

BUDDHISM IN SANKISSA: HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Thach Lon

Research scholar PH.D, Department of Phiosophy, University of Allahabad

Abstract: Sankissa (also Sankasia, Sankassa and Sankasya) was an ancient city in India. The city came into prominence at the time of Gautama Buddha. According to a Buddhist source, it was thirty leagues from Savatthi. After the Gautama Buddha's Mahaparinirvana (passing away) king Ashoka developed this place and installed one of his famous Pillars of Ashoka in the city, from which the elephant capital survives. He also built a stupa and a temple commemorating the visit of the Buddha. This temple exists even today and the ruins of the stupa are also present as a temple of Vishari Devi. It is said that the name Visahari Devi is given to the mother of the Buddha. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sankissa>

I. INTRODUCTION

Sankasya (also Sankissa, Sankassa) is one of the 'Eight Great Places' (Ashtamahasthan, in the Pali canons) of the Buddhist pilgrimage. According to Buddhist literature, it was here that the Buddha performed the 'miracle of descending from the heavens accompanied by Indra and Brahma'. The Buddhist text says that in his 41st year, the Buddha went up from Shravasti to the Trayastrimsa (also called Tushita) heaven and passed the rainy season retreat teaching Abhidharma to his mother Mayadevi, who had died seven days after his birth. Three months later, at the time of his descent from paradise, kings and devotees from the eight kingdoms gathered at Sankisa. According to Buddhist literature, a flight of gold stairs appeared, which the Buddha climbed down accompanied by Brahma on the right and by Indra holding a jewelled umbrella on

In 249 BC, King Ashoka visited Sankisa as part of his pilgrimage to all eight places of the Buddha's life. He constructed a stupa and erected one of his pillars, 60 feet high according to Chinese pilgrim Fa Hian who visited Sankisa in the 5th century. the left.

II. PILGRIMAGE OF CHINESE SCHOLARS TO SANKISSA

The Chinese travellers – Fa Hian and Hwen Thsang, 7th century — mentioned Sankisa as 'Song-kia-she or Kia-pi-tha' in their accounts. Samuel Beal in his translated account of Fa Hian – Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun, Buddhist pilgrims, from China to India (400 A.D. and 518 A.D.) – also relates an interesting tale about Sankisa. "As per legend, Bodhisattva

Maitreya was born here in Sankassa as a millionaire named Siriwardhana at the period of the Buddha Gautama, and on this exact day, the day the Buddha descended from heaven Tavatimsa, Siriwardhana arrived to this area and was admitted to the Buddha's dispensation here," Beal writes. Not much is known about Siriwardhana but the story confirms the sanctity of Sankisa even during the Buddha's lifetime.

Hwen Thsang saw a 70-foot high staircase at the spot where the Buddha had descended from heaven. He describes the "three holy flights of steps as being in a line from north to south and facing east". On the top of the stairs was a temple with a stone image of the Buddha that according to Fa Hian was 16 cubit (16 ft) tall. Close to the stairs was a 70 ft high Ashokan pillar, he wrote.

Both Hwen Thsang and Fa Hien saw three ladders in the decaying shrine, which had been made of bricks and stone by the ancients to mark the Buddha's descent, but the ladders were practically submerged in the ground. (James B Pratt, The Pilgrimage of Buddhism, 1928)

Both the pilgrims saw the pillar, which is now all gone except its famous elephant capital, still standing. While Fa Hian saw Sankisa full of shramnas (Buddhist monks), Hwen Thsang saw a stronger presence of Brahmans and their temple in the area.

III. BUDDHIST ATTRACTIONS IN SANKHASYA

The Buddha Temple: The most important attraction of Sankisa is the Buddha temple situated at the spot where the Buddha descended after His stay in the Tushita heaven. The temple houses a statue of the Buddha.

The Temple of Maya Devi: A small temple dedicated to the mother of the Gautam Buddha is at Sankisa. Maya Devi is regarded as the goddess of fertility by the people. Also to be seen here on the walls are Buddhist sculptures dating back to Mahayana age.

The Ruins of Ashokan Elephant Pillar: This is yet another attraction of the small village. The unique of the pillar, quite obviously, is the presence of elephants instead of lions. The elephant, it is believed, is symbolic of the white elephant of

which Mayadevi had a vision at the time of conception of Siddhartha(Lord Buddha).

Shravan Mela: The huge Shravan Mela held in the month of July August also draws large number of tourists to Sankisa.

IV. THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTENTION TO DEVELOP SANKISSA BUDDHA LAND.

Mentioning that Sankissa village of Farrukhabad had one of the most ancient Buddhist links of the world, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced the place to be developed as a Buddhist pilgrimage.

Sankissa is known as a major Buddhist pilgrimage across the world and monasteries of Sri Lanka, Japan, Myanmar, Bhutan, Tibet, Cambodia, are located in this village where devotees stay and worship Lord Buddha.

“It is a matter of pride that Uttar Pradesh is a home to several important places related to Lord Buddha and these are being developed under the Buddhist Circuit,” he said.

The CM also asked the officials to chalk out an action plan on this and draw a route map from Sarnath to Gautam Buddha Nagar adding Sankissa village.

Intending to develop all six sites related to Lord Buddha including Sankissa, the CM wanted people from across the world to visit Sankissa, Kapilvastu, Shravasti, Kushinagar, Sarnath and Kaushambi and see the ancient stupas and know about Lord Buddha.

Yogi also said that once Sankissa was developed as a tourist place, employment opportunities would increase and system

of road, power and water would be better, giving a fillip to the hotel and market businesses.

Uttar Pradesh plays host to a large number of tourists from abroad every year to the Buddhist Circuit.

V. CONCLUSION

Sankissa, as one of India's ancient cities, came into prominence at the time of Gautama Buddha. Years later King Ashoka developed the area by building a stupa and a temple commemorating the visit of Lord Buddha along with Brahma Ji and Devraj Indra and also installed one of his famous Ashoka Stambh (pillars) there. This temple still exists and the stupa's ruins are also present. Other ruins of old monasteries and Buddhist monuments are also present. Although the area is one of the holy sites in Buddhism, it is rarely visited by pilgrims since it is difficult to reach and has not been developed.

VI. REFERENCES

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