



REDISCOVERY OF BUDDHISM

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Abstract

Obliteration of Buddhism rested never walk again faintly when James Crockett, painted the birthplace of Buddhism itself, c.1799. The record puts it to the earliest drawing of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh-Gaya subscribed as 'East View of the Hindoo Temple at Bode-Gya, in the neighborhood of Gaya in Behar, taken by Capt. Crockatt.' The beginning of the end is marked rather inauspiciously. Two hundred twenty-one years since the apparent change is in the spelling of the word 'Hindoo' to 'Hindu,' but conceptual claim over the site stands still today formally and spiritually ascribed to this word. The identified and unidentified unexcavated sites wait with promisingly true stories. The excavated sites spoke less and lately. The accidental Orientalist discovering forgotten past of buried ruins was the blessing in disguise in fact to re-discover the glory of India's ancient history. The passion and curiosity of re-discovery had killed the spirit of revival. The numerous identified sites lay idle and unrecognized. Similar to the story of its gradual decline and sudden disappearance, Buddhism struggled through the disorganized and misinterpreted re-discovery this time. Watercolor copy of a painting by Thomas Hickey c.1815 depicts the basis of Colonel Colin Mackenzie's knowledge source in one way or the other. His image with his Brahmin and Jain pandits and his peon with a Jain statue in the background tantamount to philosophical rivalries then and historical rivalries now. The bold cover design of Charles Allen reads, 'AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCANDAL,' in his book, 'The Buddha and Dr. Fuhrer.'

Introduction

Going by the abstract, my idea is to understand the history of the archaeology in India that is undeniably linked with the colonial rule. The rulers who had no due respect to the living shrines but had too much fantasy in dead shrines. Their aristocratic pride and theocracy did not stoop to existing splendors but bent on to dig hidden treasures from the ruins deep underneath. I would like to present the synopsis of how archaeology stepped in India and executions of excavations in general in this introductory part. The chapters that follow would be specific to the sites or the particular place under discussion to provide undivided sanctity that is now well established archaeologically and historically. The contents of the chapters include symbolizing the three phases of Buddha's life as Siddhartha Gautama, wandering ascetic, finally getting enlightened, and the life of fully awakened being; the place of birth, place of enlightenment and the place where Buddha spent his maximum lifetime. The last site also has enormous significance. It's the place Buddha visited before and after

enlightenment. The main chapters containing significantly essential contents of my aim are to present it as plainly as possible. Thus, I want to discuss and cover the controversial issues beginning from the history of archaeology in India, its excavations, interpretations, and re-interpretations of interpretations here lucidly and factually.

In 1798, Col. Colin Mackenzie had stumbled upon some puzzling ruins in Amravati at Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. His purposeful visit met with merely coincidental puzzle that he didn't have time to care. "He was in the Guntur-Nellore region, as part of the British campaign against Tipu Sultan of Mysore, and he had thus to move on with his troops for the assault upon Tipu Sultan at Srirangapatnam". But something must have twirled in Mackenzie's mind, because he revisited the area several years later, in 1816: in his new capacity as the Surveyor General of India.

The several illustrations he made then were of some old ruins of Deccan Jainism. Later, his documents including around 85 sketches were presented to the Asiatic Society of Kolkata. This was revealed by Jawhar Sircar at 6th Kripasaran Memorial Lecture, Bengal Buddhist Association in 2015. He made several illustrations of what he thought were some old ruins of Deccan Jainism and he presented his documents and 85 sketches of Amravati before the Asiatic Society in Kolkata. These were the beginnings.

As the research continued, contradictions and controversies over findings prevailed. Some among different researchers and some among their own research later on. Arguments continue still. In the study of Borobudur by Paul published in 1935, he emphasised the importance of architecture as a material representation of religious doctrines of Buddhism. Written fifty years later in 1987, Schopen argued otherwise. Inscriptions were not considered by Paul according to Schopen. Schopen questions that if religious architecture would provide correct information to us regarding the religious history when actually many monuments were permanently changed as a result of colonial disturbance.

The sacred Buddhist landscapes were generally studied on the basis of architecture, or with regard to chronology and in relation to patronage. With developments, the in-depth studies are focused on generation of colonial knowledge. We can see the distinction made between colonial and nationalist studies of Indian architecture. The colonial studies lacked spirituality scope of the research and nationalists amalgamates all possibilities to reconstruct the missing link. The positing of this supposed opposition between western scientific study of architecture and the Indian or nationalist predilection for Sanskrit treatises presents a simplistic representation of the complex legacy of colonialism, which attempted to impose a monotheistic religious identity on essentially culturally pluralistic societies in Asia-Indian Economic and Social History Review Volume 45, number 3, September 2008: 417-49

It attempts to present the Western perspective. The culturally religious instinct of individuals brought environment guides our insights while pondering upon a totally new subject matter. Thus, loses the beauty and the truth of the past historicity. Lost the beauty to the museums established in Europe to display the treasure hunt items from Asia beginning eighteenth century. And the truth was lost to those treasure hunters.

Finding and Discussion

Though the human culture of Magadh-Anga region could be traced since the lithic age but as part of greater civilization, this area has been settled by the early Aryans in the later Vedic age. The forest reference of this area has been mentioned in the Atharvaveda and later on the Brahmana literature mentions this region in the context of Vratyas and other people of little tradition. The topography of Gaya has rich historical and mythological narratives. Every narration is fascinating. All the hills, rivers, trees and places were sanctified space at least on oral account centuries before the coming of Prince Siddhartha Gautama in search of seeking salvation adding the sanctity of the site. Gaya geography as we see at present with sufficient sacred spaces existed from around 9th-8th BC as per the textual references made in Vayu Purana of Mahabharata as mentioned by P.B. Singh in his writing 'Sacredscape and Manescape: The Sacred Geography of Gaya, India'¹.

He translates the literal meaning of 'Gaya,' loosely as 'let's go to another place,' referring to contact with another realm. The translation looks plain but has a deeper meaning too. It symbolizes a journey from this world of humanity and to that world of the divinity. One can comprehend the context as a place from where to go to our destiny. According to one of the most Sanskrit texts on pilgrimage and sacred places, the Tristhalisetu meaning 'Bridge to the Three Holy Cities,' dated circa sixteenth century, of the three pillars of the 'bridge to the realm of the soul,' Gaya is the easternmost. The others are Varanasi and Prayaga (Allahabad), both along the River Ganga in the west.

The above statements can be substantiated or validated according to the Vayu Purana. Purana referred by the author above speaks about the liberation achieved through acquiring the highest knowledge of Brahman, or getting oneself killed by the

¹Rana P. B. Singh, "Sacredscape and Manescape: The Sacred Geography of Gaya, India," *Facets of Social Geography*: 502, doi:10.1017/up0978817969360.029.

protecting a cow, or to pass a simple life at Kurukshetra; however, performing the ancestral ceremony at Gaya is better than anyone. The glory of Gaya then was to have already recognized in the period of Mahabharata. But especially for ancestral rites; says the Mahabharata: A man should wish to have many sons at that time because of the reason that one of them may go to Gaya (and liberate the ancestors by offering them Pindas, rice balls), or may perform an Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice), or may let loose a Nila bull.¹ Chinese traveler Hsuen-Tsang (seventh century) has also mentioned Gaya as a sacred place for bathing which possesses the power to wash away sins.

The Buddhacharita narrates that the city was supposed to have named after the sage-king Gaya, similar to that of the Rig Veda. The story of demon Gaya elaborates about this ancient tradition probably during the period of struggle that also had been destined to happen between the Hindus and Buddhists. There is another legend of demon-king Gayasur mentioned below. The two narrations are similar in a sense that in Buddhacarita it says sage-king Gaya and other tells a story of demon-king Gayasur becoming Devine spirit².

B.M. Barua states that the name Gaya as derived from a demon-king, Gayasur and this demon that we referred here depicts differently. It aspired to be the ground of sacred places. Through his arduous austerity, the devil pleased the gods. Related ideas are developed later in Mahayana traditions that when the demons were supposed to have subdued, they promised to be the protector of the land that they belong to in propagating the Buddha Dharma. Here, the demon king obtained the blessing that the spirit of all the divinities would find the place on his body. The demon meditated upon his aspirations. Thus, by his power of great meditation, it resulted in the formation of an important holy place. So, the site after that came to be known as what it is called today as Buddhagaya to commemorate the glory and spiritual power of demon Gayasur³.

That was the naming part. Now, how every the natural entity evolved to be a sacred identity over time. Asher (1989: 46) suggests that the Mahabharata specially eulogizes the River Phalgu and Akshayavata (the eternal Banyan) that gives the never-ending merit by pleasing the ancestors. Despite mythological legends of holiness and brilliance of Gaya before eighth century BCE, the sculptural or inscriptional sources are not available for earlier times. Therefore, as per the inscriptional sources, the antiquity of the site and tradition of an old ritual in and around Vishnupad temple goes to the period of Samudragupta (fifth century CE). A seal discovered at Basarh (Vaishali) mentions 'Sri Vishnupad Swaminarayan' (the patron deity of Gaya) in early Gupta characters (ASI, 1903-04: 10-11). The connection between Gaya and Vaishali describes the ancestral ceremony performed by the Kings and else well the seal of Basarh is most likely to be a mark of commemorating the event, states Asher. Asher further mentions that little later the Mehrauli pillar inscription of King Chandra says the installation of the lofty standard of Vishnu on the Vishnupad hill. All this records the history of Vishnupad dating back to circa fifth century CE.

Now the narratives and references made by different authors in their writings are from the textual records of its past mythologies written since from Mahabharata. It says that at least, "Two other chapters of the Vayu Purana, describes many sacred spots and sites of Gaya." Considering this textual evidence, the sacredness of Gaya as an origin of sacred geography was the ancient evolution of fire worshipers. They worshiped Sun as an element of the divine. Although the sun was worshiped in colder regions and moon in the hotter places historically, the Vedas considered the sun as a storehouse of inexhaustible power and radiance. Chauth Puja celebration is a genealogy of Vedic sun worshipping found in Puranas where Ramayana speaks of Sage Agastya initiating Rama into sun worship through the Aditya Hridaya Mantra. So, the Gaya was so much time inhabited by fire worshipers in the past. Buddhism also makes references of converting Kashyapa brothers who were fire worshipers in the same locality. These worshipping in a process had climaxed the upward aspects of the hills, the liquid attribute of the river, and the pillar imputation of the tree together interlinked to cosmological frame resulting to the formation of the sacred geography.

These features are yet supported by existing sacred performances still today. Ancestral rites and rituals, therefore, were supposed to hold at the conjunction of holy time, place and a spot. That was how a unique environment evolved where sacrality, spatiality, and temporality converged making its wholeness referred to as 'faithscape.' This dynamic nature of Gaya has great vitality, making it a 'theosphere' of opening to self-transformation, as is the case in many self-arising systems. The place transformed itself to take the place of mandala-Gaya Mandala. Interpretations are that whole Gaya is an abode, the mandala of a sacred place. The hills are considered to be the symbols of interlinking ladders. The soul may follow the path for the final release. "These hillocks play a major role in the spatial symbolism of transcendence - represented by their 'high appearance,' 'vertical projection' and 'passing from the earth to another realm.' They are also the particular domains of all hierophanies of atmosphere, and therefore the dwelling of the divinities" (Eliade, 1958: 99)⁴.

¹Ibid., p. 504.

²Asvaghosa, Edward B. Cowell, and S. Jain, *The Buddha-carita by Asvaghosa, Or, Act of Buddha (Delhi, India: New Bharatiya Book, 2003), 12.*

³Beni Madhab Barua, *Gaya and Buddha-Gaya (Varanasi: Bharatiya Pub. House, 1975), 2.*

⁴Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (Mariner books Pub, 1958), 99.*

Three symbols of rivers, trees and hills were sanctified symbolically. The river symbolized liquidity of fertility where life, strength and eternity contained thereof. People believe that the waters are indeed the healers as the water drives away and cures all illness. Akshayavata (Bo tree) represented the growth and expansion of natural elements in the symbolic manifestation of the cosmos. The tree is given complete alleviation spiritually in all religions. The cosmic tree had been elements of ancient pillar cult, representing the mythical center of the universe. The tree as a pillar of the earth and sky were pillared apart, and creation began. Hills and peaks were considered the representation is symbolizing the ladder linking the globe and the heavenly sphere. The five hills surrounding the territory of Gaya Kshetra are Pretashila, Ramashila, Prabhas, also called Ramagaya Pahar, across the River Phalgu, and Griddhrakuta.

Siddhartha Gautama in search of salvation arrived at the sacred region of Gaya. He went through arduous meditation for six long years. While he was looking for the right place for his enlightenment, many Gods and Goddesses indicated different locations. Finally, Gautama visited a place under a Bo tree. Gautama attained Buddhahood under this special tree called Mahabodhi tree now. There are many sacred sites evolved after Buddha's enlightenment in the vicinity. Many places are the locations where Buddha spent before his nirvana. Due to the vast area and differing views, the attention is drawn to describe the seven places around the immediate surroundings of Mahabodhi temple. This is according to the information stating that Buddha had spent forty-nine days around the Bodhi tree divided into seven days. He spent seven weeks at different locations after his enlightenment. Although, there are still controversies whether all seven places are at the locations marked with plates now, following seven places are based on the understanding that all seven incidences at each place happened around the Bodhi tree at the sites marked today.

First Week-Mahabodhi tree

Buddha meditated sitting with the legs crossed looking at the Bodhi tree with unblinking eyes; and where the Lalitavistara at the beginning of Chapter XXII says that the Buddha continued sitting at the foot of the Bodhi tree. Thus, we know that he spent his first week under the Bodhi tree experiencing the complete bliss of freedom, free of all mundane sufferings. He was free of thoughts, calm and serene. He was never found tilted from the meditation till the completion of his first seven days. He absorbed himself into meditation continuously for seven days contemplating under the Bodhi tree with unblinking eyes¹.

Second Week-Animesha-Locana

To the right from the main entrance stands a stupa type temple housing Buddha image, several small Tara statues and some Sutra scriptures in Tibetan. There is a big donation box placed in front of it. This temple is called Animisa Ceti, the Unblinking Shrine. The site marks the place where Buddha spent his second week gazing at the Bodhi tree uninterruptedly on his foot. It is around 40-50 meters from the main temple towards the northeast. However, it is hard to comprehend the matter as some sources would provide with different information saying that he still went on with his meditation sitting cross-legged².

Third Week-Chankramana Chaitya

Walk down to the main temple and circumambulate. There is a large rectangular base raised over 1 meter from the ground after crossing Diamond Throne. The platform is decorated with lotus flowers symbolizing that lotus sprang up from where Buddha placed his feet. This is the place where Buddha spent walking back and forth for the next seven days. The raised platform is to symbolize that Buddha walked above the ground in the air to indicate his enlightenment to higher realms of beings such as Devas. Consequently, Devas were convinced of Sidhartha's attainment of complete nirvana. Buddha spent days walking up and down a long way because of the deep joy that he derived from his accomplishment. He walked between the seat and the spot were got the insight. The treasure cloister stretched from east to west. Today this spot known due to the Dāgaba of the Treasure-Cloister³.

Forth Week-Ratnaghara Chaitya

This site is at the North-west of the main temple. One can see a small shrine with Buddha images. Here Buddha sat for more profound meditation in the fourth week after his enlightenment. Location is marked as Ratanaghara Chaitya, the Jewel House Shrine at present. It is said that the colours of the Buddhist flag were those emanated from the Buddha while

¹Osmund Boppearachchi, *Seven Weeks after the Buddhas Enlightenment: Contradictions in Text, Confusions in Art* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2016), 17-18.

²*Ibid.*, Pp. 19-20.

³*Ibid.*, p. 20.

meditating here. The colors were Blue, Yellow, Red, White, and Orange. There is one more story that Kāla, the Nāga king, approached Buddha at that time. The king bowed his head at the feet of the Buddha, and said, “Lord, former perfect Buddhas, the exalted Krakucchanda, Konākamuni, and Kāśyapa lodged in my abode.” Further, he added, “Well would it be if thou, Lord, would take pity on me and also lodge in my abode” He also presented him with the robe. He was after that requested to stay in a house offered by the king; the only home of jeweled which was believed to have been created by the gods. He spent the week seated there cross-legged, before having lodged in the jeweled house¹.

Fifth Week-Ajapala Nigrodha Tree

Descending the main entrance towards the main temple one can come across a tall stone pillar. Pillar would date back to the Asokan period. This pillar marks the Ajapala Banyan tree where Buddha spent his fifth week. Brahman was supposed to have raised a question to the Buddha about karma. So, Buddha’s response was noted to be that only good karma one becomes Brahman and not the birth. Some claim that it is at this place that Mucilinda the Nāga king threw his coils around the Exalted One to form an envelope to protect from the rain².

Sixth Week-Muchalinda Lake

Towards the North, straight from the main entrance without claiming down the stairs, there is another pillar. The pillar was moved to present location in 1956. Behind this pillar, there is a huge pond supposed to be the abode of Mucilinda, the Naga king. While meditating for the sixth week, the serpent king rose up from the water to protect Buddha from the storm created by the Mara (the God of Demons). We can see the image of the story right in the middle of the lake today. There came three sisters of Māra to disturb while he was in deep contemplation. However, he was never troubled as the blessed one neither paid attention to their words nor looked at them. Instead, it provided him the opportunity to sit with under focused mind. Therefore, unable to interrupt him from meditation the three daughters accepted their defeat never to have seen again to disrupt.

Seventh Week Rajayatana Tree

On the South side of the main temple, another Banyan tree replanted by Myanmar Missio marking the Buddha’s last seventh week. This place is significant particularly in terms of turning of Dharma Wheel. Buddha first started teaching under this Banyan tree to two merchants, Tapussa and Ballika and other passersby. They were the first lay followers of the Buddha. The idea of relics and stupa too started here. Buddha gave to two merchants his eight strands of hairs. Shwedagon Pagoda at Yangon has hair relics of Buddha given to Tapussa and Ballika. They were merchants on trade from Myanmar. Buddha broke the fast upon the offering made to him by these two merchants. They offered rice cake and honey.

Despite confusions about the specific activities that the Buddha did in the forty-nine days and the places he spent in the vicinity, Buddha had certainly spent seven weeks between his Supreme Enlightenment and about the first meal offered by the two merchants. Thus, Buddha spent forty-nine days fasting in the vicinity of Bodhigaya after enlightenment before he went to start his first sermon at Samath³.

Emergence of Bodhgaya as Pilgrimage Site

The pilgrimage site is marked by a Mahabodhi temple constituting several architectural and structural embellishments done upon the site makes it a whole-of-a-thing that is created out of the collective efforts of the followers. The site today stands not only the magnificent temple but also several votive stupas that are constructed within the peripheral of the entire landscape. One can vividly take the view of flattened on-the-top stone platform signifying the location where Buddha got enlightened under a Bodhi tree. The Mahabodhi temple which is structured fervently for sightseeing tends to give the unique structural embodiment. Some of the scholars noted the existence of these features of the tree, stone platform, and temple mentioned by Faxian⁴, a Chinese traveler and monk who visited the place around 400 AD who wrote that “...at the spot [where the Buddha attained enlightenment] they have raised a tower” [Guy, 1991]. Observing the architectural monument, we can deduce structural changes in construction would not have done under the same patronage. Many scholars have argued that it might be due to the changing fate of Buddhism that would have caused the emergence of different patronage as well as the changing ‘political events’. The much changes in the development of the Mahabodhi temple can be observed from the structural feature of the temple. On each of these layered structures do not signify the same style but constitutes several ideas. On the other hand, the sacred seat which is enclosed with the railing and it is believed to have been the

¹Ibid., p. 21.

²Ibid., Pp. 23-24.

³Ibid., Pp. 24-26.

⁴ Chinese Buddhist monk and a Traveller

contribution made by a pilgrim from Sri Lanka named Bodhiraksita (Guy, 1991). According to some archaeological sources by the scholars, the image of the Mahabodhi temple was found on the pedestal of Buddha image from Mathura which was depicted during the Kushana period (second century AD). Even Xuanzang, another Chinese monk who studied Buddhism in India visited Bodhgaya around early sixth century mentioned about the landscape and structure of the Mahabodhi temple and the site. According to Guy, he notes the records of Xuanzang that there used to be a 'vihara'¹ towards the east of the Bodhi tree which had many stories having a golden color. Moreover, the Xuanzang's account talked about the decorative figures of celestial gods and the sides of the gate of the temple were the figure of Avalokiteshvara and Buddha Maitreya. Further, in support of explaining the site, it is also mentioned that some of the replicas of the Buddha worship were also found at "...east gateway of the great stupa at Sanchi." (Asher, 2008).

On the other hand, the hand drawing of Mahabodhi temple with its periphery by Charles D'Oyly² in 1824 shows completely different feature with lone towering temple surrounded by trees which is slightly different from the modern existence. It is entirely different from what we witness today at the temple site. It explains that the votive stupas that one find today around the Mahabodhi temple gradually came up in the later times. Asher in his book mentioned that this existence of votive stupas had been contributed by the Buddhist pilgrims visiting from other countries. Both the explanations by Guy and Asher agrees in their writings that the Mahabodhi temple that what we witness today has come a long way in modifying its structure influenced by the different Buddhist individuals from different countries. The towering structural shape of the Mahabodhi temple depicts the influence of the Burmese architectural attributes. When the Muslim rulers were over-powering their rule across India, Buddhist monasteries and temples were in the turbulent state. So was the Buddha Dhammā itself got eliminated with the monks being fled to another peaceful region. Even Nalanda monastery (the seat of Buddhist learning) was on the verge of its end because of the Muslim rule where, it is said that Nalanda Vihara was used as Military Headquarter during the late twelfth century (Guy, 1991).

The existence of Mahabodhi temple and its replica being migrated to other countries during the earlier periods can be understood with some of the temples that can be found still in Thailand (15th century CE), at Patan (Nepal), China (fifteenth century CE), and others. (Guy, 1991). The icon of Buddha today is the depiction of His Great Moments such as birth, first sermon, Enlightenment and Mahaparinirvana. However, in most of the Buddhist temples today, the depiction differs. For example, the main iconic representation of the Buddha is in *bhūmisparsāmudrā* (the symbol of earth as his witness against *Māra* (the evil who refute Buddha). The *Chaityas* that we can see today on the sculptured pillars conserved in the museum directly relates to the aniconic worship of the Buddha in Sanci and Barhut. These architectural feats relate to the contribution made during the Pala period (5th-6th century BCE). Later on, during the period of the Gupta Dynasty, they seemed to have no or fewer interventions in the contributions in Buddhism. One can see the art of the Gupta period which is distinctly different from the other. We cannot make out the art, unlike other arts. Since the archaeological remains excavated did not show any signs of the Gupta period it is understood that not much development was done until the next ruling *Shunga* came into power that were said to have emerged with their unique style of art and architecture. In fact, one of the queens of the Shunga did contribute the railings with the carving and inscription depicted their contribution towards Buddhism in the form of worship through depicting the life of Buddha. According to tradition, when Buddhism was in its normal phase, the Mauryan Dynasty took a broader interest in the development of Buddhism. The special mention in the all the historical accounts, as well as the archaeological evidence, mentions about one Mauryan ruler (a converted Buddhist) called Emperor Ashoka whose reign between 273-232 century BCE was considered as the period of flowering of the Buddhism. Not only did he emphasize Buddhism in India but also took the initiative in spreading the religion beyond India even with the help of his sons and daughters. In one of the account, it is mentioned that Ashoka (the Chakravartin King) did destroy the Bodhi tree which made him repent and once again took care in the growth of the tree until it was again destroyed by his queen (Myer, 1958). The Rock Edits of the pillar signifies the Ashokan imperial rule in line with the moral law³ which has been depicted in the remaining pillars that we witness today.

Today one can also view some of the iconic worship of Hinduism in the earlier period in the form of idolatry image which indicates there are also some interventions in the development of the Bodhgaya pilgrimage site. During the Muslim rule, it is noted that the Buddhist structures, as well as Hindus, were demolished making to almost an end to the Buddhism religion. The Muslim fighters such as *Bakhtiyar Khilji*⁴ eroded all the belonging of the Buddhists and Hindus starting from Bihar Sharif towards Bodhgaya. The account of the disappearance of Buddhism has also been mentioned in the records of one Tibetan monk called *Dharmasvāmin* who witnessed the *Vihara* in Bodhgaya being left with just a few monks during his pilgrimage in India around the end of 13th Century CE (Guy, 1991). Regarding the railing pillars, the colonials did several excavations putting the notions of the existence of the railings about first century BC. Among the notable archaeologists,

¹ monastery

² Guy, 1991, P. 363

³ Dharma

⁴ Muslim Military General

Cunningham initiated the record of *sixty-four* numbers of railings pillars that have been installed which, he maintains in his findings that the date records around first century BC. Another significant feature that is prevalent around the Mahabodhi temple is the existence of Hindu idolatry gods particularly the idol of Lord Shiva and other.

Moreover, the art and architectural designs that are put on the pillars signify people from the Hindu religious background did have their devotion towards historical Buddha. In one of the tradition, the Hindus regard Buddha as the tenth reincarnation of Lord Shiva. The remains preserved in the museum also highlight the prevalence of the beliefs of the people on the deities. The art of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* are noticeably depicted on the monumental pillars. Examining the existence of the numerous votive stupas at the site, one can deduce that each of these Buddhist stakeholders tried to maintain the share of its attachment towards the site in the form of structuring those stupas within the smallest possible area.

Scholars had opinioned different points with textual, physical and logical conclusions to claim the basis of their interpretations. Gaya and Buddhagaya had gone through differing controversies, and it still goes through as many intellectual controversies as it had gone before. The sacred places went through centuries of evolution and adaptations. Religious ideas were adopted to adapt the society into their circle of beliefs. It seems that the difficulty of collective settlements regarding facts and figures would remain under controversies of Scholars debate with religious participants taking a backdoor with their own established acceptance. Social norms to participate in culturally built religious heritage also would remain intact for many years to come.

Debatable issues are much more expected. Because the subject matter itself was being put under the lens of individual understanding. The authors writing about Gaya and Boddhagaya have the same references and different conclusions, different references, and interpretations. Authors are of different backgrounds. There are a few things common for sure. It is the sacredness of the place. The place is an ultimately sanctified place as every issue is about the place as an eternal sacredness. All related religions or sects and Scholars agree that it was a sacred landscape and it still is.

Critical Analysis

There can be no end to debate. Claim over the exact location of Buddha's birth place hook winked an issue. The controversy crossed through the words of researchers and historians. Kapilavastu (Tilaurakot) in Nepal and Piprahwa in India. Looking at the issue through the perspective of country as a place, both the claims can arguably be logical. Sticking to particular point of place demanded evidence. Lumbini now being World Heritage Site under UNESCO, following are the facts authenticated by its authority: Literary sources of Buddhism showed description of Kapilavastu. To mention some of the very important ancient scriptures that mention the Sakya kingdom by Asvaghosha are- the Lalita Vistara, the Buddhacarita, the Saundarananda and the Sumangalavilasini andsuttas by Dhigha-Nikaya- the Sutta-Nipata, the Papanchasudini, the Jataka Stories, etc. In an epic, the Saundarananda by Asvaghosha, it gives an account of how Kapilavastu was established as the kingdom of the Sakyas. It states that there came princes called Ikshvaku from Saketa towards the north who settled down at place where sage Kapila was undergoing penance. The princes were named Gautama by Kapila Gautama as it was the name of their clan. It was told that a city to be built after his death in the sala tree marked by him. The city was found Princes accordingly and named Kapilavastu after the sage Kapila meaning city.

According to the Jataka tales, many labourers were employed by Sakyas at their service for different occupations such as smiths, stoneworkers, ivory workers, jewelers etc (Davids, 1971: 90). When the joint archaeological excavation was done by Nepalese and Japanese government at Tilaurakot (1967-77), following items were found; a large hoard of coins, weapons, ivory objects and jewelleryes. These discoveries of antiquities matched the Jataka tales.

The travelogues of Chinese pilgrims authenticated the sites solidly. In the 4th century of present era, Fa-hsien visited Kapilavastu and Lumbini recording the places he visited providing a rare source of locating these historical sites. As per his description, Kapilavastu was close to the Asokan pillars. By his record, Lunbini stands 50 li (14.41 km) to the east of Kapilavastu capital where Sidhartha Gautama the Prince heir to king Sudhodhana stepped on earth. This too supports the location on Nepal's side. Another great pilgrim Chinese traveller Xuanzang who visited the country in 629AD left detailed travel account. His travel documents revealed the following sites of great importance.

Kapilavastu was towards the South-east of Sravasti measuring 500 li (144km) in the record. With several totally ruined and abandoned cities, the country measured around 4000 li (1152) in circumference. It was rough calculations and measurement by Xuanzang that the royal palace area measured around 14 li (4km) round. The capital city was abandoned and in ruins. Brick materials were used in building the city. His observation finds that the foundation walls very strong and standing high although it has been deserted for many years. Place called Kudan towards south of capital city of Kapilavastu where there is stupa was mentioned by Xuanxang. It was the place where Buddha met with his father Suddhodana having arrived there after fully enlightened. Yet in another description about the same place-Kudan, he mentions that going towards the south of

the city of Kapilavastu around 3 or 4 li there is a nyagrodha tree grove where great emperor Asoka built that particular stupa. This particular place was supposedly a place where Buddha having journeyed towards his homeland after fully enlightened met his father Suddhodana. He preached his father the law of Dharma here.

Gotihawa is yet another place mentioned by Xuanzang. This place is towards the south east of the Kapilavastu city where there is stupa of Buddha's relics. Prior to the erecting of 30 feet high stone pillar with a carved lion on the top of the pillar, a stupa was there. Erected by the Dharmaraj Asoka, there were records explaining circumstances of Buddha entering Nirvana on the side of the pillar. Again towards the north east there stands a place called Niglihawa in the town of Krakuchhanda Buddha walking about 30 li (8.5km) there comes an old but great capital city marked by a stupa. This stupa was built to mark the place where Buddha Kanakamuni was born during the Bhadra-kalpa when people lived up to the age of 40,000 years. Now, towards the north of Niglihawa he found hundreds thousands of stupas built in a place named Sagarhawa. The place with many stupas indicated the spot where Sakyan tribe members were brutally killed by Virudhaka-raj. Total of 9,990 members of Sakya tribes were being killed by Virudhaka-raj after defeating and capturing them.

Small stupa towards the south east from capital city around 30 li (8km) was there in the place called Sarakupa. The place has a fountain and its waters are crystal clear like a mirror. The story goes to say that during the athletic contest, the prince shot an arrow that penetrated the target, fell on the ground and got buried itself up to the feather under the ground that caused the fountain to come out. Traditionally, the fountain was called the arrow fountain thus, the name Sarakupa (arrow fountain). It is believed that drinking this water can cure the person who fell sick. Therefore, people from distances were seen taking some mud from this place to apply over the part of their body with pain anticipating the recovery of the pain. Lumbini is around the same vicinity towards the north east of fountain well around 80 li (24km) called Lumbini garden or Lavani. Here there is a bathing well of the Sakya tribe. The water is clear like mirror like that of fountain water above surrounded by flowers. About several footsteps away, now decayed Asoka flower tree was found marking the place as the birth place of Buddha born in the Vaisaka month on the eighth day. Another important place around the city by Xuanzang is Ramagrama towards the east from Lumbini garden around 300 li (86km) into the abandoned wild forest. It is called Lan-mo (Lumbini garden).

Presentation of these sites may not satisfy the political and historical thirst. The political and historical geography of India would make Indians preferable claimants to the site too. The claim is that although India may not have existed country as a political entity the cultural unit of India existed as ancient as the Mahabharata tales. Culturally civilized India ruled so-called Lumbini by the rulers of Bihar and UP in the past. It was only from 1768 that the Gorkhas established the state of Nepal. They began to expand in full swing in all directions. When they were unsuccessful in the North with the stern defence by the Qing dynasty, Indian in the south faced diverted force in addition. The rulers of Indian kingdoms were weak. The Mughal Empire had already declined by then. British were in infancy and not powerful enough at the time. The Marathas kept themselves engaged in the South and Central of India. Taking an advantage Nepalese Gorkhas pushed as far into as Gorakhpur of present UP state. Gradually, there was war between British and Gorkhas of Nepal. Unfortunately, Nepalese lost almost all the areas they captured before. Fortunately, British acted loyal later in 1857 rebellion. The British Government returned Tarai region to Nepal as per the Anglo-Nepal treaty of 1860.

"The British Government hereby bestows on the Maharajah of Nipal in full sovereignty, the whole of the lowlands between the Rivers Kali and Raptree, and the whole of the lowlands lying between the River Raptree and the District of Gorukpore."- British-Nepal Treaty 1860, Article 2. That was the destiny of birth place of Buddha decided by British where Lumbini ended in Nepal.

Xuanzang also mentions that the area of royal palace measured about 4km in circumference protected by highly concrete defense wall mentions that the area of the royal precincts is about 4 km in circuit that was protected with high and strong defense wall. Similarly, number of excavations revealed archaeologically that Tilaurakot was a very large palace area surrounded by 10 to 12ft high and wide defense wall. The successions of archaeological excavations at the site have also revealed that Tilaurakot is big palace complex surrounded by 10 to 12ft wide protective wall. The wall stood deep and wide with circular channels from outside. Likewise, Xuanzang also locates Kudan. It shows the ancient Nyagrodharama to be at 1.5km south of the capital city. It provides the reference of the capital city to be towards south east of Gotihawa about 8.64 km. This is to the south-west direction of Niglihawa. It is the distance and direction of these two historical sites bearing Asoka pillars from Tilaurakot or vice-versa. The location by Xuanzang of the Kapilavastu from Lumbini is most noticeable and accurate in terms of distance and the direction with birth place of Buddha and the site of Asokan pillars. The distance of 8km from the south-east of Kapilavastu palace was identified as Sarakupa and within a distance of 24km north-east of Sarakupa locates Lumbini according to him. This concludes the Lumbini exactly with the present location of Tilaurakot about 28km from the east of Kapilavastu.

More specific and concrete archaeological excavation findings too supported the Lumbini in Nepal. Conclusions of the archaeologists based on their archaeological findings accurately matched the travel records of Chinese pilgrim especially that of Xuanzang. The Tilaurakot site went through a series of archaeological excavations conducted by the following

renowned archaeologists such as Dr. A. Fuhrer (1897), P. C. Mukherji (1899), Debala Mitra (1962), Tarananda Mishra (1967-72), Babu Krishna Rijal (1972-73) and also by a joint team of Rissho University of Japan DoA, Nepal (1967-77) over a period of 100-years. The vestiges of the fortification walls, moats, palaces, stupas, temples, viharas, ponds and guardrooms have been revealed and large amounts of antiquities have been collected from those excavations at Tilaurakot.¹Rai, 2010:116. Some of their findings are as following:

PC Mukherji mentioned in his report after his first scientific archaeological excavation at Tilaurakot confirming the kot at Tilaura as the ancient capital city of Sakyas. The Tilaura fort spread over a large area, stretching from south to north about 1,600 feet and about 1,000 feet from the east to the west. Tilaurakot fulfills all conditions as early Buddhist literatures and the Chinese travelers mention². Owing to the low land plain, and safety and the security of the palace during those days, the palace structures were built on elevated areas. Tialurakot on the elevated plain area is enclosed by fort wall in the middle. Going straight towards north for a certain distance, river Banganga receives the slight curves of it with its bank. As such the wall is roughly in a pentagonal shape. The distance of the wall from east to west through the centre is at 405m while the rampart running from north to south is 500m. The bricks and brickbats make up the fortification wall with deep moat rampart surrounding it. The wall is of 10 to 12 feet wide, which indicates that it must have been very high wall. In the Buddhist scriptures the height is mentioned to be of 18 feet. This majestic fortification wall enclosed the ancient Sakya palace³. The structure of a deep moat rampart surrounding the defense wall in all directions indicates existence of safe and strong defense system of the palace. The moat rampart built to protect from the entrance of enemies were deep and wide water trench with full of dangerous crocodiles and other man-eating aquatic animals. This is to check the enemies and ensure effective defense system in case enemies try to swim across the deep and wide trench into the premises of the palace.

The entrance gates at four cardinal directions with fortification wall at each side were found. Archaeologists were able to excavate two walls out of the four gates at the cardinal direction. One exposed gate at the western direction is made up of materials like, iron, mortar, wood, brickbats and bricks. It had many consecutive doors. Three phases of the gateway construction were found by Archaeologist T. N. Mishra. Dated from 2nd-1st century B.C the first and the second phase were found at layer 3. The third phase of construction is associated with layer 2, which dates from 1st - 2nd century A.D⁴. It was P. C. Mukherji who explored the eastern gate in 1899. His discovery of a large square ancient building closer to the gate was assumed to be that which might have been used for safety and security purposes of the palace. "The middle section of the eastern fort wall, which has been identified as the Mahaviniskramana Dwara or Mangal Dwara, is the gate from where Prince Siddhartha walked out of the palace"⁵. This gate is very significant one. Prince Siddhartha said to have sneaked out of palace from this gate. "It is said that Siddhartha set out on the journey, the guards posted at the gate and people of Kapilavastu had fallen asleep and did not notice anything"⁶. A number of doors were found along the gateway. These doors leading to the guardrooms indicate that the palace had a high degree of safety precaution and security management inside the palace, the residences of the king and the main administrative complex. There lies a stupa about 100m east of the gate. This place marked by a stupa is believed to be the spot where favorite chariot horse of the Buddha, Kanthaka, had died. "It is believed that the horse had a sole purpose to accomplish - to take the Bodhisattva out of the world of luxury and help him attain perfect enlightenment. After crossing the Anoma River, Siddhartha shaved his head and formally entered the world of monkhood. He sent Chhanna, his charioteer, and Kanthaka, the horse, back home. The horse served the destined purpose and died before entering the palace gate"⁷. Both Chinese travelers Faxian and Xuanzang have noticed and recorded about the stupa during their visit to Kapilavastu. Towards the north-eastern corner of the fort lies a large pond made by the inhabitants. "The ancient pond might have been built for pleasures of the Sakya royal palace, as there is a mound, possibly the ruin of the palace to the west of it on an elevated surface. There is another pond to the south of the hypothesized palace"⁸. Further, PC Mukherji also discovered many ponds during his Tilaurakot excavation. Finding of many ponds were also mentioned by Lalita-vistara in the palace of king Suddhodana.

"The temple of Samai Mayi, the sylvan deity, was found close to the exposed palace annex to the north-west part of the fort"⁹. Fragments of ancient sculptures supposed to be for the idol worship by Sakya dynasty members were mentioned in the Buddhist literatures. The travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrims and the Laita-vistara also mentions about the temples inside the complex of the palace of the Sakya. Group of Japanese archaeologists led by Nakamura have excavated the ruins of a palace-like structure. It was on the north-western direction of the fort. Their group speculated it as the northern wing

¹Rai, Hari D. *Lumbini: The Supreme Pilgrimage. Kathmandu: Holy Asoka Tours and Travels P. Ltd, 2010.*

²Mukherji, P.C. *Reports on a Tour of Exploration of the Antiquities of Kapilvastu Tarai of Nepal. Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969.*

³Bidari, B. *Kapilvastu: The World of Siddhartha. Lumbini: The Author, 2007.*

⁴Bidari, B. *Kapilvastu: The World of Siddhartha. Lumbini: The Author, 2007.*

⁵Rijal, B. K. *100 Years of Archaeological Research in Lumbini, Kapilvastu and Devedaha. Kathmandu: S.K. International Publishing House, 1996.*

⁶Mitra, R.L. (Trans). *The Lalita Vistara. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1998.*

⁷Rijal, B. K. *100 Years of Archaeological Research in Lumbini, Kapilvastu and Devedaha. Kathmandu: S.K. International Publishing House, 1996.*

⁸Mukherji, P.C. *Reports on a Tour of Exploration of the Antiquities of Kapilvastu Tarai of Nepal. Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969.*

⁹*Ibid.*

part of the ancient Sakya palace. “The exposed complex is, though smaller and is possibly a part of the main building of the palace. However, the vestiges belong to a later period of the Sakya dynasty”¹. It is worked out that the usage of brick materials in the region had not been introduced at the time. However, it is observed that the complex materials were possibly of best available materials of the time. For this reason, uncovering of any palace structure of Buddha’s time were not possible by the archaeologist. And this situation required very intensive and massive archaeological excavation to find out the Sakya period palaces, as it was made up of not so durable objects.

Near the defense wall at the southern part, a metal workshop was found by T.N. Mishra. According to him, the workshop was used by the smiths to make various utensils for different occupations like household items, weapons and agricultural tools. There seem to have minted coins too in the workshop. “The workshop had a big oven, and metal objects were found nearby. They include two big water jugs, pieces of copper pots, 12 early cast copper coins, two iron spades, iron chisels and frying pans”². Supporting the assumptions that it was the capital city of the Sakya clan, the weapon factory and the coin minting plant were discovered in the locality of the area. “Mishra unearthed ancient roads dating from 7th - 6th century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. in the vicinity of the fortified area of Tilaurakot. The roads were very wide and paved with bricks and brickbats. Some roads have stone edging on both sides. Very interestingly, some roads have eight inches soling made from iron slag”³. Such an amazing and improved road transport facility in the nearby areas indicates that the place was very important. “The potteries found at Tilaurakot date from 6th century B.C. - 8th century A.D. They can be categorized into Painted Grey Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, Black and Red Ware, Red Ware and Grey Ware”⁴ However, elsewhere, elsewhere, the Painted Grey Wares and its associate findings were dated back to the 9th century BC or earlier. So, in the case of Tilaurakot excavation by Debala Mitra, there were some serious shortcomings in the antiquities dating.

“Human figurines, animal figurines, toy carts and toy wheels were discovered by Debala Mitra at Tilaurakot. These figurines date from the pre-Mauryan, Mauryan, Sunga and Kushana periods. Mishra collected silver and copper punch marked coins, early cast coins, die-struck coins etc from Tilaurakot.”⁵“Coins of various shapes and sizes belonging to different periods were discovered during the excavations. The coins mainly included copper ones; they were punch marked coins, inscribed copper coins and uninscribed copper coins”⁶. The presence of these coins indicates that there was trade system and prosperity in the Sakya kingdom. Other stone objects proving the ancientness of the place were also found. “Debala Mitra found 31 stone objects in total. Some of the stone objects found were ornaments. They were fine grained and well-polished sandstone products. Some of them were fragments of rods turned and tapered by a lathe machine.”⁷The discoveries of stone objects at the sites suggested the site being very ancient. “The seals and sealings uncovered at Tilaurakot bear legends read as Ne-ga-ma, Ne-ga-me-ya, Da-vi-la-sa, Jetha-kichakama, Sa-ka-na-sya etc.”⁸Seals bared different symbols. Among the seals that bared the legend Sa-ka-na-sya meaning the token of the Sakyas designates to associate the site with Sakyas.

Other miscellaneous objects were unearthed out of the excavations at Tilaurakot suggesting the place to be very ancient. The objects unearthed at Tilaurakot excavation sites were numerous. It included objects of ornaments like bangles, rings, beads made of bronze, copper, silver and even gold were found. Others like bangles made of clay, beads, metal and stone, ivory objects, bone, metal objects that included pots and vessels, weapons of arrow, dagger, knife and etc were richly obtained.

Further analysis of Archaeological conclusions of archaeologists provides different evidences to support the actual location of the place. For example, Dr. Fuhrer excavated the site at Kapilavastu mainly in Sagahawa. That was from 22nd December 1897 to March 1898. His report compilation ascertained that the Tilaurakot is the ancient Sakya capital. According to him, the ancient capital city of Kapilavastu included even greater area such as Kudan, Sagarhawa, Niglihawa, Gotihawa and the like. And according to him, the Tilaurakot was the inner part or the core city of Sakyas where their palace was situated. Next, PC Mukherji, who was the senior archaeologist of India, conducted scientific archaeological excavations for the first time. The excavation was carried out in different archaeological sites in and around Kapilavastu. The potential site excavation underwent for two months from 3rd February-29th March 1899. Mukherji is highly credited for his painstaking job of scientific archaeological explorations of many sites and formulating convincing reports and drawings of the sites for the future reference. His findings fulfil all the conditions mentioned in the ancient Buddhist literary sources regarding the Sakya palace complex according to him.

¹Nakamura, Z. T. Kubo., and H. Suzume. *Tilaurakot Fortified Village in Tarai Excavated in 1967-1977 Vol-I. Japan: The Rissho University, 2000.*

²Bidari, B. *Lumbini: A Haven of Sacred Refuge. Lumbini: The Author, 2002*

³*Ibid*: 260

⁴Mitra, D. *Excavations at Tilaurakot and Kodan and Explorations in the Nepalese Tarai. Kathmandu: HMG, Department of Archaeology, Nepal, 1972.*

⁵Bidari, B. *Kapilavastu: The World of Siddhartha. Lumbini: The Author, 2007*

⁶Mitra, 1972: 84-91

⁷*Ibid*, 2007:224

⁸*Ibid*, 273

Then, after P C Mukherji, Debala Mitra was commissioned to Nepalese Terai for the continuation of archeological excavations of potential sites of capital city. She conducted and collected antiquities in 1962 during her brief excavations at Tilaurakot. With a difference of around 300 years, she was of the understanding that the antiquities collected by her were close to 300 BC where later realizing of her short coming in her own conclusions, she corrected the report stating that the antiquities dated as back as 600BC. This report was acceptable to the Government of Nepal as well as it was in conformity with other researches. Excavations from 1967 to 1972 were continued by Mishra. He was the senior archaeological officer working under the Department of Archaeology of India with credible experiences and expertise. His work were brought under 3 phases of 9 layers. It brought cultural depositions of Tilaurakot to light. The defense wall of 9th layer was dated to 7th-6th BC century by him. The gateway complex was discovered by him too. There were three phases of the defense wall with its outer moat rampart surrounding it. The roads dating back to 7th- 6thBC until the 2nd century BC were his discoveries. Large amounts of antiquities were also recovered from Tilaurakot by him. His excavation work also included Dhamnihawa mound along with exposing the twin stupas. It was an incredible of Mishra that his research guarantied the finding of ancient capital city of Sakya to be Tilaurakot.

Then, Mishra was followed by Rijal at the Kapilavastu site. The then Chief Archeological Officer of Nepal was joined by his team at the site. The team was responsible for excavating and exploring over 30 different archaeological sites. It was during the 1972-1973 season in the Kapilavastu region. Human depositions were divided by Rijal within the fortified palace of Tilaurakot into four periods. Out of four periods, I Period yielded Painted Grey Wares. It dated back to 8th-7th century BC. II Periodically found Northern Black Polished Wares. This dated back to 6th-5th century BC. The III Period yielded red wares and Grey wares. The red wares were associated with NBP whereas Grey ware was associated with Mauryan period. And the IV Period also consisted of red ware but there were black-slipped grey ware too. These were dated to Sunga and Kushana period. These findings by Rijal confirmed the human settlement prevalence at Tilaurakot as early as 8th century BC.

Besides textual references by the pilgrims and the archaeological findings, the geographical locations and the characteristics of Tilaurakot bring the conclusion closer by every inch. "Based on the early Buddhist sources, Basanta Bidari concludes that the banished royal children of king Ikshvaku who hailed from Kosala kingdom towards north and lived on the foothills of the Himalayas, on the east bank of ancient Bhagirathi (Banganga at present) River near the hermitage of Sage Kapila"¹. There was no evidence of existence of river nearby Piprahawa. The verses from Theragatha read,

**“Let the Sakyans and the Koliyans see you
Facing the west, crossing the Rohini River”-Theragatha verses: 527-33**

The Theragatha Commentary bases its reference to River Rohini and Koliya kingdom in providing information about the location and direction of Kapilavastu. According to the commentary by Theragatha, the River Rohini flows from north to southwards and separates the two kingdoms, Sakya kingdom Kapilavastu on the west and the Koliya kingdom on the east. Far towards the south locates Rajagaha (Rajgir) across the Ganges. People of Rajagaha wanting to travel to Kapilavastu must journey via the Vajjian country finally crossing Rohini facing west through the Koliyan country. "The position of Kapilavastu to be 60 (540 miles) from Rajgriha, 50 (450 miles) from Vaisali and 6/7 (50/60 miles) from Sravasti and opines that Tilaurakot roughly lies in this position"². According to travel records, the Chinese travelers Fa- Hsien (399 AD) and Xuanzang (629 AD) both had seen Gotihawa and Niglihawa. They narrated that the stone pillars were erected by Emperor Asoka nearby Kapilavastu. These great sites of Gotihawa and Niglihawa are close to Tilaurakot. Xuanzang locates Lumbini about 30km towards the east of Kapilavastu which today is accurate distance and direction of Tilaurakot.

Many artifacts were found, which prove the prevalence of human settlements around Tilaurakot that extended in a vast area into a century from 8th -7th BC. The existence of civilization around Tilaurakot is clearly evident according to the archaeological excavations. It was found that sites such as Gotihawa existed about 9th century BC, Kudan about 3rd century BC or earlier, Niglihawa about time immemorial to 3rd century BC, Sagarhawa about 5/6th century BC. It was characteristics of a palace to be surrounded by civic settlements. So, fulfilling all the characteristics of a capital city, Tilaurakot qualifies over other site as the ancient city. On the other hand, not even a single archaeological discovery of the Buddha period was evident in and around the vicinity of the Piprahawa on the Indian plain. It would imply that the Piprahawa area in those days was under the cover of thick impenetrable forest on all sides. A king cannot possibly rule from a densely forested area. The kings mentioned in the references were supreme authority over the legislature, executive and the judiciary head. For a King of such power and responsibility it would not only be difficult but also impossible to rule his

¹ (Bidari, 2002: 8).

² (Rhys Davids, 1971:17:).

country from the middle of the jungle for his own security also. Even today with modernity, ruling a country from these setups would not be viable for political, administrative, economic and other reasons. Revealing of 10-12 feet fortification by archaeologists with four big gates in four cardinal directions surrounded by watchtowers at Tilaurakot proves otherwise. There was also a deep wide moat rampart encircling the fortification wall from the outside. The large and fortified area with intensive designs of security systems in place suggests Tilaurakot to be a royal palace without any reservation.

To conclude, all the findings that the association of ancient Kapilavastu with that of two nearby sites-Gotihawa and Niglihawa; the direction of Tilaurakot with reference to Lumbini garden, Himalayas, the Banganga and the Rohini River; large fortified palace complex with a trench surrounding the fortification wall and discovery of various antiquities that dates back to 8th or 9th century BC to Kushan and Gupta period and also including the seals bearing inscription meaning token of the Sakyas (Sa-ka-na-sya) etc are the well-established evidence that the Tilaurakot have been hometown of Siddhartha in childhood days. The above facts were also shared by the travelogue of the Chinese travellers and the ancient Buddhist texts. In addition to it, contemporary scholars and the renowned archaeologists proves to confirm Tilaurakot of Nepal as the ancient capital city of Sakyas. It was K.M.Srivastava who claimed Piprahawa as ancient Kapilavastu. His claim was on the basis of Piprahawa seals containing inscriptions that read: Devaputravihara, Kapilavastu Bhikkhu Sangha and Maha Kapilavastu Bhikkhu Sangha. But it could not withstand against the concrete scientific archaeological evidences that were found at Tilaurakot. Those three seals unearthed by Srivastava is not an enough proof to prove Piprahawa as the capital city Sakya rather it would suggest that the site to be of a Vihara complex associated to Bhikkhu Sangha (association of monk) of Kapilavastu later.

With all the evidences discussed and mentioned above and the opinions of renowned archaeologists, researchers, scholars and textual references, conclusion can be drawn without any doubt to confirm that the present day Tilaurakot is the ancient capital city of Sakya called Kapilavastu. The place was the palace complex of Sakyan King Suddhodana, where Siddhartha Gautama lived as a prince, and experienced all the worldly life till the age of 29. Realizing the reality of life and inevitability of sufferings in life, the prince renounced all princely luxuries and set out from the eastern gate in a journey to search wisdom to end all the sufferings of the life.

However, we cannot totally ignore or underestimate the significance of Piprahawa. It was in fact an important Vihara complex of the monks amidst the jungle. This place probably must have been Vihara controlled by Kapilavastu Bhikkhu Sangha after the Buddha's mahaparinirvana. The site of Piprahawa therefore can be assumed to have been an important place of Buddhist learning and practices under the authority of Bhikkhu Sangha of Kapilavastu. Ancient Sakya Kingdom extended in a large area. It stretched from the Himalayas to the north, Kushinagar to the south, the Rohini River to the east and the Rapti River to western side. The ancient Kapilavastu area was shared between present day Nepal and India during the political division of the neighbouring countries. Of these divisions, the present day Tilaurakot as the Kapilavastu, the ancient capital city of Sakya fell within the boundary of Nepal. The Vihara complex in Piprahawa fell within the boundary of India. It was divided along with the demarcation of borders between the neighboring countries. Therefore, with respect to paying visits both are significant Buddhist sites and should be visited with much devotion.

So, Buddha was not born in present Republic of India, but undoubtedly born in Ancient India. Buddha thus was culturally Indian. Going by this assumptions and theories, it would sound complete futile on the part of Nepal that the Buddha was Nepali. For Nepal, Nepal is only a country being referred here and in the past but India as claimed is not only the present Republic of India but also the Ancient India where it spread across both modern Pakistan and the Bangladesh. Comparatively, for an example, the Nepal's claim of Buddha as Nepali or is form Nepal would be similar to claiming Jesus Christ was born in Israel or that the Prophet Muhammad was born in Saudi Arab.

Chronology of Exploitation of Nalanda

Rediscovery works at historic Nalanda University began as early as 1811 to 1812 by Francis Buchanan. The great seat of learning extended from 1600ft north to south. It is told and retold that the glory of Nalanda declined close to 11th century AD in the hands of Muslim invasion under the notorious campaign of Bhakiyar Khilji after which, it was forgotten to remember for centuries. It remained silent and went underground gradually until the disturbance by Francis Buchanan-Hamilton who had no prior idea of what it is. Major Markham Kittoe associated the mounds of earth and debris in 1847. The official resurrection dateline of famed Nalanda was drawn in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham under the auspices of Archaeological Survey of India. He continued his exploitation until 1862 in his first attempt to be continued later. However, the systematic archaeological excavation of the ruins began only in 1915 and ended in 1937. There was second phase to it to conclude and restore earlier discoveries spanning over a decade from 1974-1982. The excavations of more than one and a half centuries revealed eleven monasteries and six major brick temples eventually. Most structures of the ruins showed evidence of multiple layers of construction over different periods with new buildings being raised atop the ruins of older ones. The reconstruction of the story told about the ruins was fascinating. For Dr. Buchanan, it was like ruins of the king's

palace. He saw abandoned ancient tanks and mounds surrounding the area with many specimens of sculptures scattered all around. To trust his own conscience, a Jain priest in Bihar informed him that it was the residence of king Srenika and his ancestors. But real truths are in the records of Chinese pilgrims. During the time of Fa-Hian, the place seemed to be called Nalo. He describes about the hamlet of Nalo at one yojan (7 miles) from Giryak and by the same distance from Rajgir. Later findings of the same place but different name Baragaon have the similar measurements with respect to this distance. Distance of one yojan with respect to Rajgir is also mentioned in the Pali annals of Ceylon. One of the renowned Buddhist Scholar and the traveler from China, Xuanzang gives a reference point from Bodhgaya as 7 yojans. Eventually, two inscriptions were discovered with the name of the place mentioned as Nalanda. The seals found at the spot revealed the structures belonging to the University of Nalanda monks.

Alexander Cunningham and Nalanda

Taking field surveys from 1861, Alexander Cunningham made considerable observations and measurements of the area. But scholars condemned the excavations more than hard work he put in. Probably, his hard and sincerity were misplaced. The criticisms came under different subject matters relating to the issues such as his unsystematic methods for identification of places, procedural lapses for conducting field survey and being too much obsessed to explore the places mentioned by Chinese pilgrims. Despite the criticisms, Cunningham published his first investigation report in 1871 and it's much in use as a reference point. His report includes the sketch titled "Sketch of the ruins of Nalanda Mahavihara," showing the spatial view of the place. Approaching from North in 1812, Buchanan observed that the ruins stretched from Dighi Pokhar in the village of Begumpur to the east where visible ruins were still there in 1907. In addition to excavated physical remains that we see today, assumptions based on eyewitness accounts of place being greater than this matches with the records of Chinese traveler about the 10,000 residents in the Mahavihara. Thus, it is due to lack of interests or fund from the Government halting the further excavations leading to assumptions that the place could be larger because facts in the accounts and the vastness of the area in which antiquities were found could not be corroborated. This situation creates anxiousness and curiosity to the zealously enthusiast archaeologists to offer their open opinions based on the facts and figures at their disposal.

Fortunately, field exploration was undertaken in 2014 to the satisfaction of the archaeological expertise fielded in the survey office otherwise. The new excavations were carried out using modern scientific methods but in snail's process with minimum coverage. And, yes exactly the evidence of remains were found stretching to the corners of Begumpur settlement with undulated and exposed walls around 4-5 meters high by 450 to 400 meters in area. The spots were plotted with GPS navigation. People in the vicinity were curious though were apprehensive about not only of what might be underneath their settlements but also of its consequences of national importance. They came forward with information regarding the excavation more than half a decade around the Kamgar mound. Some residents reported of a trench dug in their fields where they came across a part of brick structures. This structure was exposed when villagers used earthmover to cultivate their fallow hard land. Subsequently, the owner of the land was issued with stay order barring him to use the land for cultivation. The team exposed the mound through remote sensing technology partially. Two mounds were then located in the locality as the image captured indicated two distinct mounds within the high resolution of image in the location.

One of the mounds to the southern side was adjacent to the villages of Baragaon and Muzaffarpur whereas the second mound to the northern side which is in size covered Begumpur village. The southern mound is confined to ASI's property covering only one-third of the actual area. The elongation of north-south direction of the southern mound stretches 1.6 kilometers. The mound in the north ends as wide as the size of Baragaon and Surajpur villages combined with about 400 meters at its widest band. These two villages in the north connect with settlement of Muzaffarpur in the south that joins with the excavated area in the east. The study was conducted with high-resolution satellite image to analyze and identify the region multispectral. Evidences of two more temples and the additional structures were found through the recent past studies. Analyzing of the multispectral images has revealed two successive images to the north of temple no.14 already in the list of rediscovered structures. When an axis-line was extended through the centers of excavated temples i.e., temple no.12, 13, and 14, structural images were found along this axis. Presence of these structures was not new to require investigation through scientific studies. As early as 1812, Buchanan recorded its presence. This was followed by all the previous archaeologist fielded in the area; by Cunningham in 1861, and Broadley in 1873. Mishra also observed the mound appearing to be a chaitya in the same excavated row. But the outcomes of present research yielded more scientific evidence. The accuracy of the measurements and the distances in between placed more confirmed and systematic approach to archaeological excavation. The patches of images in the observation would be marks of earths removed for trenches and canals which are now buried with time. It is suggested that patches observed would be due to quarrying of bricks for centuries.

This observation would have been true long before this study. Because, Alexander Cunningham noted long in the past: “From its close proximity to the village, this ruin has supplied materials for all the existing houses, and is consequently of much smaller dimensions....” He mentioned after his excavation: “If the relative proportion of base to height was the same as that of the Buddha-Gaya Temple, the height of this temple could not have been less than 228 or 240 feet, according to which side of the base is taken for calculation”. The unscientific methods of Alexander Cunningham should be appreciated more than criticisms at least in comparison not with present method of highly scientific technology but with that of similar findings.

The obligations and obstacles to rediscover Nalanda had not deterred in continuing the legacy of Nalanda tradition. The tradition of imparting knowledge and infusing wisdom blossoms at the sad backdrop of ancient university in leaps and bounds. The Nalanda University located at Rajgir stands to the past glory around twelve kilometers away from the old ruins. The institute of international repute to re-establish ancient Nalanda as an undisputed seat of excellent learning was a historical consequence of contextual and contemporary needs. Not only Nalanda, the ancient Magadha region was uniquely characterized by a cultural and intellectual hotspot from the earliest known time to its last breath that is ever known to human history. The seekers of the knowledge from every background of caste, religion and social inequalities were blended with multiplicity of discourses embracing the entire diversity distinguished itself from the rest. Various Historical sources and the archaeological discoveries indicated that the outstanding University had existed over eight hundred years beginning fifth century to the end of twelfth century witnessing generations of dynasties. It was first wholly residential university in the world with 2,000 teachers and 10,000 students at its heydays. Looking through blossoming of present campus structure, the Nalanda ruins reckons their architectural components of the complex in holistic nature of knowledge that was sought by and imparted to at this University in all respects. The co-existence between human nature and environment nature is explicitly comprehensible in the best culture of living and learning.

Owing to its unparalleled contribution in the field of knowledge thus, it was in the wisdom of most knowledgeable person of his status, the Hon’ble Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, missioned his vision of reviving the past glory of ancient Nalanda University to Legislative Assembly of Bihar in 2006. The proposal of Singapore later, endorsed by members of East Asia Summit, the past is back to present.

Cradle of Buddhism and modern civilization

The ancient capital of Magadha kingdom, Rajgir was the place of dawning of humanity. It is situated in Nalanda District of Bihar at present. It has breathtaking scenic beauties of hills and valleys. The place had natural inspiration for the growth of dynasties and settlements. The natural protection by hills and valleys and then suitable natural vegetation due to good weather made Rajgir a natural choice of people and its rulers to establish their capital and the dwellings. Migrating people in the past probably fell in love with the serenity of the place turning travelers to settlers in groups and communities gradually. The haphazard style of living matured to social community with time. The instability of a day to day life in larger communities gave ideas of rules that conversed into laws. The laws protected cultural practices and enhanced spiritual contemplations.

The good laws patronized the spiritual practices. The comfort of the natural settings enabled kings to share and spare the commonalities of his people. Normalcy in daily life give rise to flourishing of thinking cultures. More and more religious leaders, preachers and teachers were attracted to this place. Rulers and leaders were also attracted. These schools had different opinions from each other but there existed no disputes in those days. There was a co-existence of remarkable thinking patterns. Buddha referred sixty-two wrong views (Micchaditthi) in the Brahmajala sutta representing the varying teachings of such schools. Amongst it were the six prominent teachers patronized by the economic prosperity and political sovereignty of the state. The multiple schools of thought developed a tradition of greeting to enquire about the school of thought they follow in casual conversation. It required big halls for logical debates and consensual discussions among the different schools. A tradition of exchanging necessary perspective in drawing out the best from different thoughts of intellectuals began.

Rajgir was home to many religious and political leaders. Buddha takes most prominent place in the history of those who called Rajgir home. Numerous structures were built in memory of Buddha which lies ruined and buried now. To explore the life of Buddha through the archaeological remains, the following places of historical importance are brought under the purview. The places underwent rise and fall but the Buddha and the Rajgir goes almost synonymous. A medical doctor serving East India Company, Francis Buchanan was the first explorer of Rajgir. Also an enthusiast geographer, he visited Rajgir in the beginning of 19th century. Existence of ruin was reported by him. Ruins of caves, monasteries, fortification walls and stupas were found in the vicinity of Rajgir. He was followed by Alexander Cunningham, who substantiated his findings from the travel records of Xuanzang and Fa Hien. The ruins were excavated to recover its ancient constructs by him. Some of their following findings and later findings bring back the past glory of Rajgir fresh and vivid

Cyclopean wall

To the entrance of Rajgir town from Gaya side, the fortification wall fortifies the town right from the entrance. The most antiquarian ruins of the city, the wall run forty eight kilometers covering to join all the five hills that surrounds Rajgir city. Besides these huge Cyclopean walls, there is also an inner fortification wall that supposedly enclosed the core of the original ancient capital city. The wall is built of earth pebbles and runs seven and half kilometers long. Most part being in ruins, it measures up to ten kilometers at certain heights. Subsidiary walls were built for different purposes. The gaps at certain portion suggests of openings for gates to the city. Continuity of construction and restoration works is evident but no authentic dates available. In the recent past, maintenance was carried out at visible locations for the attractions of tourist. These walls have well-marked gaps representative of ancient gate sites. No date has been designated to these ruins.

Sonbhandar (cave)

The Sonbhandar cave greets visitors with most intriguing sites. The mysterious part is that it has hidden doors that lead to the hidden treasures of king Bimbisara. We could imagine no doors to solid rock-cut cave other than some chiseled out frame of marks on the rock. The saddest part is that this beautiful cave had pillared veranda that is noticeable in front of the cave was destroyed by the earthquake in 1934. Front walls can be seen with dated inscriptions to Gupta era of 2nd century. The cave has well cut out window for ventilation suggesting that there must have shutters to the entrance. Presence of veranda indicates the place was not part of spiritual practice but belong secular activities. Cut structure is similar to Barabar Caves but polish on the walls and design predates the meditative caves of Barabar. Myth of Bimbisara's wealth narrates the cave to the age of Buddha, but the historians claim would place the earliest existence of this cave to Asokan period. The cave on the eastern side retains carvings of images that date to 5th century CE. Jain sculptures were defaced by the invaders has lost its roof.

Bimbisar jail

Bimbisar was father of Ajatshastru who ruled Magadha Empire with Rajgir as its capital from 558-492 BCE. His father was the ruler of Haryanka dynasty. It ruled smaller part of ancient Magadha. Annexing Anga to his kingdom, Bimbisar paved way for great Magadhan Empire. He was patron to both Buddhism and Jainism but Jains mention him as Shrenik in their text. As the fate have it for us in store, the great ruler was put in jail by his son Ajatshastru. The remains of the prison of Bimbisar can be seen on the way to Gaya facing to Griddhakuta. It is believed that Bimbisar died in the prison while his son was on his way to release him.

Griddhakuta or the Vulture peak

Griddhakuta is a hill considered to be the most sacred site in Buddhism according to Mahayana teachings. Many sacred teachings were given by Buddha at this site to his disciples. Buddha meditated on this peak and Prajnaparamita Sutra and the Lotus Sutra were taught here. It is said that King Bimbisar built a stone pavement leading to the hill top but there are no remains to be seen. Two caves on the way are believed to be belonging to the two disciples of Buddha Ananda and Mougelayana. There are also remains of few stupas on the way. Alexander Cunningham located this site based on the records of pilgrim Xuanzng.

The famous Kunds

There are several hot-water springs in Rajgir which are very famous for tourist during winter months. Amongst these Saptadhara and Brahmkund are the most famous. The hot springs are at the conjuncture of two foot hills. The site is a holy site devoted by Hindus, Buddhist and Jains equally. It is spiritually blessing as both Buddha and Mahavir is believed to have taken bath in the hot spring. People also say that the water contains medicinal values that cure certain diseases. It is also said that in fact, there was Buddhist vihara during the peak age of Buddhism. All presence of vihara went to ruins and the revival was undermined by developments of monuments belonging to other religious groups. At the location we can see multiple temples now where devotees pay homage to almost all the Hindu deities.

Conclusion

Alexander Cunningham executed several diggings with no proper procedures and ideas of the sites he was supposed to lay his hands on. Later, becoming the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India he came across scriptures that recorded the travel history of Chinese pilgrims. The travel accounts of traveler like Xuanzang was like a magic wagon. The narration in the record that provided locations and distances of places was real blessing. He was able to fix the locations and distances of many famous sites that we can see which were mentioned in ancient Indian texts. Thus, rediscovering the lost and forgotten sites and monuments that remained under the earth for centuries.

Yet, places like Kapilavastu are put in controversies. Because, the measurements of distances were inaccurate and details of places were inconsistent. There was lack of textual understanding and time to analyze the scriptures properly. Locating the sites and finding out what remains hidden were carried out in rush and hurry. The curiosity and lust for discoveries killed the spirit of revival. It was James Prinsep who came across script two years later in 1837. 'Devanampiya Piyadasi' which translates as "Beloved of the Gods of Gracious Mein" brought Ashoka into light.

The work has jostled me with more questions than answers. British findings of what Indians have forgotten can be speculated. Not even local residents who built their shelters over it were able to give faintest traces of their dwellings. For some haunted places, the reasons could be the zealous curiosity of British and beliefs systems of Indians. The culture that was built over time by spirituality instilled the fear of spirits and ghosts at the ruins. It also offended people due to religious differences that the myths passed from generation to generation that the site belonged to inauspicious sects. Dangerous animals that nestled too deterred them from visiting. Their curiosity and authority of science over beliefs pushed the British forward for a search to research.

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