



Review Article

Assess *Bodh Gaya's* Religious, Historical, and Tourism Significance

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14884263>

Abstract

One of the major pilgrimage sites associated with Buddhism is *Bodh Gaya*. *Bodh Gaya* bears a strong connection to the Buddha's achievement of Buddhahood. Consequently, the Buddha held *Gaya* in high esteem as a holy place during his life. Again, Buddha's disciples or followers worship him in various places around his memory. Various books have discussed the importance, significance, and history of *Bodh Gaya*. Since the legendary man Gautama Buddha attained Buddhahood at *Bodh Gaya*, this place has a distinct identity among people all over the world, especially among Buddhists. It also has a special attraction for tourists. That's why thousands and millions of people from all over the world come to visit and tour *Bodh Gaya* every year. Similar to the widespread recognition of the state of *Bihar*, *Bodh Gaya* has established India as a global map. The discussion article highlights the significant religious, historical, archaeological, and tourism aspects of *Bodh Gaya*. In which, besides other subjects, it is specifically mentioned how and what the Buddha spent his time on before and after attaining Buddhahood.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 30-12-2024
- Accepted: 03-01-2025
- Published: 17-02-2025
- IJCRM:4(1); 2025: 127-131
- ©2025, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Kiron MAK, Nasrin S. Assess *Bodh Gaya's* religious, historical, and tourism significance. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2025;4(1):127-131.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Pilgrimage, Religious, Historical, *Bodh Gaya*, Archaeological sites, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Each *Mahātirtha* in the world has its unique history. This incident has led to its recognition as a *Mahātirtha*, bearing witness to the passage of ages and times. In this regard, *Bodh Gaya* is no exception. *Bodh Gaya* is also famous for its flow of religious events. The great man Gautama Buddha achieved Buddhahood here approximately 2612 years ago, following six years of intense austerities. It is because of that memory that *Bodh Gaya* has become such a well-known and holy place in

the world. The river on the banks of which the Buddha meditated still bears witness to his memory. However, the name of the river has changed. The river's name has shifted from *Nairanjanā* to *Falgu* River. And *Urubilb* village is now known as *Bodh Gaya* in the *Gaya* district of Southwest *Bihar*. The *Urubilb* of the past is no longer just an *Urubilb*. Now it has become a place of pilgrimage and meetings for people from all over the world. People from different countries of the world who follow Buddhism come here to pay their respects. They

come here throughout the year. The *Dalai Lama* resides here for more than a month during December and January every year to conduct morning prayers. In the discussion article, the religious, historical, archaeological, and tourism importance of *Bodh Gaya* has been explained and presented in various aspects.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The works so far on the topic under discussion are: *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism* (Lars, 2015), the author has made a statement on Indian Archeology and Buddhism. *Buddhist Civilization and Buddhist Achievement in Deshe Deshe* (Barua, 2016), gives a brief description of the Buddhist traditions of different countries. *Buddhist Art and Architecture* (Sarkar, 1997), the author presents a series of descriptions of Buddhist art and architecture. In *Char Punyasthan* (Ghosh, 1921), the author states Purnatirthas. So it appears that the article in question is a complete dissertation to my knowledge. The research paper has been written to fill that gap.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The discussion research paper aims to:

1. To understand the Buddha's life relationship with *Bodh Gaya*;
2. To gain knowledge about the religious history of *Bodh Gaya*;
3. To gain insight into the activities the Buddha engaged in before and after attaining Buddhahood.
4. To learn about the history and archaeology of *Bodh Gaya*, and
5. To highlight the significance of *Bodh Gaya* as a tourist destination.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The discussion paper is written following the historical method of qualitative approaches. Researchers collected and analyzed theory and data for the essay from textbooks, historical books, Buddhist archaeology-related books, essays, and other sources. Consequently, researchers have employed the aforementioned method to write a comprehensive research paper.

5. Buddha and Bodh Gaya

The legendary man Gautama Buddha was the beloved son of King *Shuddhodhana*. His family name then was *Siddhartha*. He got married and fathered a son. And that son's name was *Rahul*. *Siddhartha* left home at the age of 29 after four visits. At *Sarnath*, *Kalam* and *Ramputta* made their first visit to *Ruddaka*. When he attained enlightenment there, he came to *Bodh Gaya* on the advice of those sages to seek or know the truth. After six years of rigorous asceticism, he attained Buddhahood in this *Bodh Gaya*. *Rahul* and his mother, *Gopadevi*, subsequently adopted the lives of Buddhist monks and nuns. Therefore, there is a close relationship between the life of *Bodh Gaya* and that of Gautama Buddha. Moreover, the discussion of *Bodh Gaya* contributes to the religious significance of Buddhism.

One of the four *Mahatirthas* of Buddhism is also believed to be *Bodh Gaya*. This is the location where the Buddha achieved enlightenment. It is a very prestigious pilgrimage site for Buddhists all over the world. Over time, it has achieved this prestigious status. Visitors to this courtyard will undoubtedly perceive an image of an international arena and multinational atmosphere.

6. Bodhi Tree

We also refer to the *Bodhi* tree as the Tree of Awakening or the Tree of Enlightenment. ^[1] This tree is also known as the *Mahabodhi* tree or Bo tree. ^[2] It is a fig (*Dumur*) tree. ^[3] Similarly, the tree is also referred to as the pipul tree. The location of the tree is *Bodh Gaya*, India. The legendary man Gautama Buddha attained Buddhahood by sitting and meditating under this tree. The period was 500 BC. ^[4] Its leaves are shaped like hearts in religious iconography. The page that is featured. The tree under which Gautama Buddha meditated and attained Buddhahood is no longer alive. However, this tree is known to have a fourth generation. About three hundred years after *Siddhartha's* Buddhahood, Emperor *Ashoka*, after being initiated into Buddhism, would often sit under the sacred *Bodhi* tree for eternal punishment. Upon witnessing Emperor *Ashoka's* deep respect and affection for *Mahabodhi*, his wife, *Mahishi Tishyarakshita*, became jealous and chopped off the roots of the *Bodhi* tree. Emperor *Ashoka* made new trees grow again from the roots. About 750 years later, in 600 AD, *Gaudraj Shashanka* cut down the *Bodhi* tree for the second time. A few months later, King *Purnavarma*, said to be the successor of Emperor *Ashoka*, revived the tree from the roots. Cunningham discovered the tree in a state of extreme disrepair and deplorable condition in 1862. A heavy storm uprooted the old tree in 1876. We then planted one branch at the old tree's site and another branch 80 feet north of the *Mahabodhi* temple. People say the current *Mahabodhi* tree is carrying the fourth generation. ^[5]



Fig. 1: Bodhi Tree, Bodh Gaya, India ^[6]

Vajrāsana or Bodhipāllāṅka

The place where *Siddhartha* sat in meditation in front of the *Bodhi* tree later came to be known as '*Bodhipāllāṅka*' or '*Vajrāsana*.' In the *Gupta* era, a solid rock of red sandstone

seven feet six inches long, four feet ten inches wide, and three feet high was erected as a permanent 'Vajrāsana.' The temple built a 10-foot-high wall with various sculptures in front of the Bodhi tree, and placed Buddha and Bodhisattva idols in its shell. [7]



Fig. 2: Diamond throne 'Vajrāsana', period, 250 BCE, Bodh Gaya, India [8]

Mahabodhi Temple

One of the attractions of Bodh Gaya is the Mahabodhi Temple. The Gupta dynasty played an important role in building this temple. The seventh century saw the completion of this temple's construction. It is located on the east side of the peepal tree. Here the Pala kings made an idol. The temple enshrined it with a seated Buddha image in a gold-encrusted hardstone *mudra*. Sitting in the courtyard of the Mahabodhi Temple in the late afternoon light is a must to truly calm the mind. Currently, the temple premises boast an 80-foot Buddha statue. To build the Buddha statue, 120,000 masons came together. [9] Furthermore, the construction of numerous Buddhist monasteries has taken place. In 2002, the Mahabodhi Vihara in Bodh Gaya became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. [10]



Fig. 3: Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, India [11]

Animesa place

After attaining Buddhahood, the Bodhisattva spent a week in the original seat, where the Buddha achieved bodhi in the joy of liberation. Then leaving his seat, he came a short distance away and looked at the bodhi tree, which sheltered him. He gazed at the tree for seven days with unblinking eyes, absorbed in deep reverence and gratitude. Devotees later built a small spectacular temple, or *chaitya*, as a memorial, now known as 'Animesh Locan Chaitya,' on the low mound where Animesh Locan spent the second week standing at the northeast corner of the Mahabodhi Temple. [12]

Caṅkramaṇ place

After attaining Buddhahood, he spent weeks circling between Mahabodhi and Animesh places. The narrow space, sixty feet long by three feet wide, on the north side of the present Mahabodhi temple was his walking path. [13]

Ratana Caitya

He spent the fourth week of Buddhahood meditating at a place in the northwest corner of the Mahabodhi temple, not far from the Mahabodhi tree. During his deep meditation at this location, his body radiated light rays of blue, purple, green, white, and mixed colours toward the Bodhi tree. The Buddhist religious flag today reflects this. This location also boasts a memorial *chaitya*. [14]

Ajapāla Tree

Buddha Ajapāla spent the fifth week of Buddhahood meditating on the tree. However, the location of this Ajapāla tree has not been identified yet. No monuments were discovered. Perhaps the monument was located near the Mahabodhi tree on the riverbanks. The current location of the Ajapāla tree is not correct. At that time, the Niranjana River traversed the currently designated area. [15]

Mucalinda Hrada

In the sixth week, he came to the shores of Muchlinda Sarovar. As he was meditating there, a sudden heavy rain began. Nagaraj Muchlind surrounded him and spread a huge canopy over his head to protect him from the storm. We identify the Puskarini to the south of Mahabodhi Temple as 'Muchlinda Sarovar.' It is also known as 'Bokunda.' [16]

Rājāyatana Tree

The Buddha spent the seventh week of attaining Buddhahood in the Rājāyatana tree. It was at this place that Tāpasu and Vallikh, merchant brothers from Bactria in Afghanistan, met the Buddha on their way to trade. They offered honey and cakes to the Buddha. They received from the Buddha the initiation of Panchasīla with 'dvisharana' and the eight hairs of the Buddha. They first traveled to Brahmadesh, where they established the five pujas of Keshdhatu. After the trade, he returned to his homeland and placed the remaining three hair metals of the Buddha in the *chaitya*. Later on, he built a memorial *caitya* at the place where the Buddha gave the Keshha-dhatu. But later,

that mark disappeared. It's also possible that the mark was not located near the *Mahabodhi* tree. At present a place is designated for devotees based on *Rājāyatana's* assumptions. ^[17]

Ashoka Pillar

To the south of the main temple, on the way to the *Muchlinda* Lake, stands the *Ashoka* pillar, which attracts the attention of the visitor. Emperor *Ashoka* built the pillar, which has carried his great work from that ancient period to the present day. At the same time, this pillar shows Emperor *Ashoka's* respect for the Buddha.

Other places of interest

Originally built in the 6th century and renovated and enlarged over time, today's *Mahabodhi* Temple and its surrounding area are dotted with stupas, *chaityas*, railings, etc. In addition, several other historical buildings can be found in the vicinity. In the 4th century AD, the *Sinhalese* king *Meghavarna* built a three-storied *saṃgharam* outside the present *Mahabodhi* area to the north of the *Bodhi* tree for *Sinhalese* monks and pilgrims and installed a Buddha image made of gold, silver, and precious stones. The Muslim invasion of the thirteenth century destroyed this *saṃgharam*. ^[18]

1. Burmese Rest Houses and Temples

King *Mindon* of *Burma* built the two-storied *Dharamshala* known as the '*Mahanter Yatrinivas*' on the south side of the *Mahant's* house in 1874. In front of it, two temples still stand proudly, bearing the memory of *Barmaraj*. Two kings of *Burma*, *Bajido* and *Mindon*, sent precious gems for the construction, development, and maintenance of the *Mahabodhi* Temple. The enormous *Hemanarayan Giri* of that time absorbed most of the jewels. Thanks to his legacy, the current *Mahant* is also a millionaire, the second richest person in the state of *Bihar*. ^[19] *Burma* constructed a new temple in 1936. Other temples that have been built are the Tibetan *Manatti*, Chinese Buddhist *Manatti*, Thai *Manatti*, Bhutan *Manatti*, Japanese *Manatti*, Bangladesh *Manatti*, Taiwan *Manatti*, Laos *Manatti*, and Vietnam *Manatti*.

2. Sujātā Griha and Matangabapi

After six long years of hard asceticism, *Kankalsa* assisted in his *Siddhilav* by bestowing *paramanna* on the ascetic *Gautama*, whose home was the noble *Sujata*, two kilometers from the *Mahabodhi* tree on the other side of the river *Niranjanā*. Currently, the site is a low hill that is covered with bushes and forests. Half a kilometre southwest of *Sujata's* *Vastuvita* and half a kilometre east of *Niranjanā*, a small temple and a place adjacent to a *banyan* tree are identified as the site of *Sujata's* *Payasanna* Donation. This is called *matangapapi*. The idols installed here and the paintings on the walls remind us of a beautiful event two and a half years ago. ^[20]

3. Dugeswari Cave

'*Dugeswari* Cave' is about five kilometers from the *Mahabodhi* Temple on the other side of the *Phalgu* River. The

monk *Gautama* meditated under the *Niranjanā* or *Urubilva* *Bodhi* tree on the west bank of the *Falgu* River. Inside the cave, there is a *Kalankasa* statue of the monk *Gautama*. The earlier name of this cave is unknown; later, local people named it "*Dugeswari* Cave," after the goddess *Dugeswari*. ^[21]

4. Varāvar Cave

Bela station is located 20 km north of *Gaya* and is reached after two stations. From there, 10 km by rickshaw or *Tonga* is the *Varāvar* cave, along with the most important archaeological site. Monk *Gautama* reportedly meditated here for a while before achieving Buddhahood. Beautiful paintings depict the stories of Buddha's life and birth on the walls of these caves. The carved walls are carved with beautiful images depicting the life of the Buddha and *Jātaka* stories. The smoothness of the polish on the carved walls evokes wonder. Time and the jungle have destroyed many caves. ^[22]

5. Bodh Gaya in the eyes of the traveller

Fa-hian visited India in 400-418 AD. He visited *Gaya* in 409 AD and wrote a brief account. Mr. *Beal* has translated his book into English. Mentioned in Chapter 31 of *Fa-Hian's* Travels. The text mentions that he arrived at *Gayanagar* after traveling 4 *yojanas* to the west. He found the city deserted and abandoned at that time. Having travelled 20 *li* to the south, he arrived at the place where the *Bodhisattva* had practiced penance for six years. The place was forested. 3 *li* to the west of this place was the bathing place of Buddha. The gods would distribute tree branches to facilitate the Buddha's ascent. After another 2 *li* to the north, the place where the village girls had offered *pāyāsanna* to the Buddha was seen. ^[23] According to *Fa-Hien*, the Buddha experienced pure bliss for seven days after achieving supreme enlightenment. Devotees, kings, and subjects have erected *stupas*, *viharas*, and *saṃgharams* at the places where He resided in such ecstasy to mark each of His pastimes. Namely:

1. *Ratnachangram* Buddha spent seven days walking east and west at this location.
2. This is the location where the gods honored the Buddha.
3. *Nagaraj Muchlinda* prevented the washing away of Lord Buddha's body on the lake's banks;
4. Under the banyan tree, *Brahma* offered the alms pot to the Buddha in public;
5. The place where five hundred merchants offered honey to the *Tathagata*;
6. *Kasyapa* built *stupas* at all the places where he had initiated the ascetics. ^[24]

6. Transportation

We need to present ideas for visiting *Bodh Gaya* to both domestic and international tourists. *Gaya* Station is the nearest railway station from *Bodh Gaya*. Its distance is roughly 17 kilometers. It is possible to reach *Bodh Gaya* by taxi from the station. Trains like the *Howrah-Gaya Express*, *Mumbai Mail* (*via Gaya*), *Purba Express* (*via Gaya*), etc., are going to *Gaya*. There are several other trains. If time permits, you can combine

a trip to *Varanasi* with a trip to *Bodh Gaya*. Trains such as the *Dikshabhoomi Express*, *Ranchi Express*, *Humsafar Superfast*, *Purba Express*, *Ganga Sulej Express*, and *Buddhapurnima Express* are arriving at *Gaya Junction* from *Varanasi*. Trains such as the *Buddhapurnima Express*, *Neelachal Express*, *Shabadvedi Express*, and *Jammu-Tawai Express* are departing from *Gaya Junction* and heading towards *Varanasi*. The *Gaya-Varanasi* rail distance is 220 km. There are direct bus services from *Rajgir* (78 km), *Patna* (135 km), *Nalanda* (101 km), and *Varanasi* (252 km) to *Bodh Gaya*. The *Kolkata-Buddha Gaya* Road distance is 495 km. Transport companies like *Maharani Transport*, *Maharani Express*, *Aitiana Travels*, etc. have *Kolkata-Gaya* bus service.

7. Hotel for stay

Budh Gaya accommodates all types of national and international visitors. Notable among them are *Hotel Siddharth Vihar* and *Sujata Vihar of the Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation*. Private hotels include *Hotel Ajatshatru*, *Hotel Bodh Gaya Gautam*, *Hotel Heritage*, *Hotel Genre*, *Hotel Taj Darbar*, and *Shanti Buddha Guesthouse*. Apart from this, among the accommodation facilities available through donation are the *Mahabodhi Resthouse*, *Bhutan Resthouse*, *Tibet Resthouse*, *Burmese Monastery*, *International Buddhist House*, and *Birla Dharamshala*.

CONCLUSION

Given the preceding discussion, *Bodh Gaya* is considered one of the four *Mahātīrthas* in the history of Buddhism. Buddha attained Buddhahood here. A large number of visitors from all over the world travel to *Bodh Gaya* to capture that magnificence. In addition, Buddhists travel to *Bodh Gaya* with the intention of achieving merit. They involve themselves in various religious activities, including Buddha worship. Besides, on the holy day of Buddha *Purnimā*, not only Buddhists but also various tourists from home and abroad gather in *Bodh Gaya*. Furthermore, the rich history and traditions of *Bodh Gaya* have significantly elevated its status. This history and tradition is about 2700 years old. Moreover, the archaeological resources it houses hold immense value. Because of this archaeological wealth, many researchers from around the world travel to *Bodh Gaya* to gather. Therefore, *Bodh Gaya's* significance and importance continue to grow daily and increasing day by day. We can't just say its importance has increased. It has many meanings for all religions and historians worldwide. We anticipate a further increase in its importance and status in the future. And to be clear, there is no chance of any change in that continuity.

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