

## **Development Of Buddhist Religion And Sarnath (With Special Reference To Archaeological Evidences)**

**Dr. Anuradha Singh**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi-221005, U.P., India.*

---

**ABSTRACT :** *This research work holds the account of Sarnath from DharmachakraPravartan of Mahatma Buddha till the reign of Harshavardhana. This analysis is based on the work of historians and archaeologists. After his enlightenment at Bodhgaya, Buddha decided to give preachings to his five disciples at Sarnath. His preachings are known as DharmachakraPravartan. Sarnath has been a centre of attraction for scholars, excavationists and historians since past two hundred years. This place holds an important position to study of origin and strengthening of Buddhism. This place is known for cultural and archaeological heritage and on high religious importance. In the reign of King Ashoka, there was huge development of Sarnath. Many important religion based archaeological evidence of Ashoka's reign are also found in Sarnath. Chinese traveler Fa-hien and Huen-tsang shows the importance of Sarnath as a religious place, with Buddha delivering his first ceremony. So Buddhists have deep regards for this place.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sarnath, Mahatma Buddha, Ashoka, Place, Traveler*

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sarnath, at present, is situated in Varanasi district approx. 8 km away from Cant Railway station. This place holds its significance in world history as it is the place where Lord Gautama Buddha gave his sermon for the first time and thus Buddhists have deep regards for this place. In Buddhist literature. This place is called as

**Rishipattan or Mrigadaav:** In Buddha scripture Mahavastu holds a record of 500 sages living at this place and getting Nirvana, due to which this place got its name as **Rishipattan**. The place got its name as **Mrigadaav** due to a story in which its forests were full of deer's roaming freely, which were prohibited from killing because of an order passed by the king of Varanasi. In this description from the medieval period the name of this place is written as Dharma- Chakra or sadharmachakrapravarta- vihar. Its modern name is derived from **saragnath** which is also a name of Lord Shiva, whose temple is situated nearby. Sarnath has been a center of attraction for scholar, excavationist and Historian since past 200 years. First of all Jonathan **Duncon** in 1794 gave a description about two boxes found by **Babu Jagat Singh** who was chief at the court of King Chet Singh of Varanasi. He made destroy at **Dharmarajika** Stupa and built a market of his name in the city from the bricks and stone found here. Colonel C. Mackengy in 1815 AD was the first person to start archaeological excavation but he got no big results. In 1935-36 AD. This great work of excavation was carried further by Archaeological survey of India. In the directorship of General **Alexander Cunningham**, who completed the excavation and described the place in his annual report of Archaeological survey department. He started his work of excavation in December 1974 and completed it in January 1836. His excavation work was mainly focused around **Dhamek**, **Dharmrajika** and **Chaukhandi** Stupa. The excavation work at Sarnath during 1851 to 1853 was carried by Major **Morkham Kitto**, **G. Thomas** and **Fitz Edward**.

In 1865 AD C. Hone also did some excavation work, without gaining useful results.

In the year 1904-05 AD, F.O. Oertel started excavation work in the area of ancient Mrigadaw from where he

discovered **MoolgandhKuti**-vihar Ashoka's pillar, a statue of Buddha in the position of **DharmachakraPravartan**, Stone umbrella of 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Kanishka reign and bodhisattva statue. In 1907 – 1908 Sir John Marshall with the help of Sten Konow, W.H. Nicholas, Dayaram Sahni and B.B. Chakravarty started an excavation. In this excavation 3 Mahavihar of post Kushana era were found. These Mahaviharas were the home for many Buddhist monks of that time. To preserve the archaeological heritage of Sarnath an archaeological museum was established in the year 1904. In 1914-15 H. Hergrives, discovered **GajPrishthakar** Chaitya of Post Maurya region. In 1921-22 AD, Dayaram Sahni did excavation at Sarnath on a huge level, due to which the path and building between Dhammekh stupa and main temple came into existence. Small excavations work were also carried out in later years. These excavation helped in the manifestation of old and regular form of Sarnath due to which its Archeological and religions importance could be entertained. After his enlightenment at **bodhgaya**.

Buddha decided to give preachings to his 5 disciple at **Sarnath**. His preaching is known as **Dharmachakrapravartan**.

Lord Buddha gave his sermon on **four truths** which are as follow –

- [1] World is full of pain and sorrow.
- [2] Reason of pain and sorrow are sex and desires.
- [3] Pain and sorrow can be annihilated.
- [4] Pain and sorrow can be overcome by following Ashtangikamarga.

#### Figures and Tables

These noble **eightfold path** area

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right view      | 5. Right livelihood    |
| 2. Right intention | 6. Right effort        |
| 3. Right speech    | 7. Right mindfulness   |
| 4. Right action    | 8. Right concentration |

In his preaching's about right livelihood Buddha told the way of neither to lament nor to keep too calm of one self. He told to follow the middle path. This first sermon was filled with a solution to Worldly problems and anxiety and due to this. Due to act of Buddha Sarnath become at Centre for knowledge and preaching's. An association was formed by Lord Buddha for spreading religious knowledge and influenced by this, two son of an aristocrat, who belonged to Varanasi became his disciple with his **54** friends. His First association was formed by his **5** mendicant monks whom he sent to different directions for delivering sermons. After *mahaparinirvana* of **Lord Buddha**, nearly 200 years later. In the reign of King Ashoka. There was huge development at Sarnath. Many important religious archaeological evidences of Ashoka's reign are also found in Sarnath. The inscription on the pillar reads an order which says about stopping the disintegration of Buddhist association. The inscription has an order in it which it says - Whosoever will cause the disintegration, even if the monks will be expelled act of association.

There is not much knowledge about the religious evolution at Sarnath during rule of **Shunga dynasty** except for a one dozen of Vedita stambh which were supposed to be built around 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. with the advent of Kushanas in North India. There was revival of religions and cultures and Mathura became the centre of this revival although Sarnath was not left uninfluenced, many new *viharas* were made here. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of reign of King **Kanishka** of Kushana dynasty, some Monk from Mathura established a *Bodhisattva sculpture* of Buddha with an umbrella on top which was made of red sandstone. During the Kanishka period two kings of Varanasi also helped in the establishment of the statue and their name are inscribed on the statue. In this period monks of Sarvastvadin sects were cherishing prosperity who built **two** mahaviharas of Sarnath. In Gupta's period Sarnath reached at the pinnacle of prosperity and during this period most beautiful statues were built, and Sarnath became more famous as religious Centre. Chinese traveler Fa-hien visited Sarnath during the reign of King Chandragupta II (376 – 414) AD and saw **four** stupa and **two** viharas. An inscription on Buddha statue at Sarnath reveals that the Statue was donated by Kumargupta I (414 – 55) AD. Cunningham found some vandalized statue during the excavation which was probably the outcome of Huns attack during Gupta period. During the reign of **Harshvardhana**, Chinese traveler **Hiuen-Tsang** visited Sarnath and immortalized its beauty in his traveling account. He visited Dhammekha stupa and Ashokan pillar. According to his description **1500** monks of *Heenyaansects* were residing in the viharas and main sample was decorated with a big statue of Buddha in the position of Dharmchakrapravartan.

## II. CONCLUSION

This research work holds the account of Sarnath from *Dharmchakrapravartan* of Mahatma Buddha till the reign of Harshvardhana presented in a chronological order. This analysis is based on the work of Historians, Archaeologists, and modern scholars. Sarnath's archaeological sites hold an important position when it comes to study of origin and Strengthening of Buddhism. This place is also known for its cultural and Archaeological heritages which are of high religious importance. Religious importance of Sarnath remained unaltered in the reign of Ashoka, Kanishka and Harshvardhan and Buddhist art also flourished during their reign. Travelling accounts of **Fa-Hien** and **Hiuen-Tsang** show the importance of Sarnath as a religious place, with Buddha delivering his first sermons and further its evolution through ages Sarnath has developed into a great place of religious, cultural and archaeological importance in the whole world. Even till today this archaeological place holds importance not only as a religious place for Buddhists but for the peoples of other religions as well.

**REFERENCE:**

- [1] Joshi, E.B., *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer*, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, 1955, pp. 14-18.
- [2] Mani, B.R., *Sarnath, Archaeology, Art & Architecture*, Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi, 2006, pp. 5-8.
- [3] David's, T.W.Rhys, *Buddhist Birth Stories of Jataka Tales (Translated)*, London, 1880, Vol. I, pp. 112-146.
- [4] Konow, Sten, *Sarnath Inscription of Kumardevi, EpigraphiaIndica, Vol. IX*, 1907-08, pp. 319-328.
- [5] Duncon, Jonathan, *An Account of the Discovery of Two Urns in the Vicinity of Benares, Asiatic Researches, Vol. II*, 1798, p. 131.
- [6] Cunningham, A., *Archeological Survey of India, Reports. Vol. I, 1871, pp.103-130, Vol. III, 1873, pp. 121, Vol. VIII, 1878, pp. 16, Vol. XI, 1880, pp. 181.*
- [7] Thomas, E., *Note on the Present State of the Excavations at Sarnath in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal. Vol. XXIII*, 1854, pp. 469-477.
- [8] Oertel, F.O., *Excavation of Sarnath in Archeological Survey of India, Annual Reports, 1904-1905*, Calcutta, 1908, pp. 59-104.
- [9] Marshall, J.H., *Excavation of Sarnath in Archeological Survey of India, Annual Reports, Calcutta, 1909*, pp. 68- 101.
- [10] Cowel, E.B. (ed.), *Bddhacaritam of Ashvaghosa, Clarenton Press, Oxford, 1893*, pp. 135-157.
- [11] Bhattacharya, B.C., *The History of Sarnath or the Cradle of Buddhism*, Tara Printing Works, Banaras, 1924, pp. 42-46.
- [12] Majumdar, B.A., *Guide of Sarnath, Pilgrim Books, Varanasi, 1937*, pp. 18 -23.
- [13] Hultzsch, E., *Corpus Inscription Indicarum*, Ideological Book House, Vol. I, 1969, pp. 161-163.
- [14] Bapat. P.V. (ed), *2500 Year of Buddhism, Publication Divison, Indian Government, Delhi, 1956*, pp. 28-31.
- [15] Agrawal, V.S., *Bhartiya Kala, PrithviPrakashan, Varanasi, 1966*, pp. 133-135.
- [16] Agrawal, V.S., *Sarnath, Archeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1956*, pp. 18-25.
- [17] Vogel, J.P.H., *Epigraphical Discoveries at Sarnath, EpigraphiaIndica*. pp. 166-179.
- [18] Sahni, D.R., *Catalogue of Museum of Archeology at Sarnath*, Ideological Book House, Delhi, 1972, pp. 11-15.
- [19] Legge, James, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms, Being on Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hein of his Travels in India and Ceylon*, Oxford, 1886, Reprint Oriental Publication, Delhi, 1972, pp. 110-118.
- [20] Watters, Thomas, *On YounChawang's Travel in India*, London, 1904-05, Vol. II, pp. 46-59.