Resurgence from Ruins
the Sanchee saga

Archaeological Survey of India
Bhopal Circle
Foreword

Sanchi famous for earliest stone stupas with richly carved stone railings and toran gateways with narratives from Buddhas life was discovered as ruins in the year 1818 CE. We owe enormously to the inquisitive European (mostly British) officers who stumbled upon ruins at Sanchi and then not only documented but also initiated research enquiries. Gradual and concerted efforts over the period have helped in restoring the ancient glory of the place now known as Sanchi. The story of discovery of Sanchi is interesting even more interesting and somewhat intriguing is the story of rise of Buddhism as religion in India.

A chance discovery at Sarnath in the last quarter of 18th century brought to light strange object which generated curiosity in the scholarly world. Initial research and enquiries in 1794CE indicated to the practice observed by the followers of Buddha. In the decades that followed, ZuanZhang’s travelogue were translated first in French (Stanislas Julien) and then in English (Samuel Beal). Endeavours of James Princep and others bore fruits, scripts were deciphered. Buddhism began to be gradually understood and moved from the realm of simple philosophy to being established as an ancient religion spreading all over the Indian Sub-continent. Mahabodhi Society of Srilanka equipped with Mahavamsa, played a significant role in bringing Buddhism back to its place of birth. Similar ruins were Sarnath, Rajgir, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vaishali, Sankissa, Ajcibhatra, Kushinagar, Lumbini and many other places were identified as buddhist centres in the Ganga Valley where Siddhartha Gautam Buddha had actually visited. Role of Emperor Ashoka was also understood in spreading tenets of Buddhism. After the Kalinga war when the great bloodbath cleansed the heart of Ashoka. The efforts of an emperor helped Buddhism spread into the lands where the Buddha himself has not gone. Buddha’s dhamma reached far and wide into west and east riding on the wheels of trade along the routes followed by the Sarthavaah.
Emperor Ashoka is believed to have raised 84000 stupas all over the Indian Sub-continent. Sanchi, as the place is known today, was one such spot. Not much is, however, known about the significance of the place other than that it lies on the ancient trade route and in the vicinity of the thriving city of Vidishathat could have supported it well with certain patronage. It is also not known as by whom and when the relics of Sariputta and Mahamoglayan, the two contemporaries of Buddha, were brought here and enshrined and then further divided and enshrined at nearby Satdhara. Future researchers may attempt to find the answers.

Here is an humble attempt our team to present the story of Sanchi interwoven with the life of Buddha as gleaned through the archaeological evidences; literally the “Resurgence from the Ruins The Sanchee Saga”.

Bhuvan Vikrama
In 1818 CE Major General James Taylor of Bengal Cavalry, pursuing the Pindaris, stumbled upon a place with ruins of structures, later Captain Edward Fell published an article on these remains found at a place called Sanchee Kanikhera. He could identify it with remains of a Buddhist establishments as the Buddhism had been rediscovered in 1794 CE at Sarnath when Jagat Singh, Dewan of Raja Chet Singh, ordered for quarrying of bricks and stones from a place near Benaras called Sarnath, where a great heap of brick was readily available. The work was stopped only when some pieces of bones along with ashes, and some gold leaves, pearls and other objects were found in a casket of green marble. Thanks to one Mr. Jonathan Duncan, a resident of Benaras, that this finding was report to learned world in 1798 CE and
Buddhist tradition was identified & established. The great heap of bricks was the Dharmarajika stupa of Mrigdava, which was completely dismantled and carted to Benaras.

Buddhism had remained under oblivion, removed from the human memory for almost six centuries after the great run of devastation carried out by the commander of Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji, who ravaged entire Ganga plains destroying every settlement which came in way upto Bengal. All the big centres of learning like Ahichhatra, Sarnath, Nalanda, Vikramshila and many more were set ablaze and razed to ground, monks killed and the surviving had left the plains for Nepal and Tibbet. Though uprooted from the heartland Buddhist centres in regions like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh survived for some more time but succumbed due to lack of inspiration from the heartland.
Around 600 BCE when the Indo-Gangetic plain was witnessing the unfolding of 2nd Urbanisation with the establishment of 16 great city states and several republican tribes dotting the Himalayan foothill region. It was a time when the Vedic rituals and rites were the mainstay of the fourfold society.

King Shuddhodhan of Gotama clan was ruling at Kapilvastu. Queen Mahamaya, pregnant as she was, dreamt of an elephant entering her womb. The dream was interpreted as a good omen and when she was travelling to Devadaha, her father's principality for delivery,
she made a stop at Lumbini vana. Suddenly, she felt the pains, before the hurried arrangements could be made, from the right side of her womb a son was born, while she stood holding a branch of Sala tree.

The new born took seven steps and proclaimed to the world that the saviour has arrived who will eliminate the *dukkha*.

The interpretation of the dream and the premature birth and unnatural as it was, made the king consult the sages about the future of the child. Rishi Asita also known as Kanhasiri, holding the child in lap wept and predicted that the child will either become a great king who...
will unite the world or a saint who will renounce the world and end the sorrows of the people. It was a prediction which the future was to see come true. King father made sure that the child Siddharth, as he was named, does not encounter any kind of hardship or even see. All pleasures and comforts were arranged in the palace. Soon the best match was found in Yashodhara and Siddhartha was married. During his few city rides Siddharta saw an ailing person, and old person, a dead body and an ascetic the inquisitive mind started questioning why there is sorrow?, can it be ended? Question made him sad and gloomy. Years passed and the marriage resulted in the birth of a son Rahul, but the quest haunted him and the urge to find the solution was intensifying.

One day Siddhartha silently left the palace, the city, the carriage and then the royal robes. He took the path of wandered, a seeker the journey had begun. The ascetic Siddhartha wandering in search of answers and the right Guru who could help him, reached Rajgriha.

Begging his food from one house to other and passing from one teacher to other time went by but the satisfaction was not in the sight. Alara Kalama was a well-known spiritual teacher, Siddhartha stayed with him for long and learned all the practices and gained all the knowledge that the teacher knew and asked him if he can teach him to go beyond the
life and death. Expression of ignorance from Alara Kalama made Siddhartha move on in search of some other teacher. Siddhartha came to know about Uddaka, a great teacher in possession of vast knowledge and became his pupil. Uddaka was proved no help to Siddhartha in finding the answer to his quest of conquering the birth and death. Now disappointed with teacher Siddhartha, decided to take the hard road of penance himself. He practiced all modes of hardships, rigorous self-torture, gave up food and meditated for 6-7 years, but in vain. Perceiving the futility of the rigorous path, Siddhartha returned to Magadha at a place called Uruvella and decided to stay. Here he also met the five other medicants who impressed by Siddhartha’s demeanour, became his followers. Continued fasting and rigours of harsh meditation had made Siddhartha physically so weak that he could not carry his search further and then he realised that extremes are of no good, better to be healthy and pursue his goal.
He again started eating food that he got as alms from the nearby village and soon regained health. Siddhartha had become popular in the village. One day when he was about to sit for his daily meditation, a village maiden Sujata brought him a bowl of rice cooked in best milk (*kheer*) and wished him success in attaining the desired goal. It became a daily routine. The five followers were not so impressed by the sudden change without understanding the reason for it and taking it as deviation from the holy path parted their ways and left Siddhartha. Deserted by his followers, resolute Siddhartha threw his begging bowl in the Niranjana river (Phalgu as it is called now) and said if I have to get the ultimate knowledge the bowl should travel up-stream, and it did. He finally sat down beneath the Pipal tree, determined not to rise from his seat, come what may, without gaining the deliverance from birth and death the ultimate truth, the supreme knowledge. Concentrating hard, Siddhartha had to conquer temptations from the evil side the Mara. As the evil temptations were all conquered the final truth gradually emerged to the Siddhartha of the Gautma clan. Sakya Muni the Buddha was born.
Awakening of Siddhartha as Buddha made many Rishis engaged in penance near Varanasi fall to disfavour as the ultimate knowledge had been gained by the Enlightened. And the place came to be known as Isipatan (RishiPatan).

After enlightenment Buddha met with two merchants, Tapussa and Bhallika, who offered him some gruel of barley and honey. These two came to be the first lay disciples of Buddha, and this was the beginning of formation of a band of lay disciples. Buddha then decided to make understood and preach to the people of the world given to material attachment.

He was in a state of confusion that to whom he should first reveal the Dharma, since his own teachers Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra who could have understood the Dharma were already dead. He set out for Banaras to preach to his five mendicant companions who had left him in despair and had then settles in Banaras. He approached the deer park of Rishipattan (Sarnath) near Banaras. He then preached his first sermon to them, setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma (Dharmachakra-pravartana).

The five monks became his first disciples after this sermon.
Sometimes Buddha performed miracles to support his claims much to the chagrin of the Brahmanas and other sectarians. In one such instance, Kasyapa of Uruvela, a fire worshipping Brahma with matted hair, was performing a great sacrifice when the Buddha performed a miracle. The Brahmanas could not kindle a fire without Buddha's permission. When the fire was kindle, there was a great flood. The Buddha, however, saved the sacrificers and Kasyapa along with his followers. Then they joined the Sangha. Along with them Buddha went to the hill of Gayasirs and delivered his famous sermon on burning. From Gayasirsa he went on to Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha. In Magadha lived Sanjay, an ascetic with a large number of pupils including Sariputas and Mogalana.
Sariputas became a disciple of Buddha, and Mogalana followed his example. The Sangha was enriched by the addition of these two brahmanas, who became the chief disciples of the Master. After a year, having heard about his Son's glory Suddhodhana invited him to Kapilvastu. The Buddha accordingly came to his parental home. Suddhodhana did homage to his son as he was now a holy man. On the following day, Buddha made a round of the city for calm. Hundreds of Sakya kings doffed their finery and put on yellow robes. Even Upali the family barber and keeper of the royal wardrobe, renounced his home...
and became a follower of the Buddha. Anathpindaka, a rich merchant of Sravasti, bought from prince Jeta a large park for as many gold pieces as would cover the whole ground. There he erected a monastery (Jetavana vihara), and made a gift of it to the Sangha. Prasannajit, the king of Kosala, Vishaka, a rich lady, and many eminent people of Kosala became lay disciples of the Buddha, he then went to Rajgriha. One important event was taken place when king Suddhodhana was died; his widow Gautami, the step mother of Anathpindaka a rich merchant of Sravasti, bought from prince Jeta a large park for as many gold pieces as would cover the whole ground. There he erected a monastery (Jetavana vihara), and made a gift of it to the Sangha. Prasannajit, the king of Kosala, Vishaka, a rich lady, and many eminent people of Kosala became lay disciples of the Buddha, he then went to Rajgriha. One important event was taken place when king Suddhodhana was died; his widow Gautami, the step mother of

Buddha asked her son for admission to the Sangha. Ananda, the personal attendant of the Master, strongly supported her cause. This was the beginning of an Order of Nuns in India. Years rolled by, the master and his disciple travelled many places and Sangha continued to increase in strength. When Buddha was 72 years of age, King Bimbisara of Magadha was murdered by his son Ajatasatru. Ajatasatru was an admirer of Devadatta, a monk of the Sangha. Both these wanted to kill Buddha. One day Devadatta left a mad elephant on the Buddha, but the animal humbly bowed down before the Master. Frustrated in his murderous attempts, Amrapali the famous courtesan presented her mango-grove to the Sangha the last great gift during the Buddha's life time. When the Buddha was at Pava. Cunda, a blacksmith of the town, invited him to a meal of rice, cakes and sukaramaddava.

Amrapali performing in the royal court

Mad elephant bowed down before Buddha

Amrapali the pupil of Buddha
There is no agreement among scholars about the meaning of the last word. It may be either a boar's tender flesh or some kind of edible herb. Whatever it might have been, it was difficult to digest and the Buddha was fallen ill with dysentery. His illness, however, did not prevent him from going on to Kushinagar. Here he asked Ananda to spread a cloth on ground between two Sala trees. He was born between two Sala trees and was to die in a similar place. He lay down like a lion and gave his last admonitions to thousands of monks and lay folk who had assembled to have a last glimpse of him. The following were his last word. "Now, monk, I have nothing more to tell you but that all that is composed is liable to decay! Strive after salvation energetically." The event of demise of Buddha is called Mahaparinirvana in Buddhist world. Buddha's remains were cremated with royal honours. A battle for the possession of his mortal remains for daily worship was stopped by Drona, a Brahmana. Eight stupas were erected in different parts of India to house his relics.
Since, Buddha's Parinirvana was taken place at Kushinagar, the Mallas of Kushinagar kept the relics under their possession. The other Kings also claimed on the relics. Following are the Eight groups who claimed for the relics:

1). Ajatshatru - Rajgriha
2). Sakya - Kapilvastu
3). Buli - Alpkaps
4). Koli - Ramgram
5). Malla - Pava
6). Lichhavi - Vaishali
7). Brahmana - Vethdweep
8). Malla - Kushinagar
Stupa:

The Stupa is evolved from the simple prehistoric burial heap of tumulus under which the ashes of the dead were buried. Though the Jaina too built stupas, but this kind of monuments appears mainly in the Buddhist context. The stupa is a circular or hemispherical structure contains relic of a dead (sarira). The stupa consists of a solid hemisphere or dome called the anda which stands on a medhi (circular / square base). It has a flattened top rests a kind of kiosk usually called harmika a dwarf railing or vedika is fixed around the dome. At the centre of harmika yasti holds an umbrella. Sometimes the stupa is surrounded by another vedika on the ground and four entrances are provided on the cardinal direction like that of Sanchi. The vedika (railing) is composed of three parts i.e. stambha (vertical pillar), suchi (horizontal stambh) in between two pillars and third part is called as ushnisha (copping pillar).
Stupas are found in four types. First **Saririka** stupa to enshrine body relics, mainly in the form of small pieces of bone of Buddha or Buddhist teachers; Second **Paribhogika** stupa to preserve personal belongings like crystal, gold and other materials. Third type of stupa is called **Uddesika** erected to commemorate some event at places sacred to the Buddhist. Fourth type of stupa is called **Votive** stupa considered as an offering.

**Sanchi : Through the ages**

Sanchi was a great religious center for many centuries right from 300 BCE to 1100 CE. The stupa No. -1 (Great stupa) had been gone through various stages of development. In the beginning it was made of bricks and dateble to Mauryan period. This brick stupa was just half of the present time. After Mauryan, the stupa was developed during the time of Sunga period and the vedika around the anda and medhi, harmika was added to the early Mauryan stupa. In the 100 BCE, the Stupa was further enhanced by the great Satavahana rulers by adding four toranas on four cardinal direction. The last addition to the stupa took place during Gupta period when four images of Buddha, each seated under a pillared canopy were installed against the walls of the stupa facing its four entrances. The monuments at
Sanchi remained unnoticed until 1818 when General Taylor of the Bengal Cavalry camped near the site in the course of a military campaign. For a number of years thereafter Sanchi suffered from the depredation of treasure-hunters and amateur Archaeologists, the stupas were being especially damaged by digging in 1822. The excavation of Alexander Cunningham and F.C. Maisey in 1851 mark the beginning of a more scholarly approach. In addition to recovering the reliquaries, Cunningham attempted to describe the site in detail and given account of the inscriptions. Cunningham's book Bhilsa Topes, published in 1854, represents the best work of the period. According to Cunningham "the name of Sanchi, or Sachi, is most probably only the spoken form of the Sanskrit Santi: for the term Santi-Sangham (the Santi community) used in the inscription on the southern pillar of the Great Tope."
There is the reference in Mahavamsa that Mahendra, son of Asoka and his queen Devi, is said to have visited his mother at Vidisa, and the latter took him up to the beautiful monastery of Vedisagiri built by her. In some recessions it is called Chetiyagiri.

From the early votive inscriptions it appears that the locality was known anciently as Kakanaya or Kakanava.

A later inscription of the seventh century CE mentions it as Bots-Sri Parvata.

**Names of Sanchi in Early Records:**
1. **Vedisagiry or Chetiyagiri**: There is the reference in Mahavamsa that Mahendra, son of Asoka and his queen Devi, is said to have visited his mother at Vidisa, and the latter took him up to the beautiful monastery of Vedisagiri built by her. In some recessions it is called Chetiyagiri.
2. **Kakanaya or Kakanava**: From the early votive inscriptions it appears that the locality was known anciently as Kakanaya or Kakanava.
3. **Kakanadabota**: The records of 412-13 CE and 450-51 CE, inscribed on the ground balustrade of Stupa 1, refer to it by Kakanadabota.
4. **Bota-Sri Parvata**: A later inscription of the seventh century CE mentions it as Bots-Sri Parvata.
Restoration work at Sanchi was begun in 1881 under Major H.H. Cole, curator of ancient monuments, and was continued between 1912 to 1919 by Sir John Marshall, who was responsible for bringing most of the structures to their present condition.

Sir John Marshall, Director General of Archaeological Survey of India, who, between the year 1912 and 1919, brought the monuments to their present condition. His work entailed a large-scale clearance of jungle, excavation and thorough conservation of the edifices, which included the complete dismantling and rebuilding of the south-west quadrant of Stupa 1, setting up of its balustrades and erection of the crowning members of Stupa 3, resetting of the out of plumb pillars of Temple 18, repaired to the perilously decayed Temple 45, rebuilding of the retaining wall between the Main Terrace and Eastern Area, re-roofing and repairs of Temple 45, rebuilding of the retaining wall between the Main Terrace and Eastern Area, re-roofing and repairs of Temples 17, 31 and 32 and provision of an effective drainage. The site was next planted with trees and flowering creepers. A small museum was also built to house the loose antiquities found in the course of these operations.
Offering of honey by monkey
The spontaneous offering of honey to Buddha by a monkey is regarded as one of the eight important events of Buddha's life. True event is said to have taken place at Vaishali.

Miracle of the serpent in the fire temple at Uruvela.
Buddha overcome a serpent who took this residence in a fire temple.
Meanings of the relic is a part belonging to the holy persons body kept as an object of reverence. This part may be a bone of the holy person, the objects like ring bracelets etc. used by the divine person. After the cremation of Buddha his relics were distributed among the eight kings. The containers used for the relics in the Buddhist tradition have been variously describe of as reliquaries, casket and relic boxes. Most common word is relic casket. It is important to note that no Buddha, relics have been found from any of the stupas of Sanchi but, the relics of Sariputa and Maha-Mogalanasa the two chief disciples of Buddha found in the ruins.
of stupa No. -3. In introductory note of Sanchi and its remains (Maisey) was a great contribution of Britishers. Cunningham himself wrote about the discovery of these relic-caskets as, “I arrived at Sanchi on the 23rd of January, 1851, and the same morning, after only a few hour's work, we found the relics of Sariputa and Mogalana, the two chief disciples of Buddha in the ruins of No. 3 Stupa. As this discovery and all our subsequent explorations are fully describe in my Bhilsa Topes,” I only refer to them here to explain how it happened that I became associated with Lieutenant Maisey in the explorations of “Sanchi and its Remains.” The relic caskets were made of steatite. The caskets were covered by a thin earthen saucer of lustrous black ware. These relic caskets were recovered on the level of the terrace at the centre of the dome. Inside the relic-chamber, which was covered by a large stone slab of over 1.5 metres were two stone boxes with their lids respectively inscribed with the words 'Sariputas' and 'Maha Mogalanas', the lids are now in the Museum. The Stupa No. -3 is situated about 45 metres to the north east of Stupa No. -1. Its diametres and height are 15 metres and 8.23 metres respectively. It is equally important to note that Stupa No. -2, located at the western side of the Stupa No. -1 yielded relic casket of a few Buddhist teachers.

At a height of 2.13 metres above the terrace, Cunningham found within a relic-chamber (which was not at the centre but 0.61 metres westward) a relic-box of sandstone, 0.28 X 0.24 X 0.24 metres. Inside the box were found four small relic-caskets of steatite inscribed with the names of ten Saints whose burnt bones were enshrined within.
Among these ten Saints the name of Kasyap-gota and Moggliputa are very important, it is noteworthy that Moggliputa Tissa was the key person to organized the third Buddhist council during the reign of Ashoka.

The Brahmi script, the earliest writing system developed in India, is one of the most influential writing systems; all modern Indian scripts and several hundred scripts found in Southeast and East Asia are derived from Brahmi. The script was fully deciphered by James Prinsep in 1837, an archaeologist, philologist, and official of the East India Company, with the help of Alexander Cunningham. To complete the decipherment of Brahmi, James Prinsep analysed a large number of donator inscriptions on the reliefs in Sanchi, and noted that most of them ended with the same two Brahmi characters. Prinsep took them as "danam" (donation), which permitted to complete the puzzle and allow for the full decipherment of the Brahmi script. In a series of results that he published in March 1838, Prinsep was able to translate the inscriptions on a large number of rock edicts found around India, and provide, according to Richard Salomon, a "virtually perfect" rendering of the full Brahmi alphabet.
By 1850s photography was gaining wide popularity in the country and among the princely states. Although not much is known about the early photographers, Lala Deen Dayal's name has become a synonym for 19th-century photography in India. From documenting the exotic life of the Maharajas, the British officials, to India's marvellous architectural heritage and beautiful landscapes, his oeuvre encompassed it all. No wonder then that the Bombay Gazetteer, upon his death in 1905, gave him the status of being the “first great Indian photographer” while the Government of India issued a 500-rupee postage stamp in 2006 in his honour. With his studios successfully running in Indore, Secunderabad and Bombay back in the late 1800 and early 1900, they captured some of the most illustrious and iconic moments in the history of India in photos, estimated to be over 30,000 in number.
Stupa No. - 1, Restoration work Photographed by Deendayal, 1883, © British library

Chaitya No.-18 to the south of Stupa No. - 1 Photographed by Deendayal, 1883, © British library

Stupa No. - 1, present condition

Chaitya No.-18 present condition
Stupa No. - 1 Photographed by Deendayal, 1883 © British library

Stupa No. - 1, Getty images
Photographer: Alice Schalek, 1929
Published By: 'Die Dame'

Northern gate Stupa No. - 1
Joseph David Beglar, or Joseph David Freedone Melik Beglar (1845-1907), was an Armenian-Indian engineer, archaeologist and photographer working in British-India and reporting to the Archaeological Survey of India, known for his images of temples and religious art. He was an assistant of Alexander Cunningham.
This oil painting documents the making of a plaster cast of the eastern gateway of the Sanchi stupa. The cast was made to be displayed in the South Kingston Museum's Architecture Court. Henry Hardy Cole was responsible for organizing the making of the plaster casts and in his *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art exhibited in the South Kingston Museum* (London, 1874), footnote on pp.13-14, he writes: 'This cast was made in the winter of 1869-70 under my direction..
Representation of Buddha at Sanchi

Buddha has preached his followers not to worship Tathagat in his human from, rather has suggested Stupa worship. In early Buddhist art Buddha is represented through symbols. Later under the Greco-Roman influence during Kushan period. Buddha began to be depicted in human form. Symbol worshipers were named Hinayana and the image worshipers were called Mahayana.
Buddhist sites around Sanchi
Sonari:
Stupas at Sonari are situated about 9 km south-west from Sanchi. Relics of five monk's viz., Gotiputra, Majhima, Kashyapagotra, Kosikiputra and Alabagira are found from stupa no 2.
Satdhara:
Satdhara Buddhist complex is composed of a large main stupa 1, 29 smaller Stupa and 2 monasteries. The name Satdhara according to the local people might have been due to the fact of confluence of 7 streams of the river Halali. This site was discovered in 1853 by Sir Alexander Cunningham. This place is located at Bhopal-Vidisha road and 9 km west from Sanchi.
Bhojpur (Murelkhurd):
Located on a small hill, a huge complex of about 72 Stupas and monasteries situated at four levels on the hill. It is located about 11.5 km south east from Sanchi.

This Crystal object was discovered by Alexander Cunningham and F.C. Maisey in the excavated relic chamber.
**Andher:**
This site is 18.5 km south east from Sanchi having three main stupas and relics caskets of Buddhist monks are also reported from this site.

*Bhilsa Tope, Cunningham, 1854*
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PUBLIC AWARENESS

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