

Bodh Gayā Narratives in Ancient Literatures

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Abstract

Bodh Gayā is one of the most important Buddhist places of pilgrimage in the Buddhist world and known for Gautama Buddha's enlightenment and the existence of Mahābodhi Temple built to mark this event. Buddhist literatures such as Pāli Tipitaka, *Mahayana sūtras- Lalitavistara Sūtra* and Oral histories mentioning Bodh Gayā and are full of different stories, conflicts, and subtle complexities. This paper extensively discusses the illustrations of Bodh Gayā as a Buddhist Site in various Buddhist literature and Chinese travelogue.

Bodh Gayā is described in the Buddhist literature in connection with life events of the Buddha. The place where he attends enlightenment is named differently in the various Buddhist texts such as *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, *Mahayana Sūtra*, & *Visuddhimagga*. The lack of exactitude in the narrative raises the questions about the relation between the ancient place and its modern location and name. It also raises several questions about the site, such as: Is there any similarity between the Chinese traveller's accounts records and literary descriptions of these sites? Is there any mentioning of who inhabited these sites and the surrounding? What are the changes that were happening during different time period or kingdom which can be traced through different

accounts of three Chinese travellers or monks of different time period? Faxian and Xuanzang came in different periods of time in India and recorded Buddhist sites, *stūpas*, places, and their surroundings. It will help to understand later social and cultural development through these records. These Buddhist literary evidences played an important role to record the development of the Buddhist world. It also gives cultural, social and political understanding of an ancient period in relation to Buddhist sites. It is useful to understand how *stūpas* and monasteries were build and what changes occurred during the course period of time.

Introduction

Bodh Gayā is a landmark in the history of Buddhism. Located in the district of modern day Gayā, State Bihar, India; this is the place where prince Gautama or Gotama of Śākya clan sat in meditation under an *āsvattha* or *pīpal* tree (*It is called Ficus religiosa or sacred fig¹, a species of fig, which is found in the Indian subcontinent*) and attained Supreme Wisdom or *Sambodhi* (Perfect enlightenment or bodhi). This historical event happened at Uruvilvā or Uruvelā, a village which is identified with the modern village called Urel, about 15 km. from south of Gayā Railway Station (fig.1). Because of its sacred association, this locality came to be known as Buddha-Gayā (Bodh-Gayā). The *pīpal* tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment is called the Bodhi Tree and place known as *Mahābodhi*. Buddha-Gayā was also known as *Sambodhi* in the ancient history. *Sambodhi* got mentioned in the inscriptions of Aśoka's 8th rock edict as “*rājā dasavasābhisitto samto ayāya saṃbodhhiṃ*”² .

The eighth rock-edict and its translation follow as;

¹ It is a species of fig tree and found in Indian subcontinent.

² A.L. Basham, *Sambodhi* in Aśoka's 8th Rock Edict in 'The Journal of the international association of Buddhist studies', edicotr- A.K.Narain, USA: University of Wisconsin. Madisom, Vol-2, 1979.p. 81-83.

“Atikaṃtaṃ aṃtalaṃ Devānaṃpiyā nāma nikhamisu. Hidā migaviyā aṃnāni chā heḍisānā abhilāmāni husu. Devānaṃpiye Piyadasi lāja dasa-vasābhisite saṃtaṃ nikhamithā Saṃbodhi. Tenatā dhamma-yātā Heta iyaṃ hoti samana-bambhanānaṃ dasane chā dāne chā vudhānaṃ dasane cha hilaṃna-paṭividhāne chājānapadasā janasā dhammanusathi chā dhama-pali-puchhā chā tatopayā. Ese bhuye lāti hoti Devānaṃpiyasā Piyadasisā lāgine bhāge aṃne.”³

Translation— “For a (long) time past, kings used to go out on tours of pleasure. Here, there were chase and other similar diversions. Now king Priyadarśin, Beloved of the gods, repaired to Saṃbodhi (Bodhi Tree), when he had been consecrated ten years. Hence this was touring of Dhamma. Here this happens, namely, visits and gifts to the Brāhmaṇ and Śramaṇa ascetics, visits and largesse of gold to the aged, and visits to, instructions in Dhamma to, and enquiries about Dhamma of, the provincials. The great delight that (springs) from it is the extraordinary luck of king priyadarśin, Beloved of the gods.”⁴

³ Nalinaksha Dutt and Krishna Datta, *Aśoka and his edicts in Development of Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh*, Lucknow: Publication Bureau, Government of Uttar Pradesh. p 424.

⁴ Nalinaksha Dutt and Krishna Datta, *Aśoka and his edicts in Development of Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh*, Lucknow: Publication Bureau, Government of Uttar Pradesh. p 424-425.

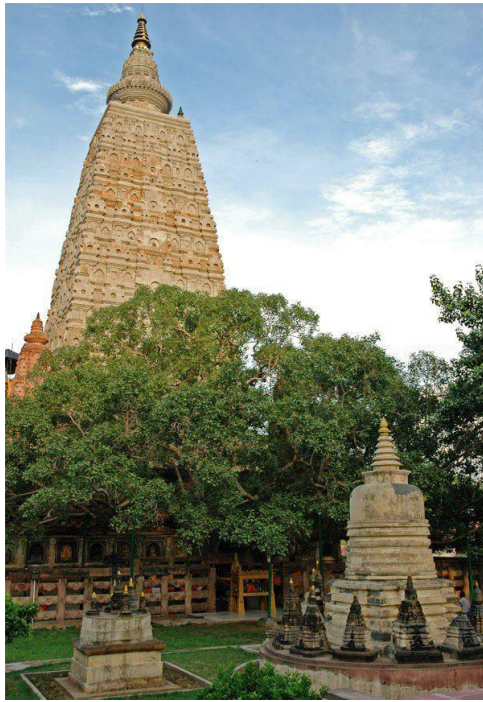


Fig. 1. Mahabodhi temple and Bodhi Tree, Bodh Gayā.

Stories of Bodh-Gayā in ancient Buddhist and Brahmanical literatures

In ancient literature, Buddha Gayā is mentioned in different stories and events. Such as, in the *Mahāvamsā*, which is a story about the life and labours of Buddhaghosa⁵, is narrated as:

“A Brāhmana youth, born in the neighbourhood of the terrace of the Bodhi Tree (in Magadha), accomplished in the ‘Vijjā’ and ‘sippa’, who had achieved the knowledge of the three ‘Vedas’... There upon having assembled the priesthood who had acquired a thorough knowledge of the doctrine of Buddha, at the Bodhi tree, he commenced to read out (the work he had composed)... Thereafter, the objects of his mission having been fulfilled, he returned to *Jambudīpa* to worship at the Bodhi Tree (*Uruvelāya* in Magadha).”⁶

⁵ He was a 5th century Indian Theravada Buddhist commentator and scholar.

⁶George Turnour, *The Mahāvamsā*. Colombo: Skeen, 1837.p.250-253.

Mahāvamsa of Ceylon also renders a village name *Uruvelā*. It also talks about Gotama's perfect enlightenment at Buddha Gayā recorded as follows:

“-having offered homage to these twenty-four Sambuddhas and having received from them the prophecy of his (future) buddhahood he, the great hero, when he had fulfilled all perfection and reached the highest enlightenment, the sublime Buddha Gotama, delivered the world from suffering. (Verse 10 & 11)”⁷

“At Uruvelā, in the Magadha country, the great sage, sitting at the foot of the Bodhi-tree, reached the supreme enlightenment on the full-moon day of the month Vesākha. Seven weeks he tarried there, mastering his senses, while that he himself knew the high bliss of deliverance and let (others) behold its felicity. Then he went to Bārāṇasī and set rolling the wheel of the law ... (Verse 12, 13 & 14)”⁸

“When he had sent forth these bhikkhus to preach the doctrine, and when he had converted the thirty companions of the company of Bhaddha then did the Master dwell at Uruvelā the winter through, for the sake of converting the thousand jaṭilas led by kassapa, making them ripe (for deliverance)”.....(Verse 15 & 16)⁹

In the Brahmanical literature too, Bodh Gayā got mentioned. In the *Vāyu Purāna*¹⁰ a section named *Gayā-māhātmya* is mentioned *Dharmāranya*¹¹ which, as its name implies, constituted a

⁷ The *Mahāvamsa* or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, Translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo: Published by the Ceylon Government Information Department, 1950.p 2. (Chapter I- verse-10 &11.)

⁸ The *Mahāvamsa* or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, Translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo: Published by the Ceylon Government Information Department, 1950.p 2. (Chapter I- verse-12, 13, & 14)

⁹ The *Mahāvamsa* or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, Translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo: Published by the Ceylon government information department, 1950.p 2. (chapter I- verse-15 & 16)

¹⁰ This is an ancient Purana (Sanskrit text) of Hinduism talks about shaivism.

jungle-tract and may be identified at least in part, with what the Buddhists call the forest of *Uruvelā* or *Uruvilā*.¹² *Vāyu Purāna* define as “a sanctified boundary inside which is enshrined the image of *Dharmesvara* or Buddha and reigns the Bodhi-tree *Aśvattha* of world-wide fame.”¹³ *Vāyu Purāna* is also mention Bodhi-Tree of Bodh-Gayā as *Bodhidruma Aśvattha*, at the foot of which the Buddha attained enlightenment.

‘Buddha Gayā’ as a name appears for the first time in the apocryphal inscription of Amaradeva.¹⁴ Also in another apocryphal inscription of the tenth century *Bodh-Gayā* is described as “a wild and dreadful forest” where Lord *Viṣṇu* as taken avatar of Buddha.¹⁵ R.L. Mitra says that

“the village could not have received the name from one of the disciples when the Buddha selected it for his hermitage, before attaining the rank of a saint. That the name of the place was *Uruvilvā* when Śākya retired to it is certain from the *gāthā* portion of the *Lalitavistāra*, where it is named; and as that portion of the work was composed immediately after the reformer’s death, it is impossible to suppose that any mistake was made about the name of a place which was so intimately connected with his life.”¹⁶ The *gāthā*, as we know, describe the place as the old *Uruvilvā* (*prācīna Uruvilvā*) with its charming woods, herbs, and creepers, on the banks of the *Nairāñjanā*.”¹⁷

¹¹ Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, *The Vāyu Purāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. *VāyuPurāna*, 111. 23-24.

¹² B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p. 16.

¹³ Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, *The Vāyu Purāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. *VāyuPurāna*, 111. 23-24.

¹⁴ Charles Wilkins, *Asiatic Research*, Vol.I, *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia*. Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1972. p.284.

¹⁵ Charles Wilkins, *Asiatic Research*, Vol.I, *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia*. Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1972. p.284.

¹⁶ Rajendralala Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972, p. 7.

¹⁷ Rājendralāla Mitra, *The Lalita-vistāra: Memoirs of the Early Life of Sakya Sinha (Chs. 1-15)*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1998.p. 327.

B.M. Barua has written extensively on Bodh Gayā from different perspectives and stated, “we are to understand broadly the ancient tract of Uruvelā, and narrowly the sacred site of the Bo-tree and its neighbourhood.”¹⁸

R.L. Mitra has also written that when Buddha was engaged in his profound meditation, “the village girls, cowherds, wood-cutters and grass-cutters, would take him to be a hobgoblin fond of filth, and cast dust on him.”¹⁹ Then the event is described as, “when the Bodhisattva sojourned on the Gayāśīrṣa Hill, he proceeded, walking all the way, to the village of Uruvilvā, belonging to a general (*senāpati*) and arrived there at. There he beheld the river Nirañjanā, and with its clear water, with a holy spot on its bank, and the village decorated with masonry houses, trees, herbs and pastures”. Greatly delighted, Buddha exclaimed: “Friends, this is a charming place, well worthy of myself... let us abide here”.²⁰ This is how in Bodh Gayā and its surrounding place names and event are recorded in different text too.

When Siddhārtha was at Uruvelā at the time of his enlightenment; Senāni or Nandika was the most prominent man of Uruvelā village; it was his daughter, who offered rice-milk to the Buddha.²¹ Also *Lalitavistāra* talks about the land and its surrounding, it is marvellous and picturesque and attracted Goutam on his first arrival here, before attaining Enlightenment.²²

¹⁸ Beni Madhab Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-gayā: Vol. II. Book II-V: Old Shrines at Bodh-Gayā* (Calcutta, Indian Research Institute, 1934. Bhartiya Publishing House, Sonarpur Varanasi, 1975), p.1.

¹⁹ Rajendralāla Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972, p.325.

²⁰ Rajendralāla Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972., p.311.

²¹ Rājendralāla Mitra, *The Lalita-vistara: Memoirs of the Early Life of Sakya Sinha (Chs. 1-15)*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1998. Pp. 334-35.

²² Rājendralāla Mitra, *The Lalita-vistara: Memoirs of the Early Life of Sakya Sinha (Chs. 1-15)*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1998. p. 311.

The *Therīgāthā*²³ also gives the name of these encircling hamlets such as Nāla, applied to Upaka, the Ājīvika. It apparently mentioned that Nāla was a hamlet near the Bodhi-tree (*Bodhimandasa – āsannapadase*) and the *Cūlavamśa* also give reference of a hamlet adjoining the Bo-tree as the birth-place of Buddhaghosa, who was a great Pāli commentator.²⁴

‘Sambodhi’ and ‘Mahābodhi’ are the name of the Great Bodhi Tree which is an *aśvattha* or *pīpal*, the Indian Fig. It is the famous tree and the place where Buddha gained enlightenment. The Bodhi Tree still stands there or replanted again and again during the different time periods. Other words associated with this Banyan tree are ‘Bodhi’ in the Barhut labels inscriptions²⁵, ‘*Bodhi-vṛkṣa*’ in the Buddhist literature and ‘*Mahābodhi taru*’ in the *Gayāmāhātmya* of *Vāyū Purāṇa*. This parapet surrounding the holy banyan tree is known as ‘*Bodhi-manda*’ or ‘*Mahābodhi-manda*’. The *Kālingabodhi Jātaka*²⁶ gives an account of the Bodhimaṇḍa and its surroundings prior to the advent of the Bodhisattva on this spot.²⁷ It also gives details about Bodhimaṇḍa, which was just a small silver-white sandy ridge around the Bodhi Tree with a radius of eight *karisas* and it was so clean, it has nothing upon it even not a single blade of grass. Creepers had encircled it with their serpentine courses and surrounded by woodland with lofty trees inclining all towards the Bodhi tree, which stood at the centre.²⁸

There are as many as eight other spots near the holy tree — important history with the early days of Budha’s enlightenment, which have been praised enthusiastically in most of the Buddhist work in Pāli and Sanskrit. After enlightenment of Siddhartha, he spent seven weeks around this

²³ It is a Buddhist scripture, a collection of short poems written by nuns from around 600 BCE. It is classified as part of the Khuddaka Nikaya, the collection of short books in the sutta pitaka.

²⁴ *Bodhimaṇḍasamīpamhi Jāto Brāhmaṇa-mānavo* (quoted in B.M. Barua, op. cit., p. 105).

²⁵ Cf. Bhagavato Vipasino Bodhi. Bhagavato Vesabhuno Bodhi Sālo. Bhagavato Sākaminino Bodho.

²⁶ A literature talks about the previous births of Gautama Buddha and Stories of Moral teachings.

²⁷ *The Jataka, Vol. IV: No. 479.: Kāliṅga-Bodhi-Jātaka*. Web. (Accessed on 10 Jan 2017).

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j4/j4043.htm>

²⁸ *The Jataka, Vol. IV: No. 479.: Kāliṅga-Bodhi-Jātaka*. Web. (Accessed on 10 Jan 2017).

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j4/j4043.htm>

spot, it is also mentioned in the *Viṇaya Piṭaka*. *Nidānakathā* mentioned that, Buddha spent his first week under the shade of the *Bodhimaṇḍa*, then the second week, under the tree (*animiṣa*) a few paces north-west of the Bodhi-tree. The third at the small space on the north between the tree and the *animiṣa* walking east and west which eventually came to be known as the Jewel-Walk shrine (*Ratana-Caṅkama Cetiya*); the fourth week in a small solitary chamber, where he developed the higher phases of his doctrine, a few yards north-west of the Bodhi-Tree. This chamber came to known as Jewel Chamber (*Ratana-ghara*); the fifth at the Neat-herd's banyan (*ajapāla-nigrodha-mūle*). Situated at the some distance from the compound of the holy-tree where he is said to have pondered over his new doctrine; the sixth week stay at the Mucalinda under a tree; and, finally, the last seventh week at the foot of *Rājāyatana*.²⁹ Details of four week (the first and the fifth, the sixth and the seventh) are elaborated in the *Vinaya-Mahāvagga* (i.e. *Viṇaya Piṭak's Mahāvagga Section*) and only all the seven weeks as fully described by the *Lalitavistār*.³⁰

At end of the seventh week, Buddha met with two caravan merchants, *Tapassu* and *Bhallika*. Who were going to north from Utkala (Orissa) and paid their homage to Buddha. Then enlightened one decided to propagate the truth to the world, so he proceeded towards to the famous Deer-park near *Vārānasī*. During the journey he met with *Ājīvaka Upaka* at a place between the Bodhi-Tree on one side and the *Gayāśīrsha* hill on the other. He is converted to Buddhism. The *Mahāvastu* and the *Lalitavistāra* has mentioned more or less same halting places

²⁹B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. pp. 125-27, & Rajendralala Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972, chap. II.

³⁰ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p. 128.

of the Buddha on his way from Gayā to Vārānasī, the places are *Apara Gayā, Chundadvolā, Lohitavāstu, Gandhapura and Sārathipura*.³¹

Glimpse of Bodh Gayā in Chinese travelogue/ accounts / Texts

Bodh Gayā is vividly described by the Chinese pilgrims who visited India. Faxian (399-413 C.E.) was the earliest Chinese visitor describing the status of Bodh Gayā, Kuśīnagar, Sarnath and other places where as Xuanzang and it sing in the seventh century described many places. It offers to see as to how these places keep changing once a period of time.

Faxian, the Chinese pilgrim, mentioned three monasteries (*saṃghārāma*) or sanctuary (*caitya*) in the region of Uruvelā and they were close to the Bodhi-Tree. One monastery was a memorable construction because it made by the king Meghavarna of Ceylon during the reign of Samudra Gupta. All the Buddhist sanctuaries in Uruvelā were seen by Faxian, comprising the votive structures and images, which became traditionally associated with the endeavours and wanderings of Siddhārtha. These Buddhist sanctuaries are related with the event of the Prefect Enlightenment, following with the seven periods or weeks and the triumphant conversion of the Jaṭilas. Descriptions of Faxian are in perfect agreement with that of Budhaghosa, where he credits not specially the great builder Aśoka, but rather indefinitely “after ages (*pacchimajanatā*) with all such erections”.³² Moreover, there is hardly any noteworthy point of difference between the itinerary of Faxian and the earlier or later Buddhist literary accounts, regarding the episodes

³¹ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p.128.

³² B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p. 129; & Tsiang, Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trübner, 1884.,p. IXI.

of the seven periods and the conversion of the Jaṭilas.³³ The hill, *Prāgbodhi* (*Po-lo-ki-pu-ti* or pre-enlightenment), and the caves are located by Xuanzang, a place that lies across the great river of Gayā and opposite the city and at a distance of 14 or 15 li (four or five miles) north-east from the Bodhi-Tree. This description by Xuanzang has reminiscent with that of Faxian where he too. The Prāgbodhi hill and the cave, acquired a special religious sanctity where “every year, on the day of breaking-up of the season of Wass (Varṣa or Buddhist Lent) religious lay-men from different countries” used to throng together “for the purpose of making religious offerings to the faithful.”³⁴

Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang³⁵ (600?-664 C.E.) in his account wrote that *Uruvelā* extended north-east 14 or 15 *li* at least from the spot of the Bodhi-tree as far as the *Prāgbodhi* hill. He reached there by crossing the Phalgu River the base of the *Gayāsīrsa* hill.³⁶ Southern side of *Gayāsīrsa* hill has an extensive forest-tract, known as *Vaṅka* (*Vaṅga* or *Vaṅkahāra*) *Janapada*. The area was inhabited by indigenous people, known as *migabeddkā*. From the topographical point of view, this jungle-tract may be identified with the modern Hazaribagh district and the tribe hunters seem to be none other than the ancestors of the Santals, Orāons and Mundas. They still inhabit those tracts.³⁷

³³ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975., p. 129-30.

³⁴ Tsiang Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trübner, 1884. p.114. Regarding the hill and the cave, see the note in the *Gayā District Gazetteer*, p.233.

³⁵ A Chinese Buddhist monk, Scholar, and traveller of Tang dynasty of China, who visited India in 7th century.

³⁶ Tsiang Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629) by S. Beal*. 2 Vol., 1884. p. 114.

³⁷ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p. 106-07.

Uruvelā was a great centre of *Jatila* (fire-worshippers) activities in those days.³⁸ The village of the local *Jatilas* was situated near the bank of the *Nairañjanā*, “which were destined to play an important part in the history of Buddhism and the other of *Brāhmanism*, has all through been maintained”.³⁹ The three brothers of *Uruvelā*, who were the *Kassapa* leaders of the *Jatilas*, attracted the attention of *Buddha*. Their activities had almost confined to the *Magadhan Kingdom*. The name of the oldest *Kaśyapa* was *Gayā-Kaśyapa* or *Kaśyapa*, the mountaineer, the second brother named was *Nadi* or *Sarita-Kaśyapa* or *Kaśyapa* of the river drive from meaning of the *Nairañjanā* or the *Phalgu*, and the third was *Uruvila* or *Uruvela-Kassapa*, or the *Kaśyapa* of the wood. Their names have relation with the prominent places in the locality.⁴⁰ In the *Uruvelā* region, *Kassapa* brothers had great prestige; *Buddha* undertook the arduous journey to *Gayā* and *Uruvelā* “to perform the most marvellous feat of converting the *Kassapa* brothers with their huge following”.⁴¹ The conversion of the *Kassapa* brothers to *Buddhism* has marked as an era of splendid growth and prosperity, an era of glorious triumph and tremendous success.

Buddha and his earlier wanderings are staying “served to create memorable historical associations affording good excuses for the cropping up of various *Buddhist* shrines of considerable architecture and sculptural value”.⁴² Even today *Gayā* and *Bodh Gayā* has major population of *Hindus*. On the basis of the present state of our knowledge, we can presume that *Uruvelā*, and its adjoining tracts have stronghold of *Brāhmanical Hinduism* and *Buddhism* gained considerable foot-hold in the area.

³⁸ *Buddhaghosa. Manoratha-Pūranī; Commentary on the Anguttara Nikāya* London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac, 1956. (Siamese Edn.), Pt. I, p.325-26.

³⁹ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975. p. 108-09.

⁴⁰ Rajendralala Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972.,p.9.

⁴¹ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House,1975. ,p.109-112.

⁴² B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House,1975., p139.

The new information that we get from Xuanzang travelogue is that the wooded and sandy strip of land between the two rivers, *Nairāñjanā* (*Ni-len-shan-na*) and *Mohānā* (*Mo-ho*) rivers, which now constitute the site of the village Bakraur (Vaṅkapura or Vakrapura), grew to be a sacred place of Buddhism in course of time because of related to Buddha's enlightenment.⁴³ The Hill, which was in those days known as *Kukkuṭapādagiri* or *Gurupādagiri*, and its nearby places known as sacred Buddhist places. These places got noticed by the great Chinese pilgrims. This region has a river named *Mohānā* on the eastern side, which creates a boundary of the holy region of Bodh-Gayā.

Thus, above discussions indicate that Buddhist monasteries had enormously grown in number all over the Uruvelā tract, and also the other sites, associated with the enlightenment of Siddhārtha and the early activities of the Buddha, including the hermitage of the Jaṭilas as noted above, had turned into places for votive constructions, installations and offerings of the Buddhists. Also, the Buddhist legends as that of the *Mātīposaka Jātaka*⁴⁴ came to be fully utilized by devotees to give a Buddhist stamp on the legend concerning "the time-honoured tank" (*Mataṅga-Vāpi*)⁴⁵. All these instances show the predominance of Buddhism in the limited region of *Uruvelā*.⁴⁶ *Uruvelā*, a small village without any previous historical or cultural importance, rose to be of great value in the Buddhist history as "the hermitage of one of the greatest religious reformers of

⁴³ Tsiang, Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trübner, 1884., Vol. II, p138-139.

⁴⁴ Viggo Fausbøll, and Thomas W. Davids. *The Jātaka: Together with Its Comm. Being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*. London: Trübner, 1891. Fausbø, No. 455.

⁴⁵ Tsiang, Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trübner, 1884. Print. Vol. II, p. 138-139.

⁴⁶ Tsiang, Hiuen, Fa Hian, Xuanzhi Yang Yun Sung Sāng Hwei, Daoyong, and Samuel Beal. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trübner, 1884. Print, Vol. II, p. 138.

the world of one who exercised the most unbounded influence on the mind of man”.⁴⁷ For over sixteen hundred years it was held to be,

“the most sacred spot on earth by at least one-fifth of the human race. For centuries, the stream of pilgrims flowed towards it without intermission. Princes from all parts of India vied with one another in enriching it with the highest treasures of art that they could command. Every spot where the Buddha had rested or taken his meal, every pool in which he had saved his person or washed his scanty raiment, every nook and corner connected in some way or other with his long-protracted meditations and self-torture, once had its recording stone; and nothing was left undone to produce an uninterrupted page of monumental history for the period he devoted to the acquirement of perfection in the knowledge of good and evil”⁴⁸

However, eliminated nearly the whole Buddhist sacred places at Bodh Gayā of this age, and what little remains cannot be explained without some idea of what the whole probably was.⁴⁹ As the story goes that after attaining perfect enlightenment, Buddha never visited Bodh-Gayā and the spot of the Bodhi-Tree again. But, he could not forget his association with the Bodhi-Tree and its surrounding events and areas, and while he lay on his death-bed at Kuśīnagar he specifically mentioned the spot of the Bodhi-tree suggesting it as one of the four memorable

⁴⁷ Rajendralala Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972., p. 21.

⁴⁸ B.M. Barua, *Gayā and Buddha-Gayā: Early History of the Holy Land*. Varanasi, India: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975, p.148, and For details see Rajendralala Mitra, *Buddha-Gayā: The Great Buddhist Temple: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*. Delhi, 1972., Chaps. III-IV.

⁴⁹ *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia*. Varanasi: Bharat-Bharati, 1972. Vol. I, p. 84.

places (the other three place are Lumbinī, Sāranātha and Kuśīnagar) worth visiting by a man of faith and a Buddhist pilgrim.

Concluding remarks

This research began with the question of the identity of Bodh Gayā as an ancient Buddhist site in various ancient literary texts. In ancient times these sites had their own religious and historical importance, mentioned in various literary texts and historical records. In numerous Buddhist texts, Bodh Gayā is mentioned as Uruvelā, where Gautama attained perfect enlightenment. Uruvelā is identified with the modern village called Urel, 15 km away from modern Gayā Railway station. The place is not just mentioned as the place where Gautama got perfect enlightenment but also talks about its surrounding as deep forest situated at the bank of river Nirañjanā. Uruvelā village is full with trees, herbs and pasture decorated with masonry houses. This picturesque description of the village scene also got mentioned in the *Lalitavistara sūtra*. It renders the richness of village life that would be due to the river, which works as trade route with other parts of the region.

The physical account of Uruvelā is noted in the travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. He also mentioned that the place is inhabited by indigenous people (*migabeddkā*). Identification that establishes a relation with a modern place is always a major core concern within scholars. They attempted to observe the changing nature of places by using the Pāli and Sanskrit texts. The nineteenth and twentieth century scholarships identified the spots and the *stūpas* marked the spots related to early days of Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gayā. *Kālingabodhi Jātaka* also talks about the events of enlightenment and talks elaborately about a Bodhi tree, Bodhimanda,

Jewel-walk shrine. After enlightenment, Buddha spent seven weeks at Bodh Gayā, mentioned not only in the *Vinaya* text but also other text such as *Lalitavistara sūtra*.

Another Chinese traveller, Faxian mentioned three monasteries in the region of Uruvelā built by the Ceylonese king, Meghavarna, a good example of ancient relation with foreign regions and their interest in building monasteries at Bodh Gayā. He has also written about places related to Buddha's enlightenment that had grown into sacred places of Buddhism with *stūpas* and votive constructions. For about sixteen hundred years Bodh Gayā gained attention from all over the world and getting enriched with new monasteries and temple marking at every spot related to Buddha.

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