



***Srāvastī* is the City of Buddhist History and Tradition: A Review**

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

Srāvastī, Buddhist, History, Tradition, Tourism, Traveller

ABSTRACT

During the Buddha's lifetime, the metropolis *Srāvastī* on the banks of the *Achirāvātī* River was the capital of the mighty *Kosala* king *Prasenjita*. In the *Pratiharya-mandapam* of *Srāvastī*, in the presence of King *Prasenjita*, a contest of divine powers took place between famous *Shāstās* of different religions. The Buddha proved himself to be possessed of greater divine powers by creating numerous living images of him seated on a thousand lotuses rising to the heavens under the influence of his miraculous powers. But none of his rivals could show such power. King *Prasenjita* became one of the supporters of the *Samgha* and donated the *Rajkaram Vihara* to the Buddha and the *Samgha*. *Sudatta*, the wealthy nobleman of *Srāvastī*, was a householder of the Buddha. He purchased some gardens in *Jetarajkumara* at *Srāvastī* and covered them with gold seals as a price. He built a few monasteries here and donated them to the Buddha and the *Samgha*. Among these, the names of '*Kosambkuti*' and '*Moolgandhkuti*' ashrams are notable for the location of Buddha in *Jetavan Vihara*. This huge *Jetavana Vihara* had sixty dormitories for the monks, sixty prayer rooms, kitchens, baths, and ponds in the courtyard, and other necessary

facilities. *Rajkumar Jetabuilt* a large toran in the *Vihar*, and later Emperor *Ashoka* built two pillars about 21 meters high on the southern side of the *toran*. It is said that the mortal remains of *Sāriputra* and *Maudgalyayana*, the Buddha's first son, were enshrined here. But later Emperor *Ashoka* shifted them to *Sanchi Stupa*. *Ramani Utpal Varna of the Sravasti-Vasini* noble lineage was one of the two *Agrasravikas* of the Buddha. *Vittmān Shrestha's* wife, *Visākhā*, built a large two-storied *vihara* called *Migārmātā* Palace for the Buddha and the *Samgha*. All this was done mainly for the Buddha and the Buddhist *Samgha*. The discussion article sheds light on the history and tradition of Buddhism in the city of *Srāvastī*.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14843775>

1. Introduction

Among the sixteen *Mahājanapadas* of ancient India, the kingdom of *Kosala* was one of the kingdoms that came to dominate vast boundaries and power. After *Magadha*, it was the place of the *Kosala* kingdom. And *Srāvastī* was one of the capitals of the *Kosala* kingdom. Ancient and later Pali texts mention the city. In ancient India, the centres of urban Buddhism were located in present-day *Bihar* (*Magadha and Anga*), *Uttar Pradesh* (*Kasi and Kosala*), and the *Ganges Basin region of Madhya Pradesh* (*Avanti and Matsa*). *Srāvastī Nagar* is now known as '*Mayeta*.' *Kosala* is the main town of *Nagar*. *Srāvastī* is located on the banks of the *Achirābartī* (Ancient River) between the *Gonda* and *Bāirāk* districts of *Uttar Pradesh*. At present, the river's name is *Rapti*. The current name of *Srāvastī* is *Sayet-Mayet*. '*Sabbamettha atthiti'ti savatthi*.' In other words, it is called *Srāvastī* because all kinds of human objects are found here. At one time it was one of the trading centres of import and export. *Srāvastī* occupied a special place in the history of Buddhism. The discussion paper presents the ancient and contemporary significance of how the city of *Srāvastī* was in the continuity of Buddhist history and tradition.

2. Review of Literature

The works so far on the topic under discussion are: *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism* (Lars, 2015), the author has made a statement on Indian Archeology and Buddhism. *Buddhist Art and*
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Architecture (Sarkar, 1997), the author presents a series of descriptions of Buddhist art and architecture. *Buddhist Civilization and Buddhist Achievement in Deshe Deshe* (Barua, 2016), gives a brief description of the Buddhist traditions of different countries. In *Char Punyasthan* (Ghosh, 1921), the author gives a statement about *Purnatirthas*. So it appears that the article in question is a complete dissertation to my knowledge. The research paper has been written to fill that gap.

3. Objectives of the Research

The purpose of the discussion research is: 1. to enlighten the position of *Srāvastī*; 2. to examine the relationship between Buddhism and *Srāvastī*; 3. to know the relationship of Buddhist monks, nuns, and disciples of Buddha with *Srāvastī*; 4. to know about the concept of *Srāvastī* in the eyes of travellers and 5. to present the tourism importance of *Srāvastī*.

4. Research Methodology

Qualitative method has been used to compose the discussion paper. The historical methodology involved in the methodology was followed to conduct the research. To complete the research, Buddhism-related texts, various books, books related to Buddhist archaeology, articles, inscriptions, and other materials have been collected and analysed.

5. Location

Presently, *Srāvastī* is a district in *Uttar Pradesh*, India. It is the town of *Bhīngā*, which belongs to the district headquarters. It belongs to the Devipatan division. It is one of the minority-concentrated districts in India based on the 2001 census data on population, socio-economic indicators, and basic amenities index.¹

6. *Srāvastī* is the city of Buddhist monks, nuns and disciples

The names of six famous cities in ancient India are known in the '*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.' Namely *Srāvastī*, *Rājagriha*, *Champā*, *Sāketa*, *Koshāmbi*, and *Varanasi*. The society respected these individuals as exceptional individuals. Their work garnered them respect from all corners. Gautama Buddha's exaltation: Encouraged them to follow the right path. *Srāvastī Nagar* has a close connection with their life. It is presented sequentially:



7. *Anāthapiṇḍik and Srāvastī Nagar*

Anāthapiṇḍika, one of the greatest of *Srāvastī*, was very charitable. His contribution to the propagation and spread of Buddhism is immense. *The Buddha bestowed upon him the title of 'Agra or Best' in recognition of his contribution.* His real name was *Sudatta*. He was the son of *Shresthi Suman*, one of the wealthiest people of *Srāvastī*. After his father's death, he inherited a lot of wealth. The context of his naming is that the *Anāth* person never returned from his home. That is why he was called '*Anāthapiṇḍika*.'

At *Srāvastī*, *Anāthapiṇḍika* took the initiative to build a monastery to house the Buddha. It was the pleasure garden of *Rāj Kumār Jeta*. *Kumār Jeta wanted to buy this garden for the purpose of building a monastery for the Buddha and his disciples to live in; he demanded a very high price for this land.* Nevertheless, he was interested in buying. Hence its purchase price was eighteen crore gold coins. At the cost of another eighteen crores of gold coins, a beautiful *Vihara* was built on the *Pramod Udyan*. Additionally, a three-month-long donation festival, which cost over eighteen crores of gold coins, took place following the construction of the *Vihar* project. Thus the *Vihar* built by the *Jetabna Anātha* or *Piṇḍiks* was named as '*Comfort of the Jetabna Anāthpiṇḍika*.' The establishment of this temple cost a total of 450 million gold coins. Here the Buddha completes nineteen tri-monthly monsoon vows. The *Jetavan Vihar* was very big. Among these were monks' dormitories, caves, prayer rooms, storage rooms, meditation rooms, places for circumambulation, wells, baths, etc. Buddha preached '*Belam Sutta*' to *Anāthapiṇḍika* to encourage him when his financial condition became weak by donating four crores of coins to the Buddha's rule.² *Anāthapiṇḍika* was not only well known as a donor but also an eloquent orator and logician. He was once able to present the Buddha's teachings through argument to a traveler. He has many reputations as one of the disciples of Buddha. After hearing this, the Buddha greatly praised *Anāthapiṇḍika*.



*Srāvastī, Uttar Pradesh, India*³



*Anāthapiṇḍika Stupa, Srāvastī, Uttar Pradesh, India*⁴



8. *Visākhā and Srāvastī*

Visākhā was one of the many devout Buddhist devotees of the Buddhist era. The world's scholarly and Buddhist societies have widely recognised him. Buddhist history will forever remember his extraordinary devotion and respect for Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. He was born into an extremely wealthy family in *Bhadiya Nagar* in the inner kingdom of *Magadha* during the Buddha's time. His father's name is *Dhananjaya Shresthi* (King of *Kosala Kingdom*), and his mother's name is *Sumana Devi*. She was the granddaughter of *Mendaka Shresthi* and *Chandrapadma*. When *Visākhā* was seven years old, the Buddha entered the city of *Bhaddiya*. By seeing the Buddha and listening to the Buddha's *Amrit Dhammadeshana*, everyone in the family, including *Visākhā*, got the *srotapatiphal* result. *Visakha's* marriage to *Punyavardhan*, son of *Migar Shrestha* of *Srabanti*, was solemnized. While going to his father-in-law's house, *Visākhā* gave ten pieces of advice given by his father and ordered them to be followed. Every *Kulabadhu* lives a life of prosperity and peace if he follows the ten valuable pieces of advice given by his father. He followed the advice and made his home life worthwhile." *The Bhikkhu Sa'gha, Vishakha's father-in-law, also engaged Buddha and others in service.* By wearing '*Mahalta Prasadhan*,' made of nine crore gold coins given by his father, *Visakha* decorated the chariot with fifty-four crores worth of bathing equipment.⁵ *Visākhā* was engaged in *Triratna's* service all his life. *Pitrudatta* sold ornaments called '*Mahalta Prasadhan*' and built a beautiful temple called '*Puvaram Mahavihar*' in *Srāvastī* at a cost of nine crore rupees. Buddha lived here for six monsoons. Buddha glorified this place by veiling it. In *Vihar*, if a monk fell ill, he would charge with their treatment and medicine. Also, those who nursed the sick also had the burden of food on *Visākhā*. He used to feed every five hundred monks. *Viskhā* was supremely honoured by the Buddha as a charitable Buddhist worshipper. That is why she is called *Mahāupasika Visākhā*.

9. *Patāchārā and Srāvastī*

Patāchārā was one of the household disciples of Buddha. One day when the Buddha was preaching in the *Jetavan Vihara* of *Sravasti* in the afternoon, a mad woman who was homeless, husbandless and childless appeared in the Buddha's assembly naked. Buddha addressed her as 'Sister' and allowed her to sit down and provided clothes to cover her shame. After listening to the spoken words of the Buddha, wisdom again dawned in her heart and she resolved to become a nun. He is '*Bhikkhuni Patāchārā*', famous as the best *Vinayadhara* of the *Bhikkhuni Saṃgha* in Buddhist history.⁶



Jetavan, Uttar Pradesh, India⁷

10. *Kishāgotamī and Srāvastī*

Krishā Gautami, the daughter of a poor man of *Srāvastī*, was maddened by the death of her only child and came to the Buddha at *Jetāvan Vihara* with her dead son in her arms. *Akul* appealed to the Buddha to revive his dead son. The Buddha asked him to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no death had ever occurred before. *Krishā Gautami* wandered from house to house in *Srāvastī* and found no deathless house. Finally, he realised that death is inevitable—it is the inevitable fate of man, and his son is no exception. Then he forgets the grief, *cremates the dead son, and again returns to the Buddha and takes the bhikkhuni* vow.⁸

11. *Aṅgulimāla and Srāvastī*

King-priest *Bhargadeva* of *Kosala* sent son *Ahimsaka* to *Taxila* for higher education. Within a short time, *Ahimsaka* became the best student and the master's favorite. His teammates got jealous and plotted against him. They turn the *Guru* against him. *Enraged, the Guru travelled to the Jalini forest in Kosala state, where he collected the thumbs of a thousand people from Ahimsaka and committed manslaughter.* He earned the name '*Aṅgulimāla*' due to his practice of killing numerous individuals and tying the garlands of their right thumbs to his neck. The subjects of *Kosala* appealed to King *Prasenjita* for redress. The king ordered troops to be prepared to capture *Aṅgulimāla*. Hearing that *Kosala Raj's* soldiers were going to kill *Aṅgulimāla*, his mother herself appeared in the forest to bring her son back. Then 999 fingers of *Aṅgulimāla* are collected, and only one completes the thousand. Seeing the mother coming from a distance, kill her and proceed to collect the last finger. Seeing a monk coming towards



him, *Aṅgulimāla* left his mother and ran towards the monk. But even running with outstanding speed, nothing can reach the monk. Very angry, he shouted to the monk to stop. The monk replied that he was stopping and asked *Aṅgulimāla* to calm down. Upon hearing the monk's words, the darkness in his mind dissipates. Dropping the sword, he knelt down and begged forgiveness from the Buddha. Buddha brought him to *Jetavan Vihara* and gave him *Prabrajya*.⁹

12. The first Buddha statue at *Srāvastī*

*While staying at Jetavana Vihar, the Buddha allegedly displayed his greatest Riddhi, or miraculous powers. After performing the miracle at Srāvastī, the Buddha went to the Tāvatiṃsa heaven to preach to the Mother for three months. After a prolonged period of not seeing the Buddha, King Prasenjita fashioned an image of the Buddha out of candan wood and placed it on the altar. When the Buddha descended the stairs in Saṃkāsya Nagar and returned to Jetavana, the wooden statue stood and bowed to the Buddha. This is the first Buddha statue in the history of Buddhism. Fahien came to Srāvastī and saw this idol. Two hundred years later, Hiuen Tsang also saw this Buddha image of Prasenjita in a ruined environment.*¹⁰

King *Prasenjita* prepared a *Vihar* named '*Rajakaram*' for the *bhikkhunis* at *Srāvastī*. *Prasenjit's* great-grandmother, *Mallikadevi*, also built a temple called "*Mallikaram*." A year before his *Mahāparinibbāna*, when he was staying at *Jetavan Vihara*, his chief disciple *Sāriputra* attained *Mahāparinibbāna* in his native village of *Nalaka, Magadha*. After the cremation, *Sāriputra's* ashes and other relics were brought to the Buddha at *Jetavan* in *Srāvastī*. *Jetavan Vihar* preserves them.



Buddhamurti, Uttar Pradesh, India¹¹



13. Arrival of Emperor Ashoka at *Srāvastī*

Emperor *Ashoka* came to *Srāvastī* on his historic pilgrimage. He is here for *Sāriputra*, *Maudgalyayana*, *Saknyapa*, and *Ananda*. *Fahien* visited *Srāvastī* in the fifth century. Subsequently, they abandoned all other *Viharas* except *Jetavan Vihar*. In the seventh century came *Hiuen Tsang*. *Srāvastī* then lost its former glory. He found very few monks in the trials. *Hiuen Tsang* describes the destruction of *Jetavan Vihara*, many *stupas*, and the royal palace of *Prasenjita*. No history of *Srāvastī* is found after the twelfth century. The monks abandoned it in the adverse political environment.¹² About one-and-a-half kilometres from *Jetavan Vihar*, there are two *stupas*, known as *Pakkikuti* and *Kachchakuti*, on the edge of the forest. People have identified *Pakkikuti* as a pile of *Anāth* and *Kachchikuti* as a pile of limbs. At this place, Buddha dissuaded *Āngulimāla* from matricide and brought him back to the path of *Dharma*. In 1863 AD, General *Cunningham* excavated at *Sahet Maheta* and discovered *Kosambakuthi*, and in 1876, *Swarna Gandhakuti*. General *Cunningham* excavated an area of approximately 400 acres in *Maheta*, uncovering the ruins of the ancient city. The excavated area of *Sahet*, 500 meters away, is 32 acres. Here was the famous *Jetavan Vihar*.¹³

14. *Ānanda Bodhi tree*

Excavations have discovered the ruins of many *Mauryan* and *Kushan* era *stupas*. The construction of these structures took place between the third and twelfth centuries. There is a very old *Bodhi* tree in this area. Buddha's beloved disciple *Ānanda* brought *Bodhi* tree seedlings from *Buddha Gaya* and planted them here, hence the name '*Ānanda Bodhi Tree*'.¹⁴



*Ānanda Bodhi tree, Uttar Pradesh, India*¹⁵



15. *Burmese and Chinese monasteries*

Burmese and *Chinese* have built beautiful temples in their own style and architecture. The two temples are known as the *Burmese Monastery* and the *Chinese Monastery*.

16. *Sravasti in the Eyes of Travellers*

After *Fahien* converted to Buddhism, he expressed his desire to visit pilgrimage sites in India. He came to this subcontinent after making many sacrifices. The *Chinese traveler, Fahien, came to ancient India in the fifth century*. That's when he saw the destruction. Also in *Srāvastī* he found two hundred families. He was a native of *Chang'an*, a city in *Shaanxi Province, China*. Before converting to Buddhism, his name was *Koṅgo*.

In the seventh century AD, *Hiuen Tsang* arrived at a location known as *Visākhā*. Then another five hundred li to the northeast, he reached *Shi-ro-fu-shi-ti*, or *Srāvastī*. He sees *Srāvastī* in a ruined state. At the time of Buddha, *Prasenjita* was the king of this kingdom. There he found 20 *Viharas* and 3000 *Hinayana* monks. In this city, the production of staple food grains among the people has increased manifold. The weather was also suitable for crop production. The people were individualistic, polite, and respectful of knowledge. People were always enthusiastic about beneficial works. *Lila Niketan*, of outstanding variety, was *Srāvastī*. Traveller *Hiuen Tsang* noticed buildings, houses, and Buddhist monasteries, including the palace of King *Prasenjita*, in an almost dilapidated state. The city walls still existed. According to him, the extent of this city was twenty li. Here one notices many Buddhist monasteries, most of which are in ruins. Additionally, a temple honours 100 gods and goddesses.¹⁶

British archaeologist *Alexander Cunningham* has termed *Srāvastī* as a city. Archaeological excavations at *Sayeta and Mayeta* have led to the discovery of many traditional artworks. Among these are mud defence walls, moats, arches, brick houses, stupas, viharas, etc. ruins; *Bodhisattva* idols are notable. These artefacts indicate the presence of two distinct cultural phases in the excavated sites. We determine the first phase in AD. The period spans from the tenth century AD to the fourth century AD. The second phase is in AD. P.O. The period spans from the fourth century AD to the first century.¹⁷



17. Conclusion

In view of the above discussion, it can be said that *Srāvastī*'s relationship with Buddha's life is very intimate. Buddha spent many of his beautiful moments here. *Jetram Vihara*, *Purvaram Vihara*, and *Rajakaram Viharas* played a leading role in Buddhist education and achievement. The inhabitants of this city were very religious. Currently, *Srāvastī* has improved considerably. The government of *Uttar Pradesh* has been quite alert for the development of this *Srāvastī*. Realising the importance and dignity of this place, the government has taken up several development plans. Development work is progressing rapidly. *Srāvastī* has now looked at roads and traffic for ease of commuting, and the roads have improved considerably. At present, *Srāvastī* has looked into roads and traffic for ease of commuting, and the roads have improved considerably. *Balrampur* railway station has been improved for the convenience of common passengers. *Srāvastī* has now seen a considerable increase in the number of foreign pilgrims and luxury travelers. In response to this increase, the government has initiated special development initiatives. Today there is a post office and a market for daily needs.

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