

## **Pilgrimage and Patronage : The Connected Histories of Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ**

***Vijaya Laxmi Singh\* and Prem Kumar\*\****

*The cities of Gayâ and Bodhgayâ are celebrated pilgrimage centres for Hindus and Buddhists of the world. Since the early centuries, Gayâ and Bodhgaya were deeply connected to the different parts of the Indian subcontinent and across Indian oceans through trade, culture, and politics. Pilgrims not only travelled to Gayâ and Bodhgaya but also took the cities back to their parts of the world as memories, records, and relics. Inscriptional sources, traveller's accounts, and Gayâwal's records provide sufficient information to establish shared or connected histories of pilgrimage and patronage in both cities.*

**[Keywords :** Pilgrimage, Patronage, Connected Histories, Gayâwal's Records, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mahabharat, Sraddha, Pinda, Gayâ-ksetra Skanda Purana, Hiuen Tsang, Fa Hien, Ceylon, China, Burma, Myanmar]

---

**\* Professor, Department of History, University of Delhi, Delhi (India) E-mail: <ddvijayalaxmisingh@gmail.com>**

**\*\* Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Delhi, Delhi (India) E-mail: <prem.kumar.du@gmail.com>**

---

**CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES, Vol. 32, No. 4 (October-December), 2023**  
Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal

## **1. Introduction**

Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ are two sides of the same coin: the ancient city of Gayâ. The city is a celebrated pilgrimage centre for two major religions of the world, i.e., Hinduism and Buddhism; had a long, shared and connected histories<sup>1</sup>. Gayâ has been a land of liberation since the ancient period. Hindu pilgrims visit Gayâ for the salvation of the ancestor's spirits by performing post-funeral or *sraddha* ceremonies. Buddhist pilgrims visit Bodh Gayâ to liberate themselves, just like Buddha freed himself after enlightenment. In this paper, we explore the connected histories of Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ that are expressed through the interplay of pilgrimage and patronage. In ancient times, Gayâ was deeply connected to the different parts of the Indian subcontinent and across Indian oceans through trade, culture, and politics. The cultural encounters at Gayâ were explicit in religious pilgrimage and patronage. Ancient religious communities travelled to their corresponding sacred palaces and built and rebuilt architectures through patronage or religious endowments. Religious pilgrimage and patronage opened cultural dialogue between Hinduism and Buddhism at Gayâ and opened competitive avenues. With pilgrimage and patronage, the connected histories of Gayâ continuously evolved and are still evolving. A pilgrimage centre connects local, regional, inter-regional and long-distance religious networks. The connection is not based on the one-way movement from different parts to the sacred centre or city. The sacred city and its architecture also reached different parts of the world along with the pilgrims.

Much of the connected histories of Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ are known from the votive inscription, followed by literary texts, travel accounts and Gayâwal's records. These written records tell us about a shared history of the pilgrimage and patronage at Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ. The connected history of Bodh Gayâ was attempted while writing the connected history of India and the world by several historians such as Tansen Sen<sup>2</sup>, Upinder Singh<sup>3</sup> and Parul Pandya Dhar<sup>4</sup>. The pilgrimage and patronage at Hindu Gayâ were not taken into account as a site of study while discussing the Buddhist Bodh Gayâ. One of the major objectives of the paper is to bring forth the connected history of Hindu Gayâ to the world.

## **2. Gayâ, Bodh Gayâ and the Convergence**

Based on religious affiliations, literature divides the religious landscape of Gayâ into two Gayâ-*ksetra* and Buddha-*ksetra*<sup>5</sup>. Skanda

Purana mention the presence of two Gayâ – Adi Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ<sup>6</sup>. *Puruans* such as *Skanda Purana*, *Vayu purana*, etc., offer the mythical origin of Gayâ and Gayâ pilgrimage (Gayâ-tirtha). According to *Skanda Purana*, the Gayâ tirtha was formally established in Avanti. Afterwards, it originated in Kikata (Magadh) country<sup>7</sup>. According to *Skanda Purana* not only Gayâ but the Kikata (Magadha), the river Puna (Phalgu) and Râjgrha are highly meritorious. *Skanda Puran* also fixes the geographical extents of the Gayâ ksetra and Gayâsira to five krosas and one krosa, respectively<sup>8</sup>. Gayâ tirtha was situated in Mahâkâlavana<sup>9</sup>. According to *Skanda Purana*, the land of Gayâ was given to Brahmans by Nimi, the legendary king of Videha<sup>10</sup>. Gayâ is also called the city of Camatkarpura in *Skanda Purana*. According to *Vayu Purana*, Gayâ was among the three sons of Sudyumna, namely Utkala, Gayâ and Vinatasva; and the city of Gayâ was called the saintly king<sup>11</sup>. The name suggests that it was the capital of King Gayâ, the son of Samudravijya of Râjgrha, as mentioned in the Svetambara Jaina agama Uttaradhyaya sutra<sup>12</sup>. According to *Vayu Purana*, the holy place became famous by the name of Gayâsura<sup>13</sup>.

Thousands of pilgrims from all parts of India visited Gayâ or Gayâ-ksetra throughout the year to offer *pinda* or the rice ball (final death rites of their ancestors). Some of them also visited Bodh Gayâ and worshipped the Bodhi tree and Buddha image with the same purpose since the Kusana period. Gayâmahâtmya also prescribes Hindus visit Bodh Gayâ as a part of Gayâ *sraddha*. On the other hand, till the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhist pilgrims visited Gayâsira as a place related to Buddha<sup>14</sup>. Brahmanical Hindus also visited Bodh Gayâ and contributed towards the growth and development of Bodh Gayâ. Many Brahmans patronised the Mahabodhi temple through the religious endowment. Hiuen Tsang also testifies the same. When Buchanan Hamilton visited Bodh Gayâ in 1811, he found the temple dilapidated. Pilgrim from Gayâ came here to offer *pinda* and worship the Bodhi tree.

### 3. Pilgrimage Sites at Gayâ

Visnupada is the centre of the Gayâ pilgrimage. According to Barua the Mundaprishta is no other than modern Visnupad<sup>15</sup>. The Pretakuta or Pretasilâ described in Gayâmahâtmya is the hill of ghosts and sacred to Yama, a Hindu god, and another pilgrimage place. Pilgrims' chief bathing place is the Phalgu River's bathing ghats. The Phalgu is associated with funeral ceremonies, as Sita offered a *pinda* of sand, in default of rice, to the spirit of Dasratha, the father of Rama. The

Akshyavata, or undying banyan, is situated half a mile to the southwest of the Visnupada, immediately under the Brahmajoni hills (Gayâ sira hills). From the days of Mahâbhârata the Gayâûira was the prominent landmark of the town of Gayâ, writes Barua<sup>16</sup>. The pilgrimage at Gayâ concludes with the offering to Gayâwals<sup>17</sup>. Besides funeral rites, pilgrims also visited Gayâ to desire many sons, hoping that at least one of them would perform funeral rituals at Gayâ. Pilgrims from Bengal and east come mainly in *Chait*, while pilgrims from the northwest and western India come in the month of *Asin*<sup>18</sup>. Buddhaghosh also provides information about the connected road measuring three *gavutas* (6<sup>th</sup> to 7 miles) between the Bodhi tree to Gayâsirsha (Gayâûira) hills<sup>19</sup>.

#### **4. Hindu Pilgrimage and Patronage at Gayâ and the Connected Histories**

According to Barua, Gayâ had attained pre-eminence among the notable places of Hindu pilgrimage as early as the days of the Buddha<sup>20</sup>. *Mahabharata* also mentions the Gayâ as a sacred place of Hindus. The Ashokan inscription does not mention the name of Gayâ. However, Buddhist literature and early traveller's accounts do not support the Gayâ acquired pre-eminence in early India. Fa Hian visited Gayâ at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. During his pilgrimage to Bodh Gayâ, he found the city of Gayâ in 'desolate and desert' condition. Two and half centuries later, when Hiuen Tsang visited the town of Gayâ in the middle of the Seventh century AD, he found the city a small settlement with a thousand families of Brahmans and *rishis* (few inhabitants) whom the people highly respected. When Hiuen Tsang visited Gayâ, Gayâûira had been an important Buddhist pilgrim spot. Hiuen Tang also mentions a stupa on the top of the hill built by Aúoka. Based on the authenticity of the records, Barua doubts that King Aúoka built any Buddhist sanctuary in or near Gayâ<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, despite being a vigilant pilgrim, Fa Hian did not notice any stupa in Gayâ-*ksetra*. Both Chinese pilgrims found nothing worthy to be recorded except the decadent condition of the city. Literature does not provide a bright picture of the early phase of pilgrimage and patronage at Gayâ.

The second phase of pilgrimage at Gayâ started around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD when texts like *Skanda Purana* or *Vayu Purana* eulogized the Gayâ tirtha. Gayâmahâtmya in the *Vayu Purana* was written to glorify and propagate the image of Gayâ tirtha. According to Barua

Gayâmahâtmya is propaganda work written to attract a large number of pilgrims from different parts of India<sup>22</sup>. Legends were created to connect Gayâ to a different part of India. For example, the Gayâsura legend mentioned in Gayâmahâtmya. According to the text, when Visnu killed the demon, his gigantic body when stretched to the ground, his head rested on the Gayâ range of hills, his naval rested on Viraja hills (Jajipur) and his feet on the Mahendragiri (the hill at Rajmandri). In Jajipur, a town in the district of Cuttack (Odissa), there is a sacred well or pit within the enclosure of Jajipur temple called the Gayâ *nabhi* or Bamphi. People used to throw the *pindas* of their ancestors in the well. Barua dates Gayâmahâtmya not posterior to the Palas of Bengal<sup>23</sup>. The images enshrined in Hindu temples at Gayâ are older, though non-dated before the Pala period, the most ancient having been carved in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>24</sup>. *Skanda Purana* records a king named Visnusena from Mahishmati of Haihayas Clan who came to Gayâ to perform *sraddha* ceremony of his father, Indrasena<sup>25</sup>. Mahishmati was located on the Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh. It was also the capital of Kalchuris. After Ujjayinî, Mahishmati was the second capital of Avanti. The story symbolizes the transfer of *sraddha* tirtha from Avanti to Gayâ.

Pilgrims inscribed their inscriptions to commemorate their pilgrimage at Gayâ. Large numbers of votive inscriptions were made to record their patronage. Wealthy pilgrims and proxy pilgrims from different parts of India came to Gayâ and patronized sacred centres such as temples, *ghats*, tanks, *dharmasalas*, *maths*, etc. Apart from rebuilding the older ones, many new structures were also added by pilgrims from different parts of India. the proliferation of inscriptions at Gayâ from the mid-eleventh century onwards shows more significant pilgrimage traffic and patronage coming to the city.

An inscription reported by O'Malley (1906) reads that Vajrapani of Nayapala, dated 1060 AD, says that Gayâ was raised from a small place into Amravati (city of Indra noted for lofty decorated buildings)<sup>26</sup>. Another inscription dated 1242 AD records the pilgrimage and religious construction at Gayâ by some Rajput minister from northwest India<sup>27</sup>. Inscription of Kakatiya Prataparudra<sup>28</sup> (1199-1260 AD) of Warangal (Andhra Pradesh) records the performance of the Gayâ *sraddha* ceremony by Gauri, wife of Mallikarjuan (preceptor of Prataparudra), to secure the salvation of her husband. According to the record, she performed the *nitya-sraddha* for the emancipation of her husband's spirit. Inscription

of the time of Hoysala Narsimha III<sup>29</sup> belongs to the royal family of Hoysala from Dorasamudra (modern Halebid in Mysore state). The first inscription refers to a person named Appana as the son of a priest named Padmanabhba-ttopadhyaya of the temple of Hoysala king Vir Narsimhadeva. Appana also constructed a Gayâ-rajana-matha (*dhammasala*) for the pilgrims who visited Gayâ from Karnataka country from which Appana belonged. These persons, namely Rudrapada, Vishnupada and Gadadhara, witnessed the construction of the *matha*. Devaras engraved this inscription. The second inscription speaks of Chandiranna, son of Jakanna, an employee in the mint Vira Narsimhadeva, and his pilgrimage to Gayâ. From the two inscriptions, it appears that Appana and Chandiranna visited Gayâ at the same time.

Another inscription belonging to Krishnadeva Raya (1502-29) of the Tuluva dynasty of the Vijayanagar kingdom<sup>30</sup> refers to the king's installation of a *Vijaya-sasna* at Gayâ. The inscription is written by his court poet Nandi Timmana. According to D. C. Sirkar, as a proxy of his patron, poet Timmana visited Gayâ to install the victory rule. Sirkar regards the rule as *dhamma Vijaya sasana* rather than *Vijaya sasana*<sup>31</sup>. According to Sirkar, such kind of practice of sending proxy pilgrims on behalf of the lord was prevalent in medieval inscriptions<sup>32</sup>.

The inscription of Achyutaraya (dated 1531 AD)<sup>33</sup> also discusses the *dhamma-úasana* (religious merits) of King Sri-Vira Achutyaraya-Maharaya, Narasimha's son, Isvara's grandson and great-grandson of Timmaya. A person visited Gayâ on the king's behalf. The inscription states that certain Timmananna made the occupants of the Vijayanagar throne Gayâ-mukta (ancestors of the king emancipated at Gayâ). It means that on behalf of the king, Timmananna performed the Gayâ-*sraddha* of Achutyaraya's ancestors at Gayâ. Timmananna was probably a priest of the king. Besides Gayâ, the inscription also mentions the city of Vijayanagar (modern Hampi in the Ballary district of Karnataka). King Krishna Deva and his queen Tirumala Devi in 1521 AD, constructed a gateway that lies between Vishnupada temple and Surya temple<sup>34</sup>.

The Chaitanya Bhagavata and the Chaitanya Charitamrita mention the pilgrimage of Chaitanya, the Vaishnava reformers of Bengal, to the holy land of Gayâ. He visited Gayâ in the year 1508 AD and offered *pindas* to his forefathers at sixteen sanctioned sites- Siva Gayâ, Brahma Gayâ, Preta Gayâ, Rama Gayâ Yudhhthua Gayâ,

Bhima Gayâ, Brahma Kunda, Visnupad, Uttaramansa, Dakshinamansa, Gayâûira and the rest.

Maratha queen Ahilya Bai Holkar made the most generous endowments to Gayâ's temples, *ghats dharmshala*. In addition to the construction of the famous temple of Vishnu and a magnificent ghat on the Phalgu, she replaced the old temple at Pretaûilâ with a new one. She patronised many monuments at Varanasi as well. In the 19th century, Madan Mohan Datta from Bengal financed the stairs leading to the hills, Ramshilâ and Pretaûilâ. He also repaired old temples and built new temples on the two hills. He also constructed the road joining the Pretaûilâ with the town of Gayâ<sup>35</sup>. Rây Ballava, son of Rajâ Rây Ballava, the company Deewan during Hastings built a Dharmasala located on the right corner of the main ghat of Phalgu<sup>36</sup>. Ranjit Pandey, the minister of the raja of Nepal, donated the main bronze bell that hangs in the Visnupad temple. A British officer named Gillanders presented another bell to Visnupad temple in January 1790<sup>37</sup>.

## 5. Gayâwals and their Connected Histories

Gayâwal's records also mention the names of several kings, princes, landlords and other affluent pilgrims from Kashmir, Rajasthan, Bengal, Bombay, Mysore, and Baroda. Vidyardhi thinks the Gayâwal's information is very vague and incomplete<sup>38</sup>. The Gayâwals associated their religion with the Vaishnavism established by the Dravida Brahmana Madhava-charya in southern India during the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>39</sup>.

The professional lineage titles of Gayâwals also indicate local, regional, and subcontinental connections with different social groups. They adopted these titles after those professional groups. They adopted the title '*Baddihia*' after the village 'Badi Dih', where the family is believed to have taken shelter when some Muslim ruler attacked the city of Gayâ<sup>40</sup>. Some Gayâwals adopted the title of 'Bhaiya' after princes of royal families of Madhya Pradesh, as the princes were called '*bhaiya*'<sup>41</sup>. They adopted the titles of '*Dubhaliya* and '*Katariyar*' after the village name Dubhaliya and Katari' where they took their shelter at the time of Muslim attacks<sup>42</sup>. Those who got pilgrims from hills or '*Garva* and '*Pahar*' were called '*Garai* and '*Pahari*' respectively<sup>43</sup>. Gayâwals specialised in Punjabi pilgrims were called '*Jhangar*'<sup>44</sup>. Some Gayâwals borrowed the title '*Mahata*' from their south Indian pilgrims<sup>45</sup>.

## 6. Pilgrimage Beyond Gayâ-sraddha

Beyond *sraddha*, pilgrims also visit Gayâ to worship many gods such as Surya, Siva, Durga, etc. In Chaita and Kartika months, many devotees visit Suraj Kund, Uttaramansa and the sun temple at Brahmani ghat. The Gayâ Sitala temple inscription of Yakshapala (dated 1077-85 AD) refers to a *shudra* vassal named Visvarupa of the king of Gauda and his son Yakshaapala built a temple of Maunaditya, Sahtralinga, Kamal- rdhangina Narayan (combined image of Visnu and Laxmi just like Ardhanarishvara, Someshvara, Phalgunath, Vijyaditya and Kedara, dug a tank called Uttramanasa, and established hall of charity<sup>46</sup>. According to Rana P. B. Singh Yakshapal installed a 1.5-meter-high sun statue<sup>47</sup>. According to Rana P. B. Singh, before Gayâ became closely linked with Vishnu's presence and *sraddha*, sun worship may have been a dominant feature of the area. The widely scattered stone slabs depicting nine *graha* with prominent of the sun support this possibility<sup>48</sup>. The sun temple with a sun god statue is one of the oldest temples in Gayâ. However, Buchanan based on inscriptions, dates it to the thirteenth century by Pratap Rudra of Warangal. The adjoining sun tank was rebuilt with bricks and plasters by Mitrajit of Kashmir in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## 7. Buddhist Pilgrimage and Patronage at Bodh Gayâ in Connected Histories

Records of pilgrimage and patronage at Bodh Gayâ go back to the third century B.C. The 8<sup>th</sup> rock edict of King Aúoka records the pilgrimage of the king to the Bodh Gayâ (called Sambodhi) around 260 BCE. Asoka is said to have built a chaitya at the site of the Bodhi tree under which Buddha meditated. The Asokan visit is also sculpted in the relief of the Bharhut stupa and the eastern gateway of the stupa no one at Sanchi, both dated 2<sup>nd</sup>- 1<sup>st</sup> BCE. Ashokan building of chaitya at Bodh Gayâ is also mentioned in the Burmese inscriptions at Prome in Myanmar and Bodh Gayâ.

King Meghavarma, the king of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), was the first Asian king who sent envoys with valuable presents to Samudragupta and sought permission to erect a monastery for the residence of Ceylonese pilgrimage at Bodh Gayâ. When great Chinese travellers Fa Hian and Hiuen Tsang came to Bodh Gaya, they heard about the Ceylonese pilgrimage legacy and mentioned them in their accounts. Fa Hian wrote about the monastery built by the Ceylonese king, and

according to Hiuen Tsang, the king of Ceylon just sent one pilgrim, his brother, who took to monastic life. To facilitate his brother's visit, the king built a monastery at Bodh Gayâ. On the other hand, Wang Hiuen-t'se says that King Meghavarma sent two monks on pilgrimage, named Mahanama and Upa (Upasena). Both are mentioned in the inscription of Mahanama II, dated 587 AD. A tenth-century Sri Lankan inscription from Ramkale near Sigiriya also confirms Mahanama visit and gives patronage at Bodh Gayâ<sup>49</sup>. According to the Ramkale inscription, Mahânâma visited Bodh Gayâ thrice in his lifetime<sup>50</sup>.

Besides the institutional patronage, the votive at rail bars of stone railing shows the beginning of gifts at Bodh Gayâ by different individual pilgrims such as Amogha, Patiharaka, Buddharakashitâ, etc. Buddhara-kashitâ was the earliest known Ceylonese pilgrims to Bodh Gayâ. According to Barua, King Meghvarama sent any pilgrim from Ceylon, must be other than Buddharakashitâ<sup>51</sup>.

Apart from building monasteries, pilgrims started donating objects like images of Buddha, railings, and a gateway to the temple. An inscription on an image of Buddha reads, "Om this is the appropriate religious gift of the elder Mahanama, a Buddhist monk an inhabitant of Amardvipa (Sri Lanka)." Two other Buddha images were also donated by three other Buddhist monks of Ceylon named Dharmadasa, Dharmagupta and Damshttrasena. They came on pilgrimage together with Mahanama II of Amardvipa. Dharmaguta and Damshttrasena jointly gift one image and both are mentioned as residents of Tishyamratirtha. Tishyamratirtha is a place on the island of Lanka, and Damshttrasena, too, is a Singhalese name, argues Barua<sup>52</sup>.

Chinese traveller, Fa Hien visited Bodh Gayâ in 409 AD and mentioned about great pagoda (temple) at the site. Fa Hien visited the monastery and mentioned that the monastery was sheltering 5000 monks<sup>53</sup>. On his first trip to the Indian subcontinent, another Chinese pilgrim-traveller Hiuen Tsang first visited Râjgrha and then Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gayâ, where he placed an inscription within the Bodhi tree where Sakyamuni attended the enlightenment. The mission also accompanied an artisan named Song Fazhi who drew images of Buddhist architecture and artefacts that were replicated in China<sup>54</sup>. When Fa Hian came to Bodh Gayâ, the shrine was a simple and decent structure. But two and half centuries later,

when Hiuen Tsang came to Bodh Gayâ, he drew a flourishing picture of the Mahabodhi temple. Hiuen Tsang also attests to the gift of images made to the Mahabodhi temple. He credits a Brahmin votary of Siva-Maheshvara with the costly erection of a temple at Bodh Gayâ, and his younger brother excavated a tank with a flowery bank on the south side of the great shrine. The Buddha image enshrined in the main shrine is praised as the handiwork of the skilled Brahmin artist employed by the builder.

Soon after the introduction of Buddhism into Vietnam in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the first batch of pilgrims came to India. Two monks named Khuy Sung and Minh Vien took a ship, and via Sri Lanka, they landed on the west coast of India, and from there, they came to Bodh Gayâ. From Bodh Gayâ, they went to Râjgrha, after which Khuy Sung became sick and died at the age of 25<sup>55</sup>.

Ceylonese pilgrimage continued in the coming centuries. Another Sanskrit inscription of the stone railing mentions the name of a Ceylonese pilgrim, Prakhyatakritti, who visited Bodh Gayâ in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. The votive inscription of Udayasri, written on the pedestal of a Buddha image, yields a record of the Singhalese pilgrimage to Bodh Gayâ. Udayasri was an upâsaka or layman who came on pilgrimage with his wife and son. An inscription from Ghuriyavan (Gayâ) talks about donating an image. The image on which the description is inscribed belongs to Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara modelled per the characteristic features of Pala period sculpture (8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century). The purpose of the inscription is to record a donation of an image of Bodhisattva by a person named Yaúodharâ, an inhabitant of Abhayagiri Achala. Abhayagiri Achala is identified as Abhayagiri Vihara (monastery), located on a hill to the north of the capital city of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. The Ceylonese monastery at Bodh Gaya also succeeded in getting land grants. According to the Janipura stone inscription, found 10 km west of Bodh Gayâ, Pithapati Jaysena, the son of Buddhasena, granted a village for the maintenance of the monastery to the Ceylonese monk Mangalavamin. The inscription shows that Acharya, with the Sena title, continued ruling over the region<sup>56</sup>. Buddhasena was a pilgrim from Dattagalla in Ceylon who gifted an image of the Buddha at Bodh Gayâ.

The eleventh century witnesses an upsurge in pilgrimage and patronage at Bodhgaya. The 11<sup>th</sup> century also brought the second great epoch of the Chinese pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. Chinese

dynasties like Han and Song (Sung) promoted and patronized pilgrimage. The pilgrimage to Bodh Gayâ by Chinese monks is evidenced by four inscriptions belonging to the Song dynasty. Out of four, the first three are dated to 1022 and the fourth to 1033 AD<sup>57</sup>. Five 11<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese inscriptions are also found at Bodh Gayâ<sup>58</sup>. All Chinese inscriptions record the endowments made by Chinese monks. According to one inscription, on the command of the Song emperor, a monk gifted a stone stupa at Bodh Gayâ. The inscription of pilgrim Chi I shows that he was a priest of the great Han dynasty. He came twice to the kingdom of Magadha to gaze upon the diamond throne (Vajrayana). Hwei Tsci and Kwang Fung accompanied him for the second time. The longest Chinese votive inscription, dated 1021 AD, is devoted to pilgrim Yun Shu from China's western (Yellow) River. On his first visit to Bodh Gayâ, he became associated with Chiang Hsia-Pias, another Chinese priest who had come there earlier. He was also accompanied by two pilgrims named I-Ching and I-Lin. I-Ching and I-Lin set up a separate inscription dated 1029 AD, the 6<sup>th</sup> regnal year of the great Sung dynasty. I-Ching and I-Lin inscriptions also mention another priest from the monastery of the commencement of holiness in the eastern capital named Yu-Pin. Lastly, the inscription of Hui wen, dated 1033 (the second year of Ming Tao), records the erection of the diamond throne at Bodh Gayâ.

The 11<sup>th</sup> century also began a long-term relationship between Burma and Bodh Gayâ. The Burmese King Kyanzittha of Pagan (1084-1112 CE) sent the first Burmese mission to the Mahabodhi temple and Bodhi tree. Pyuthkin, the prince; Radha, the minister; and Waradathi, the Buddhist, successfully repaired the Mahabodhi shrine's first Burmese repair. According to Burmese inscriptions, Burmese rulers sent three such missions to Bodh Gayâ. The purpose of these missions was to repair the Mahabodhi temple. The Shwesandaw Pagoda inscription at Prome, dating approx. 1100 CE, reads as:

"In this respect, no other king is like him. Thereafter, the holy temple of Sri Bajras, of three ..., destroyed by the kings ..... King Kyanzittha (Sri Tribhuvanadityadhammaraja) got together jewels of diverse kind and sent them in a ship with intent to build up the holy temple of the glorious Sri Bajra (Vajrasana), to buy (land) ..., to dig tank, to irrigate arable land, to make dams, in order to burnt tapers that should never be allowed to go out, to present drums..., xylophones, singing dancing, finer than

before. In this respect, too, no other king is like him. Therefore, the greater building which Dhammasoka built, which were old in ruin, king Tribhuwanadityadhammaraja proceeded to build a new, making it finer than ever before".<sup>59</sup>

Another inscription that records the Burmese connection is found at Bodh Gayâ, which dates back to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The inscription reads :

"When 218 years of the Buddha's dispensation has eclipsed, one of the 84000 chaityas built by Sri Dhammasoka, the king of Jambudvipa, at the place where the milk-rice offering had made (Sujata offering of payasa to Siddhartha at Bodh Gayâ), fell into ruin due to stress of age and time. A senior pansaku monk repaired the chaitya. Thereafter, it fell into ruin again. The 'king of the law, 'lord of the white elephant' sent his acarya Dharmarajaguru to repair it, and the latter took his pupil, Sri Kassapa. When the finance was found to be insufficient, at the request of a Vanavasi monk, Putasin Man (Buddhasena, named a local ruler) extended a helping hand, which seemed to have involved financial assistance. The work was thereafter resumed and continued from 1296 to 1298 CE".

Bodawpaya, king of upper Burma and ruler of the Alompra dynasty of Ava sent a Buddhist mission to Bodh Gayâ. The predecessor of Burmese king Thibaw sent a second repair mission to Bodh Gayâ. Asokavalla, the Buddhist king of Sapadalaksha (Sivalik), built a monastery installed a Buddha image, and employed cook Mamaka and keeper Harichandra to prepare offerings to the deity. Sahanasana, the treasurer of Prince Asaratah, the younger brother of Asokavalla, made meritorious patronage at Bodh Gayâ. Dhammazedhi was the famous king of lower Burma and author of the Kalyani stone inscriptions who sent a Buddhist mission to Bodh Gayâ to make a drawing of the holy shrine for building a model in his capital. Sri Dharmarajaguru from lower Burma, the elder brother of King Sahadevinda, was gifted a large copper guilt umbrella.

Bodh Gayâ's connected history is explicitly reflected in patronage showered upon Bodh Gayâ by different rulers at different points in time. Burmese kings not only sent pilgrimage missions to repair the Mahabodhi temple, but they also built monasteries at Bodhgaya and a replica of the Mahabodhi temple at their places. For example, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hrilo Minlo, who ruled from Pagan, built

a temple modelled on the Mahabodhi temple of Bodh Gayâ. When pilgrims visited Bodh Gayâ, they brought some articles such as clay tablets as mementoes or souvenirs to memorise their visit to the sacred city. These pilgrimage items show the two countries' backward and forward links. For example, the Bodh Gayâ tablet is found stamped at Kyaunak Gu Cave temple Began dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The replication of Mahabodhi temple in the Burmese tablets is natural considering the link Myanmar had with Bodh Gayâ, argues Suchandra Ghosh<sup>60</sup>. The manufacturing techniques of these tablets were also adopted from Bodh Gayâ. Travelling of Mahabodhi images in the form of tablets is the best manifestation of the connected history of Gayâ with Myanmar.

Apart from the significant influx of pilgrims from China and Myanmar, the 11<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed subcontinental pilgrimage. In 1011 AD, a great teacher Atisa from Bengal visited Bodh Gayâ<sup>61</sup> for ordination before going to Tibet. Around the same time, famous translator Richen Sangpo (959-1051) came to complete his study at Bodh Gayâ<sup>62</sup>.

A 12<sup>th</sup>-century inscription from Bodh Gayâ also mentions the presence of Singhalese samgha (Sri Lankan) at Bodh Gayâ. The presence of Singhalese sangha indicates the inflow of Sri Lankan pilgrims at Bodh Gayâ. The Sri Lankan pilgrims also brought an influx of income to the temple. Besides Burmese and Sri Lankans, there were also pilgrims from China and Tibet. According to a Sanskrit inscription Prakhyatkirtti, a Sri Lankan monk, not only built a new temple just next to Vajrasana but also repaired the old one and gifted 100 cows for a perpetual lamp placed before the brass image of Buddha. He also provided to dig a water reservoir and lay land for monks' needs.

Pilgrims from different parts of the subcontinent also visited Bodh Gaya A votive inscription also mentions a pilgrim named Viryendra from the great monastery of Sompura and an inhabitant of Samatata attract which formed a part of ancient Bengal. According to Barua, the last cycle of Buddhist pilgrimage to Bodh Gayâ from different parts of India started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>63</sup>. Many inscriptions are dated 1359 AD (two), 1365, 1385, and 1388 AD. The rest of them do not bear dates. The inscription dated 1385 mentions the epithet Karasaka. Karasa was probably a locality in the Punjab or Sind. This shows that Buddhist pilgrims from northwest India also

turned up at Bodh Gayâ. An inscription (on the old stone railing) of Pandita Jinadasa engraved by Samgatta records that Pandita Dinadasa hailed from Parvata. In all its possibilities, Parvata mentioned in the votive inscription is none other than Multan<sup>64</sup>. Between 1302 and 1331 several pilgrim batches came to Bodh Gayâ from Sindh and, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, from Multan, all evidenced by granite paving stones.

The third phase of the Chinese pilgrimage to Budh Gaya began at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1401-02 a delegation of the Ming emperor and Hou Xian also visited Bodh Gayâ. According to Tansen Sen, the Chinese pilgrims visited Bodh Gayâ through both maritime and overland routes. During the early Ming period, the pilgrim named Hou Xian (1403-14-27) went to Bengal and Bodh Gayâ by both the overland route through Tibet and the maritime route through Sumatra<sup>65</sup>. A Buddhist monk from south India visited Bodh Gayâ in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from Bodh Gayâ, he visited Afghanistan, Kashmir, Ladakh, Sri Lanka, Java, Laccadives, Tibet, Burma, Lumphun in northern Thailand, and even East Africa<sup>66</sup>. Around the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a Nepalese pilgrim named Abhayaraj came to Bodh Gayâ and resided here for several years. During his stay at Bodh Gayâ, he made a layout of the Mahabodhi temple. On his return, he constructed a more miniature replica at Patan near Kathmandu<sup>67</sup>. In the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century, a copy of the Mahabodhi temple was also built at Mrauk U, the ancient capital of Arakan. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a mission was sent to Bodh Gayâ to take saplings of the bodhi tree. Inscriptions from Burma and Bodh Gayâ indicate that Bodh Gayâ received not only regular pilgrims from Burma but also substantial patronage in the form of royal endowment whenever they found the shrine in bad shape. Kings of Burma took a personal interest in conserving the shrine at Bodh Gayâ. According to Upinder Singh, among the all-Buddhist sites of India, Bodh Gayâ seems to have been of preeminent importance when it came to the trans-regional endowment<sup>68</sup>. Through these endowments, Bodh Gayâ possesses the longest and largest trans-regional history.

In 1773, the Puchen Lamba from Tibet sent nine monks and three laymen led by Tung Rampa to Sarnath and Bodh Gayâ. The king of Varanasi welcomed them, and in their return, the gifted Lama a small model of the Mahabodhi temple along with a watch and elephant tusks<sup>69</sup>.

Generous endowment to Bodh Gayâ from Burmese kingdoms became intense in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three inscriptions at Bodh Gayâ testify to this. In 1810, the Alompra dynasty of Burma started repairing the main shrine. In 1911 King Bodawpaya sent a mission to Bodh Gayâ to repair the temple. In 1877, Mindon Min the last Burmese king also sent a mission to Bodh Gayâ to repair and build a monastery. The Burmese king Mindon Min was also profoundly interested in conserving the temple and started the conservation work once again in 1877. The outbreak of the Anglo-Burmese war forced the work to be stopped.

## 8. Conclusion

Hindu Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ attracted a large number of pilgrims from India and the world. There is a doubt that Gayâ was a sacred centre from the epic time. However, in the absence of literary and inscriptional records, Barua is not correct when he argues that 'Gayâ had attained pre-eminence among the notable places of Hindu pilgrimage as early as the days of the Buddha'<sup>70</sup>. Chinese pilgrims (Fa-Hian and Hiuen Tsang) also present a grim picture of the Hindu Gayâ. The 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries were the formative period of Hindu Gayâ. The sculptural records at Bodh Gaya also indicate the beginning of image donations started in the Pala period. *Skanda Purana* also registers the shift of pilgrimage from Avanti to Gayâ; during this period, texts like *Gayâmahâtmya* were written to propagate the importance of Gayâ as a pilgrimage centre. As per epigraphic records, the actual phase of the Gayâ pilgrimage started in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and continued without breaks. The other side of the history of Bodhgaya is entirely different. Pilgrimage and patronage at Bodhgaya started with King Asoka in the middle of the third century BCE and gained momentum in the post-Christian Era. Buddhist rulers (China, Sri Lanka, Burma) patronised Bodh Gayâ by sponsoring restoration works with new projects and various endowments. According to Janice Leoshko, the Buddhist practice at Bodh Gayâ largely ceased after the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>71</sup>. However, records of pilgrimage, both at Hindu Gayâ and Bodh Gayâ, provide that from 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gayâ continuously received pilgrims and patronage and remained connected with the Indian and South Asian Buddhist communities. The 'Vijaya-asana' inscriptions of the kings of Vijayanagar at Gaya show that Muslim rule did not put obstacles to the pan-Indian pilgrimage that Gayâ received during the medieval time and continued after.

## Notes and References

1. Bodh Gaya is also called Urevela in Buddhist literature. Here, we are not debating what predates Buddha's enlightenment at Bodh Gaya or the tradition of ?raddha at Gaya.
2. Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World : A Connected History*, Ney York : Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
3. Upinder Singh and Parul Pandya Dhar (eds.), *Asian Encounters Exploring Connected Histories*, New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2014.
4. Parul Pandya Dhar (eds.), *Connected Histories of India and Southeast Asia*, New Delhi : Sage and Spectrum, 2023.
5. Gayâ Kshetra is the old town of Gayâ and its suburbs. It is also called Andar Gayâ.
6. *Skanda Purana*, V.i.59.1-8.
7. *Skanda Purana*, V.i.59.10.
8. *Skanda Purana*, V.i.59.13.
9. *Skanda Purana*, V.i.59.28-30.
10. *Skanda Purana*, I.ii.74. Mimi is also famous as a royal sage in Buddhist Jataka. Mahabharata also records his gift to the kingdom.
11. *Vayu Purana*, 23.19.
12. *Vayu Purana*, 43.8.
13. G. V. Tagare, *Vayu Puran*, Delhi : Motilal Banarsidaas, 1960, 911.
14. Ven. S., *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 2008, 74.
15. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 12.
16. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 137
17. Gayâwals are the religious guides and family priests of the pilgrims at Gayâ.
18. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 30.
19. Cited in Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 115.
20. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 147.
21. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 123.
22. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 2.

23. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 63.
24. Janice Leoshko, *Bodh Gayâ the Site of Enlightenment*, Bombay : Marg Publication, 1988, 74.
25. *Skanda Purana*, VI.31.34-104.
26. L. P. Vidyanthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 26.
27. Cited in L. P. Vidyanthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 26.
28. D. C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 103-08. The inscription is engraved on a black stone slab fixed into the eastern wall of the shrine of Shiva in front of the Vishnupada temple.
29. D. C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXII, 108-10. The inscription is engraved on the left door of a Mahadeva shrine under the *Pipal* tree in the compound of the Vishnupada temple. The record is written in the Nandi nigari character of about the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century AD It contains two inscriptions, and both refer to the same Hoysala king Narasimha.
30. D.C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 111.
31. D. C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 111.
32. D. C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 111. An inscription from Bothpur in the Mahbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh refers to a chief named Vittaya who sent two persons named Bachaya and Boppa to Varanasi. In another inscription of 1272 AD from the same place, a chief named Malyala Gunda gave some lands to several people for making a pilgrimage on his behalf to tirtha like Ramsetu, Úrîparvata, and Alampuru on the Tungabhadra.
33. D. C. Sirkar and K. H. V. Sarma, *Inscriptions from Gayâ, Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 113-15. This inscription is engraved on a sculptured stone in the Mahadeva compound right to the Vishnupada temple. The inscription is written in the Telegu character of about the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
34. *Buchanan*, 1911-12.109.
35. L. P. Vidyanthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 26.
36. L. P. Vidyanthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 27.
37. L. P. Vidyanthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 26.

38. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 28.
39. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 38.
40. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 141.
41. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 141.
42. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 141-43.
43. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 142-44.
44. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 142. Jhangar is said to be the title of certain Brahmans in Punjab.
45. L. P. Vidyanarthy, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gayâ*, Calcutta : Asia Publishing House, 1961, 143. Mahata is a royal position in south India.
46. "Gayâ Sitala temple Inscription of Yaksha pala (dated 1077-85 A.D.)" in D. C. Sirkar (eds.), *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilisation*, Vol-II, Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, 102.
47. Rana P. B. Singh, "Sacredscape and Manescape: Sacred Geography of Gayâ, India" in Asoka K. Datta, et al. (eds.), *Facets of Social Geography: International and Indian Perspectives*, Delhi : Foundation Books, 2012, 505.
48. Rana P. B. Singh, "Sacredscape and Manescape: Sacred Geography of Gayâ, India" in Asoka K. Datta, et al. (eds.), *Facets of Social Geography: International and Indian Perspectives*, Delhi : Foundation Books, 2012, 506.
49. S. V. Sohoni, "Epigraphia Miscellanea", *Journal of Bihar Research Society*, 42, 1-4, 1975-76, 190-204.
50. David Geary et al., *Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on a contested Buddhist site Bodh Gaya Jatak*, London : Routledge, 2012.
51. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 181-82.
52. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 183.
53. S. Krishnamurthy, "Inscription from Ghuriyavna", *Studies in Indian Epigraphy*, XLV, Mysore, 2020, 26.
54. Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*, New York : Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, 142.
55. Ven. S., *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Kandy : Buddhist Publication Society, 2008, 50.

56. Dr Bhagwant Sahai, *The Inscriptions of Bihar*, Patna : Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, 1983, 17. The Arama inscription refers to Acharya Devasena, who was Pithipati and a feudatory under Madanapala in 1157 AD.
57. Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade, the Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, 2003, 108.
58. Tang rulers also carried out religious activities at Rājgrha.
59. *Epigraphia Birmanika*, Vol 1, Part II, Archaeological Survey of Burma, 1960, 163-164.
60. Suchandra Ghosh, "Mapping Connections: Early Trade and Cultural Contacts between India and Southeast Asia" in Parul Pandya Dhar (ed.), *Connected Histories of India and Southeast Asia*, New Delhi : Sage and Spectrum, 2023, 24.
61. Suchandra Ghosh, "Mapping Connections: Early Trade and Cultural Contacts between India and Southeast Asia" in Parul Pandya Dhar (ed.), *Connected Histories of India and Southeast Asia*, New Delhi : Sage and Spectrum, 2023, 24.
62. Ven. S, *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 2008, p.52.
63. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 210.
64. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 212.
65. Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World a Connected History*, Rowman and Littlefield, New York : Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, 73.
66. Ven, S., *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Kandy : Buddhist Publication Society, 2008, 56.
67. Ven, S., *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Kandy : Buddhist Publication Society, 2008, 55.
68. Upinder Singh, "Gift from other lands South Asian Religious Endowments in India" in Upinder Singh and Parul Pandya Dhar (eds.), *Asian Encounters Exploring Connected Histories*, New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2014, 56.
69. Ven, S., *Dhammika Middle Land, Middle Way a Pilgrimage Guide to the Buddha's India*, Kandy : Buddhist Publication Society, 2008, 56.
70. Benimadhab Barua, *Gayâ and Buddha-Gayâ, Early History of the Holy Land*, Vol-1, Book-1, Calcutta : Satis Chandra Seal, 1934, 147.
71. Janice Leoshko, *Bodhgaya: the Site of Enlightenment*, Bombay : Marg Publication, 1988, 3. ★