



प्राचिनकीर्तिमयावृणु

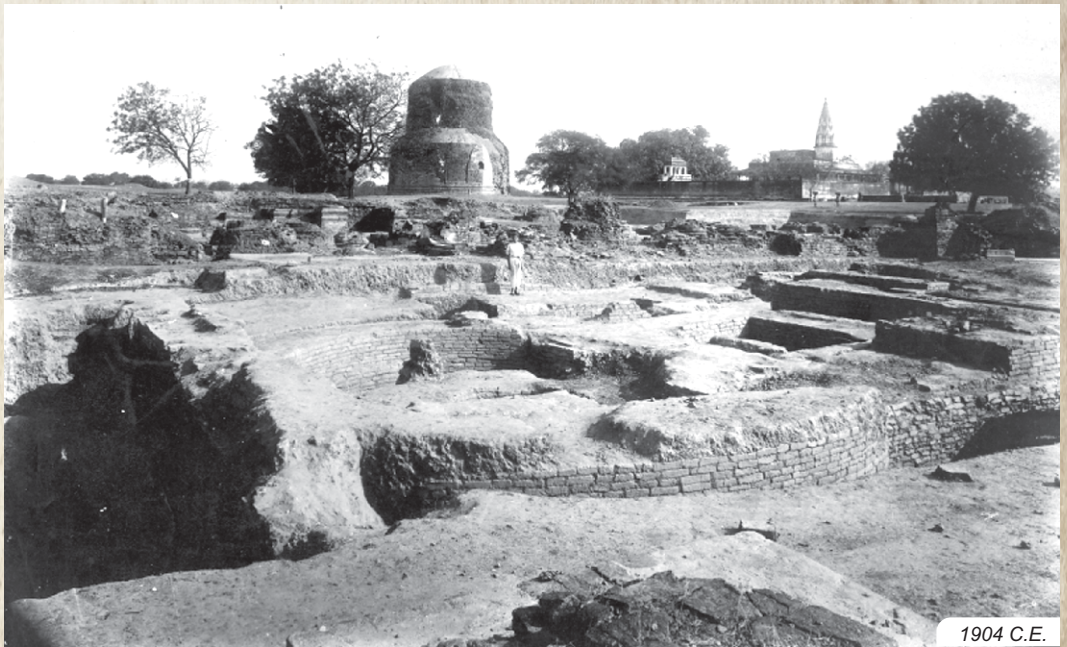


Excavated Remains, Sarnath



Archaeological Survey of India, Sarnath Circle
Sarnath, Varanasi

Sarnath is one of the four most sacred places of the Buddhists. According to the '*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*', Buddha himself told his disciples to visit four places- *Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar* which were associated with his birth, enlightenment, first preaching and *Mahaparinirvana* respectively. In ancient Buddhist literature the place finds mention as *Rishipatan, Mrigadava* or *Mrigadaya*. The modern name Sarnath seems to be a contraction of *Sarangnath* still born by the lord Shiva enshrined in a temple nearby. Sarnath is also sacred to the *Jainas* for being the value of austerities and death of *Sreyamsnath*, the eleventh



Tirthankara. After attaining enlightenment, Buddha, delivered his first sermon at Sarnath to five monks (*i.e. Kaundinya, Vappa, Bhadriya, Mahanama and Asvajit*) for redeeming humanity in 6th century B.C.E. This place is also significant for the foundation of a new religion and new order of monks (*Sangha*).

Ashoka (273-32 B.C.E.) the great *Mauryan* Emperor raised several monuments at this place including *Dharmarajika Stupa* and monolithic pillar surmounted by the lion capital. Archaeological excavations of the site have brought

to light many carved railing pillars ascribable to the *Sunga* period (second- first century B.C.E.). With the advent of the *Kushana's* in north India (first century C.E.), this tradition was growing further. During the Gupta period (fourth-sixth century C.E.) Sarnath became main centre of structural and artistic activities. Harsh Vardhana (606-647 C.E.) must have initiated fresh religious activities and restoration of the earlier building at this place.



Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang visited this place during his time. Kumara Devi, wife of Govinda Chandra (1114-1154 C.E.) of the Gahadavala dynasty built a large monastery *i.e. Dharmachakra-Jina Vihara* at Sarnath, which is probably the last massive monument raised here, after which the architectural and artistic activities came to a halt. In 1798 C.E. Mr. Duncan, the then commissioner of Benaras has written an account regarding the destruction of this place and discovery of a casket of green marble inside a stone box by Jagat Singh, Dewan of Raja Chet Singh of Banaras while dismantling the *Dhararajika* Stupa in order to

procure building materials in 1794 C.E.

Latter on, excavations were conducted at Sarnath by Sir Alexander Cunningham (1835-36), Major Markham Kittoe (1851-52), Mr. C. Horne (1865), Mr. F.O. Oertel (1904-05), Sir John Marshall (1907), Mr. H. Hargreaves (1914-15) and Mr. Dayaram Sahni (1927-32). Excavations have revealed seven number of monasteries, *Dhamekh Stupa*, *Dharmarajika Stupa*, Apsidal Chapel, Ashokan pillar, Panchayatan temple, monolithic railings, cluster of votive Stupas and number of sculptures, inscriptions, architectural members and other antiquities ranging from 3rd Century B.C.E. to 12th Century C.E. However in a recent excavation in 2014 this date goes back to 385 B.C.E. by C¹⁴ dating method.

DHAMEKH STUPA-: It is an important monument of Sarnath. It is perhaps commemorating the spot where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon. In search of the relic casket, Alexander Cunningham bored a vertical shaft through its center down to the foundation level and at a depth of 91.4cms. He found a slab with the dedicatory inscription "*ye dhamma hetu pabhava*" written in the *Brahmi* script of



1902 C.E.



6th - 7th century A.D. Further below he traced out a stupa made of Mauryan bricks. However the present diameter of this solid cylindrical tower is 28.5 meters at the base and 33.35 meters in height. Its total height is 42.60 meters including the foundation. The structure consists of a circular drum cased with decorated stone pannels up to the height of 11.20 meters from the ground above which rises the cylindrical mass of brick work about 6.0 meters. Eight niches are provided in eight directions which must have contained images of Buddha. The decorations suggest it to be of Gupta period.

DHARMARAJIKA STUPA:- *Dharmarajika stupa* was built by Ashoka to enshrine the relics of Lord Buddha. It is referred that king Ashoka opened seven original relic stupas (except *Ramgram Stupa* which was guarded by the *Nagas*) and collected



relics to erect 84,000 of stupas. *Dharmarajika Stupa* is one of them. Originally it was a small stupa of 13.49 meters in diameter. Subsequently it was enlarged in six

different phases. As per available records this huge structure was unknowingly pulled down by *Jagat Singh*, an official of Raja Chet Singh, king of Banaras, during 1794 C.E. in order to exploit building materials. A relic casket of green marble inside a stone box was discovered by him from this stupa.

ASHOKAN PILLAR-: These are the fragments of a 15.25 meters high monolithic pillar created by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (272-232 B.C.E.) made of Chunar sand stone, which was once surmounted by the famous four addorsed lion capital. This is an excellent example of the Mauryan art and displayed in the site museum (now the national emblem of India). The pillar bears 3 incipations (Ashok,



1904 C.E.



Present view

Ashvagosha of Koushambi and an early Gupta).

MULGANDHA KUTI:- This is the remnant of a huge temple which probably represents the spot where Lord Buddha used to sit in meditation. According to *Hiuen-Tsang* its height was 61.0 meters. It's thick walls were obviously meant for supporting a lofty super structure. The temple was raised on a square platform,



1904 C.E.

each side measuring 18.29 meters. The entrance was towards the East with a rectangular *mandapa*. In the front there was a long open courtyard. On the basis of

its architectural style and brick mouldings etc. the temple appears to be constructed during the Gupta period.

CHAUKHANDI STUPA--: Chaukhandi stupa is situated at a distance of about 11 km.



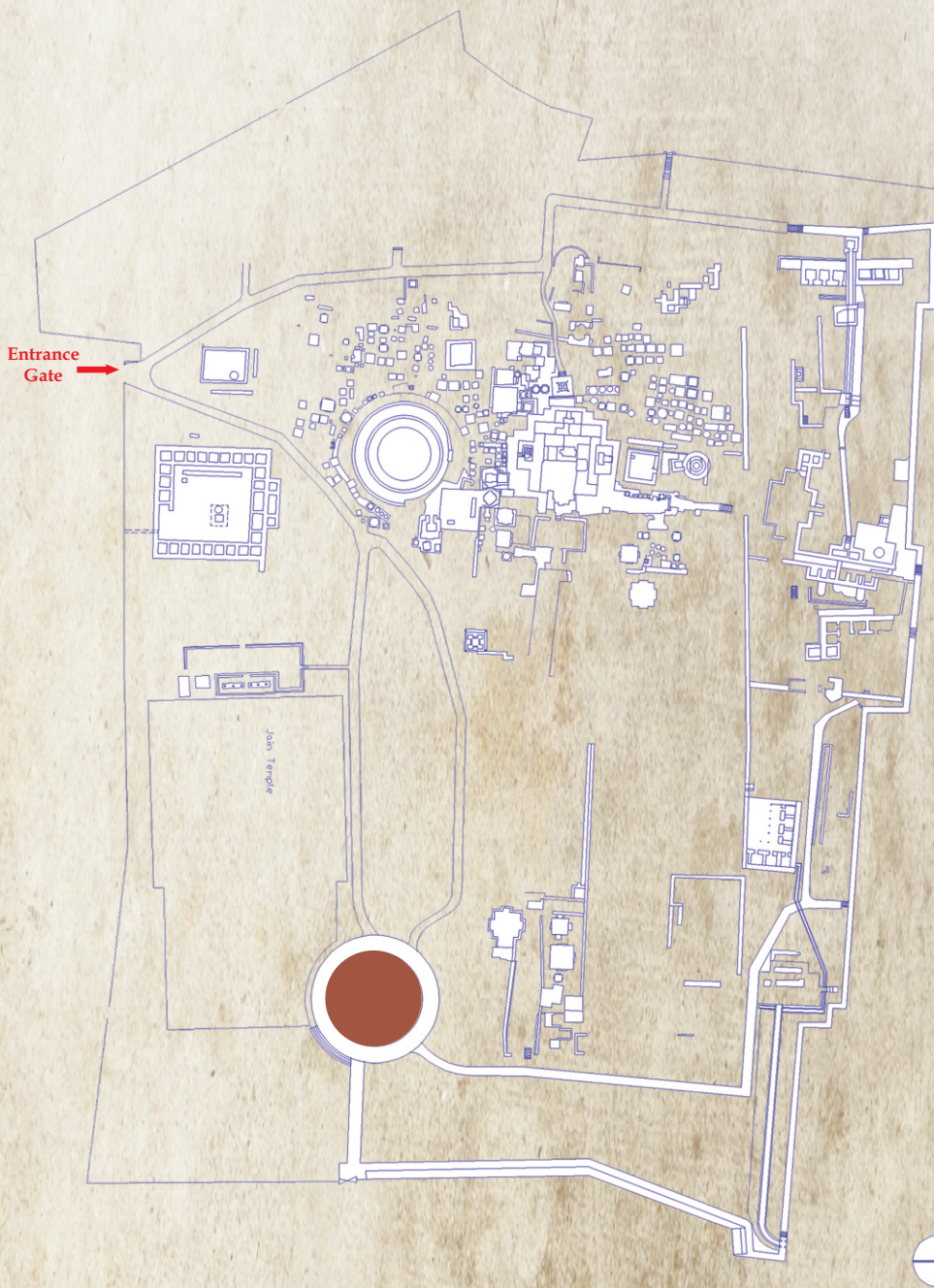
north-east from the Varanasi Cantt. Railway Station. This is a lofty brick structure crowned with an octagonal tower. The octagonal tower is a Mughal monument



built by Goverdhan, son of Raja Todarmal, in 1588, when he was the governor under Mughal emperor Akbar, to commemorate the stay of Humayun at this place for one night. An image of Gautama Buddha seated in *Dharmachakrapravartan Mudra*, two beautifully carved base reliefs and two leogryphs were found at this site which are carved in Gupta style and prove that this monument existed in the Gupta period.



Site Plan of Excavated Remains, Sarnath



Latitude: 25° 22' 51.14" N,

Longitude: 83° 1' 28.28" E

Sarnath is situated at a distance of about 10 kms. North-East from the Varanasi Cantt. Railway Station, which is connected with air, rail and road.



Visiting Hours

Monuments remain open daily from Sunrise to Sunset

Entry Fee

For the tourists of India, BIMSTEK and SAARC Countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, Afghanistan)

₹ 25/-

Visitors from Other Countries

₹ 300/-

Free entry for children below the age of 15 years

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