far. The Archaeological Survey of India maintains the Nalanda Museum across the road which houses some exquisite bronzes of the 9th and 10th centuries, Pala dynasty, and other remains excavated at the site. The beautiful Thai Temple and the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, a centre for research in Pali and Buddhist studies, are 2 kms from the main site. There is also a memorial in the name of Chinese traveller monk Hiuen Tsang

Ven.Sariputta stupa



Journey to The Sacred Places of Lord Buddha



The relics of Ven. Sariputta

How to reach Nalanda

By Air:

The nearest airport is Patna, 99 km away.

Rail:

The nearest railway station is Bhakhtiyarpur, 38 km connecting the Delhi-Howrah rail line

Road:

90 km southeast of Patna and 11 km from Rajgir. It is 80 km from Bodh Gaya and is easily accessible by well-maintained highways