

A SHORT GUIDE TO BODH GAYA

Bhante S. Dhammika

*If you want to make a worthwhile journey, go to Vajrasana.
Mhārepa*



MAHA BODHI SOCIETY OF INDIA
(Founded by Ven. Anagarika Dharmapala in 1891)
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Gaya

A SHORT GUIDE TO BODH GAYA by Bhante S. Dhammika

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PREFACE

A Short Guide to Bodh Gaya by Bhante S. Dhammika is designed to offer pilgrims and tourists an accessible introduction to Bodh Gaya, the geographical heart of the Buddhist world. Although it does not delve into the full history of the area or provide comprehensive details on all its attractions, it serves as a reliable resource for visitors seeking accurate information about this sacred site.

The author, Bhante S. Dhammika, hails from Australia and brings a wealth of experience and knowledge about Bodh Gaya and its significance. His expertise ensures that readers will gain a deeper understanding of the site's importance and its place in Buddhist culture and history.

We hope that this guide enriches your visit to Bodh Gaya and inspires you to learn more about the teachings and traditions of Buddhism. Enjoy your journey to this remarkable and revered destination.

Venerable P. Seeawalee
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Mahabodhi Society of India,
Kolkata, India.

PUBLISHER'S REMARKS

A Short Guide to Bodh Gaya by Bhante S. Dhammika is an insightful resource for visitors seeking to explore the spiritual heart of Buddhism. The guide provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of Bodh Gaya, covering its historical and cultural significance, key sites to visit, and practical information for travelers.

Bhante Dhammika's practical knowledge and experience are evident throughout the guide, offering readers a meaningful understanding of this revered destination. It serves as an invaluable companion for pilgrims and tourists alike, enhancing their experience of Bodh Gaya's serene and sacred environment.

We recommend this guide for anyone planning to visit Bodh Gaya or simply seeking to learn more about this important spiritual site.

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AUTHOR'S REMARKS

As a Buddhist when I first visited Bodh Gaya many years ago, I was struck by the profound sense of reverence and tranquility that pervades this sacred site. As the place where the Buddha attained Enlightenment, Bodh Gaya holds immense spiritual significance for millions of people worldwide. My aim in writing *A Short Guide to Bodh Gaya* is to provide visitors with an accessible and informative resource that enhances their experience of this extraordinary place.

In this guide, I have focused on the most essential aspects of Bodh Gaya: its historical and cultural importance, key sites to visit, and practical information for pilgrims and tourists. My hope is that this guide serves as a useful companion for your journey, offering insights into the profound teachings and traditions that have flourished here for centuries.

As you explore Bodh Gaya, I encourage you to approach the experience with an open heart and mind. Allow yourself to be inspired by the serene beauty of the surroundings, the depth of the Buddhist heritage, and the warmth of the local community. May your time in Bodh Gaya be transformative and enriching.

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INTRODUCTION

Just before the full moon day of the month of Vesākha (Vesak) in about the year 528 BCE, a young ascetic of noble birth, worn out by years of self denial, arrived on the outskirts of the small village of Uruvelā nestled on the banks of the sandy Nerañjarā River. Many years later he described the scene that unfolded before him. "There I saw a beautiful stretch of countryside, a beautiful grove, a clear flowing river, a lovely ford and a village nearby for support. And I thought to myself; 'Indeed, this is a good place for a young man set on striving'." He settled himself under the spreading branches of a nearby tree and prepared to begin his meditation. Just then a young woman named Sujātā happened to be passing and noticing how thin he was, ran quickly home and brought him a bowl of milk rice and honey. Strengthened by this nutritious meal the ascetic began his meditation. All night he sat there as the leaves of the tree quivered in the warm breeze and the moon shone bright in the velvety black sky. Eventually the clouds of ignorance dissolved and he saw the Truth in all its glory and splendour. He was no longer Prince Siddhattha or the ascetic Gotama; he had become the Awakened One, the Compassionate One, the Light of the World, the Buddha Supreme.

The Buddha spent the next seven weeks near Uruvelā experiencing the bliss of Awakening and moving to a different location every seven days. Then he set off for Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Varanasi to proclaim

to the world the liberating truths he had realised. Some months later, back in Uruvelā, he met three old ascetics with matted hair of the type that some Hindu swamis still wear; the brothers Urevela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa. Although revered teachers themselves they had never heard such wisdom as they did from the Buddha's lips nor had they ever experienced the serenity and joy that showed so clearly on his smiling face. The three brothers, followed by their disciples, bowed at the Buddha's feet and asked him to ordain them as monks. This done, the whole party with the Buddha at its head set out for Gaya, where the Buddha preached his famous Fire Discourse, then to Rājagaha (modern Rajgir). There is no evidence that the Buddha ever returned to Uruvelā, but as his teachings spread and attracted more followers some of these people began to want to see the place where their teacher had attained Awakening. Understanding that this could arouse faith or further nourish faith already arisen, the Buddha encouraged such visits. Thus the Buddhist tradition of pilgrimage began. Over the centuries Uruvelā has several different names – Sambodhi, Bodhimaṇḍa, Vajrāsana, Mahābodhi and finally, in the 18th century, Bodh Gaya.

There are records of pilgrims coming to Bodh Gaya from all over India dating from the 3rd century BCE and starting about a century later, from almost every land and region where Buddhism spread. In the 11th century Acharya Dharmakirti from Sumatra made a pilgrimage to Lumbini, Kapilavatthu and Bodh Gaya. When the Chinese I Tsing was in Bodh Gaya in the 7th century he met a monk who had come all the way from what is now Kazakhstan in the former Soviet Union. Vietnamese began coming to India on pilgrimage soon

after the introduction of Buddhism into their country in the 6th century. One of the earliest such records concerns two monks, Khuy Sung and Minh Vien, who took a ship to Sri Lanka, sailed up the west coast of India and then went from there by foot to the holy land. The two companions reached Bodh Gaya and then continued on to Rājagaha where poor Khuy Sung died. He was only twenty-five years old. In about 402 CE, after an epic journey through the mountains and deserts of Central Asia, the gentle and pious Faxian reached Bodh Gaya, the first Chinese monk ever to do so. On returning home he wrote an account of his pilgrimage which in later centuries inspired hundreds of others to follow in his footsteps. The most famous of these was Xuanzang who stayed in India from 630 to 644 CE visiting Bodh Gaya at least twice during that time. He too wrote an account of his pilgrimage in which he included much detailed and accurate information about Bodh Gaya. In fact, we today are able to identify many locations in and around the Mahābodhi Temple and know their histories and the legends associated with them, because of Xuanzang's book. Another pilgrim, this time a Tibetan, who also bequeathed to us much information about Bodh Gaya's past was the scholar-monk Dharmasvāmin. He arrived in Bodh Gaya in the spring of 1234 only to find that "the place was deserted and only four monks were staying there. One of them said; "It is not good! All have fled from the Turushka soldiers." The monks blocked up the door in front of the Temple with bricks plastered it and on it they placed another image as a substitute. They also plastered up the outside door of the Temple saying; "We five dare not stay here and shall have to flee." As the day's stage was long and the heat great, they felt tired and as it became dark, they remained there and fell asleep. Had the Turushkas come

they would not have known it. The danger passed and Dharmasvāmin and the other monks were able to return. Dharmasvāmin stayed for three months, went off to Rājagaha and Nālanda and then returned to Tibet. His biography is the last full account of Bodh Gaya until 1811. The first evidence of a Sri Lankan coming to Bodh Gaya is an inscription by a monk named Bodhiraksita written in the 1st century BCE. It is also the earliest evidence of any pilgrim from outside India coming to Bodh Gaya.

When, during the first half of the 4th century CE, the younger brother of King Meghavana of Sri Lanka (304-332) went on pilgrimage to India he found it difficult to get suitable accommodation. On his return home he mentioned this to his brother the king, who decided to ask the Indian ruler for permission to build pilgrims' rests at all the holy places. Permission was given to build one such establishment and thus the great Mahābodhi Monastery came to be built at Bodh Gaya on the north side of the Temple compound. An inscribed copper plaque above the door of this monastery announced that hospitality was to be given to everyone who came. It read; "To help everyone without distinction is the highest teaching of all the Buddhas." The last Sri Lankan to come to Bodh Gaya until modern times came in the second half of the 15th century, the monk Dharmadivakāra. He went to Bodh Gaya and then decided to go on from there to Wu Tai Shan in China. While there he met some Tibetans who invited him to their country where he travelled and taught widely. However, the strain of several long years of travel, the strange food and the cold climate all proved too much for poor Dharmadivakāra for we read that on his way back to Sri Lanka he disrobed in Nepal and later died in India.

In later centuries Bodh Gaya grew into a great monastic university on a par with Nālandā and Vikramaśilā and became the premier centre for the study of Theravāda Buddhism in India. The great Theravādin scholar Buddhaghosa wrote both the *Aṭṭhasālani* and the now lost *Ñāṇodaya* at this monastery before going to Sri Lanka. Other famous names associated with the place include the Chinese monks Chin-hung and Hsuan-chao, the famous south Indian monk Dharmapāla, and the Kashmiri Tantric siddha Ratnavajra. Tsami Lotsawa Sangye Trak is described in one ancient book as “the only Tibetan ever to hold the chair at Vajrāsana” suggesting that he was a professor at the university. The last Theravādin monk whose name is mentioned in connection with the Mahābodhi Monastery is the Sri Lankan Paṇḍit Ānandaśri who subsequently lived and taught in Tibet.

It is widely believed that Bodh Gaya’s temples and monasteries were destroyed soon after the Muslim invasion of India in 1199 but this is not correct. On the contrary, records show that Bodh Gaya continued to function as a centre of Buddhist scholarship and pilgrimage up to at least the beginning of the 15th century although it had declined considerably. When Dharmasvāmin came in 1234 there were still 300 Sri Lankan monks there. Shortly before his visit some Muslim soldiers had tried to steal the gems from the eyes of the main image in the Temple but this seems to have been just a part of a brief smash and grab raid that did little other damage. Twenty eight years later a local ruler, King Jayasena, donated some land in trust to Maṅgalasvāmin, described as the abbot of the Sri Lankan monastery and in

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1298 a party of Burmese came to make offerings at the Bodhi Tree and to repair the Temple. If you look at the paving stones on the floor inside the Mahābodhi Temple you will notice some have inscriptions and drawings on them. These were made between 1302 and 1331 by groups of pilgrims from Sindh, in what is now southern Pakistan. At the beginning of the 15th century King Cingalarāja repaired some of Bodh Gaya's shrines with the help of a monk named Śāriputra and shortly after this an embassy from the emperor of China arrived with a letter for Śāriputra, inviting him to visit that country. Records mention Śāriputra passing through Kathmandu in 1412 and Gyantse in Tibet the following year. This is the last mention until the 19th century of monks actually residing at Bodh Gaya although a trickle of pilgrims continued to come. In 1427 the Indian Tantric siddha Vanaratana planned to go to Bodh Gaya to erect a statue of his teacher but fear of being attacked by bandits made him cancel his trip. There is no doubt that Bodh Gaya endured at least two attacks by Muslims but the monks survived these and continued with their meditation and study. However, with the stream of pilgrims gradually drying up and royal patronage no longer forthcoming, staying at Bodh Gaya became increasingly difficult and one by one the monks and nuns drifted away and Bodh Gaya was deserted.

Sometime in perhaps the 16th or 17th centuries a Hindu Swami settled down near the crumbling Mahābodhi Temple and being ignorant of the true identities of the Buddha statues scattered around, began worshipping them as Hindu gods. This Swami's successors, the Mahants, eventually became powerful and wealthy and began to look upon the Mahābodhi Temple as their

private property. In 1877 the king of Burma received permission from the British Government to repair the Mahābodhi Temple and soon after sent a large delegation of officials and craftsmen to do the work. Knowing nothing of archaeology these Burmese did enormous damage and destroyed much important evidence about the Temple's history. Finally, at the insistence of Alexander Cunningham, the then Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, the government intervened and did the job at a total cost of 100,000 rupees. In 1891 a young Sri Lankan named Anagarika Dharmapāla came to Bodh Gaya. He expected to be inspired and uplifted by such a holy place but all he saw were greedy priests nagging him for money and local people using the Temple compound as a toilet. He was deeply shocked and being of strong faith and abundant energy he then and there conceived the audacious idea of restoring Bodh Gaya to its former glory. This immediately put Dharmapāla on a collision course with the Mahant. Until his death in 1932 he struggled on, often alone, through physical attacks and court cases, despite reversals and disappointments, but never lost sight of his noble goal. Finally in 1949, mainly due to the efforts of Mahābodhi Society, the organisation Dharmapāla had founded to continue his work, the Bodh Gaya Act was passed, making provision for the setting up of a committee of four Hindus and four Buddhists to manage the affairs of the Temple.

THINGS TO SEE AROUND BODH GAYA

TORAᅇA

Enter the main gate of the sacred compound, descend the stairs and you will come to a *torana* or gateway. In ancient times such *toranas* were often erected to mark entry into sacred places. This richly carved *torana* was erected in about the 8th century CE. At the foot of the *torana* are two graceful figures of Burmese workmanship in the gesture of worship. They were probably placed here by the Burmese embassy who came to repair the Mahābodhi Temple in 1298. Linger for a few moments to examine the interesting carvings on the *torana*.

BUDDHAPĀDA SHRINE

A little beyond the *torana* and to the left is a small spired shrine with two beautifully carved pillars supporting its portico. Under this portico is a large round stone with a pair of symbolic Buddha footprints on it, one of the loveliest antiquities to be seen at Bodh Gaya. In the earliest days of Buddhism, before Buddha statues were made, footprints were often used to indicate the Buddha's presence. A date equivalent to 1308 is carved on the side of the stone.

PAÑCAPAṆḌU SHRINES

Next to the Buddhapada Shrine is a line of Hindu temples which were built in the early 19th century when there were no Buddhists at Bodh Gaya. Inside the first temple is a collection of Buddha statues dressed up to look like Hindu gods

MAHĀBODHI TEMPLE

You now stand in front of the majestic Mahābodhi Temple built over the very spot where the Buddha attained Awakening (*bodhi*). Although some people mistakenly call it a stūpa, the great Temple conforms in all ways to the canons of classical Indian temple architecture - one large inward sloping spire (*sikhāra*) 52 meters high topped by an *amalaka*, and four smaller spires in the corners of a rectangular base (*pañcāyatana*) inside of which is the sanctum (*garbha*). Except for the portico pillars and the paving, which are made of stone, the rest of the Temple is of brick. These bricks are not held together with mortar allowing for some 'give' so that it has withstood the many earthquakes that have rocked the region. Exactly who built the Temple and when is not known. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang who visited in the 6th century was told that it had been built by two brothers in fulfilment of a vow. It was probably built in the early 5th century CE to replace an earlier one built by King Asoka. By the middle of the 19th century the Temple was badly decayed and in 1880 was extensively restored by the British archaeologists J. D. Beglar with guidance from and Alexander Cunningham. Much of the Temple's exterior actually dates from this time.

On either side of the main entrance are niches containing two beautiful Buddha statues. The one on the left, crowned and jewelled, dates from about 10th century while the one on the right is from the 7th century. Both Buddhas stand serenely on lotuses that rise above the jagged rocks and swirling waves of *samsāra*, the rounds of birth, death and rebirth. Entering the Temple at the far end of the inner sanctum is the main shrine marking the Diamond Throne (*vajrāsana*) or as it is sometimes called, the Navel of the Earth (*paṭhavīnābhi*), the very place where the Buddha attained Awakening and sat in meditation for seven days. On the shrine is a statue of the Buddha found in the ruins and placed there by Beglar in 1880 after he had finished repairing the Temple. It dates from about the 10th century and was donated by a ruler named Śri Pūrnabhadra on the Chinda dynasty. The Buddha's left hand is nestled in his lap while his right one is touching the ground. It is said that after his Awakening he called upon the Earth to witness his momentous achievement. The female figure in the centre of the pedestal is *Paṭhavī*, the Earth Goddess, bearing witness to the Buddha's victory over ignorance. Flanking her are two lions and two elephants, often used symbolize the Buddha qualities – the elephant for patience and the lion for spiritual courage.

Now climb up the stairs at the entrance on the right that lead to the Temple's upper chamber. Near the top is a fine Buddha statue flanked by two smaller Buddhas, the one on the right subduing the elephant Nālagiri. The Buddha statue on the shrine in the upper chamber is particularly beautiful. Now descend the stairs, go outside, turn right and walk around the Temple. Notice that the niches on the Temple's wall's all have

statues in them. Some of these are recent while others, mainly the ones of the various bodhisattvas, are ancient.

THE BODHI TREE

At the back of the temple in a stone enclosure is the Bodhi Tree. Buddhists honour the Bodhi Tree because it sheltered the Buddha during his final struggle for Awakening and also because it is a fitting symbol of the Buddha himself. Like him, a tree is silent, majestic and offers its soothing cool to anyone who sits in its shade, just as the Buddha gave his liberating Dhamma to all without distinction. This is not of course the original tree the Buddha sat under. Legend says that King Asoka's wife cut down the Bodhi Tree out of jealousy but that it miraculously sprouted again. Another legend says that King Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (187-151 BCE) also tried to destroy it. The fanatically anti-Buddhist King Śaśāṃka certainly did destroy the tree in about 600 CE and it must have died off and been replaced by seedlings on at least several other occasions. When the tree died again in 1871 Cunningham took a seed from it, and Beglar planted it where it now grows in 1880 and that is the tree that we see today. It is probably a direct descendant of the original one.

THE VAJRĀSANA

At the foot of the Bodhi Tree is a large carved, rectangular stone, the oldest and most important artefact still to be seen at Bodh Gaya. Made by King Asoka (304-232), he had it placed at the foot of the Bodhi Tree when it grew at its original location, i.e, the shrine now inside the Temple. This was probably done when King Asoka

made his pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya in 260 BC. The stone has an unusual geometrical pattern on its upper surface and a line of geese around its sides. Because of its migratory habits the wild goose (*hamsa*) was used by the ancient Buddhists as a symbol of detachment and freedom.

THE JEWEL PROMENADE SHRINE

Leaving the Bodhi Tree and proceeding to the north side of the temple you will come to the Jewel Promenade Shrine (*ratanacaṅkama cetiya*) marking the place where the Buddha mindfully walked up and down for seven days to stretch his legs during his third week at Bodh Gaya. This shrine originally consisted of a long plinth with a row of eleven pillars on either side supporting a roof over it. The plinth was encased in stone in 1956 and only the bases of the pillars on the north side survive.

RAILING

You will notice that the whole Temple is surrounded by a fence or railing, now a cement copy of the original one. The first railing, around the Bodhi Tree (there was no temple at that time) was made of wood. In about the 2nd century BCE this was replaced by a richly carved stone railing which had been donated by Queen Nāgadevi and two noblewomen, Kurangi and Srīma. When the present Temple was built in about the 5th century this railing was dismantled, new parts were added and it was re-erected where the cement copy now stands. The original stone railing is now housed in Bodh Gaya's museum. Go and have a look at the many carvings

on it. They are of great interest and are amongst the earliest examples of Buddhist art.

THE UNBLINKING SHRINE

Directly outside the north gate in the railing is the foundations of a large rectangular building. There are usually Tibetan monks doing prostration's on it. This is probably the remains of the Unblinking Shrine (*animisa cetiya*) marking the place where, in his second week at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha sat for seven days looking without blinking at the Bodhi Tree out of gratitude for the shelter it had given him. The Jātakas very clearly say that the Unblinking Shrine is directly north of the Jewel Promenade and Xuanzang reconfirms this. The temple on the embankment to the right of the entrance to the sacred compound now pointed out as the Unblinking Shrine cannot possibly be correct as it is facing away from rather than towards the Bodhi Tree.

JEWEL ABODE SHRINE

Now walk through the *stūpas* and gardens and in the north east corner of the sacred compound you will see the foundations of a small building. This is the remains of the Jewel Abode (*ratanaghara cetiya*), the shrine built over the place where, in his fourth week at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha sat for seven days contemplating the Abhidhamma. It is said that while he was there the gods made him a shelter out of jewels, hence the shrines name. The Jewel Abode originally had a spire on it but this is now missing. The elaborately carved stone door frame dates from about the 10th century. Inside you will notice a small collection of ancient statues.

STONE STUPAS

Proceed a little further and on the left of the path you will come a row of three large *stūpas* calved out of blue-black stone. Look carefully at the delicate carvings. Note the depiction of the four main events in the Buddha's life, the eight treasures of the Universal Monarch; the wheel, elephant, stallion, jewel, queen, householder, and the minister. These *stūpas* date from about the 10th century. Other similar *stūpas* in the sacred compound are also worth looking at, especially the row placed inside the east side of the railing

STONE PILLAR

It is known that King Asoka raised a great stone pillar crowned by an elephant at Bodh Gaya but this monument disappeared centuries ago. The present pillar originally stood next to Sujāta's *stūpa* across the river, was moved to Gaya in the 1820's and then erected here in 1956. Whether it is one of Asoka's pillars is uncertain. It exhibits the same polished surface but lacks the slender gentle inward sloping on most of Asoka's pillars.

TANK

Just a little beyond the pillar is a large rectangular water tank with beautiful water lilies and lotuses growing in it. The sign says this is the Mucalinda Tank where the Buddha spent his week at Bodh Gaya but this is incorrect. This is clear from Xuanzang's comments. He says; "Outside the south gate of the compound is a large tank about 700 paces in circuit ... This is the tank made by the younger brother of the brahmin who built

the temple.” In fact, his tank was formed in ancient times by digging earth for bricks to build the temple and many other monasteries and shrines at Bodh Gaya. Later it was used as a bathing place for monks.

THE MUSEUM

The museum houses a modest collection of sculptures and artifacts discovered in and around Bodh Gaya. Its most captivating exhibit is the remains of the stone railing that once encircled the original temple constructed by King Asoka. The museum's visiting hours are from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, and it is closed on Fridays.

MODERN TEMPLES

Since Anagārika Dharmapāla established the first rest house in the 1890s which encouraged pilgrims to once again begin coming to Bodh Gaya, numerous other rest houses, temples and monasteries have been built, mainly from 1956 onwards. There is a new Chinese temple, the large temple and monastery built by the king of Thailand, the colourful Bhutanese temple, two Japanese temples and one temple each for the Gelukpa, Kagyupa, Nyingma and Sakyapa sects of Tibetan Buddhism, all of them beautifully decorated and painted. On the old road to Gaya you will find the Burmese temple with its golden spires and on the new road, a little out of town, the Vietnamese temple. Smaller Buddhist communities such as the Chakmas, the Sikkimese, the Bangladeshi and the people from the Darjeeling Hills have also built or are building temples.

MUCALINDA TANK

The Buddha spent week at Bodh Gaya besides a tank where the great *nāga* Mucalinda sheltered him from a rain storm. Xuanzang says that this place was some quite some distance south-east of the tank mentioned above. The Mucalinda Tank is in fact near a small village called Mucharin, about one and a half kilometres south of the Temple. The tank itself, now much silted up, is surrounded by bamboo and palm trees and had a small Hindu temple on its west side. Inside the temple are several Buddhist *stūpas* now being worshipped as Siva lingams.

SUJĀTA'S STUPA

Across the Nerañjarā River from Bodh Gaya in the village of Bakraur is a ruined *stūpa* about 11 meters high. According to an inscription found at the site, this *stūpa* was built over the house of Sujāta, the young girl who offered Prince Siddhattha a bowl of milk rice and honey thereby giving him the strength to recover from the austerities he had been practicing. The *stūpa* was first built during the Gupta period and enlarged on two later occasions until it got to its present diameter of 65 meters. It originally had a processional path around it, an enclosing wall and a gate. The *stūpa* was excavated in 1972.

Near Bakraur and beyond it are several locations that some are beginning to claim are where various events in the Buddha's life occurred. All these places have been created only recently and have no basis in either tradition, history or archaeology.

THE MAHANT'S MONASTRY

This large complex running along the bank of the Nerañjarā River is the home of the Giri Swamis, a monastic order founded by Śaṃkara in the 9th century. The abbot of the monastery is known as the Mahant. Visitors are welcome to visit but while here or in any temples or monasteries in Bodh Gaya, it is good to maintain an attitude of quiet respect. For Buddhist, the main attraction of the monastery is the large collection of Buddha statues housed there dating from the 7th to the 11th centuries.

PRAGBODHI

To the northeast of Bodh Gaya, you will see a long chain of high, rugged mountains. One of the peaks, now known as Dugeshwari Cave, was known in ancient times as Pragbodhi, which translates to 'Prior to Awakening.' According to a legend, Prince Siddhattha sheltered in a cave on Pragbodhi while he was practicing austerities and before he went to Bodh Gaya. Xuanzang came here and wrote a detailed description of the mountain and the stories associated with it. Half way up the mountain is a temple run by Tibetan monks and just above this at the base of a sheer cliff is a small cave with a statue of an emaciated Prince Siddhattha in it. If you take the rough path to the top of the mountain you will be rewarded by a sweeping view across the countryside. Directly above the cave and along the spine of the mountain are the ruins of several *stūpas*. Pragbodhi is a beautiful peaceful place and it is worthwhile to spend some time there meditating. There are two ways to get to Pragbodhi. You can hire a vehicle and drive there via Gaya. Alternatively you can

take a three wheeler to the village of Kiriya near where the second line of pylons cross the river and take one of the paths across the river and then leads through the paddy fields to the mountain.

GAYĀSĪSA

After teaching his first two discourses at Sarnath, the Buddha returned to Bodh Gaya where the Kassapa brothers and their followers became his disciples. Then they all set out for Rajgir. On the way they stopped at a mountain called Gayāsīsa and the Buddha taught his third discourse, the famous Fire Sermon. It is said that when he was teaching the audience sat on a large flat rock. Climb the stairs leading up the mountain and just after passing through the gateway half way up take the path on the left. This leads to a large area of flat exposed rock which may well be the spot. When Xuanzang visited the hill he saw a *stūpa* on it that had been built by King Asoka. Pilgrims were still coming to the place as late as the second half of the 16th century. At that time the Tantric siddha Rāmagopāla is said to have visited “all the pilgrimage places of the Victorious One” including Gayāsīsa. Buddhaghosa says that the hill’s original name was Gajasīsa, ‘Elephants Head’ because of its resemblance to a crouching elephant, Gayā being a contraction of ‘gaja’. The hill is now called *Brahmayoni* and is considered sacred to Hindus. To get there take a three wheeler along the river road to Gaya. Get off at the cross road leading to the new bridge and turn left. It is just a short walk to the mountain.

Selected Pictures:



The image in the main shrine of the Temple



Carvings of the torana



Sri Lankan pilgrims with Buddhist flags



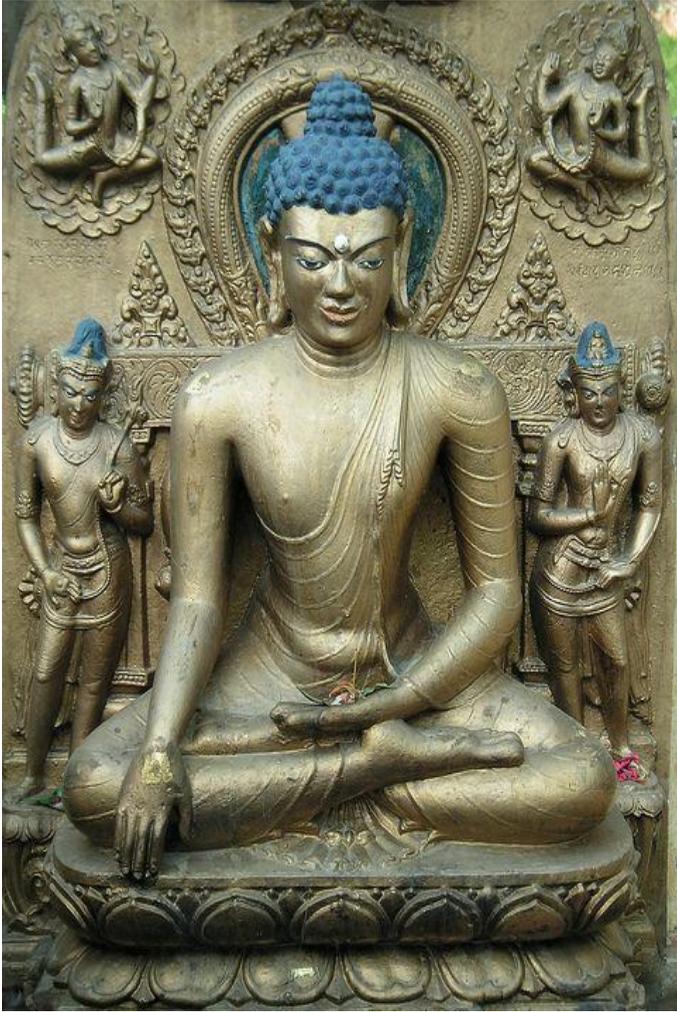
Symbolic Buddha's footprints



Ancient Buddha images in the Mahant's monastery.



Maiābahi Temple before its renovation.



A Buddha image in the sacred compound.



Paying respects to the Bodhi Tree, 2nd century B.C.