



***Rājgir* as a Metropolis of Ancient Indian Buddhist History and Tradition: A Review**

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ABSTRACT

Rājgir is an ancient metropolis located in the green valley of five mountains. It is located in the *Nālandā* district of present-day Bihar state of India. It is a lovely place. *Rājgir* is mentioned in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Puranas*, as well as in Jain and Pali texts. However, *Rājgir* is called by different names in these books. For example: *Basumati*, *Brihadrathpur*, *Giribraj*, *Kushāgrapur*, and *Rājgriha* or *Rājgah*. There are several hills around the palace. Among those hills, the notable ones are *Baivar*, *Barah*, *Rishabh* or *Rishi Giri*, *Chaityak*, and *Shubo*. However, the Pali texts mention them as *Baivar*, *Pandava*, *Bepulla*, *Gijjut*, and *Isigili*. Jains bear most of the modern names. For example: *Baivar*, *Vipul*, *Ratna*, *Chathashail*, *Udaya*, and *Sona*. In the 5th century BC, Buddha himself started propagating his religion and *Samgha* around the royal palace. He has visited here many times and spends his monsoon vacations. According to legend, he once lived for a full year. Buddha's favourite places are: *Giribraja*, *Gridhrakuta*, *Gautama-Nagrotha*, *Chaur-Prapata*, *Saptaparni*, *Kalasila*, *Sarpa-Shondika-Prakvara*, *Tapodaram*, *Kalandaka*

Reservoir, Amrakanana, and Mrigadava. The discussion article presents the Buddhist history of the *Rājgir* metropolis and its traditions.

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1. Introduction

Ascetic Gautama wandered around in search of the way to liberation and eventually arrived at the palace. Rich palaces adorned the capital of the Magadha kingdom. Then King *Bimbisara* was the ruler of *Magadha*. Five hills surround the beautiful city of *Baivar*: *Baipulya*, *Ratnagiri*, *Udayagiri*, and *Shongiri*. Many hermits live in small and large caves in the gaps between the vine-bush forests on the lonely hills. The hermit Gautama took refuge in *Ratnagiri* Hill in the east. When he went out for alms, a crowd of curious people began to gather to see the wandering *Divyakanti* young monk. Very quickly the news of this young monk spread throughout the city. King *Bimbisāra's* words reached the ears of the new monk. The king left the palace in a chariot to see the monk in person. He met the monk on the way to *Ratnāgiri*. He wanted to take the monk back to the palace. Gautama politely declined the king's request. Promising that he would meet the king again if he ever found the truth, the monk set foot on the road to *Ratnāgiri*. After that he spent his days in meditation in the *Ratnāgiri* Cave and alms in the palace. The discussion article presents various aspects of the history and tradition of Buddhism in *Rājgir*.

2. Review of Literature

The works so far on the topic under discussion are: *Buddhist Civilization and Buddhist Achievement in Deshe Deshe* (Barua, 2016), gives a brief description of the Buddhist traditions of different countries. *An Archaeological History of Indian Buddhism* (Lars, 2015), the author has made a statement on Indian Archeology and Buddhism. In *Char Punyasthan* (Ghosh, 1921), the author gives a statement about *Purnatirthas*. *Buddhist Art and Architecture* (Sarkar, 1997), the author presents a series of descriptions of Buddhist art and architecture. *Pali Sahitye Nagar Vinnyas & Nagar parikalpana* (Karunananda, 1994) in the book, the author has discussed various topics of cities and rivers and archaeology from various texts of Buddhist philosophy. 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 know about the name and location of *Rājgir*; 2. To know when and where Buddha met King *Bimbisāra*; 3. To present what kind of Buddhist archaeological material has been found and exists at *Rājgiri*; 4. To know the importance of *Rājgir* as a Buddhist tourist centre; and 5. To evaluate *Rājgir* as a Buddhist historical city.

4. Research Methodology

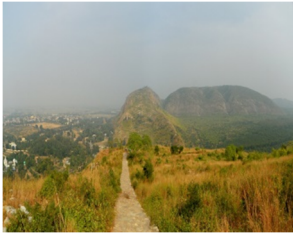
The discussion research was completed using qualitative approaches. To be clear, we conducted the research using the historical method inherent to this qualitative approach. For this, Buddhist religious texts, books, Buddhist archaeological-related books, various historical texts of ancient India, manuscripts, inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, relevant articles, etc., have been used.

5. Location

Rājgriha, or *Rājgah*, belongs to the ancient *Pātnā* district of *Rājgir*, Bihar, and is situated 62 miles southeast of *Pātnā*. The palace is accessible by both bus and rail. Ancient India also called it *Vasumati*, as King Basu founded the city in India's oldest epic, the *Ramayana*.¹ 78 km from Buddha Gaya and 12 km from *Nālandā* is *Rājgir*, the then royal residence. *Rājgir* is a commemorative memorial of various events of the Buddha's life and the significant activities immediately after the *Parinibbana*.²

6. Nomenclature

The name '*Rājgir*' literally means 'royal mountain.' The Pali form of the word discussion is '*Rājgah*,' and Sanskrit means '*Rājgriha*.' It means 'king's house' or 'royal house.'³ The area is encircled by mountains. The name *Kushāgrapur* is given in *Jinprāvasuri* and by *Xuanzang* (in Chinese); the name means "place of higher reed grass."⁴



*Rājgir Hills, Pātnā, India*⁵



*Rājgir Hills Senary*⁶



*Jain Temple, Rājgir*⁷

7. Meeting of King *Bimbisār* and Buddha at *Rājgir*

After attaining Buddhahood, he introduced *Dharmachakra* at *Mrigadāb* of *Sārnath* and lived there for the first time. At the end of the rainy season, his disciples spread around preaching '*Bahujan-hitaya Bahujan-sukhaya*.' The Buddha himself went out preaching and travelling from village to town; he reached *Urubilva* on the outskirts of the palace. *Kasyapa*, the renowned disciple of *Tapas*, took shelter with the Buddha. After a few days, *Nadikashya* and *Gayakashya* also took shelter under the disciple Buddha. He reached the borders of the palace with his newly initiated disciples. On hearing the news, King *Bimbisār* came to Buddha-philosophy. The king was overwhelmed by hearing Buddha's sermon in the assembly surrounded by disciples, including *Sāknyapa*. He invited Buddha to the palace. He donated his famous Garden of Pleasure to *Benubana* Buddha and built a beautiful monastery for the residence of the monks, known in Buddhist history as '*Benubana Vihara*.' Buddha spent his second and third years here and stayed here for a long time afterwards. He spent a total of 12 years in the palace at different times during his long 45-year Buddha life. While staying here in the third year of Buddhahood, *Sāriputra* and *Maudgalyayana* accepted the Buddha's discipleship. Subsequently, the Buddha regarded them as his chief disciples. *Mahabhishaka Jeevan* of *Rājagriha* became attached to the Buddha and built a monastery for him and the *Samgha* of monks in his *amrakana*, which is known as *Jivakamravana*.⁸

8. Venuvan

King *Bimbisāra* was in the Garden of Delights, which he donated to the Buddha, and he built the *Vihara* here for the Buddha and the *Samgha*. The '*Venubana Vihara*' stands as the inaugural Buddhist monastery in Buddhist history. Buddha spent a total of seven monsoons in this monastery. A beautiful *Pushkarini* still exists in the *Venuban Vihar* area, where Buddha and his disciples used to bathe. *Venuban-Vihar* is no more today, but *Chhayaghan Venuban* has some of its monuments—



archaeological remains. *Venubana* is unforgettable in the various narratives and memories of Buddha, his progenitor *Sāriputra-Maudagalyayana*, King *Bimbisār*, and Queen *Kshemā*.⁹

9. **Mukhdum and Suryakundu**

The southern part of the now-built *Japanese* Buddhist temple is home to *Mukhdumkundu*, a mosque. The tank bears the name of the renowned Muslim fakir, *Mukhdum Shah*. Next to the tank was the abode of a Muslim fakir in a cave. *Bupulgiri* is another name for Buddhist *Pandavagiri*. Chinese travellers believe that *Devadatta* perished in the *Mukhdum Cave*. However, according to the scholars in the *archaeology department*, *Suryakundu* was the place of *Devadatta's* sacrifice. *Suryakundu* was located at the foothills of *Vipulgiri*. It can be seen that the temples of this place were built on the structure of ancient buildings. The traces of *Prastur* blocks and brick-built ruins around it suggest the construction of ancient times. The steps on top of *Vipulgiri* Mountain were built by the Jains, and this place became the holy Jain *Peetha* in ancient times with the gathering of the Jains. *Bupulgiri* stands approximately 1036 feet above sea level. Many ruins are visible while climbing this mountain. Standing on the ruins of the ancient outer defensive wall, the Jain temple on its summit remains intact. The mound visible to the east of the temple is part of the outer ramparts of the ancient city of *Rājgir*. The *Jains* mark the marble block to the northeast of this mound as the primary preaching place of Mahavira.¹⁰

10. **Jivakamrabana and Ajatshatru Fort**

Jivak's honey garden was his doctor's office. He donated it to the Buddha and had a beautiful monastery built for the *Samgha*. He reportedly treated the Buddha here after *Devadatta's* stone injured him.¹¹

King *Bimbisār's* son *Ajātashru* built the fort at *Rājgrih*, the capital of the ancient Magadha kingdom, five hundred years before Christ. The name is *Ajātshatru Durg*. The northern gate alone is visible today, but there were 32 entrances in the past. A fort cut into a hill surrounded by a double wall. *Ajātashatru Stupa* is located on 6.5 square meters of land. The stupa is believed to contain Buddha's nails.¹²

11. **Bimbisāra Jail**

At a distance of about a mile on the way to *Maniyar Math*, a place is seen on the south side surrounded by a wall six feet high. Legend has it that *Magadha* King *Bimbisāra* was imprisoned by his son King



Ajātashatru at this place. The Archaeology Department's excavation work has discovered two large iron rings adjacent to this place. This ring likely served as the prisoner's binding.¹³

12. Capital of Bimbisār

Rājagriha Nagar is believed to have been the capital of the vast forested area at the junction of the Old and New Paths. Dr. *Rameshchandra Majumdar*, analysing *Hiuen Tsang's* account, identifies this place as the location of *Bimbisāra's* capital, *Rājagriha Nagari*. A small walled open area is visible as one move towards its south side. Some inscriptions are found carved on Prasturfal in this enclosure. Scholars call this script the 'Shell Script.' Scholars think that this script probably contains information about the royal palace and *Madhyachanchal*. If you go east of the road from the area where the Shell Inscription is written, you can see fragments of two tiny *stupas*.¹⁴

13. Ranbhum and Maniyar Maths

At a distance of about half a mile from *Sonbandar* lays *Ranabhoomi*, or *Mallabhoomi*. According to legend, Bhima of the *Pandavas* killed *Jarasandha* in a duel at this place. To reach this place, one has to take the side of the connected valleys of *Baivar-Parbat* and *Songiri*. The soil of the battlefield was soft due to geography at that time and was suitable for *marshland*.¹⁵

The *Maniyar Math* (Plate-52) is accessible through the northern gate of the outer fortification wall of *Rājagriha Nagar* and is also accessible through the newly constructed path. On the northern side of the road to *Maniyar Math*, the ruins of an old building are visible. The southern slope was probably the old road. Excavations of the *Monyar Math*, a large fort-shaped structure on the left, have revealed construction levels of five eras. The upper levels bear traces of Jain, Buddhist, *Shaiva*, and *Chaitya* temples and *Chaityas*. On the other hand, the idols are of a lower period. Which were of the first and second centuries of Christ? It seems that the worship of *Naga-Nagini* was prevalent in ancient times. According to legend, *Mani-Naga* was the main deity worshipped in *Rājagriha* during the *Mahabharata* period. At that time, *Yaksha-Yakshini* worship was prevalent in this place. The Buddhists mentioned *Monimalaka Chaitya*, while the Jain writers mentioned *Manibhadramandir*, or *Chetiya*, which is now known as '*Maniyar Math*'.¹⁶

14. Gridhrakoot hill



Lord Gautama Buddha's most beloved abode was *Gridhrakuta* Mountain in *Rājagriha Nagar*. Another name for this mountain was '*Chathparvat*.' The peak looks like a *gridhra* or vulture perched on top, and the mountain with the peak is known as *Gridhrakuta Parbat*. King *Bimbisāra* met the Buddha on this rugged mountain peak, creating a series of steps to climb up from the foothills. Only foot climbers can reach the top, with part of it still visible. Two small natural caves are visible just below the peak country. The Buddha resided in the higher of these two caves, and the relatively lower cave was the abode of the Buddha's disciple *Ānanda*. *Devadatta* tried to kill Buddha by throwing rocks from this mountain peak. The northern period saw the construction of several monuments atop mountain peaks. Buddhist plaques are available from this place. Originally, *Gridhrakuta* was revered as a Buddhist seat even during the later stages of Buddhism.¹⁷

15. **Saptarshi Kunda-hot spring**

The *Saptarshi Kundu* is located across the *Saraswati* River to the southeast of *Venuban*. The mountain slopes are covered in warm water, which emerges in seven distinct streams. Each one varies in temperature, with the hottest being 45 degrees Celsius. There is sulphur in the water. Bath cures skin diseases. There are separate bathing facilities for men and women at *Makhdumkund* below *Vipulgiri*.¹⁸

16. **Saptaparni Caves and Buddhist council**

A short climb up the stairs past the hot springs leads to a stone-built square. It is also known as *Pippali* Cave. At this place, Buddha preached the '*Bojjhanga Sutta*' for the cure of diseases of the *Māhākāsyap*. *Ādināth* Temple can be seen if we precede further up the stone steps past *Pippali* Cave. The place of *Saptaparni* Cave is a little further along the path that descends down the northern side of the temple hill. The 'first Buddhist council' sat in front of the *Saptaparni* cave on the northern slope of *Baivar* Hill. *This council compiled the Buddha's 'Dharma-Vinaya.'* Out of the seven *Saptaparni* caves, only two are intact now.¹⁹

17. **Balarām Temple and Tapodā**

Crossing the banks of the river *Saraswati* opposite the temple of *Rakshasi Jara*, a large and raised square area with a stone-built square can be noticed along the western bank of the stream of the river *Saraswati*. This square area seems to have been the base of a stupa or altar. Probably in a later period, someone built a Hindu temple on it. The excavations unearthed the idol of the Hindu deity *Balarama* in



this temple.²⁰ *Venuban* lies at the foot of the northern slopes of *Baivar* Mountain in southwest *Bihar*. The hot spring was anciently known as *Tapodā* after the stream that flows down the southeastern border of *Venuban*. Today it is called *the Saraswati* River. An embankment of large stone chai was built on the bend of the river to the southwest of *Venuban*, and probably the road to *Tapodārām* was connected over it. *Tapodārā*, mentioned in Pali literature, was probably located near the hot spring. A watercourse or hot spring has been created by damming the *Tapodā* River. Stone chai, located at the reservoir's edge today, suggests existence. Lord Buddha often bathed in *Tapodā* hot springs. Currently, the hot spring is managed by Hindus, as a Hindu temple has been built there.²¹

18. *Sonavāndār*

The *Sonvāndār* or *Svarnavāndar* temple is further south of *Balarāma's* temple. According to legend, the treasury of the *Magadha* king *Bimbisāra* was enshrined inside this cave, and the inscriptions carved inside it could be deciphered.²² According to modern scholars, this cave was a gorge cave for the residence of *Prabrajits*. According to them, it is likely that the mysterious scripts are merely a remnant of the ancient *Bahma script*. They probably created this cave in the 4th century AD by cutting a mountain pass for Jain monks. Inside the cave, there is an idol of Jain *Tirthankara*. The cave was two-storied, but the upper floor has now collapsed.²³

19. *Jīvakāmrabana and Pippali Caves*

Near the eastern gate of the main city of *Rājgriha* and on the way to *Gudhrakoot* was the *Āmravana* of the famous *Rājveidya Jīvaka*. *Rajyaveedya Jīvaka* gave his garden for the use of Lord Buddha, and later it was converted into a *vihara*. Despite the area's forest cover, researchers have discovered numerous ruins here. The ruins were only the remains of *Vihara* or *Chaitya*. Archaeologists assert that its construction occurred in a later period.²⁴

The foothills of *Baivar* Mountain are home to temples, *chaityas*, mosques, and other structures from various communities. Parts of the old, decayed plaster and brickwork of these institutions are still visible. An ancient lake is reached past the *Tapodārām* hot springs. An east-facing cave on the eastern bank of the sarovar or reservoir and not far from the *Baivar* Mountain, according to the famous historian *Rameshchandra Majumdar*, is the *Pippali* cave mentioned in Pali literature. The Pippali tree in front of the cave likely inspired the name *Pippali Cave*.²⁵

20. Shītaban Crematorium and Vishwashanti Stupa

Just outside the earthen walls of *Ajātashatru's* palace-fort, there is a large aqueduct. From the various signs found along it, it is assumed that there was a crematorium here at some point. This is probably what is mentioned in the Pali works and *Hiuen-Tsang's* account of the winter crematorium. It was known, and Buddha lived here many times.²⁶

On the occasion of Buddha's 2500th birth anniversary, the *Japanese* have built a beautiful *stupa* at the top of *Ratnagiri Hill* at a cost of 18 lakh rupees. The volume of the stupa is 125 feet high and 144 feet in diameter; the diameter of the upper dome is 71 feet. It has been named '*Vishwashanti Stupa*.' Four spectacular images of Buddha surround the stupa. Five kilometres from the city, one has to ride the 600-meter-long electric ropeway from the foot of *Gandhrakoot Hill*. A 15-minute ropeway ride on an open chair is thrilling. You will reach *Shanti Stupa* at the top of the hill to see the scenic view of the hill. A beautiful garden surrounds the *stupa*. There is also a footpath to climb the *Vishwashanti Stupa*.²⁷ Moreover, the royal palace incorporates a Burmese monastery in line with Burmese architecture and a Japanese monastery in line with Japanese tradition.



*Vishwashanti Stupa, Rājgriha, Nāandā, India*²⁸

21. Transportation and Accommodation

From *Pātnā* T. D. C. Transport companies make special arrangements for palace tours for visitors. From *Calcutta* and *Pātnā*, one can change cars at *Bakhtiarpur* station on the *Rājgrih* Railway. From *Kolkata*, government and private tour operators arrange regular visits to *Rājgriha*, *Bodhgaya*, and *Nālandā* by road. Tourist bungalows, ministerial rest houses, district board rest houses, and inspection bungalows are available in *Rājgrih*.²⁹



22. Conclusion

In the context of the above discussion, it can be said that the importance of the royal palace is somewhat diminished in Gautama Buddha's *Mahāparinibbāna* for natural reasons. King *Shishanaga* shifted the capital from *Rājgriha* to *Vaishali*, and later *Kalashoka* shifted the capital to *Pataliputra*; the political importance of *Rājgriha* declined. In his time, *Hiuen-tsang* found the palace abandoned and a ruin inhabited by Brahmins. Destruction destroys places of Buddhist culture, rendering them unreachable today. The city of *Rājgriha* is a pilgrimage site for all religions due to its connection to the history of Buddhism and other religions. It is a matter of profound regret that this city, the bearer of ancient cultural traditions and history, has not been able to retain some of the archaeological monuments of the past except for the destroyed structures.

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