

Mahabodhi Temple, Bihar



The Mahabodhi Vihar, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a Buddhist temple in Bodhi Gaya, marking the location where the Buddha, is said to have attained enlightenment.[1] Bodhi Gaya (located in Gaya district) is located about 96 km (60 mi) from Patna, Bihar state, India. Images of the site include Avalokiteśvara (Padmapani, Khasarpana), Vajrapani, Tara, Marichi, Yamantaka, Jambhala and Vajravajrah.^[2] Images of Vishnu, Shiva, Surya and other Vedic deities are also associated with the site.

Traditional accounts say that, around 589 BC, Siddhartha Gautama, a young prince who saw the suffering of the world and wanted to end it, reached the forested banks of the Phalgu river, near the city of Gaya, India. There he sat in meditation under a peepul tree (*Ficus religiosa* or Sacred Fig) which later became known as the Bodhi tree. According to Buddhist scriptures, after three days and three nights, Siddhartha attained enlightenment and the answers that he had sought. In that location, Mahabodhi Temple was built by Emperor Ashoka in around 260 BC.[3] The Buddha then spent the succeeding seven weeks at seven different spots in the vicinity meditating and considering his experience. Several specific places at the current Mahabodhi Temple relate to the traditions surrounding these seven weeks:[3] The first week was spent under the Bodhi tree. During the second week, the Buddha remained standing and stared, uninterrupted, at the Bodhi tree. This spot is marked by the Animeshlocha Stupa, that is, the

unblinking stupa or shrine, which is located on the north-east of the Mahabodhi Temple complex. There stands a statue of Buddha with his eyes fixed towards the Bodhi tree. The Buddha is said to have walked back and forth between the location of the Animeshlocha Stupa and the Bodhi tree. According to legend, lotus flowers sprung up along this route, it is now called Ratnachakrama or the jewel walk. He spent the fourth week near Ratnagar Chaitya, located near north - east side. During the fifth week, Buddha answered in details to the queries of Brahmins under Ajapala Nigodh tree, now marked by a pillar. He spent the sixth week next to Lotus pond. He spent the seventh week under Rajyatna tree.[3]

Traditional Hoy Site

The Mahabodhi Tree Monks participating in prayer at Mahabodhi Temple The Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya is directly connected to the life of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who attained enlightenment or perfect insight when he was meditating under it. The temple was build directly to the east of the Bodhi tree which is supposed to be a direct descendant of the original Bodhi Tree.[3] According to Buddhist mythology, if no Bodhi tree grows at the site, the ground around the Bodhi tree is devoid of all plants for a distance of one royal karÄ«sa. Through the ground around the Bodhi tree no being, not even an elephant, can travel.[4] According to the Jatakas, the navel of the earth lies at this spot,[5] and no other place can support the weight of the Buddha's attainment.[6] Another Buddhist tradition claims that when the world is destroyed at the end of a kalpa, the Bodhimanda is the last spot to disappear, and will be the first to appear when the world emerges into existence again. Tradition also claims that a lotus will bloom there, and if a Buddha is born during that the new kalpa, the lotus flowers in accordance with the number of Buddhas expected to arise.[7] According to legend, in the case of Gautama Buddha, a Bodhi tree sprang up on the day he was born.[8]

Temple Construction

In approximately 250 BCE, about 200 years after the Buddha attained Enlightenment, Buddhist Emperor Asoka visited Bodh Gaya in order to establish a monastery and shrine on the holy site.[3] The new Mahabodhi temple included a diamond throne (called the Vajrasana) to mark the exact spot of the Buddha's enlightenment. While Asoka is considered the Mahabodhi temple's founder, the current structure dates from the 5thâ€“6th century.[3] One scholar, however, considers the building "largely a nineteenth-century British Archaeological Survey of India reconstruction based on what is generally believed to be an approximately fifth-century structure." [citation needed] Prior to that, there seems to have been a pyramidal structure perhaps built in about the second century (Kuá¹£Ä¸á¹£a period). Knowledge of it comes only from a small, circa fourth century terracotta plaque found at modern Patna. It is significant that this version does not have the upper terrace with the small temples in the four corners. These small temples, although not used as such today, probably reflected certain esoteric traditions in Buddhism that were emerging more and more into less esoteric contexts by the late fourth and early fifth century. The pyramidal temple probably replaced an open pavilion that had been constructed around the tree and the Asokan platform. Representations of this early temple arc found at Sanci, on the toraa¹£as of StÄ«pa I, dating from around 25 BC, and on a relief carving from the stupa railing at BhÄ¸rhut (Fig.20), from the early Shunga period (c. 185-c. 73 BC).[9] Mahabodhi is one of the earliest Buddhist temples built entirely in brick that is still standing in India, from the late Gupta period.[citation needed]

