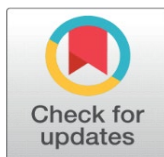
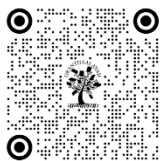


RAJGIR AN IMPORTANT PLACE OF BUDDHA CHARIKA

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ABSTRACT

Rajgir, historically known as Rajagaha, is a significant pilgrimage destination for Buddhists, symbolizing key moments in the Buddha's life and the spread of Buddhism. The ancient city, nestled among hills, played a crucial role in Buddhist history, being the location where the Buddha delivered several important teachings, including the Lotus Sutra, and where the First Buddhist Council was held after his passing. Rajgir's spiritual importance extends beyond its historical relevance, offering pilgrims a contemplative journey through the Buddha's teachings of compassion, mindfulness, and the path to liberation from suffering. The city's sites, such as Gridhakuta Hill and the Saptaparni Cave, allow pilgrims to immerse themselves in the foundational moments of Buddhism while reflecting on their own spiritual progress. Additionally, the concept of Dhammacharika, individuals who embody and propagate the Dhamma, has deep roots in Rajgir. Historically, Dhammacharikā from Rajgir were instrumental in spreading Buddhism, transforming it from a local Indian movement to a global religion. In contemporary terms, a Dhammacharika continues this role, serving as a guide and example for others by living ethically according to Buddhist principles, fostering both personal transformation and the active promotion of the Buddha's teachings. Rajgir, therefore, remains a profound spiritual center, embodying the essence of Buddhist pilgrimage and practice.

Keywords: Rajgir, Buddha, Historically

1. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is not just a religion; it is a path of spiritual transformation aimed at understanding the nature of existence, overcoming suffering, and achieving enlightenment. At the heart of this spiritual journey lies the practice of pilgrimage—a deeply personal and transformative experience for Buddhists around the world. This article focuses on the Rajgir (Rajagaha) as a pilgrimage highlighting its significance representing a key moment in the Buddha's spiritual journey and spread of Buddhism.

After the Buddha's death, Rajgir was chosen by the monks, with Mahakshyap as their head, as the meeting place of the first convocation. This took place at the Sattpanniguha and Ajatasattu extended to undertaking his wholehearted patronage¹. The King also erected at Rajagaha a cairn over the relics of Buddha which he had obtained as his share². According to the Mahavamsa³ sometime later acting on the suggestion of Maha Kassapa, the king gathered at Rājagaha seven donas of the Buddha's relics which had been deposited in various places except those deposited at

¹Mhv.XXXi 21: MT. 564

²D.ii,166.

³MA ii 987; SA.i.243

Rajagaha, and built over them a large thupa. It was from there that Asoka obtained relics for his vihāras. Rajagaha was one of the six chief cities of the Buddha's time⁴," and as such, various important trade routes passed through it.

Rajagaha identified as the modern Rajgir town of Nalanda district of Bihar state is mentioned in the ancient texts as one of the six prominent cities of Buddha's time⁵. According to Pali literary sources, it had been an abode of Kings like Mandhata and Mahagovinda, therefore it was called Rajagaha⁶. However, it is reported in the travel accounts of Huen-Tsang that this city was constructed by King Bimbisara and was named Rajagaha as the first house (graha) of this new city belonged to King (raja) Bimbisara himself⁷. Fa-Hian, another Chinese traveler, said that King Ajatasatru constructed the city of Rajagrha⁸. Several other names were also used for this ancient city. For example, less-known names of Magadhapura and Bimbisara Puri are also used in one of the Pali commentaries⁹.

It appears that there existed two distinct towns, the older one was a hill fortress, called Giribbaja. It is said that it was laid out by Mahagovinda, a skilled town architect. It was called Giribbaja (a mountain stronghold) because it was encircled by five hills - Pandava, Gijjhakuta, Vebhara, Isigila and Vepulla.

1.1. "GIRIBBAJANTI IDAMPI TASSA NAMAN TAMHIPANDAVA-GIJJHAKUTAN.VEBHARA-ISIGILA-BEPULLA-NAMAKANANMAJJHE BAJE VIYA THITAN"¹⁰

The town of the later period was built by King Bimbisara at the foot of these hills and was named Rajagaha. Although both these names have been used indiscriminately in Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit literature, however, the name Rajagrha became more popular and the name Giribbaja became restricted to the verse passages. This city was also called Kusagrapura, after Kusagra, an early King of Magadha¹¹. In the Ramayana¹² this city is called Vasumati and in the Mahabharata¹³ it is named Bhadrathapura. From the names of the Kings of this city, it may be inferred that this city was a very ancient political capital.

There is no doubt that besides being a center of political power of ancient India, Rajagaha was also a seat of religious synthesis and syncretism, accommodating religious teachers propounding different religious doctrines. From the literary sources, it is known that Rajagaha and its vicinity were closely related to the Dhamma-Cariya of the Buddha and some of his prominent disciples. This city is mentioned as one of the favorite places of the Buddha in Pali and Sanskrit literary sources. This place is also important for the early history of the Buddhist order and a unique center of non-Buddhist ascetic sects like the Niganthas, (The Jainas), several types of Ajivakas and the Paribbajakas (The Wandering Ascetics).

In Pali and Sanskrit literary sources of Buddhism it is suggested that the Buddha has a special link to the city of Rajagaha and its vicinity. Before attaining the state of an enlightened being (Buddhatta), he as Prince Siddhartha or as a Bodhisattva, visited Rajagaha soon after the great renunciation (Mahabhinnikkhama). According to the biographical sections of Pali literature, he journeyed there on foot from river Anoma covering a distance of thirty leagues.

1.2. "EKA DIVASE NEVA TINSAYOJANA MAGGAMPADASAGANTVARAJAGAHAMPAVISI"¹⁴

According to Pali Vinaya-Pitaka, Prince Siddhartha stayed here on Pandava hill. This was his first visit to Rajagaha. King Bimbisara went to meet him and tried to persuade Prince Siddhartha to return back to his father's palace. When he was unable to change the strong determination of Prince Siddhartha the King obtained from him a promise of the second visit to Rajagaha after attaining supreme knowledge.

⁴The others were Champa, Savatti, Saket, and Varanasi (D.2. 147)

⁵DIGHA-NIKAYA, II 247 (ROMAN Edition)

⁶DIGHA-NIKAYA, commentary, 1, 132 (Nalanda Edition)

⁷WALTERS: On Yuan - tsang's travels in India Vol. II, P.162

⁸EILS: Travels of Fahiyana, P.49

⁹SUTTA-NIPATA Attha-katha, Vol. II, P.584 (Nalanda Edition)

¹⁰SUTTA-NIPATA Attha-katha, Vol. II, P.101 (verse 411)

¹¹PARGITER: Ancient Indian historical tradition, P.149

¹²RAMAYAN. 1.7.32

¹³MAHABHARATA, II.24.14

¹⁴JATAKA, 1.75 (IGATPURI EDITION)

1.3. “ADDHATVAMBUBDHOBHAVISSASI, BUDDHABHUTENA PANA TEPATHAMAM MAM VIJITAMAGANTABBANTIPATINNANGANHI”¹⁵

To fulfil this, promise the Buddha visited Rajagahaa second time just after attaining the Buddhahood. This second visit to Rajagahaproved the importance of this place for the wide circulation and expansion of the newly established Dhamma of the Buddha. It is recorded that during the second visit,KingBimbisaracame to pay his respect to the Buddha at Supriya CetiyaLatthivana(identified as modern Jethiyan), where Buddha was staying together with newly converted three Jatila ascetics and the Pancavaggiyas. The Buddha accepted the King’s invitation to a meal at the palace. The King entertained the Buddha and a large following of monks and became faithful to the Buddha as a laydevotee. Thiswas, most probably the first example of royal support to the Buddha and the Buddhist order and paved the way for the growth of Buddhism under the protection of different Kings of India

The Buddha was accompanied by three Jatila brothers (matted hair ascetics) when Bimbisaravisited the Buddha with a multitude of people. It is recorded in the PaliVinaya Texts that UruvelaKassapa. The eldest among the three Jatila brothers was a highly influential religious teacher of the large population of the Magadh and Anga regions. The people were naturally influenced by the conversion of Uruvela,their highly respected religious teacher and consequently great majority of them embraced Buddhism as lay followers. Thus, this second visit of Rajagaha became highly instrumental in the expansion of Buddhism in the Magadha and Anga regions¹⁶.The donation of Venuvana (Bamboo Garden) to the Buddha by KingBimbisarais yet another significant event. This was the first donation of an Arama in the history of the Buddhist order and became precedence for such an act in future. The Buddha himself framed a rule to accept such donations of Arams:

1.4. ANUJANAMI, BHIKKHAVE, ARAMAMTI¹⁷ “

Later on this Arama became a very important place for the propagation of the Dhamma in and around Rajagaha as well as in the entire Magadha.In this respect, the Venuvenaoccupied the second position only to the Jetavana Vihara of Savatthi, which was the most important centre for the Dhamma-Cariya of the Buddha during his lifetime. This place has been a witness to many important events related to the Buddha’s Dhamma, Buddhist order and of great importance for the expansion of Buddhism. For example,Sariputtaand Moggallana, the two main disciples of the Buddha and chief architects of the Dhamma-Palace of the Buddha, joined the Buddhist order in the Venuvena¹⁸. Both of them contributed immensely to the expansion of Buddhism.¹⁴ Many Vinay rules also were framed and approved here. For example, rules on the keeping of the Vassa, the use of food cooked in the monastery, the surgical operation of monks and the use of gold and silver etc. were framed in Veluvana¹⁹.

The Buddha spent the second, third and fourth Vassavasa in the Venuvena:

1.5. “DUTIYAMVASSAMRAJAGAHAMUPANISSAYAVENUVANEMAHAVIHARETATIYACATUTTHA NIPITATTHEVAVISATIMAMPANAVASSAMRAJAGAHEYEVAVASI.”²⁰

Several important Suttas were preached in the Venuvana. For example,Sigalovada Sutta of Digha Nikaya, Sabhiya Sutta of Samyutta Nikaya, RathvinitaSutta, CulavedallaSutta, Abhayarajakumara Sutta, AmbalattikaRahulovada Sutta and many more Suttas of Majjhimaand SamyuttaNikayas were also preached in the Venuvana. So many Jatakas were also recited here.

Rajagaha continued to be an important place for the Buddha-Dhamma and Buddhist order. After the Mahaparinibbanaof the Buddha,the first Buddhist council was convened in the Sattapannicave of VebharaHill under the chairmanship of Ven. Mahakassapa.Most of the Buddhist schools accept the historicity of this first religious convocation in which five hundred monks orally collected the Dhamma and the Vinaya of the Buddha. Thus. In a way, Rajagaha

¹⁵JATAKA ATTHA-KATHA 1.76 (IGATPURI EDITION)

¹⁶MAHAVAGGA (VINAYA PITAKA),PP.41-42 (IGATPURI EDITION)

¹⁷ IBID, P.44

¹⁸MAHA-VAGGA (Vinaya) 1-142(R)

¹⁹IBID 1-42,137,212,215 (R)

²⁰BUDDHA VAMSA Commentary,3 (R)

became the birthplace of Pali canonical literature. Rajagaha is also highly respected as a holy place in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. This tradition believes that lord Buddha preached several Mahayana-sutras while staying at the Grddha-Kuta (Vultur's Peak) In Rajagaha.

The Theravada also believes that Sariputta, Moggallana, and Mahakassapa, the three leading disciples of the Buddha were born in the neighboring areas of Rajagaha. Their conversion to the Buddhist order played a significant role in the promotion of Buddhism in the region of ancient Magadha, particularly among the Brahmanas, the religious teachers of that region. Thus, the literary sources confirm the great importance of Rajagaha and its surroundings for the enrichment of Buddha's Dhamma and his Dhamma-Carika.

2. THE PILGRIMAGE AS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Pilgrims to Rajgir embark on a journey to connect deeply with the roots of Buddhism, as the town encapsulates key historical and religious landmarks essential to the faith. The Gridhakuta Hill, or Vulture's Peak, is one of the most revered sites in Rajgir, where Buddha delivered the famous Lotus Sutra and other sermons. Rajgir is also home to the remnants of monasteries and the Saptaparni Cave, where the First Buddhist Council was held after Buddha's passing. For pilgrims, Rajgir offers more than a historical exploration; it becomes a meditative journey where they reflect on Buddha's teachings of compassion, mindfulness, and liberation from suffering. The physical act of walking through these ancient sites mirrors the inner path toward enlightenment, making Rajgir a profound locus of devotion and introspection within the Buddhist tradition. This place is also important as Dhammacharikā's from the place were instrumental in transforming Buddhism from a local movement in India to a global religion.

Being a *Dhammacharika* means embracing an ethical life based on the core principles of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. It involves living with compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom, aiming for personal enlightenment while guiding others along the path. The word signifies an ongoing journey of inner transformation, where the practitioner embodies the *Dhamma* in their actions, thoughts, and speech.

In contemporary terms, a *Dhammacharika* could refer to anyone actively involved in promoting Buddhist teachings—whether through teaching, writing, or engaging in social service activities inspired by the *Dhamma*. They may also be lay practitioners who take on the role of mentors or guides within their communities, helping others to navigate their spiritual paths. Central to the concept of a *Dhammacharika* is the idea that one's life becomes a reflection of the *Dhamma*, where the individual's conduct serves as an example of Buddhist values in action.

In essence, the role of a Dhammacharika is not limited to personal practice; it encompasses the active engagement with the world in a way that brings the teachings of the Buddha to life, both for oneself and others.

“BhavatuSabbamangalam “