CHAPTER II
SURVEY OF BUDDHISM

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(A) CAUSES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM:

The sixth century B.C was a time of exceptional intellectual activity which produced the philosophy of Confucius in China, the sweeping reforms of Zoroaster in Iran and Buddhism and Jainism in India.¹

The cult of sacrifice which developed out of the prayers in the vedic samhitas had a powerful hold on the minds of the early Aryans in India. The elaborate rituals of the cult, and the inevitable discussions which took place during its performance, a long affair, to keep the participants busy are said to be responsible for doctrines which challenged the very existence of cult.²

Vedic literature is replete with reference to many problems unconnected with the present life, or to problems relating to origin of the world, its constituents, the next world, and imaginary happiness as contrasted with the misery of the present life.

The discussions at the long sacrificial sessions were primarily concerned with the performance of the ritual; but obviously they could not be confined to this alone. If the performance of the sacrifice could give everlasting results, the question of thinking on different problems would not have arisen; but when these results were efficacious only for a short time, man's mind naturally turned to things eternal.

The problems discussed by the early thinkers mainly concerned the origin of the world or universe, and to its constituents. Life is short, and sacrificial performance could bring only temporary happiness, they agree. It could not mean eternal joy; on the contrary, it may sometimes be a source of much unhappiness. If that was so, it was necessary to discover the source of eternal peace, but could Eternal peace be achieved through the life of a sacrificer leads? If not, should an alternative be sought? This was the next question. The balance was in favour of a new mode of life, the life of renunciation as opposed to the life of plenty led by a householder.

2. 2500 years of Buddhism, Page 8 by P.V. Bapat, Publication Division, Ministry Of Information, New Delhi 1987.
Subsequently, the system of Ashramas or the four stages of life was evolved, and the last two, those of Vanaprastha and Sanyasa, gave opportunities for speculation on the problems of ultimate reality and happiness.

Turning to non-vedic literature, one comes across terms like Shramana as opposed to Brahmin. Some five types of Shramanas including the Nigantha (Jaina) and the Ajiva (Ajivikas) are mentioned.

It is likely that some of them were brought up on Brahmanic lore, but later broke away from it. The literature of the Buddhists and the Jainas frequently refers to these sects. The inherent misery of the world and the notion of immortality, which was not attainable by worldly possessions, have been frequently mentioned in the upanishadatic literature. The doctrine of the chain of causation as conceived by the Buddha was obviously, the result of these speculations.\(^1\)

The introduction of the new religious ceremonies led to the rise of the class of priests. This class occupied an eminent position in the society, with a view to maintaining their hold on society they introduced unnecessary rites and rituals. Thus they came to dominate every aspect of the Aryans life from cradle to death. This class became so powerful that they exercised supervision over the rulers and advised them in matters of administration. They held many important positions in the government machinery. In fact, they were considered bhudevas or Gods of earth. In course of time, when the people began to lose faith in the vedic religion they also began to lose faith in this class. Animal and human sacrifices greatly hurt the feelings of the people and created a spirit of revolt in their mind. Commoners not only turned against the system but also the Brahmins who worked out that system.

The caste system which had grown quite rigid by this time also contributed to the discontent of the people. The society had come to be divided into the four varnas. The members of higher castes illtreated the members of the lower castes and deprived them even of basic human rights.

\(^1\) 2500 Years of Buddhism Page 10, Edited by P.V. Bapat, 1987.
The members of the lower castes were not only treated with contempt but also were not permitted to enter the temples or undertake tapasya. Naturally, there was great resentment amongst the members of these classes and they wanted to bring about necessary changes in the social system.

The spiritual unrest of the 6th century B.C. was also due to the difficult and complicated language of the Vedas which was beyond the comprehension of common people.

All the religious works of the Hindus like Vedas, Upanishadas, Ramayana and Mahabharata had been written in Sanskrit which could not be followed by the common people. Naturally they had to depend on the Brahmins for the proper understanding of these works. The Brahmins fully exploited this weakness of the people and interpreted these works in a manner which suited them best.

In the course of time not only the Vedic religion had been reduced to ritualism but the Vedic hymns were also replaced by mantras. It was commonly believed that the mantras possessed divine powers and could cure people of diseases, bring victory or defeat in war, assure the destruction of its enemies, silent opponents etc. In fact it was believed that there was hardly any phase of life which could not be effected by the mantras.

In view of the worldly miseries and suffering people were eager to find out some way to liberate their soul from the cycle of birth and death. For the realisation of this objection different theories were advocated. The priestly class laid stress on Karma marga as a means for deliverance. Certain others laid stress on tapa marga or self mortification. The advocates of this theory held that even the God submitted to a person who was able to subdue his passions and practised penance in the seclusion of forest. These two movements were quite popular among the average man. The intellectual section of the people however, believed in the theory of Moksha through jnana marga (the Knowledge). They emphasised the doctrine that ("he who knows God attains to God, nay, he is God"). They considered the soul as an integral part of God and was ultimately to merge in God. A man could attain salvation only through the absorption of his soul with God. This section of people did not have faith in karma and tapa margas. The different theories advocated for the attainment of salvation confused general people and they were not in a position to decide as to which path could lead them to salvation.
It is evident from the above discussion that during the sixth century B.C a lot of religious and spiritual unrest existed in the country. The people were so much confused that they wanted some true leaders to show them the right path, and they found these leaders in persons like Mahavira and Buddha. These two religious leaders laid the foundation of a new social order and started two new religions viz. Jainism and Buddhism. Buddha urged the hearers to give up their vices and follies and to practise the purity of conduct and sincerity of belief which is the essence of every true religion.

Buddha explained to the people the futility of the rites and rituals and insisted that true piety consisted in leading a life of simplicity and purity, with the rise of Buddhism a spirit of scientific inquiry and intellectual discussion gained prominence.

(B) LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA AND CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM:

1. LIFE:

Buddhism rose as a protest against the unnecessary rituals of Brahmanism. It was started by Gautam Buddha. Gautam Buddha’s royal name was Siddhartha. He was the son of Suddhodhana, the Chief of Sakya clan of Kapilvastu in the Nepal Tarai area. He was born in 563 B.C in the village of Lumbini a few miles from Kapilvastu.

Siddhartha showed inclination towards contemplation. He loved seclusion and avoided the company of his playmates. He spent most of his time meditating over the various human problems. His father Suddhodhana tried to attract him towards worldly objects and married Siddhartha to a beautiful princess, Yashodhara, the daughter of a Sakya noble. He provided all possible pleasures and luxuries to the young Siddhartha was not happy with all this. He continued to concentrate on problems of birth, old age, sickness, sorrow and impurity.

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1. Macmillan’s Indian History, Page 30, Published by S.G. Wasani for Macmillan India Ltd. 1989.
At the age of 29 he was blessed with a son but he did not feel happy, instead he considered it as a bond. Soon after the birth of his son he left his home in search of truth and became a wandering ascetic. This renunciation by Buddha is known as Maha Parityaga.

After leaving his house Gautam Buddha went to Vaisali. He lived with the famous Philosopher Alara Kalama but was not satisfied with his teachings. He therefore moved to Rajgriha, and met Rudraka and other philosophers. But here also he did not get any satisfaction. He gave up penance and took bowl of milk offered to him by a village girl, Sujata. He then sat under pipal tree and said, “Let my skin, my nerves and bones waste away, let my lifehood dry up, I will not leave this posture until I have perfect attainment.” He remained in meditation for seven days and seven nights and was ultimately enlightened on the eighth day. On the day of enlightenment he became to be known as Buddha or Tathagat. Siddharth discovered the Law of Causation, a cycle of twelve causes and effects conditioning the universe. This Law had not been thought of by any philosopher before him.¹

After his enlightenment Gautama decided to preach the knowledge to the people for their benefit. First of all, he went to Banaras and Sarnath which were great centres of learning in those days. First of all, at Sarnath he preached to the five monks who had left him in despair. He taught them the middle path i.e. an ascetic should avoid feeling extremes. He should neither addict himself to the pleasure of senses nor of self-mortification and so he (Gautama) set in motion his ‘Dharmachakra.’ These five monks were greatly impressed by his teachings and became his disciples again. Thus the foundation of the Buddha Sangha was laid. Then Buddha visited Rajgriha, where he was accorded a warm welcome by the King Bimbisara. From here he moved to Sravasti, the capital of Kosala. At Kosala, King Prasenjit became his disciple.

Then Gautama proceeded to Kapilvastu where larger number of people became his disciples, including his wife, Yashodhara and his son Rahul. Buddha concentrated his activities in Magadha and preached his message to large number of people.

¹ Macmillan’s Indian History, Page 30, Published by S.G. Wasani for Macmillan India Ltd. 1989.
The other places where his message was received with great admiration were Kashi, Kosala, Vajji, Avanti etc. Buddha continued to preach his message till his death in 487 B.C. His last words were “Now, monks I have nothing more to tell you but that all that is composed is liable to decay, strive after salvation energetically.”

2. **TEACHINGS OF LORD BUDDHA:**

Buddha laid great stress on morality. According to Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee, “The Buddha’s teaching begins and ends with enlightenment. On the whole he concentrates on moral aim and purpose.” His religion was very simple and practical. It aimed at the moral uplift of the people and encouraged the people to attain ‘Nirvana’, because according to him “Dharma is supreme in this life as Nirvana can be achieved only in this life.”

The basic teachings of Buddha can be summed up in four noble truths and the middle path or eight-fold path. The four noble truths emphasised by Buddha were:

(i) The world is full of sorrows and miseries. Birth, old age, death, separation with beloved and contact with unpleasant is the cause of all sorrows and miseries.

(ii) The chief cause of this suffering is desire (trishna) or craving for existence, pleasure and passion.

(iii) A person can free himself from suffering by getting rid of the desires, i.e. renunciation (nirvana).

(iv) The remedy for ending the suffering was the eight-fold path. This path is also known as middle path and insisted on avoidance of extremes of excessive attachment and excessive self-mortification.

The eight principles advocated by Buddha were:

1. Right Views.
2. Right Aspirations.
3. Right Speech.
5. Right Living.
6. Right Efforts.
7. Right Mindfulness.
8. Right Contemplation.

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Speaking of the eight-fold path, Dr. Rhys Davis Says: "If this Buddhist ideal of perfect life is remarkable when compared with the thought of India at that time, it is equally instructive when looked from the comparative point of view." It may be noted that in this middle path Buddha tried to avoid the extreme nature of Brahmanism based on pleasure and self mortification.

Buddha laid great emphasis on moral life rather than worship. He attached too much importance to the building of the moral character and laid down various principles for the purpose. These rules of morality insisted on speaking of truth, love and benevolence, obedience to parents and respect to elders, living life of chastity, abstaining from intoxicating drinks, charity, kindness and mercy to the sick and to all living-beings.

Gautam Buddha believed in the theory of Karma. A man reaps what he sows and no God or Goddesses can change it. No person can escape the consequences of his deeds. A person is born again and again to reap the fruits of his Karma. Buddha held that "If an individual sins no more he dies no more and when he dies no more, he is born no more and thus he comes to live the life of Final Bliss." Credit goes to Buddha for popularizing the doctrine of Karma.

Because of his firm belief in the theory of Karma, Buddha did not play any attention to the issue regarding God. This silence has been interpreted by the scholars as disbelief in the existence of God.

Ahimsa was another prominent feature of the teachings of Lord Buddha. According to him spirit of love is more important than good deeds and considered non-violence as an integral part of practical morality. However, Buddha did not attach as much importance to Ahimsa as was attached by Jainism. Further although he insisted on love and non-violence for the living beings, he permitted his followers to take meat under certain circumstances.

Gautam Buddha vehemently criticized caste system and did not believe in caste distinctions. According to him all men are equal and the status of a person is determined by his Karmas. He believed that caste of a person does not depend on his birth but on his deeds. This principle of Buddha greatly appealed to the people of all castes and they came to his fold in large numbers.
Thus we find that the principles and teachings of Buddha were very simple and were debarred of all pomp and superstitions. He did not introduce any dogmatic religion but simply insisted on purity of thought, speech and action. He was the first rationalist of the world who asserted that one was one’s own saviour and master without reference to any outside power.¹

3. **CONTRIBUTIONS OF BUDDHISM:**

Buddhism made valuable and lasting contributions in the field of religion, philosophy, literature and art. Its impact on Indian culture and civilisation may be studied under the following heads.

(I) **NATIONAL UNITY:**

One of the biggest contributions of Buddhism to India in the political field was that it promoted a sense of national feelings amongst the Indians. It not only shattered the dominance of the caste system which stood in the way of the achievement of this unity but also gave a death blow to the dominance of Brahmans. As a result, the unnecessary rites and rituals as well as superstitions gave way to social and political understanding. It was mainly due to this unity and social harmony that subsequently the Mauryas could found a powerful empire.

This contribution of Buddhism has been highlighted by E.B Havell thus, *“In social and political sphere Buddhism has played the same role in cultivating a national spirit in India which Christianity did in 7th century to integrate the diversified elements of Saxon Hierarchy.”*

(II) **WELFARE INSTEAD OF WARFARE:**

It is well known that Ashoka under the influence of Buddhism gave up war and made it his scheme to win the hearts of the kings and princes through love.

(III) CONTACT WITH OUTSIDE WORLD:

Buddhism was a missionary religion, and with the support of kings like Ashoka and Kanishka it soon spread into foreign countries like China, Japan, Mongolia, Burma, Java, Sumatra, Tibet and Ceylon and exercised a profound influence on the culture and civilization of those countries. According to J.N.Sarkar, due to spread of Buddhism in foreign countries foreigners considered India as a holy place and the sources of their religion. This contract with the outside world also promoted political and commercial relations with these countries.

(IV) BLOW TO THE CASTE SYSTEM:

Buddhism began as a revolt against the social and religious mal-practices, prevailing in the Vedic religion. It naturally condemned various social evils and gave a fatal blow to the dominance of caste system which was the most outstanding evil. Buddhism insisted on the equality of manhood and attracted followers from all the castes. As a result the rigours of the caste system broke down.

(V) SIMPLIFICATION OF RELIGION:

The greatest contribution of Buddhism was the establishment of a simple religion which could be easily understood and followed by the common people. In this religion, rites, rituals, yajnas and caste had no place. According to K.M.Panikkar, "To the common man this (Buddhism) was indeed a new gospel. There were no secret mantras, no expensive yajnas or sacrifices and indeed no difficult doctrines as in the Upanishads."

(VI) IMPROVEMENT OF MORAL STANDARD:

Buddhism attached great importance to the moral upliftment of man and directed the people to lead a moral life. It insisted on virtues like charity, purity, self-sacrifice, truthfulness, control over passions, non-injury to living creatures in thought and action etc. Buddhism put these virtues in actual practice and thereby greatly raised the moral standard of the people.
(VII) EFFECTS ON BRAHMANICAL RELIGION:

Buddhist thought and ethics exercised a profound influence on the Brahmanical religion. It exercised a humanizing effect on Brahmanism. The Brahmanical religion which was full of unnecessary rites and rituals was proving unpopular with the common people, because they could not undertake these formalities. The use of Sanskrit language was also proving quite difficult for the people to understand its teachings. The popularity of the teachings of Buddha, preached in the popular language of the people, made the Brahmans realise that they must carry out necessary reforms in their religion. Consequently a number of a new faiths life Bhagavad Dharma and Shaivism took shape. These new forms of Hinduism laid great emphasis on Ahimsa and Bhakti and were less dogmatic.1

(VII) IDOL WORSHIP:

It is believed that idol worship was also introduced by Buddhism for the first time. According to the historians the practice of worshipping the images of Gods and Goddesses did not initially exist in Hinduism. It was only during the reign of Kanishka that idol worship was first started when the people prepared the idols of Lord Buddha. These scholars believe that Hinduism borrowed idol worship from Buddhism. It is well known that during the vedic period people worshipped merely the symbols of various Gods in open and the idol worship did not exist. In fact the Aryans religion mainly consisted of sacrifices performed in the open. It was only after the spread of Buddhism that idol worship became popular. People constructed stupas in which they placed the idols of Lord Buddha. The Hindus followed the example and started construction of temples for their Gods. Therefore, we can say candidly that idol worship and erection of temples were legacies from Buddhism.

(IX) LITERATURE:

Buddhism also made valuable contribution in the field of literature. A vast and varied nature of literature was produced in the popular language of the people. The Tripitakas and Jatakas the most important literary works of the Buddhists are held in high esteem and have been translated into various foreign languages.

Originally these works were written in Pali, the language of the masses. They are given to the Vedas by the Brahmanas. These works are of much historical importance because they help us in linking also early history of ancient India. In addition to these works a number of Buddhist scholars produced other literary works. These included Amarkosh by Amar Singh, Sundaranand and Buddha Charit by Asva Ghosh etc. The last named author is also credited with two dramas entitled ‘Rashtrapala’ and ‘Sariputtra.’ Another Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna wrote an important book on ‘Ayurveda’. The other important works produced by the Buddhist scholars were Milindpanho, Mahavastu and Dighanikaya.¹

(X) EDUCATION:

In the field of education Buddhism made also an amazing contribution. The Buddhist Sanghas and Viharas served as great centres of education. Students from far off places, including foreign countries, came here to receive education. Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila which gained reputation as great educational centres were actually originally only Buddha Viharas. Students came to these places to receive education not only from different parts of India but also from Tibet, China etc. Nalanda particularly enjoyed great reputation as an educational centre and has been described as the Oxford University of Buddhism. It may be noted that these institutions did not impart instructions only in religion but also in other subjects.²

(X) DEVELOPMENT OF ART:

The contribution of the Buddhism to the domain of art, architecture and sculpture was also remarkable. No doubt, these were mainly used for the construction of Mandaps, Yajnashalas, altars etc. The Buddhists for the first time applied the art to religious architecture. A number of Viharas were built for the monks all over the country. Similarly a large number of stupas of stone were raised over the relics of Buddha and the Bodhi Sattvas. The whole story of Lord Buddha’s life. Buddhists were also the first to erect cave temples. These monuments were decorated with rich carvings, which possessed a style of their own. The cave temples of Kanheri (Bombay), Karle (Poona) and Nasik are the best specimens of Buddhist art.

². Ibid, Page 84.
The Gandhara school of Art was also largely the outcome of the Buddhist patronage. The artists belonging to this school tried to interpret the Indian subject and religious conceptions through the Greco-Roman techniques.

Buddhist contribution was not confined to architecture and sculpture alone. It also made valuable contribution to the art of painting. The walls of the cave and temples were richly decorated with beautiful frescoes. The best specimens of this art are found at Ajanta, Bagh and Sagiriya (Ceylon) which get the admiration of the artists even today. The Buddhist art was essentially an art with an intense feeling for nature and a vivid comprehension of the unity of all life, human, animal and vegetable. It had spirituality more intended than made manifest. It displayed an evident delight in life felt by the people. Life in it had the continuity of a stream and space was reduced to a convention. Kings, princes, courtiers, merchants, hunters, Gods, Goddesses, men, women, angel, fairies, animals, trees, creepers, flowers, all were spread across the surface of the stone and fused into a dignified cavalcade of life. The method of Buddhist art was that of continuous narration and the technique used was one of the memory picture.¹

(C) DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM UPTO THE END OF 19TH CENTURY:

(1) BUDDHISM UPTO THE END 18TH CENTURY:

Buddha’s message of equality; of hope and peace; of kindness and compassion became the talk of the day; and the name and fame of the Buddha spread far and wide. The way of the Buddha became a highway to salvation for all the recluses, scholars, philosophers, kings, queens and lay men and women.

That the popularity of the Buddha reached its Zenith from the incident which took place at Kushinara, immediately after his Mahaparinirvana. There a dispute arose about the division of the body-relics of the Buddha. Besides the Mallas, a number of the neighbouring rulers demanded a share of the ashes of the Blessed one. The Mallas were at first reluctant and the dispute threatened to end in a war.

But later the wise counsels prevailed and the relics were shared equally by the Mallas of Kushinara; Ajatasatru; the king of Magadha; Liechavis of Vaisali; Sakyas of Kapilavastu; Bulis of Attakappa; Koliyas of Ramagrama; the Mallas of Pava and a resident of Vethadipa. The turn was taken by Drona who was instrumental in dividing the relics to the satisfaction of all.¹

After the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha in 483 B.C, the rise and fall of Buddhism in India can be said to have passed through the following phases:

1. Consolidation (483 B.C - 275 B.C)
2. Systematic Propagation (275 B.C - 200 B.C)
3. Popular Religion (200 B.C - 500 A.D)
4. Struggle for Survival (C. 500 A.D - 700 A.D)
5. Decline (C. 700 A.D - 1150 A.D)
6. The Dark Age (C. 1150 A.D - 1800 A.D)

1. When the Master had gone, His disciples thought of codifying his teachings with a view to preserve their pristine purity. So they convened at Rajagaha (Rajagriha) a sangiti or council under the presidency of Ven. Maha Kassapa. After a great deal of scrutiny, this council settled the full text of scriptures. Another effort to codify the Buddha-Word, and dispel doubts about it were made at the Second council held at Vaisali after a hundred years of the passing away of the Buddha. The occasion for this council was provided by the difference of opinion between the Vajji monks, and others led by Yasa. This Council was held under the chairmanship of Ven. Sabbakami, and it gave verdict against the Vajji monks.²

2. The emergence of Ashoka the Great (273B.C - 232 B.C) was an important turning point in the history of Buddhism. Soon after ascending the throne of the Maurya Empire, which covered almost the whole of India, and even more, Ashoka embraced Buddhism and declared that hence forth he would make the Buddha-Dhamma the basis of all his actions in the spiritual as well as temporal fields.

¹. Buddhism In Modern India, Page-17, by D.C. Ahir, Published by Secretary, Bhikkhu Niwas Prakashan, Nagpur, 1972.
². Ibid, Page 18.
To devise ways and means to accelerate the propagation of Buddhism, therefore, he convened the Third Buddhist council. After the council, which was held at Pataliputra (modern Patna) under the Presidentship of Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, Ashoka launched a vigorous campaign to preach and propagate the message of the Buddha, and sent missionaries to various parts of India and the neighbouring countries. In order to supplement the efforts of the missionaries he also issued a number of Rock and Pillar Edicts which stand even today to prove his qualities of head and heart. With his systematic and energetic efforts, therefore, Ashoka took out the gospel of the Buddha from the caves and monasteries and made it a national religion. Ashoka passed away in 232 B.C leaving behind a vast empire devoted to the cause of Buddhism. After about 45 years of his death, however, the Maurya Empire crumbled when Pushyamitra, Brahmin commander-in-chief of Brihadratha, the last Mauryan King, treacherously assasinated the king and usurped the throne.

3. The systematic efforts of Ashoka the Great to popularise the gospel of Buddha created a stir amongst the Buddhist masses. They became conscious of their duty towards their sacred religion and despite presentation by Pushyamitra they stuck to their faith, and gave unreserved support to the Sangha after the decline of Mauryan rule. No wonder, most of the stupas and railings which we see today at Sanchi and Bharhut are the creation of the pious lay devotees of the Buddha who came about 50-100 years after Ashoka. It is said that the village committees were formed to help building in railings at these places. The religion of the Buddha had, thus, by the 2nd century B.C become a force to reckon with. Its popularity further increased when the Greeks and the Kushans, who established their hold over North embraced Buddhism at the hands of Ven. Nagasena around 160 B.C and the Kushana ruler, Kanishka, who ruled from 78 A.D 101 shine above all.¹

This period (200 B.C –500 A.C) saw the emergence of a number of illustrious saint-scholars who made an immense contribution to the Buddhist philosophy and religion. Here mention may be made of:

1. Ashvaghosha, who was contemporary of Kanishka. Gifted as he was, a poet, dramatist, musician, scholar and debator, he went on foot from village to village, town to town and city to city playing on his instruments and singing songs in praise of the Buddha. Thus he took Buddhism to every hearth and home.

¹. Buddhism In Modern India, Page—18, By D.C. Ahir Published by Secretary, Bhikkhu Niwas Prakashan, Nagpur.
2. Nagarjuna who was a friend and contemporary of the Satavahana King, Yajnasri Gautami-putra (166 - 196 A.D) of Andhra. He pronounced the Madhyamika school of Buddhist philosophy, popularly known as Sunyavada. He thus gave a new and definite turn to the Buddhist philosophy.

3-4. Asanga and Vasubandhu’s, who were brothers, flourished in Punjab in the 4th country A.D. Asanga was the most important teacher of the yogacara or Vijnanvada school founded by his guru, Maitreyanatha. Vasubandhu’s greatest work, the Abhidharmakosha is still considered an important encyclopedia of Buddhism.

5. Buddhaghosha, who lived in the 5th century A.D was a great Pali scholar. The commentaries and the Visuddhimaga written by him are not only a great achievement in the post-Tripitaka literature but are also a key to the Tripitaka.

6-7. Buddhapalita and Bhavaviveka were important exponents, in 5th century, of the Sunyavada doctrine propounded by Nagarjuna.

8. Dinnaga, the last mighty intellectual of the 5th century, is well known as the founder of the Buddhist logic. He wrote about treatises on logic and is often referred to as the father of the medieval Nyaya as whole.

To what extent Buddhism was popular during this period can be well-judged from what says Sir R.G. Bhandarkar. According to him “The period that we have been speaking of (that is from the beginning of second century A.D) has left no trace of building or sculpture devoted to the use of the Brahmin religion. Of course, Brahmanism existed and it was probably, during this period, being developed to the form which it assumed in later times. But the religion certainly does not occupy the prominent position, and Buddhism was followed by the large mass of the people from princes down to the humble workmen”. In other words, during this period, the religion of the Buddha was always the first choice of the thinkers and philosophers. And the princes, nobles and the masses always considered it honour to associate themselves one way or the other with the great name of Buddha.1

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The successive invasion's of the savage Hunas in the 5th century desecrated and destroyed almost all the Buddhist places of worship in the North-west India. In Kashmir, the Buddhists were mercilessly persecuted by Mihirkula, a Hun Chief, who came to power in 515 A.D. Not only that, the Huna invasions also weakened the Gupta Hindu Empire founded by Samudragupta in 330 A.D. and hastened its disintegration. Taking advantage of the slackening grip of the later Gupta Kings, some of the local chieftains carved out Independent states. A few of them were Buddhists, and they endeavoured to rehabilitate their sacred religion. Three of such powers were: the samanta rulers of Valabhi (Gujarat), the Maukharis of Kanauj (U.P.) and the Vardhana dynasty of Thanesar (Punjab). On Mihirkula’s death, Kashmir also came under the Buddhist as Meghavahana, the first ruler after the Hunas, was a staunch Buddhist, and undertook the propagation and preservation of Buddhism with great zeal.¹

Harsha (606-647 A.D) was the most illustrious King of all the Buddhist rulers of this period (500-700 A.D). He was barely 16 when he had to assume power of the Thanesar and the Kanauj dynasties under dramatic circumstances. This happened after the assassination of his elder brother, Rajyavardhana, at the hands of the king of Malva who had earlier assassinated his brother-in-law, Grahvarman and imprisoned his sister Rajyashri. Later on, Harsha extended his sway over other areas and in due course his kingdom included present day Punjab, Haryana, part of Rajasthan, U.P, Bihar Bengal and Orissa, with Kanauj as capital.

The second Chinese pilgrim, Bhikshu Yuan chwang (Hiuen Tsang), who was in India from 629-644 A.D, was treated with utmost reverence and hospitality by Harsha. To honour the distinguished guest, he convoked a grand assembly at Kanauj which was attended by thousands of Bhikkhus from all over India. It seems the Brahmins were not happy about the way Harsha honoured Hiuen-Tsang, and showed his respect and reverence to the Buddha. So they conspired and tried their utmost to make the celebrations a failure.

Firstly, they put on fire the tower and the pavilion over the gate of the hall erected at an immense cost. There was some damage but the fire was immediately extinguished. Later, the opponents of Buddhism thought of another conspiracy and hired a lunatic heretic to kill Harsha.

¹. Buddhism in Modern India Page 20, By D.C. Ahir, 1972.
So when after inspecting the damaged tower Harsha was coming down the steps the hireling tried to stab the King. The attempt was, however, foiled by the alertness of Harsha who promptly seized the knife from the hired culprit.

According to Hiuen Tsang, there were about 1000 monasteries and about 50,000 monks in India during the region of Harsha. Thus till then, the whole of India was studded with viharas, and there were a number of eminent Buddhist scholars and teachers, inspite of all that however, Buddhism was showing signs of decline. And after the death of Harsha in 647 A.D it began declining rapidly.¹

5. The history of Buddhism in India from the 8th century onward is a sad story of degeneration, decline and ultimate disappearance. In fact, the decline trend had commenced as early as the 5th century A.D. The rise of Harsha and his efforts to rehabilitate Buddhism in North India were like a last flicker, a powerful flicker no doubt, as is evident from the testimony of Hiuen Tsang. But once the protection and patronage of Harsha was gone, Buddhism crumbled. Thereafter, the decline was so rapid that I-Tseng, the last Chinese traveller, who came just after 30 years of the departure of Hiuen Tseng in 644 bemoans the dying religion which he loved. (I-Tseng was in India from 673 to 685 A.D and stayed at Nalanda for 10 years). Thus during the period from 700 to 1150 A.D, we hear very little of Buddhism outside Kashmir, Bengal and Bihar where the religion of the Buddha was still flourishing. The Khadgas was the first Buddhist dynasty to rule Bengal from 625 to 725 A.D. After 25 years gap, another Buddhist family came to power. We refer to the Pala rulers who ruled from 750 to 1162 A.D.

During the long reign of the Pala kings, who had swayed over Magadha also, Buddhism in this region was bound to flourish, and it did. These pious and virtuous kings not only patronised the Nalanda Maha Vihara but also established the famous monasteries of Vikramasila, Odantapuri and Somapuri etc.

After the downfall of the Palas, Buddhism passed into oblivion, as every where else, in the North-Eastern region also. And soon it was forgotten creed in the whole of India.

¹ Buddhism In Modern India, Page 21, By D.C. Ahir 1972.
6. As stated above, by the 12th century A.D., Buddhism in India was only confined to a small pocket in North-East India. Even there it was almost closeted within the monasteries. So when the Muslim army advanced towards Bihar; sacked the Buddhist establishments at Nalanda, Vikramasila and Odantapuri; massacred most of the monks residing in them, the rout of Buddhism was complete. The Bhikkhu - Sangha having been wiped out and the Buddhist shrines having been destroyed, the Buddhist laity were left without any guide; and in due course they went back to the fold of Hinduism.

The Dark age was in fact the darkest. During this period (1150-1800 A.D.), thousands of Buddhist Viharas, Stupas and Monasteries were destroyed and plundered by the Opponents of Buddhism on the one hand and completely ignored and allowed to decay by the masses on the other hand. To what extent the Buddhist sacred shrines were neglected and even desecrated by the people of Varanasi, the Hindu holy-city, can be judged from the fact that the Asokan Stupa at Sarnath was dismantled in 1794 by Jagat Singh, the Diwan of Raja Chait Singh of Banaras, merely for the bricks required for the construction of market in Varanasi. This market is now known as Jagat Ganj.

A good number of the Buddhist temples were also converted into Hindu or Muslims please of worship. These included the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, which was occupied by a Hindu Mahant some time in the 17th century. Thus, by and every trace of Buddhism was effaced from the land of its birth.¹

11. The renaissance of Buddhism can be said to have commenced in India towards the middle of the 18th century when the British civil servants started bringing to light its treasures hidden under dust and debris. The romantic story of the archaeological discoveries goes back to 1750 when Tieffenthaler discovered fragments of an Asokan inscription on the Delhi-Mirath Pillar which now stands on the Ridge, Delhi. In the same year, the Allahabad-Kosam (Kausambi) pillar at Allahabad was discovered. This was followed by the discovery of the Lauriya-Araraj (Radhia) Pillar in 1784 and the Barabar Hill cave inscriptions in 1785. In 1785 again, the Delhi-Topra Pilar at Ferozshah Kotla, Delhi was discovered by Captain Polier. He presented some drawings of its inscriptions to Sir William Jones who had founded in Calcutta in 1784 the Asiatic Society of Bengal to collect, decipher and interpret the archaeological, ethnological, geological and zoological specimens discovered by its members.

¹. Buddhism In Modern India, Page-22, By D.C. Ahir, 1972.
In 1801, Captain James Hoare published for the first time in the Asiatic Researches, Journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal, fascimiles of the Delhi-Topra inscriptions. This attracted the attention of the scholars and attempts to decipher the Asokan script began in right earnest.

In the year 1819, a discovery of highest importance was made accidentally by a pair of British soldiers who were on patrol duty.

They stumbled on the caves at Ajanta which had fallen into disuse and lost sight of more than 1000 years earlier. The Ajanta caves are now well known throughout the world. They are unique as they combine three forms of art: architecture, sculpture and painting. Following the discovery of the Ajanta caves, a number of caves carved out of natural rock formations in several distinctive styles, were discovered at Ellora, Nasik, Karle, Bhaja and Junnar etc.- all in Western India.

In 1822, Major James Todd discovered the first Rock Edict at Girnar, sacred mountain near Junagadh in Gujarat. In 1834, a copy of the Allahabad Pillar inscription made by Lt. T.S. Burt was published by the Bengal Asiatic society’s Journal. Two years later, the Shahbazgari Rock Edict (in Peshawar District, Pakistan) was discovered by M.A Court,a French Officer in the service of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh.

By 1836, a number of Rock and Pillar inscriptions had been discovered in various parts of India. But nobody knew either their contents or the name of their creator. No Indian scholar was competent enough to decipher the most ancient inscriptions of India which were found not only on the rocks and pillars but on the coins as well.

In 1837 A high official of the Indian Mint and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal succeeded after several years of assiduous study and hard work, in deciphering the inscriptions which were written in Prakrit. A Prakrit stood between Pali and Sanskrit. Princep consulted the Pali and Sanskrit scholars and with their help he was able to evolve the deciphering method. In July 1837, Princep published fascimiles, phonetic transcriptions and English translation of the seven pillar edicts, the opening works of which were: "Thus spake the beloved of Gods, king piyadasi!"
Who was king Piyadasi still remained a mystery. Luckily in the same year George Turner translated and published in English the Mahavamsa, a Pali chronicle of Ceylon. The occurrence of the word Piyadasi in the Mahavamsa helped James Prinsep in identifying king as Piyadasi as the great Buddhist Emperor Ashoka. The deciphering of the Asokan Script and the identification of Ashoka was an epoch making event. It enriched the history of India and of Buddhism to such an extent that all history books had to be re-written.¹

In 1838, James Prinsep deciphered and published the Rock inscriptions discovered at Girnar, and Dhauli in Puri Distt, Orissa (discovered by Lieutenant Kittoe in 1837).² Thus, James Prinsep, working almost single-handed, made available just with in a period of ten month the major portion of the Asokan inscriptions. This was truly a herculean task and over-work affected Prinsep’s health.

In 1840, the Bhabru Edict on the rock at Bairat near Jaipur was discovered by Captain Burt. This was transcribed and translated by Captain Kittoe. Ten years later, in 1850, the Jaugada Rock inscription (in Ganjam Distt., Orissa) was discovered and copied by Sir Walter Elliot who recognised it as another version of the Asokan Edicts discovered at Dhauli, Girnar and Shahbazgarhi. In 1860, yet another Asokan Rock inscription was discovered at Kalsi near Dehradun by forest.

In 1851, an important discovery was made at Sanchi, near Bhopal. Though the monuments at Sanchi were discovered and rescued from oblivion as early as 1818 but it was in 1851 that the Great Stupa was opened by Cunningham. From inside this Stupa he discovered the sacred relics of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, namely, Sariputta and Mahamoggalana. These sacred relics were taken to London and kept there in safe custody till their return to India a century later i.e. in 1949.³

The advent of Sir Alexander Cunningham accelerated the discovery and restoration of the archaeological sites in India. He was undoubtedly the greatest archaeologist and hero of the renaissance period. In 1861 the Government of India appointed him as the first Director General of the archaeological material opened a new vista in the study of Indian Archaeology.

1. Buddhism In Modern India, Page 25, By D.C. Ahir.
3. Buddhism In Modern India, Page 25, By D.C. Ahir.
He himself went round; visited all the ancient sites; and prepared a systematic geographical map of ancient India. In his monumental work ‘Ancient Geography of India, Part I’ the Buddhist Period, Cunningham recapitulated the glorious history of the Buddhist remains and monuments scattered all over the country. In 1870, he excavated the vicinity of the Maha Bodhi Temple, and published his conclusion under the title Maha Bodhi or the great Buddhist temple at ‘Buddha Gaya.’ In 1873-74, Cunningham excavated the Mahastupa of Bharhut and rescued the finest Buddhist art from further oblivion. The Asokan inscription also received Cunningham’s proper attention as it was he who in 1877 published all the then known inscriptions in one volume titled ‘Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum’. In this volume all the inscriptions were presented in facsimile, phonetic transliteration and English translation. By this time the Bairat Minor Rock Edict the Rupnath Minor Rock Edict and the Rampurva Pillar Edict had also been discovered. In 1882, a fragment of an Ashokan Rock Edict was dissolved at Sopara in Thana Distt. Maharashtra by Dr. Bhagwan Lal Indraji. The Mansehra Rock Edict (in Hazara District, Pakistan) was discovered by Captain Leigh in 1889 In 1890 the three Mysore Minor Rock Edicts were discovered by Lewis Rice.1

So much about the archaeological discoveries is there. A further fillip to the renaissance movement was given by the literary activities of the Western scholars who were responsible for creating a congenial atmosphere for the study of Buddhism in India and abroad.

The pioneers of the literary movement were Winternitz, E. Bournouf, Fausboil, Prinsep Kern, Osma de Kores, Oldenburg, Poussin Levi stcherbatsky and Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids. The discovery of Buddhist literature commenced with Winternitz, who attempted a history of Buddhist literature in French as volume II of ‘History of Indian Literature’ In 1844, Burnouf published the first history of Buddhism. His second book was a French translation of the Saddharmapundarika which appeared in 1852.

Burnouf concentrated on Sanskrit Buddhism. The study of Pali texts was under taken by Fausboil who published a Latin translation of the Dhammapada. His English Translation of the Sutta-nipata was published in 1881. Fousboil’s monumentl work was the translation of the Jatakas (Birth stories of the Buddha) which were published in six Volumes between 1877 and 1897.

Herman Oldenberg was another giant Indologist. He translated into English the Vinaya Pitaka-Discipline of the Buddhist Order from 1879 to 1833. His English translation of the Patimokha, the Mahavagga and the Cullavagga, in collaboration with Rhys Davids, appeared in volumes XIII, XVII and XX of the sacred books of the East (1881-85). Rhys Davids was a renowned scholar of Pali. He had learnt Pali in Ceylon where he was a civil servant. In 1879, he published a translation in English of the Nidanakatha (Buddhist Birth stories). In 1881 he founded the Pali Text Society in London. Under this Society Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davis did a yeoman’s service to the study of Pali and Buddhism. Rhys Davids himself edited a number of texts like the Dighanikaya (1889) the Abhidhammattha - Sangaha (1884), the Dathavamsa (1884) and a Manual of Yogavacara (1896). He translated Milinda - panho and Digha - nikaya also.

The researches of all these explorers, archaeologists and scholars were helpful in creating a new awakening amongst the people but no body had as yet thought seriously of the Buddhist revival in India. In 1885, Sir Edwin Arnold, the world famous author of the Light of Asia visited Bodh Gaya and was shocked to see the deplorable condition of the most sacred shrine of the Buddhists. He, therefore, wrote a number of articles in the Telegraph, of which he was the editor, and drew attention of the Buddhists to the pitiable condition of the Maha Bodhi Temple, and urged them to save it from further desecration.

The systematic revival of Buddhism in India began in 1891 with the arrival of Anagarika Dharmapala, a young Sinhala Buddhist who turned out to be first great missionary of modern times. Inspired by Sir Edwin Arnold’s articles on Bodh Gaya, Dharmapala visited Sarnath and Bodh Gaya in January 1891 to see for himself the condition of the Buddhist shrines. He was shocked to see the horrible condition of the Buddhist shrines. At Bodh Gaya he was visibly moved as under the Mahant’s charge the Maha Bodhi Temple was being shamefully neglected and desecrated. He, therefore, resolved to restore the sacred shrines to their former glory, and to make them living centres of Buddhist culture. He also resolved to regain the control of the Maha Bodhi Temple from the Saivite Mahant, whose ancestors had converted it into a shiva temple around the close of 17th century.1

1. Buddhism in Modern India, Page 27, By D.C. Ahir.
With this object in view, he established the Maha Bodhi Society in Ceylon on the 31st May 1891. After a brief visit to Ceylon, he returned to India and installed four monks from Ceylon in the Burmese Rest House constructed by King Mindon 1875 to look after the Mahabodhi Temple. He also decided to organise an International Buddhist Conference. This conference was held at Bodh Gaya on the 31st October, 1891. The representatives from Ceylon, China, Japan and Chittagong (Bangladesh) attended this conference and pondered over the ways and means to save the seat of Buddha’s Enlightenment from further desecration.

The year 1891 is most memorable in the history of Indian Buddhism. Same year, Ven. Kripasaran Mahasthavir, a Bengali Buddhist monk, founded the Bengal Buddhist Association (Dharmankur Sabha). It was again in 1891 that a casket containing the bones of the Buddha was discovered by Mr. Rea at Bhattiprolu in Andra Pradesh. Another important event of the year 1891 was the birth of Bhim Rao Ambedkar (on 14th April), a personality who was to change the course of the history of Buddhism after about 65 years. Further, about the same time Ven. Mahavira, the first Indian to become a Bhikkhu, took up his residence at Kushinagar, the site of the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. At that time Kushinagar was completely in ruins. In fact, it was haunted place and the people were afraid of going there. Mahavir Swami’s arrival, therefore, made Kushinagar an accessible shrine.

At the beginning of 1892, the office of the Maha Bodhi-society was shifted to Calcutta, and from May 1892, Anagarika Dharmapala started the Maha Bodhi Journal; a Journal which is still preaching the Dhamma in various parts of the world. In the same year, the scholars of India, who were awakened by the labours of the western scholars, founded in Calcutta the Buddhist Text Society. The Buddhist Text Society published many Buddhist texts in Indian languages based on the laborious researches of Rajendra Lala Mitra, Hara Prasad Shastri, Sarat Chandra Das, and Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan. The year 1892 also recorded the discovery of three Asokan Rock Edicts at Brahmagiri, Jaitinga-Ramesvara and Siddapura in the Chitaldrug Distt., Mysore.
In September 1893 Dharmapala attended the Parliament of Religions in Chicago U.S.A. On his way back he visited Hawai, Japan, China, Thailand and Malaya. At Honolulu, he met by chance a lady, Mrs. Mary E. Foster, who became in later years the most active supporter of Dharmapala and donated more than Rs. Ten Lakhs to the Society.

The year 1896 witnessed the discovery of the Asokan Pillar at Rummindel (Lumbini) by Fuhrer. The inscription on it says, "The Buddha Sakyamuni was born here." Two years later (in 1898), a relic casket was discovered in the Lumbini garden by the owner of the estate. The words inscribed on the casket are, "This relic casket of the divine Buddha is that of the Sakyas."\(^1\)

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1. Bhuddhism In Modern India, Page 28 by D.C. Ahir.
UTTAR PRADESH DURING 23RD CENTURY:

Uttar Pradesh has some of the most important sites associated with the genesis and greatness of Buddhism. At Piprahwa (Old Kapilvastu) the great one spent his youth in palaces and riches as prince Siddhartha. At Sarnath Buddha preached his first sermon. At Sravasti and Kaushambi he preached regularly and at Kushinagar he finally attained ‘Maha Parinirvana’. After the Bloody carnage of the Kalinga war when Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism, he had the essence of this renowned religion carved on stone pillars for generations to see, imbibe and learn. Some of the most important of these still stand tall here even after centuries, extolling the virtues of Buddhism.¹

1. SARNATH:

Sarnath marks the birth of religion of Gautama Buddha.² Hence it became a great centre of Buddhist activities and remained so for more than a millennium and a half. The inscriptions refer to the site as the “Monastery of the Turning of the wheel of Righteousness” (Saddharmacakra-Pravartana Vihara) by which name this sacred place was known during the early centuries of Buddhism. The place acquired celebrity, like the other holy places of Buddhism, from the time of Ashoka.

This saintly monarch erected a series of monuments. The Chinese pilgrims, Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang, visited the place in the 5th and 7th centuries A.D respectively, and left us valuable information regarding this important site. In later periods also, the site grew in size and prosperity and inscriptions and other evidence relate to the building of new shrines and edifices, as well as to the renovation of old ones, one of the latest being the Temple of the Wheel of the Law founded by Kumaradevi, one of the queens of king Govindachandra of Kanauj, in the first half of the 12th century A.D.

². Sarnath Ka Itihasa, Page 1, Bhikku Dr. Dharmaraksita, Page 1970.
The ruins of Sarnath cover an extensive area. The Archaeological Department has done a good deal of excavation at the site and a number of interesting monuments and sculptures of exquisite beauty and workmanship have come to light. As one approaches the site from Banaras, the first landmark that attracts the eye is a lofty mound of brickwork, locally known as the Chaukhandi, surmounted by an octagonal tower at the top. The mound represents the ruins of a stupa on a terraced basement erected to mark the spot where the Buddha, on his way from Gaya first met his five former comrades who were soon to become converts to his faith.¹

Half a mile to the north is the site of Deer Park, which must have had imposing buildings in the days of its pristine greatness. All is now in ruins, save a battered structure, the Dhamekh stupa, which rears its head to a height of nearly 150 feet. The ruins have been laid bare by the spade of the archaeologists and the site, as exposed, shows that temples and stupas occupied the central position with monasteries in the area around them. They belong to different periods of construction the earliest going back to the days of Ashoka. Traces of successive restorations and renovations are also evident in some of the important buildings.

The Ashoka stupa, seen by Yuan Chwang, has been identified with the ruins of a large brick stupa, commonly known as Jagat singh’s stupa after Jagat singh, the Diwan of Raja Chait Singh of Banaras. He dismantled it in 1794 for bricks for the construction of a market in Banaras. The site of this stupa probably marks the spot where the Buddha delivered the first sermon and thus literally turned the Wheel of the Law. A little farther to the north stands the broken stump of the Ashoka pillar, the magnificent lion capital of which may now be seen in the Archaeological Museum nearly on the cast may be seen the ruins of a temple, designated the main shrine, which must date from the Gupta period, if not earlier.

Around the main shrine there is paved court with a similar approach from the east. In this court are found innumerable remains of stupas of various shapes and sometimes also of shrines, the remnants of pious benefactions of votaries and pilgrims who flocked to this holy spot. On the north and south were ranged monastic establishments.

¹ 2500 Years of Buddhism, By P.V. Batat Page 274.
Among the ruins at Sarnath, the most imposing is no doubt the Dhamekh stupa situated at the south-east corner of the site. Battered though it is, it still stands 143ft. high from its original foundations. Indeed, it is a solid structure, built of massive blocks of stone at the lower stage and of brick, probably faced with stone, at the upper. It is of cylindrical shape and is relieved in the lower section by eight projecting bays, each with a large niche originally containing an image. This lower section has a broad belt of carved ornamentation of intricate geometric pattern with floral arabesques above and below it. The modern name, Dhamekh, is probably derived from the Sanskrit Dharmeksha, meaning "The pondering of the Law", and since it is in a line with the Dharmarajika stupa of Ashoka which stands due west of it, it must have been an important monument. The original structure on this spot also possibly dated the days of Ashoka.

The antiquities so far discovered in the ruins are numerous and consist of sculptures, bas-reliefs, rail fragments, terra cotta figurines, seals and sealings, inscriptions, pottery vessels, and various other objects. With very few exceptions, they pertain to the Buddhist religion and cover a period of approximately 1500 years, from the 3rd century B.C. to the 12th century A.D. They have been housed in neat little museum and sculpture shed, situated near the ruins, which well repays a visit. The Lion capital originally surmounting the Ashoka pillar, now occupies a place of honour in the museum. It consists of four addorsed lions, supported on an abacus over a bell shaped lower member. The capital was originally crowned by a wheel, the fragments of which have been recovered from the ruins. Symbolical of India’s message of peace and goodwill to the world the capital now forms the crest of resurgent India.¹

One of the foremost of the sculptures in the Museum is the famous sandstone image of the Master in the act setting the wheel of the Law in motion (dharmacakra-pravartanamudra). Which is a masterpiece of Indian Plastic art.²

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¹ 2500 years of Buddhism by P.V. Bapat P. 275.
² Ibid, P. 276.
2. **KUSHINAGAR:**

Kusinagar or Kusinara is sacred to Buddhists as it was the place where under a grove of sali trees the Lord Passed into nirvana in his eightieth year. The site has been identified with Kasia in Kusinagar district of Uttar Pradesh.¹

Like the other sacred place connected with the eventful life of the Master, Kusinara rose to be an important place of pilgrimage and in the course of time was covered with sacred shrines and monasteries. For reasons from unknown, however, the place was deserted early in its history and both Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang noted the utter ruin and desolation of this once important site. The remains that have been partially laid bare by excavations are extremely fragmentary, but the identity of the place with the site of Parinirvana is settled beyond doubt by the discovery of inscriptions referring to the Parinirvana Caitya. The stupa of Parinirvana which Ashoka is said to have built has not yet been brought to light. The Parinirvana Caitya to which the inscriptions refer dates from the Gupta period and it is possible that the Ashoka stupa lies buried under the later constructions.

Among the other sacred edifices that still remain may be mentioned the Maatha Kunwar Kakoti which enshrines a large recumbent figure of the Buddha in the state of Nirvana. The image was found in fragments and has been skillfully restored by Mr. Carleyle. The great stupa which stood on the spot where the body of the Lord was cremated and where the relics of the master were divided into eight equal portions is probably represented by a large mound locally known as Ramabhar. This mound has only been partially examined and a more systematic exploration is expected to bring to light important material relating to the history of this venerable spot.²

3. **SRAVASTI:**

Sravasti modern Saheth-Maheth in (U.P.) the capital of the ancient kingdom of Kosala, was sacred to the Buddhists, because it was here that the master, in accordance with the practice of the previous Buddhas, performed the greatest of his miracles.³

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² Kushinagara By Dr. D.R. Patel, Page 19, Archaeological Survey Of India 1981.
It was here that the Buddha had to take part in a contest of miraculous feats with the Tirthikas before king Prasenajit of Kosala and the assembled audience. The Buddha took his seat on a thousand petalled lotus and created multiple representations of himself which went up to the highest heaven. The heretical teachers, discomfited at this miraculous event, dared not show their own feats and were finally confounded by a violent thunderstorm obliged to run away.

The supreme position of the master was thus vindicated and he preached the Law before a huge assemblage of people that had come to witness the miracle. The Sravasti episode has been a favourite theme in Buddhist art from very early times.

Even from the days of the Buddha, Sravasti was an active centre of Buddhism and it was here that the merchant Anathapindaka built, in the garden of prince Jeta purchased at a fabulous price in gold, a large monastery for the reception of the master. The story of the purchase and its eventual presentation to the Lord was a favourite theme in early Buddhist art. In later time also shrines and monasteries arose the Buddhist faith for a long time.

Saheth-Maheth consists of two distinct sites. The larger one, Maheth, spreads over about 400 acres and has been identified with the remains of the city proper. Saheth, covering about 32 acres and lying about a quarter of a mile to the south-west is the site the Jetavana monastery. The excavations on the former site have laid bare the remains of the massive gates of the city and the ruins of other structures, indicating the prosperous state of the city in days gone by. The latter, sanctified by the master's association rose to be an important place of pilgrimage and numerous shrines, stupas and monasteries were built in it. The remains so far brought to light date approximately from the Mauryan epoch down to the decadent days of Buddhism in the 12th century A.D. One of the earliest stupas, the original foundation of which may go back to the 3rd century B.C, if not earlier contained some bone relics, probably those of the Master himself.

A colossal statue of the master was found at the site. One of the latest patrons of the establishment was Kumaradevi, the queen of Govindacandra, the king of Kanauj, who donated some land for the maintenance of the Jetavana monastery in the year 1278-29 A.D.¹

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4. SANKASYA:

Another holy spot connected with the life of the Master was Sankasya (Sankisa-Basantapur, Farrukhabad district, Uttar Pradesh) where the Buddha is said to have descended to earth from the Trayastrimsa heaven (Heaven of thirty-three Gods) where he went to preach the Abhidharma to his mother and other Gods.

This event is said to have occurred after the great miracle was performed at Sravasti as it was an immutable law that all Buddhas should resort to the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods after they had performed their greatest miracles. According to Buddhist legend, the Lord came down by a triple ladder, accompanied by the Gods, Brahma and Sakara, and the incident forms a favourite motif in Buddhist art. Owing to this sacred association Sankasya came to be an important place of pilgrimage, and important shrines, stupas and monasteries were raised on the site in the hey-day of Buddhism.

Both Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang visited the place and left interesting accounts of the important monuments. Through long neglect, however all is now in crumbling ruins. The accounts of the Chinese pilgrims also are too meagre to admit of any proper identification of the remains extent. The present village is perched on a mound, locally known as the fort, 41 feet high and with an area 1,500 feet by 1,000. A quarter of a mile to the south is another mound, composed of solid brickwork and surmounted by a temple dedicated to Bisari Devi. Other mounds containing masses of brickwork may be seen scattered around and there are also the remains of an earthen rampart over 3.5 miles in circumference. The trial diggings, undertaken long ago by Cunningham, indicate the extremely fragmentary nature of the remains and the urgent necessity of more systematic explorations. The Elephant capital that once surmounted a column is an important relic of the days of Ashoka and further explorations are expected to lay bare important material which has relevance to the history of this site.¹

5. KAUSAMBI:

During the time of Buddha, Kausambi was the capital of ‘Vatsa Janpad’ ruled by ‘Udyana’.²

¹ 2500 years of Buddhism, By P.V. Bapat, Page 278.
The ruins of an ancient fort are testimony to its antiquity. However, it was when Lord Buddha visited this city, that Kausambi attained true prominence.

A large number of architectural relics and ruins, sculptures and figurines, coins and other finds highlight the reverence the city was held in by the devout in times gone by. The site also yielded a large number of punch-marked and cast coins along with unique terracotta sculptures which can be viewed in the Allahabad museum. Now a days it is known as Kosam. In view of its historical importance Ashoka raised here two pillars which were removed to the Allahabad fort by Akbar. The spot Ghositaram where Buddha stayed during visit to that place at the invitation of King Udayana has since been identified. It is 35 miles to west of Allahabad. Now Kausambi has been declared a district.

6. KAPILVASTU:

Through recent excavations and discoveries, it has been established that the seat and capital city of the Sakya clan. It was at Kapilvastu amidst opulent surroundings that the young prince Siddhartha grew up. It was here that he, on seeing sorrow and pain, sickness and death, decided to renounce all worldly riches and pleasure to seek truth and the path to salvation. The ruins of the old city from where Buddhism started has several stupas. From the main stupa have been recovered stone caskets containing relics believed to be that of the Buddha.

7. KALSI:

It is 50 kms. away from Dehradun on Chakrata Road. An Ashokan Major Rock Edict is preserved here by the Archaeological deptt. It was discovered in 1860.

8. AHRAURA:

A minor Ashokan Rock Edict was found here in 1961. It is near Chunar in U.P.

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2. Ibid.
5. Buddhism In Modern India By D.C. Alir, 1972, Page-62.