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Lumbini- The Fountain of World Peace

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Abstract

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is located at Rupandehi district, Lumbini zone in the western terai region of Nepal. Asoka had visited Lumbini with His spiritual teacher Upagupta in the third century BC. He had erected a monolithic pillar with inscription in Brahmi script. He has mentioned that Lumbinigame is the birthplace of Shakyamuni and stone pillar indicates the exact point of birth. Asoka pillar is even standing at the site. It is the real evidence to identify the exact point of Buddha's birth spot. The Buddhist texts Lalitavistar, Jatak Nidan katha, Divyavadana and Mahavamsa have stated Lumbini as the birth place of Lord Buddha. Chinese pilgrims Shui-Ching-Chu, Fa-Hien, Hiuen-Tsiang and Wu-Kung have given a more accurate and authentic description of Lumbini in the fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth centuries respectively. The monumental and habitation structures; stone sculptures, terracotta human and animal figurines, fragments of pottery belonging to the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana, Gupta, Vardhan and Sena-Pāla periods, found here prove that Lumbini was well-populated till the early-medieval period and was frequently visited by the monks, nuns and other devotees from time to time. Structural remains of Mayadevi temple, Asoka monolithic pillar, Brahmi inscription, ancient stupas, vihars, marker-stone (conglomerate stone), and nativity sculpture of Buddha, Puskarini tank and fragments of pottery are the archaeological findings, which are real evidences to identify Lumbini as the birthplace of Buddha. Due to the establishment of outstanding universal value of the sacred site, it has listed as the world property list in 1997. It has proposed as the fountain of world peace and peace city. KWAAK's plan is also in pipeline for it.

Key Words

Lumbini, Buddhist literature, Chinese pilgrims, fountain of peace, peace city, structural remains, artifacts.

Introduction

Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha, is situated about 22 km from Bhairahawa (Siddharthanagar), the foot hills of the Himalayas, on the western bank of Telar River in Rupandehi district of Lumbini zone in Nepal. It is about 34 km. from Naugarh Railway Station on the North Eastern Railway of India. Buddha, known as the Lord of Asia, was born in Lumbini during the full moon day in the month of *Vaiśakha* in 563 BC. He was born under a sal (*Shorea robusta*) tree when Mayadevi was going to her maternal town on the occasion of delivery (Rockhill, 1972:15-17). *Suttanipata* has mentioned the earliest description of the birth of Buddha in Lumbini. After the birth of Buddha he took seven steps towards north and looking in all directions, he declared that "I am the foremost of all creatures to cross the riddle of the ocean of the existence, this is my last birth and here after, I will not be born again". The site is spelt as Rummindei or Rupandei (beautiful lady), the perverted form of Rupadevi, the queen Anjana of the king of Devadaha which was situated to the east of Kapilvastu in ancient time (Warren 1986:45). The site is called Lun- min and La-Fa-Ni by the Chinese pilgrims Fa- Hien and Hiuen-Tsiang respectively. In course of exploration of the ancient Buddhist sites General Cunningham has mentioned La-Fa-Ni is Sanskrit Lavani, a beautiful lady. In Buddhist literature it is known as *Pradimokha vana* blessed with various trees and flowers, which is compared to the Chittalata grove of

Indra's paradise in heaven. The earliest Pali text *Suttanipata* has mentioned that, "The wisdom-child, that Jewel so precious that can not be matched, has been born at Lumbini, in the Shakya land for well being and joy in the world of men". A Muslim historian of India named Abul Fazal has called Mokta (Cunningham 1990:351). It is also known as Paderiya (Parariya) where the Asoka pillar is located in the Nepalese Terai (Smith 1905:1-4). The name of the site is spelt *Lumminigame* and Lumbini *Vana* in the Asoka pillar Edict still standing at the same place. Mukherji has also mentioned the name Rummindei in his report. In the Magadhi language, being used in the north-eastern pillar edicts in India and Nepal, 'la' is invariable subsisted for 'ra'. The location of Lumbini is pointed out in the Buddhist literature, as well as, in the records of the Chinese pilgrims who visited India in the fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth centuries AD. As mentioned in *Jataka* story this *sal* garden was in joint possession of the Shakayas and Koliyas during the life time of Buddha. The *Mahavamsa*, a Ceylonese chronicle, and *Nidana katha* have also located it between Kapilvastu and Devadaha. The sal garden was the place of recreation during the reign of the Shakyas and Koliyas. *Buddha charita* of Asvaghosa describes Lumbini as "gay like the garden of *caitra ratha* with trees of every kind. According to Fa-Hien it is located about 50 *li* east of Kapilvastu (Giles 1981:38). Hiuen-Tsiang had also pointed out that it was about 80 or 90 *li*. (21.729 or 24.445 km.) north-east of arrow-well (Beals 1994:24). It was linked through popular '*Uttara path*' to Kapilvastu, Ramagrama and other important cities during the Buddhist period. The present location of Lumbini, the exact birth place of Lord Buddha, is absolutely clear (Rijal 1996:7).

Pilgrimage

The Buddhist texts *Lalitavistar*, *Jatak Nidan katha*, *Divya vadana* and *Mahavamsa* have stated Lumbini as the birth place of Lord Buddha. When Buddha was lying down on the death bed at the age of eighty in Kusinagar his disciples, monks and nuns surrounded him. On that occasion, he advised with feeling of holy reverence and awe, viz. the place where the *Tathagata* was born (Lumbini grove), the place where he had reached perfect enlighten (Bodha-Gaya), the place where for the first time he had proclaimed the law (Deer park near Varanasi), and the place of his final extinction (Kusinagar). Thus, Lumbini was declared as the sacred spot to the pilgrims and was visited by the scholars, nobles, Royalties and devotees from all over the world. According to *Kundala Vadana of Divyavadana* having led King Asoka into the Lumbini jungle, venerable Upagupta indicated with his right hand and said "*Asmin Maharaja pradase bhagavan jatah*", meaning 'Oh Great king! Here the Blessed one was born!' King Asoka made an offer of one hundred thousand gold coins and established the first *cetiya* or pagoda. In the next chapter *Asoka vadana of Divyavadan* we find the description of the site. In the Asoka pillar of Lumbini it is inscribed that "Here Bhagwan Sakyamuni was at the Lumbini village". It is translated by Fuhrer as to mean *King Piyadasi* beloved of the Gods (or dear to the Gods), having been anointed 20 years came himself and worshipped saying: "Here Buddha Shakyamuni was born", and he got a stone (capital) representing a horse, and the stone pillar erected. Because here the worshipped one was born, the village of Lumbini has been made free of taxes and a recipient of wealth (Fuhrer 1972:33). According to Hultsch it mean, 'when king, beloved of gods, had been anointed twenty years he came himself and worshipped (this spot).' Here Buddha Shakyamuni was born. He got a stone bearing horse made at this place. Hiuen-Tsiang's remark that the capital of the pillar contained a horse figure confirms to this interpretation. "As quoted by Rhys Davids, Buhler also says that "a stone horse was made and put on a stone pillar". King Asoka installed the stone column with a clear legend inscribed on it that it is the spot of Lumbini where the Blessed one was born. In Lumbini a brick railing was erected at a distance of 48.76 cm. from the base of the pillar and it had dentils also. After the visit of Emperor, many monks and nuns had started visiting the place. A large number of monasteries and

vihars must have been built for their stay in this sacred complex. A large number of artifacts of the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods were recovered in course of various excavations. It is thus clear that it continued to be a place of pilgrimage since the third century BC till to date (Giri 2003:177-322).

Chinese pilgrims have given a more accurate and authentic description of Lumbini. Shui-Ching-Chu describes that at Lumbini the Aśokan tree which was gripped by Mayadevī at the time of Siddhartha's birth was still in a living condition and an image of Mayadevī was placed there where devotees used to offer *puja* articles. The spot where Siddhartha's feet touched the earth first, Ashoka got the Siddhartha's foot prints shielded with stones. His description has been ratified by the noticeable findings discovered during the joint excavation of the Department of Archaeology, Lumbini Development Trust and Japanese Buddhist Federation from 1993 to 1997. It is clearly seen that Asoka had shielded the Siddhartha's footprints with stones in order to secure it. This significant news of the findings of the excavation was publicly declared by then Honorable Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on February 4, 1996. According to Fa-Hien in Lumbini the queen (Mayadevī) having entered the pool to bathe, came out on the north side, and after walking twenty paces, raised her hands and grasped the branch of a tree. She brought forth the Heir Apparent facing to the east. On reaching the ground, the Heir Apparent walked seven steps, and two dragon-kings washed his body. At the time of washing the tank was used. In this context Hiuen-Tsiang had stated that there was the bathing tank of the Shakyas, the water of which was clear as a mirror and the surface of which was covered with a mixture of flowers. 24 or 25 paces to the north of this there was fallen Asoka flower tree on the birth place of Bodhisattva. To the east from this place there was a stupa built by Asoka-*raja* on the spot where the two dragons bathed the body of the prince. Bodhisattva walked without assistance in the direction of the four quarters, seven spaces in each direction, and said, "I am the only Lord in heaven and earth; from this time forth my births are finished". To the east of this stupa were two fountains of pure water, by the side of which two stupas were built. To the south of this was a stupa, where Sakra, the Lord of Devas, received Bodhisattva in his arms. Close to the site there were four stupas to denote the place where the four heavenly kings received Bodhisattva in their arms. When Bodhisattva was born they wrapped him in a golden coloured cotton vestment, and brought him to his mother, and placed him on a golden slab (*bench*). They said, "The queen may rejoice indeed at having given birth to such a fortunate child!" If the Devas rejoiced at the event how much more could the men. By the side of these stupas there is a great stone pillar, on the top of which was the figure of a horse built by Asoka. It was broken off in the middle and fell to the ground due to the contrivance (thunder stroke) of a wicked dragon. By the side of it is a little oil river flowing to the south-east, where Mayadevi had brought forth her child to wash and to purify herself (Beal 1994:25). After Hiuen-Tsiang many other pilgrims had visited this place from time to time. One of them was Wu-Kung who came in 764 AD. Due to the absence of records very little is known about the condition of the area. The monumental and habitation structures, stone sculptures, terracotta human and animal figurines, fragments of pottery belonging to the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana, Gupta, Vardhan and Sena-Pāla periods, found here prove that Lumbini was well-populated till the early-medieval period and was frequently visited by the monks, nuns and other devotees from time to time. The names of Jitari Malla (1287-89 AD) and Ripu Malla (1312 AD) were engraved on the stone columns (pillars) at Nigalihawa and Lumbini garden (Fuhrer 1972:33-34). It consists of the words, "*Om mani padme hum, shree Ripumallaschiran jayatu, 1234*". The former portion is a Mahayani Buddhist prayer and the later portion means "prince Ripu Malla, be victorious for long 1234". The year 1234 in the Saka era, corresponding to 1312 AD. Bhuwan Lal Pradhan has claimed that Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 AD) and Aurangzeb (1668-1707AD) were mainly responsible for the

destruction of cultural heritage and property of the Lumbini- Kapilvastu region. During the reign of Mukunda Sen I (1540-1575 AD), Mukunda Sena II (1750-82 AD) and Mahadatta Sena (1782- 93 AD) in Palpa the previous religious condition in the region could not be retained. In the modern period VVIP, VIP as well as monks-nuns have also visiting to the sacred site due to the inquiry of peace (Khatry 2002:48-49). All the peace loving people had visited Lumbini from ancient to modern periods. Their main target is to keep peace and compassion in human beings. International community is working for the Peace Movement of Lumbini and Buddha (KWAAC 2013). Nepal government has not approved even now.

Discovery

From the last decade of the eighteenth century British scholars in India got interested in the rich cultural potentiality of the region. Sir William Jones and others formed the 'Asiatic Society' in 1784. Under the aegis of this organization scholars like James Prinsep, A. Cunningham and others put a great effort to expose the ancient cultural and archaeological potentiality on the region. Archaeological Survey of India started the search of the possible location of Lumbini. First of all Lassen had suggested that a part of Gorakhpur in India might be ancient Kapilvastu. Cunningham purposed Nagar khas with ancient Kapilvastu and Carlyle identified it with Bhuladiha (Cunningham 1990:350). He had proposed Lumbini between Shepour and Burhapara in Uttar Pradesh. During this period when Ranas were ruling in Nepal foreign research scholars were not allowed to explore the cultural and archaeological sites in the Nepalese Terai. In March 1895, Fuhrer was sent to take photos of the inscription on an Asoka pillar supposed to have been found at Bairat near Nepalgunj (Fuhrer 1972: preface). At that time he did not find the Asoka pillar, but only two broken pieces of an inscribed Asoka pillar were found on the bank of Nigali sagar at Taulihawa. On the information of the local people, the Nepalese team had already started digging under the aegis of General Khadga Shamsher. Several meters of earth around the pillar were dug, and there remained only 91.43 cm. from the base to be dug out. This Asoka pillar must have been seen by many of the Nepalese inhabitants of the Terai before Major Singh saw it in 1893, and before Khadga Shamsher was encouraged to do excavation by Fuhrer on December 1, 1896. At the end of November 1896, Fuhrer had gone to Niglihawa to supervise the contemplated excavations there. By a lucky chance he had gone to meet Rana at Bhagavanpur, near the village of Paderiya, in General's camp. Close to the camp, near the debris of four stupas, stood a slightly mutilated pillar rising about 3.04 m. above the ground (Fuhrer 1972:27). The pillar inscription pointed out the birth place of Lord Buddha and Lumbini garden as described in the Buddhist literature and Chinese accounts. Surmounted horse capital, as described by Hiuen Tsiang, may undoubtedly be buried under the surrounding ruins according his version (Ibid, 28). When Fuhrer saw the pillar on the first December, 1896, only a small portion, about 3.64 m. high, was above the ground and was covered with pilgrim's records. The importance of the Reminded pillar inscription for understanding the history of Ancient India in general and the sacred history of the Buddhism in particular were published on 23rd December 1896. Buhler, A. Barth and Khadga Samsher had also written articles about the exposed site of the Lumbini and its importance in the Buddhist religion and culture. Waddell has said that "...Dr. Fuhrer did not initiate, he took a copy of the inscription. This work was done by the Nepalese officials".

Present Position

All the programs are running under the aegis of the Lumbini Development Trust in the sacred complex of Lumbini. The area is 770 hectares of land as mentioned in the master plan. The area is divided into New Lumbini village, International Monastery Area and Sacred Garden. New Lumbini Village is

developing as a community center providing facilities of comfortable lodges, restaurants and other facilities. International Monastery Zone is developing as a sacred complex to the pilgrims and devotees. In this complex forty-two plots of lands are set a side (Tange, 1978). Different nations, Institutions and organizations can erect shrines in various sectors and in different styles under the permission of the project. In the complex the monasteries of Japan, South- Korea, Myanmar, France, Vietnam, Nepal and India are under construction. In this process, International Research Institute, Museum and Auditorium have been operating and providing facilities for meeting, seminar and study. The circular sacred garden contains the Asoka pillar, Mayadevi temple, sacred pond, ruined structures of stupas and vihars and other objects within barbed area. In the complex ornamental flower and hedge plantation has been done by Japanese Overseas Co-operation Volunteers (JOCV) to create a reverent atmosphere conducive to remembering and exercising Lord Buddha's Universal message of peace and harmony. The international community is very interested to establish the peace value of Lumbini (Khatry and Vaidhya 1998:125-36).

Conclusion

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is a sacred complex for the peace loving people all over the world. Buddha had advised to His disciples that all of you had visited four sites, belonged to the life of Buddha, including Lumbini. In course of pilgrimage the Buddhist sites; Asoka had visited Lumbini with His spiritual teacher Upagupta in the third century BC. He had erected a monolithic pillar with engraving inscription in Brahmi script. He has mentioned that Lumbinigame is the birthplace of Shakyamuni and stone pillar indicates the exact point of birth. Asoka pillar is even standing at the south corner of Mayadevi temple. It is the real evidence to identify the exact point of Buddha's birth spot. The Buddhist texts *Lalitavistar*, *Jatak Nidankatha*, *Divyavadana* and *Mahavamsa* have stated Lumbini as the birth place of Lord Buddha. Chinese pilgrims have given a more accurate and authentic description of Lumbini. Shui-Ching-Chu describes that at Lumbini the Asoka tree which was gripped by Mayadevi at the time of Siddhartha's birth was still in a living condition and an image of Mayadevi was placed there where devotees used to offer puja articles.

The monumental and habitation structures, stone sculptures, terracotta human and animal figurines, fragments of pottery belonging to the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana, Gupta, Vardhan and Sena-Pala periods, found here prove that Lumbini was well-populated till the early-medieval period and was frequently visited by the monks, nuns and other devotees from time to time. Structural remains of Mayadevi temple, Asoka monolithic pillar, Brahmi inscription, ancient stupas, vihars, marker-stone (conglomerate stone), and nativity sculpture of Buddha, Puskarini tank and fragments of pottery are the archaeological findings, which are real evidences to identify Lumbini as the birthplace of Buddha. Due to the establishment of out standing universal value of the sacred site, it has listed as the world property list in 1997. With the support of UNO, UNDP and other international agencies, Lumbini Development Master Plan has implemented by the interest of the concerned countries as well as agencies. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, India, Korea, China, Vietnam, France, Germany, Japan, Austria and various Nepalese groups have been involved to complete their proposed plans as mentioned in contract letter. Undoubtedly Lumbini has established as the birthplace of Buddha. It is the sacred place all of the peace loving human beings. International Buddhist Conferences and world Buddhist summits have been declaring the Lumbini as the Fountain of World Peace and Harmony. Peace flame, Peace bell and Peace stupa have also reflecting the sound of peace, compassion and tolerance of all the human beings.

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