



SHRAVASTI IS ONE OF EIGHT IMPORTANT BUDDHIST SITES

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Abstract: This article aims to bring an understanding of the history of the formation and development of Buddhism in Sravasti, an ancient town situated in Uttar Pradesh, India. Lord Buddha had spent most of his monastic life in the Gangetic plains of Northern India, Southern Nepal, and its surrounding areas. Thus, these places are deemed most important since these places had experienced some of the significant events of Lord Buddha. Thus, four sites are most worthy of pilgrimage of Buddhist followers, and Gautama Buddha is said to have identified these four sites as most worthy and are called the Four Most Important Pilgrimage Sites. They are Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. But in later Buddhist tradition, the other four sites were given a special status since these sites had experienced certain miracles by Lord Buddha. Thus, these eight sites are known as "The Eight Great Places" or Attha-mahathanani. These four sites are Shravasti, Rajgir, Sankassa and Vaishali.

Key word: Shravasti, Buddhism, History, buddhist stupas

I. Introduction

Shravast is a town in Shravasti district in Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It was the capital of the ancient Indian kingdom of Kosala and the place where the Buddha lived most after his enlightenment. It is near the Rapti river in the northeastern part of Uttar Pradesh India, close to the Nepalese border.

Sravasti is one of the most revered sites in Buddhism. It is believed to be where the Buddha taught many of his Suttas (sermons), converted many of his famous disciples, and performed his "Sravasti miracles" – "great miracle" and "twin miracle" – a subject of numerous historic reliefs, statues and literature in Buddhism. Sravasti is also important to Hinduism and Jainism. The earliest manuscripts of both mention it and weave some of their legends in Sravasti. Archaeological excavations of the Sravasti site have unearthed numerous artworks and monuments related to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism.

Sravasti, as a capital, was at the junction of three major trading routes in ancient India, connecting it to the different regions of the Indian subcontinent. Inscribed slabs and statues found at and near Sravasti suggest it was an active Buddhist site and prosperous area from the time of the Buddha (c. 5th-century BCE) through at least the 12th-century CE. It was destroyed and covered with mounds sometime in or after the 13th-century, chronologically marking the arrival and establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Excavations between 1986 and 1996, led by Japanese archaeologists, suggest that the site continued to be built up and expanded through the 1st millennium. Thereafter, the discovery of numerous charcoal remains and burnt soil suggests that a large portion of the site was burnt down and damaged, while other parts went into disuse and suffered the effects of erosion.

The Sravasti site was rediscovered by a team of British and Indian archaeologists in late 19th-century. It has attracted waves of systematic excavations from the late 19th-century through the 1990s. It is now a small town, a center of heritage tourism and religious pilgrimage by Buddhists from around the world.

II. Buddhism in shravasti

According to Buddhist tradition, the city was called Savatthi since Sage Savatthi used to live there. Shravasti was one of the developed cities in ancient India and was the capital city of the Kingdom of Kosala. It was said that the city of Shravasti was located on the bank of river Aciravati, which is popularly known as Rapti River in the present. The town was beautiful, with its diversity and vast agriculture. It is believed that around 180 million people used to reside in the city of Shravasti during the lifetime of Lord Buddha. King Pasenadi of the Kingdom of Kosala was Lord Buddha's disciple and one of Gautama Buddha's chief patrons. Other chief patrons of Shravasti were Visakha, Suppavasa, and Anathapindika.

Gautama Buddha had spent most of his monastic life in Shravasti. Gautama Buddha first visited Shravasti at Anathapindika's invitation. The main monasteries of Shravasti are Jetavana and the Pubarama. King Pasenadi commissioned the construction of another famous monastery of Shravasti, the monastery of Rajakarama, which is the exact opposite of the Jetavana. It is said that of four Nikayas of Buddhism, around 871 suttas were preached in Shravasti. Around 844 suttas were preached in the monastery of Jetavana, 23 in the monastery of Pubarama, and the remaining four in the suburbs of Shravasti. Thus, Shravasti became where Lord Buddha taught the most significant amounts of suttas and instruction.

2.1 Buddhist relics in shravasti



Fig 1. Scene in Jetavana. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shravasti>



Fig 2. Ananda bodhi. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shravasti>



Fig 3. Stupa of Angulimala. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shravasti>

- a) Jetavana Monastery: It got its name from prince Prasanjeet, Jetavana Monastery is the place where Lord Buddha spent 19 rainy seasons. The main attractions of this place are Anandabodhi tree, Anandakuti and Gandhakuti which one must explore during their visit at Jetavana Monastery.
- b) Anathapindika Stupa: Deemed to have been erected by Anathapindika, Anathapindika Stupa is a much admired site among Buddhists.
- c) Angulimala's Stupa Shravasti is named after a dacoit, who essentially must have belonged to the dredges of the society. The legend of Angulimala is also reflective of the abolition of caste system that Lord Buddha propagated. And Lord Buddha was the first to do that. In general Buddhism moved away from the vices of Hinduism, keeping the virtues untouched and therefore has had much positive and practical influence on the society; a tangible influence moved out of the scriptures to be turned into reality.

The site of Jetavana monastery is the main pilgrim destination, with meditation and chanting mainly done at the Gandhakuti (Buddha's hut) and the Anandabodhi tree. Buddhist monasteries from the following countries have been constructed at Shravasti: Thailand, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Tibet, and China.

III. Conclusion

Shravasti is the location where the Buddha gave most of his talks, later remembered by his followers and centuries later written down as Suttas. According to Woodward, 871 suttas in the four Nikayas of Buddhist canons, are based in Shravasti. These texts add that the Buddha spent twenty-five varshas in Shravasti. Scholars such as Rhys Davids state that this could mean two things. Either the Buddha primarily lived in Shravasti after his enlightenment, or that the oral tradition in early Buddhism was "systematized in Shravasti". Malalasekera, a historian of Buddhism, considers the former more likely. Either way, Shravasti is the key site where almost all the remembered teachings of the Buddha were either heard or compiled, and centuries later were recorded as the Pali canon elsewhere.

Shravasti is also mentioned as the capital and home of king Prasenajit – where the royal patron of the Buddha lived. It was also the home of Anathapindada – the richest early donor for the Buddha. Anathapindada is famous in the Buddhist literature as the one who offered his Jetavana grove and residences.

In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha is remembered for having performed miracles, of which two are particularly popular in reliefs found in its stupas, artwork and literature. The Buddha is believed to have performed the Mahapratiharya or the "great miracle", and the Yamakapratiharya or the "twin miracle" in Shravasti. These are called the "Sravasti miracles".

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