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LUMBINI,

THE BIRTH-PLACE OF LORD BUDDHA

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Resplendent with the ideals of Later Vedic Religion when most people of the Indian sub-continent were vexed in the tradition of animal sacrifice for gaining the knowledge of enlightenment and finally the salvation from the chain of births and deaths, Buddha, the Exalted Lord of Asia, took his birth at Lumbini in the grove of the Sal trees in 563 B.C.¹ and after receiving Buddhahood in 523 B.C. at Bodhgaya he wandered in the whole Aryavarta to dispel the ignorance of the bewildered people by preaching his noble principles to them up to the age of eighty and then at Kushinagar he left his corporeal body for eternal peace. The Buddha was the first philosopher to speak in the favour of universal brotherhood of man, to reject the theory of caste and he proclaimed that caste and class prejudices are two major obstacles to higher morality and knowledge, and, therefore to salvation.² Therefore, he initiated the monks to wander in each direction “for the gain of many, for the welfare of the many, for showing forth compassion on the world; for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of the gods and men.”³ In the life-time of the Buddha itself Buddhism “permeated the entire religious and philosophic thoughts and percolated into deepest recesses of the religious mentality” of the Hindus.⁴ This has been the reason why he glistened at the highest point among the traditional thinkers of Aryavarta, and long before the Hindu Puranas the Lalitvistara Sutra identified him with Swayambhu, Vishnu, Isvara and Rama.⁵ On account of this wide recognition of the Buddha, Shree Harsha, the greatest dialectician prayed to Him thus:- “You are the Enlightened One, who advocate the non-duality of a continuous stream of Consciousness; the three Vedas are not acquainted with you, you are the denier of four possible alternatives (kotis), the conqueror of Mara and possessor of six knowledge.”⁶ No one before the Buddha taught “the no substantiality, momentariness and emptiness of all things on the basis of rational analysis along with indefinable oneness of the centre and as the ground of all things, and yet transcending them, which can be experienced only in the state of enlightenment.”⁷ According to the Buddha “the world must be looked upon as empty and belief in self be given up in order that the Immortal and the Blissful may be attained.”⁸ The Buddha is thus one of the most original thinkers and one of the greatest and most holy persons that ever lived on this planet, the Mother Earth. According to the cannons of all the Buddhist schools, he is the Perfect Being; neither a human being, nor a god, but one, who having gone

¹ Rahul Sanskritayan, Baudha Darshana, Fourth Edition, Allahabad. 1977. p. 18.

² Mahesh Tiwari(ed.), Bodhi-Rasmi, New Delhi, 1984: Foreword by K.S.Murty. p. VIII.

³ Ibid, Quoted on the page after the end of the foreword from the Vinayapitaka. l. 23.

⁴ H. Bhattacharya (eel.). The Cultural Heritage of India, Calcutta. 1958, l. p. 575.

⁵ Tiwari, op .. cit.,n. 2. Foreword, p. VII, Quoted from Lalitvistara, Kyoto, 1956, p. 192.

⁶ Ibid, p. VIII.

⁷ Ibid. p. VIII.

⁸ Ibid.

beyond *samsara* (this world), because of his altruistic striving through many lives, continues to work untiringly for the liberation of all the beings.⁹

Thus the religion which the Buddha unknowingly founded is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality and it greatly “affected the religious and moral ideas of the time and acted as a powerful catalytic factor in transforming existing social conditions.”¹⁰ As the Buddha denounced all claims to superiority on the ground of birth and threw the doors of organized religious life to men and women alike, a band of disciplined and selfless workers sprung in his organization that took his message in all corners of South-East Asia and founded the Sangha, the order of Buddhist fraternity of monks and nuns. As the constitution and working style of the Sangha was on democratic line seeking its inspirations from the oligarchies of the foot-hills of the Himalayas, particularly of the Shakyas of Kapilvastu, it was destined to blossom in the days ahead. Great monarchs of India, especially Asoka, Kaniska and Harsa, added much laurels in the development of Buddhism in the sub-continent and soon it crossed the Himalayas and became the dominant religion of Afghanistan, Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan in the north and Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in south and South-east Asia. Several sects grew in various countries absorbing the traits of local religions and innumerable images and temples and monasteries and chaityas were made for the adherents in their countries which today form a great treasure of Buddhist heritage in the world. Everywhere, in all the ages, with every Buddhist the Exalted Child of Lumbini of Nepal was the source of inspiration, object of worship and the only Compassionate Being to show the Path of Salvation. His birth-place, the Lumbini Garden, holds its first place in the religious order of the Buddhists. It is because of this preponderance that Lumbini finds its descriptions in all the early sacred works of the Buddhists and is fervently being visited by the pilgrims of the country and abroad since the third century B.C. till the present day with an interruption only during the late medieval and early-modern periods when malaria clutched the Terai and forced the people to abdicate the region. Soon dense forests grew there and Lumbini Garden got lost for about five hundred years and rediscovered in the last quarter of the nineteenth century A.D. only.

Pilgrimage of Lumbini

As the legends stand, Lord Buddha was passing his days in the Tushita Heaven as a Bodhisattva and at the time of his descent on the earth in the sixth century B.C. the Republic of the Shakyas of Kapilvastu was being ruled by King Suddhodhana who was an exceptionally religious man following the ten moral codes of life and his wife Queen Mayadevi was also virtuous like her husband and she cooperated him in all his deeds conducive to the peace and happiness of the countrymen. That is why the Buddha chose them to be his parents and finally took birth, as the legends go. from the right ann-pit of the mother at Lumbini Garden on the day of Vaisakha-purnima in the Terai of Nepal in 563 B.C. Lumbini was located on the border of Kapilvastu and Koliya republics and as it was blessed with blooming Sal trees and beautiful flowers and made resplendent with the humming of the bees of different colours and sweet warbling of different kinds of birds, it resembled to the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ P.V. Bapat (eel.) Twenty-jive Hundred Years of Buddhism. New Delhi. 1956. p. 1.

Chitralata Grove of Indra's paradise.¹¹ Therefore, it was not only used as a pleasure garden by the youths of the two republics but it also developed its contemplative and aesthetic values, and, therefore eloquently recommended by the Buddha at the time of his *mahaparinirama* at Kushinagar for its visit by all the faithful followers and devotees of his order.¹²

Asoka, the Mauryan Emperor, who greatly contributed to the growth of Buddhism personally, came in the Terai of Nepal in 245 B.C. and paid his obeisance to the holy stupas of the previous Buddhas Krakuchhanda and Kanakmuni and the nativity spot of the Gautama Buddha. When in Lumbini the emperor was conducted to the actual nativity spot by his spiritual guide Upagupta and there he prostrated before the Lucky Tree with deep devotion and extreme joy and paid his homage to the Lord. After the worship of the spot the emperor installed the stone column with clear legend that it is this spot of the Lumbini Village where the Blessed One was born.¹³

At the time of visit of the site by this king a brick railing was also erected at a distance of 1'-6" from the base of the pillar and it had dentils also.¹⁴ As the monks began to come on large scale to Lumbini after Asoka, monasteries must have been built there for providing accommodation to the monks and pilgrims who visited the site. A large number of Mauryan and Shunga-Kushana terracotta and stone heads of the Mathura school discovered from Lumbini in various excavations attest that since the third century B.C. pilgrims from Northern India frequently began to visit the site, offer prayers to the nativity spot of the Tathagata and dedicate the images which they brought with them as tribute.¹⁵

Fa-hien is the other noted pilgrim of the site. He came to the Lumbini Garden from Kapilvastu in 403 A.D. and saw the Shakya Tank where Queen Mayadevi had taken bath before giving birth to Gautama Buddha, as well as the Holy Tree under which the Lord was born.¹⁶

The other pilgrim from China to visit Lumbini was Huiyen Tsiang. He visited the site in the winter of 636 A.D. and saw the Sacred Tank and various stupas and shrines in the precincts of the birth place of the Lord. According to this pilgrim the Asokan pillar was surmounted by the Horse Capital which was broken in the middle and had fallen down on the ground on account of a thunder stroke. Near the pillar he found a small stream flowing and called the river of oil (Tilar River) by the people.¹⁷

The archaeological remains, particularly the plinths of the stupas, monasteries and temples and idols and pot-shreds of the Maurya, Shunga, Kushana, Gupta, Vardhan and Pala

¹¹ B.K. Rijal. *Archaeological Remains of Kapilvastu Lumbini Devdah*. Kathmandu. 1979. pp. 12-13.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R.N. Pandey. "Archaeological Remains of Lumbini: The Birth place of Lord Buddha". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol.12. No.3 (August 1985). p. 51

¹⁴ P.C. Mukherji. *A Report on a Tour of Exploration on the Antiquities of Kapilvastu, Terai of Nepal*. Reprint Edition. Varanasi. 1969. p. 35.

¹⁵ Debala Mitra. *Excavations at Tilaurakot and Kuran and Explorations in the Nepalese Terai*. Kuthmundu. 1972. pp. 196- 205, Pls. C XYli-C XXX.

¹⁶ B.L. Pradhan. *Lumbini Kapilvastu Dewadah*, Kathmandu , 1979 , pp.23-24.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 24-25

periods show that Lumbini was well-populated till the early-medieval period and widely visited by the Buddhist monks and pilgrims. It was those monks and pilgrims who brought and offered the idols in the religious shrines for worship at the time of their pilgrimage of the site. Although concrete evidences are lacking to attest the rules of the Western Mallas it appears that the region of Lumbini and Kapilvastu was under their direct rule. That is why, the names of Jitarimalla (1287-89 A.D.) and Ripumalla (1312 A.D.) are found engraved on the stone columns of Niglihawa and Lumbini Garden. Bhuvan Lal Pradhan has given a long historical sketch of the region and forwarded the opinion that Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 A.D.) and Aurangzeb (1668-1707 A.D.) were mainly responsible for the desertion of the Lumbini Kapilvastu region and its cultural heritage.¹⁸ Even Mukundasena I (1540-75 A.D.), Mukundasena II (1750-82 A.D.) and Mahadattasena (1782-93 A.D.), who ruled the region from Palpa could not help to retain the religious ponderosity of the site and the result was the site got lost in the dense forest of the region that grew in the fifteenth-sixteenth century for about half-a-thousand years.¹⁹

Discovery of Lumbini Garden

Although the *Nidan Katha*, *Divyavadana* and *Lalitvistara* and the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims provided plenty of information about the location of Lumbini and Kapilvastu, quests for the discovery of these two sites commenced after the publication of the book called *Ancient Geography of India* by Alexander Cunningham and news of excavation works at Lumbini by Khadga Shamsheer J.B.R., the Governor of Palpa. In 1896 when Khadga Shamsheer had already removed the debris covering the Asokan column, Dr. Fuhrer reached the site and helped the governor in taking the photographs of the inscription of the pillar which was ultimately published in *The Pioneer* of Lucknow on December 1, 1896. After the sensational news of discovery of Lumbini the Government of India sent Mr. P.C. Mukherji to fix the exact location of Kapilvastu. He carried out extensive excavations at Tilaurakot, earlier identified as Kapilvastu, and identified the eastern gate-complex of the capital city as well as a large number of significant structures associated with the life of Lord Buddha until his time of *mahabhinishkramana* at the age of twenty-nine. Mukherji did some excavations at Lumbini also and brought to light the exquisite plinth of the Mayadevi temple.²⁰ He also discovered the antechamber of the temple, sculpture of Vajravahini and many other relics.²¹ The sculpture of Mayadevi that graced the main chamber has been described in detail by him and dated in 'the second century, after the death of Lord Buddha', i. e. in the third century B.C. Mukherji is of the opinion that the nativity relief was 'probably executed under the orders of Asoka.'²² In course of his excavations Mukherji dug the basement parts of a few stupas and monasteries also which have been categorically described by him in the report.²³

After the publications of the reports of Khadga Shamsheer J.B.R., Fuhrer and Mukherji when the problem of identification of Lumbini and Kapilvastu was over, Lumbini again

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 30-32

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mukherji

²¹ Ibid. p. 36

²² Ibid. p. 38

²³ Ibid. pp. 38-39

started to be visited by the pilgrims. That is why Keshar Shamsher J.B.R. did some more exploration works and partial excavation of the Mayadevi temple and the Shakya Tank during 1930-39 A.D. At that time 'a lot of damaged ancient and medieval antiquities were recovered and some of them are even now preserved' in the custody of the Department of Archaeology.²⁴ Keshar Shamsher J.B.R. provided 'a high platform around the Mayadevi temple and enlarged the Shakya Tank with successive terraces and brick veneer.'²⁵ In 1961-62 Debala Mitra of the Archaeological Survey of India excavated a small trench at the base of the Asokan pillar on the western side in order to ascertain the nature of brick enclosure described by Mukherji and to know the details of the base of the pillar. She has given an exhaustive account of the sculptures and other kinds of remains which were discovered from the site in the past.

Recent Archaeological Activities

Scientific excavation started at Lumbini under the aegis of the Department of Archaeology, H.M.G since the winter of 1970-71 alone. Main aim of this excavation was to locate the village of Lumbini mentioned in the pillar of Asoka. The cuttings around the old guest-house located on the southern side of the Mayadevi temple revealed the structures of a few monasteries of four cultural periods and ten successive layers of human occupation beginning from the sixth century B.C. Traces of a mud-wall, a terracotta ring, a circular burial containing the portion of the human skull, one iron sickle, bones of the birds and animals kept in a large number of pots and a terracotta plaque mould of Lord Buddha in the earth-touching posture belonging to the Gupta period were some important discoveries besides a huge amount of shreds of N.B.P. in the lower levels and red ware shreds in the upper stratum.²⁶

Following the call made by U. Thant in 1970 for the development of the Lumbini Garden and preparation of the architectural master-plan of the site by Professor Kenzo Tange in 1972, the task of developing Lumbini Garden has been entrusted to the Lumbini Development Committee, called Lumbini Development Trust, since 1975 A.D.²⁷ From 1975 to 1983 almost every year Mr. B.K. Rijal of the Department of Archaeology excavated the site under the aegis of this committee. His excavations have brought to light the cultural sequence of the site beginning from N.B.P. period in the vicinity of the Mayadevi temple including the remains of a brick structure of 15'-4"x12'-5" size of the pre-Mauryan period on the north of the Asokan pillar. The votive stupa which gave the lid of the gold casket is an important discovery. The other important discoveries of Mr. Rijal are the fragments of the Chunar sandstone horse capital which Huien Tsiang saw in the seventh century A.D. and the terracotta plaque showing Dharmachakra as well as a few terracotta human heads of the Gupta period. The terracotta sculpture of the Bodhisattva, which is also of the Gupta period, is another important discovery of the site besides a large number of spouted jars deposited at the bottom of a well. The excavations revealed a large number of N.B.P. shreds belonging to the types discovered at Tilaurakot in Period I and Hastinapur in periods II and IV. They are

²⁴ Pradhan, op. cit., n. 17, pp. 56-57

²⁵ Rijal, op. cit., n. 12, pp. 16-17

²⁶ B. K. Rijal "Archaeological Activities in Lumbini 1975-77" Ancient Nepal, Nos. 30-39, pp. 28-37, Pls. 7-VI.

²⁷ H. M. G., Nepal (Pub), Lumbini Development Project, Kathmandu 1978, pp. 5-19.

mostly wheel-turned and the fragments of bowls, small basin, vases, *handis*, lids, tumbler-like pots and ghatas.²⁸

Mr. Rijal excavated a few monasteries also on the south and south east of the Mayadevi temple which belong to the Shunga-Kushana and Gupta periods.²⁹ A few wells have also been discovered at Lumbini in course of the archaeological activities of the Lumbini Garden. One of them located in the nursery field found in course of the exploration of the site contained the figures of various animals, birds and votive engraved on the bricks of the Kushana period. Three more wells of this kind were found out in the excavations of 1970-71. A well discovered in 1983 was exposed up to the bottom. Built with crescentic bricks in 29 courses it contained 'a few Kushana spouted pots and a five faceted jar used for Naga worship.'³⁰ For two seasons Mr. T.N. Mishra also excavated in Lumbini. However, he did not publish any report of his excavations. Therefore, I am unable to provide information about his discoveries at Lumbini. Since last two years extensive excavation of the Mayadevi temple complex is being carried out by the Japan Buddhist Federation and its team of archaeologists who have dug the mound up to the bottom and brought to light five successive phases of construction of the temple since the visit of Asoka in 245 B.C.

Archaeological Remains

If credence be given to the accounts of Fa-hien and Huien Tsiang, the Sal tree under which the Buddha was born existed in the fifth and seventh century A.D. Likewise if the description of the *Divyavadana* about the visit of Asoka is an authentic account, the nativity spot was not having any structure till the middle of the third century B.C., i.e. 245 B.C. An examination of the literary accounts of various kinds makes it clear that the nativity spot was to the north of the Shakya Tank and left of the trunk of the Sal tree in its close proximity. When Mayadevi held the branch of the Sal Tree she faced the eastern direction. It was in this standing posture that she felt the pains of delivery and gave birth to Lord Buddha.

The sketch of the structure provided to us in the conference last year reveals that there were fifteen platforms (later on designated *kundas*) having two outer walls at the outskirts of the platforms showing a gap of 1 metre, probably used for circumambulation after the worship of the holy spot. The outer walls extended 26 metres east and west and 21 metres north and south and at present show 27 courses of bricks. The inner wall is 20.40 metre east-west and 15.70 metre north-south and shows 23 layers of bricks only. Six support-walls were given in the northern and southern walls while there were four support-walls in the western wall. Two support-walls were found at both ends of the eastern wall. Placement of the support-walls is not in regular order and this shows that no specific rule governed in the constructional method and size of the support-walls. The floor of the circumambulatory passage was paved with bricks at a depth of 1 metre. In the first stage of construction four concentric squares focusing a sand conglomerate stone (size: 0.68x0.35 metre) is seen which possibly marks the nativity spot. The central square platform (size: 1 metre square) built in the centre of a chamber (size:

²⁸ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, pp. 204-205.

²⁹ Rijal, op. cit., n. 28, p. 32

³⁰ B.K. Rijal, *Archaeological Activities in Lumbini: 1978-83*, Kathmandu, (n.d.), p. 27.

8.20x 2.70 metre) is made of 7 courses of Mauryan bricks and the size of the bricks are 38x25-1 2x8 centimetres. Judging from the remains, particularly two sorts of NBP extremely typical to Lumbini found from the soil of the southern square space, this structure, Uesaka presumed was “built in the Mauryan period, three centuries before the Christ.”³¹

The structure of the second stage was built above the central square space of Stage 1. This structure was much smaller than the square space below and measured 1.22 metre north south, 1.87 metre east-west and became smaller towards the bottom. Now the conglomerate stone, i.e. the natural stone of the nativity spot became an object of a *kunda* of the size 1.23x1.23x0.70 metre. The gaps between the outer and inner walls were filled up with cross wall grids. Two more *kundas* were made on the north and south of the main *kunda* and they measured 0.81x0.69x1.30 metres and 0.96x0.91x1.30 metres respectively. These three *kundas* were built with the bricks of 38x26x8, 36x24x7 and 31x22x6 centimetre sizes and later served the purpose of *garbha-kunda* for the Sikhara Temple. The brick sizes of the *kundas* are similar to those of the bricks of the First Phase which attests that these *kundas* were built shortly after the construction of the structure of the first stage.³²

Three square spaces were discovered constructed in the third phase above the squares of the first and second phases of which the central square space was located exactly above the central square of the first phase. The square spaces of the north (size: 1.14x1.10 metre) and south (size: 1.14x1.10 metre) were located more inside than the squares of the first stage. The central square space measured 1.25 metre at the top and 1.25 metre in the bottom. An arch was built here at the centre of the bottom to give the glimpse of protecting the two small natural store placed in Stage II. Special bricks (size: 40x40x6 centimetre), supposed to be of pre-Mauryan period, were carefully used to make the top of the arch. The northern and southern square spaces were similar in workmanship and relatively good bricks were used in their construction.³³

In the fourth phase a square platform of 1.50x1.30 metre size having the height of 0.45 metre constructed in 9 layers of bricks with north-south direction as principal axis was found in the excavations. It was 0.50 metre below the floor of the inner temple. The bricks seen in the walls of the inner temple measured 30x20x5 centimetres. The floor of the platform of the inner temple is also made by the bricks of this size. As no remains were found in the inner shrine on the platform, it was not possible to provide any date to this phase of construction. As this structure was located above the square spaces built in the first second and third stages, it has got some similarities to those square spaces.³⁴

Uesaka has forwarded the opinion that in the Stage V the Mayadevi Temple was built for five times. First time the temple was constructed as a superstructure on the platform. It was based on the outer wall of the double inner wall installed above the inner wall built in

³¹ Uesaka, "Reports of Results of Excavation of North-South Transverse Investigative Ditch in the Centre of Mayadevi Temple and the Lower Part of Outer Walls Constructed in the Second Half of 1930s, Lumbini, March 1995, pp. 1-5.

³² Ibid. pp. 6-7

³³ Ibid, pp. 7-9

³⁴ Ibid. p. 10

Stage I 38 Second time it was given the shape of the temple P.C. Mukherji has described after the excavations in his report. Uesaka has written that in 1901 A.D., i.e. after the publication of the report of the excavations of P.C. Mukherji, a garden was built on the eastern side with a low brick-wall on its east to protect the whole complex and the Mayadevi Temple was located on the western side of the garden. On the northern side of the temple at a distance of 16 feet a building (*matha*) was built by a Hindu Sanyasi on the ancient foundations after removing the ruins of two stupas. The Sanyasi was dead at the time of the excavations of Mukherji. Here on excavation Mukherji found the northern boundary-wall,³⁵ now fully excavated by the Japanese Excavation Party. Uesaka has further written that in the fourth phase of this stage the Mayadevi Temple was similar to the current Mayadevi Temple but different in outer appearance from the Mayadevi temple shown in the photo taken in 1901. This shows that after 1898 and before 1901 A.D. it was remodeled into what was similar in appearance and size to the current Mayadevi Temple.³⁶ Uesaka further writes that a severe earthquake that hit Nepal in 1934 A.D. cracked the outer walls of the double inner-wall of the Mayadevi Temple. That is why in 1938 A.D. Keshar Shamsheer J.B.R. opened both the northern and southern entrances of the temple and set up the platform and outer-walls properly. In course of this repair work the northern and southern sides of the inner double wall were destroyed. After 1939 till 1956 there were partial repairs in this temple for several times.³⁷

To begin again or to explain the whole complex of Stage V or the fifth phase an area covering 21x21 metre above the three square spaces (called *kundas*) was filled up with brickbats, mud surkhi and half bricks up to the height of 3 metres and a structure of 4x3 metres was built on it as sanctum for the nativity relief that was worshipped there since a long time. The sanctum chamber was covered with carved brick temple from outside. A courtyard also existed on the east of the sanctum chamber. The carved brick temple which was built on the deposited plinth is constructed on the four courses of brick-bats and mud-fillings. At the plinth level of this carved brick temple a white lime plastered floor is seen covering the area of 6x6 metres; hence it was square in shape and served the purpose of *mahamandapa* or prayer-hall on the east of the sanctum with a vestibule in the middle.³⁸ After the excavations in March 1899 Mukherji wrote that the temple was curvilinear in shape and *saptaratha* (seven bayed) on plan. It was a beautiful temple with a 12x10 feet sanctum at the rear back showing six flights of steps provided from the east, beginning from the gate, a vestibule and a *mahamandapa* on the east opened by gates from the sides of north and east. The total length and width of the temple was 48x30 feet respectively. On the west in the sanctum a raised plinth of 3x1 feet contained the nativity sculpture which is even today worshipped by the pilgrims of the site.³⁹

The plinth which Mukherji exposed was plain and four bricks high in the lowest portion on which two courses receded by about an inch which again went by a bent in vertical line. There a neck appeared in the single course and on it a band of ornaments in two courses

³⁵ Mukherji, op. cit., n. 15, p. 38

³⁶ Uesaka, op. cit., n. 34, p. 12

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 10-12.

³⁹ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 55

of bricks, carved in circular designs were put by the architects. Above this was the floriated cyma (*padma*) standing on a fillet in single course. There was another neck on it which supported a course which was decorated with the designs of heads. On this was the course of big cyma which occupied the middle of the plinth-wall. This cyma was surmounted with a course of beads and on that was placed the third neck (*gala*). There a big band projected about 2 inches; it was carved out with wavy floriation and other decorations and finally crowned with a cyma, carved with the designs of the lotus-petals. Lastly the fourth neck makes its appearance in a hollow line on which was placed an ornamental *dasa* and a *kumbha*, the torus of the Greek architecture, done in two courses. Then again a cyma was ornamented with the lotus-petals. The plinth, about 5 feet high, was finally finished up with the lines of squares and little holes.⁴⁰

The general details of the plinth indicate that it was built in the fifth century A.D. after the visit of the site by Fa-hien and before the visit of Huien Tsiang in the seventh century A.D. and at that time the nativity sculpture was installed in the sanctum on the raised platform for the worship of the devotees. Attached to the temple of Mayadevi was the ante-chamber which housed the so-called Vajravaraahi sculpture of the site.⁴¹ Mukherji found that the temple of Mayadevi was linked up with the Shakya Tank by a causeway having flight of steps of baked bricks.⁴² The people who wanted to worship the nativity sculpture inside the temple, first took bath in the tank and then they went to the temple for their prayers and offerings.⁴³

Since the declaration of the Lumbini Garden as a sacred site of pilgrimage several stupas were built by the adherents in the periphery of the Mayadevi temple. One of them was located 16 feet on the north of the temple. In the vicinity of the ruined foundation of this stupa Mukherji found several sculptures of ancient and early-medieval periods. On the west of this stupa another stupa was also located. It was small in size and its foundation on the north-west was much broken. Its basement was square 'having rectangular projections in the middle of the sides and rising in regular gradations or courses in rather plain mouldings.'⁴⁴ Mukherji has given description of some more stupas which he excavated there, and a few of them were of round form. In the vicinity of the tank five stupas were excavated by him. The southern wall of the basement of these stupas showed batter.⁴⁵ Five feet to the north of the Mayadevi temple Rijal also excavated a square-based stupa of the Mauryan period. He is of the opinion that this stupa was 'cut from the top up to the depth of 3'-0"x2'-8" possible during the operation of 1933-39 A.D.' by Keshar Shamsher J.B. Rana. On excavations the floor of this stupa provided the lid-portion of a gold casket of cylindrical type in association with some charred human bones and other ritual offerings.⁴⁶ The container part of the relic-casket seems to have been broken into pieces and removed by Keshar Shamsher Rana himself. This was the reason why the relics of the casket scattered on the floor. When the upper portion of the stupa fell down, it

⁴⁰ Mukherji, op. cit., n. 15, pp. 36-37

⁴¹ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 55

⁴² Mukherji, op. cit., n. 15, pp. 34-39

⁴³ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 55

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rijal, op. cit., n. 28, pp. 34-39

was encased during the Kushana period by the builders. In all 33 courses of bricks of this stupa are available.⁴⁷ There are two more votive stupas on the north of the Mayadevi temple and they also belong to the Mauryan and Shung-Kushana periods.⁴⁸ On the north-east of the Mayadevi temple 16 stupas have been found built on a platform. They are attributed to the 16 Arhats.⁴⁹ All these stupas have been conserved now.

A few monasteries were also built at Lumbini in the past. One of them, located on the south-east of the Shakya Tank, was of quadrangular shape and had rooms on the four sides of the courtyard. The partition walls of the rooms are reduced to a few courses only. At places the floors of the rooms are visible and at other places they have been removed by the builders of the later phase.⁵⁰ The large bricks (size: 35.5x20.3 cm) of the monastery reveal that it was initially built during the Mauryan period, perhaps at the time of the visit of the site by King Asoka. On the ruins of this monastery are scanty traces of a structure representing possibly a latter monastery. A wall was also excavated here and was used by the monks living in the monastery for the purpose of drinking water. There are the ruins of some more monasteries on the northern side of these monasteries. However, they are in complete ruins and it is difficult to ascertain their features and dates of their constructions today. Yet they seem to be the structures of the Shunga-Kushana and Gupta or Vardhana periods.⁵¹

Mukherji excavated a brick-railing around the Asokan pillar which showed three phases of constructions; the earliest (5'-6" high) exhibiting very large bricks, most ancient in style. The middle portions of the wall were 2'-8" high and it belonged to the subsequent period. Mukherji noticed dentils also in between the constructions of the first and second periods.⁵² In 1960 Mrs. Debala Mitra excavated a narrow trench on the western side of the Asokan pillar to check the nature of the enclosure-wall described by P.C. Mukherji in his report. She has expressed the opinion that owing to the disturbances caused by the excavations of Keshar Shamsher J.B. Rana the brick railing no longer exists on the western side of the pillar.⁵³ She has written in her report that on the immediate north-east and south-west of the pillar there were small brick stupas showing square bases while its south-western portion was marked with a *triratha* brick plinth. Mitra provides much later date to these structures.⁵⁴ The revised plan of structures around the Mayadevi Temple shows that there were several stupas and monasteries at Lumbini and they were under use till the beginning of the rule of the Mohammadans in the sub-continent.⁵⁵

The Shakya Tank, located on the south of the Mayadevi Temple, was originally oval in shape. Keshar Shamsher Rana cleaned it fully at the time of his archaeological activities at Lumbini and made it *pakka* with the use of kiln-burnt bricks. The tank is 50' square, shows

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 37

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 35.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 35, Pl. II.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 32, Fig. 2

⁵¹ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 56

⁵² Mukherji, op. cit., n. 15, p. 35

⁵³ Mitra, op. cit., n. 15, p. 35

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Rijal, op. cit., n. 28, p. 35, Fig 2.

six terraces and a night of steps for descending to the level of the water (*ghata*). The bricks used in the repair of the tank bear the date of 1939 A.D. in their centrally depressed parts. In the summer when the water is dry, the oval shape of the tank is visible even today.⁵⁶

Sculptures of the Site

Because Lumbini was under habitation for more than 2000 years, a large number of terracotta, stone sculptures and metallic statues have been found here in the course of various archaeological explorations and excavations. The most interesting piece of antiquity of the Lumbini Garden is the inscribed stone column itself which was installed there by King Asoka in 245 B.C. This 21 high pillar shows its lower girth 7'-9" and its diameter is 2'-7-1 2" in size. Made of Chunar sand-stone with tiny blackish specks, it bears the characteristic Mauryan polish. The pillar has got a vertical fissure down to the bottom and its top is broken off probably by lightening, as noted by Huien Tsiang. The capital of the pillar was of bell-shape. Its base broken into two halves still exists at Lumbini. The fragment of the horse capital, which was surmounted on the top, has been discovered now. It shows that the pillar was complete in the beginning. The capital shows the usual festoons in the face of the big cyma under which there was a 1'-0" deep hole of 5" diameter in which was filled the copper mortise that was fixed above the shaft.⁵⁷ The pillar contains an inscription in the Pali language and Brahmi script of the third century B.C. which reads as follows:-

'King Piyadasi, beloved of gods, having been anointed twenty years, came himself and worshipped (this spot) saying 'Here Buddha Shakyamuni was born.' And he caused to be made a stone (capital) bearing a horse, and he caused (this) stone pillar to be erected. Because here the Worshipful One was born, the village of Lumbini has been made free of taxes.'⁵⁸

The other engravings are of the time of Ripumalla and Samgrammalla only. The column is more a piece of art than an object of architecture. Its beautiful tapering towards the top, mirror-like Mauryan polish and sophisticated chiseling indicates that art under the skillful Mauryan masons had reached an admirable standard.⁵⁹

The sculpture of nativity of Lord Buddha (size: 5'-6"x 3'-6") is the most splendid relief of the Lumbini Garden. In the panel Mayadevi has been represented life-sized in high relief under the Sal tree, holding its branch with her right hand, and her left hand is resting on the hip. The *Nidankatha* contains that when the queen came to this most beautiful and stately tree, its branches curiously bent down to ease her reach like a stemmed reed. Stretching out her hand she caught hold of the branches ... and the pains came. Standing thus and holding the branch, she gave birth to Lord Buddha.⁶⁰ This legend the artist has successfully carved out and this is the earliest and the best relief so far discovered from the sub-continent. Since the

⁵⁶ H.M.G. Nepal (Pub.), Lumbini Development Project, Kathmandu: Lumbini Development Committee 1978, p.11. Pl.V.

⁵⁷ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, p. 197; Mukherji. op. cit., n.15, pp. 34-35; A. Fuhrer, *Antiquities of the Buddha's Birth Place in the Nepalese Terai*, Reprinted, Varanasi, 1972, pp. 26-34

⁵⁸ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 57

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

queen has been depicted in maternity, her waist is held by Prajapati. The extreme right of the panel has been executed with the figures of Brahma and Indra who wear basket-like crowns and stand in devotion before the queen to receive the divine child. Below, between Brahma and Mayadevi, is seen the standing figure of the Buddha with a halo round his head.⁶¹ The sculpture has suffered a vertical abrasion and is broken into three pieces. Mukherji has expressed of the opinion that this sculpture was executed 'under the orders of Asoka' because it is similar in material and workmanship to the Yaksha-door keepers of Pataliputra of the Mauryan period.⁶² However, V.S. Agrawal thinks that it is a replica of the figure set by Asoka during the Kushana period.⁶³ Debala Mitra has written that stylistically the sculpture is ascribable to the Gupta period only.⁶⁴

The sculpture of so-called Vajravarahi (size: 4'-0"x2'-1") also seems to be of the Gupta period on stylistic grounds. Slender body of the goddess is particularly noticeable in the relief. It is split in two halves across the breast.⁶⁵ Keshar Shamsheer Rana collected a large number of sculptures of Lumbini Garden during 1933-39 A.D. and kept them in a monastery of the site under the protection of the Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee. Today they have been acquired by the Department of Archaeology, H.M.G. Among them one head of the Buddha of molded red sandstone which came from the atelier of Mathura is beautifully marked 'with a plain pump-like *Usnisa*' and a circular mark or *urna* on the forehead and shows similar face and open eyes. Stylistically this head is ascribable to the Kushana period.⁶⁶ The image of the Buddha on chlorite in *bhumisparsa-mudra*, rigidly seated in *vajrapamyankasana* on a *viswa padma* below the Bodhi tree is also a beautiful sculpture of Lumbini Garden.⁶⁷ The fragments of slabs representing the Miracle of Sravasti and Eight Great Miracles are two quite notable sculptures of the site. In the latter slab the Buddha has been executed sitting in *vajraparayankasana* on a double-petalled lotus and his damaged right hand shows *bhumisparsamudra*. He is clad in *dhoti* and scarf, the latter, with ends tucked on the left shoulder, has left the right chest and shoulder bare. Around the Buddha are represented the seven other great accidents of his life of which the birth and the first sermon are alone preserved on the Dexter and the offering of honey on the sinister.⁶⁸ The other sculptures of the site include one crudely executed figure of Maitreya on greyish sandstone, a basalt sculpture of the Bodhisattva, a two armed seated image of Bodhisattva in *lalitasana*, two images of Ganesha and some fragmentary figures and plaques of males and females crudely executed in the Pala period (750 - 1160 A.D.). The two images of the site, one belonging to a Bodhisattva and the other to a devotee, although of the Kushana period, are very crude in workmanship.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, pp. 197-98.

⁶² Mukherji, op. cit., n.15, p. 37. Pl. XXIV a, Fig 2.

⁶³ V.S. Agrawal, *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, pp. 162-63.

⁶⁴ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, pp. 197-98.

⁶⁵ Pandey, op. cit., n. 14, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, p. 199, Pl. C XIX A.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 199, Pl. C XIX, B. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 199-200, Pl. C XX. B. 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 200-201.

Of the several terracotta figures of the Lumbini Garden, one Buddha head, set within an architectural frame, is quite beautiful. The open eyes with prominently arched eye-brows and stylized *daksinavarta* curls, covering the head and the *usnisa* of the head point that this terracotta is a work of the seventh century A.D. itself.⁷⁰ The other terracotta is the head of an old man with a prominent nose. The head is very individualistic in character and speaks the hands of a very skilled artist in its modelling. The third head with spiral curls and open mouth displaying the upper row of teeth is ascribable to the Gupta period on the basis of plastic qualities.⁷¹ Terracotta of the Gupta period is a fine head with half-closed meditative eyes; a crown is also given to it by the modeler.⁷² Among the other terracotta the defaced head of a woman showing fairly good workmanship, the laughing face with open eyes and a mark in the form of a circlet on the forehead, the bust of the female with a necklace in the form of a row of impressed roundels, the lower part of a figure wearing a frilled skirt (*antarvasaka*) and scarf and the leaf-shaped plaque impressed with the figure of Manjusri Bodhisattva on a double-petalled lotus-flower in a *maharaja-lilasana* inscribed with the characters of late ninth century A.D. in “three lines on the dexter and one line on the sinister” are quite notable specimens of this place.⁷³ Last decade B.K. Rijal excavated three terracotta human heads and the upper-half of the figure of a Bodhisattva of the Gupta period.⁷⁴

Among the three heads, one illustrated at upper portion of the plate, is crudely moulded and is datable to the Kushana period. It is 2-12" in size and badly damaged on the left side in the portion of the face. The other two heads belong to the Gupta period. The head-dressing of one of them is in the style of deep curls called Dhupika Kuntala. ‘Its lips without any bold depression at the two comers of the lips and in the middle of the chin can be seen as evidence of the transitional phase. Although the facial details of the other figure is worn out, its ‘turban-like hair-dressing is noticeable.’⁷⁵ The terracotta sculpture of the Bodhisattva is endowed with the grace and elegance of the Gupta period. Only the bust of the sculpture is available. Rijal has written that the figure is slim, clad in transparent dress and his tight hand is raised in protection (*abhaya*) pose. The facial expression of the figure reveals spiritual contentment and celestial happiness. The face is elongated and straight nose, smooth cheeks; thick lips with depression at the comers are particularly remarkable. The two sides of the chin are separated in the middle and the eye-brows have taken a sharp curve. The forehead is bright and prominent and the crown with one crest is decorated with dotted designs in a technique of oblique. Thus, it is a beautiful terracotta figure of the site.⁷⁶ The terracotta Dharmachakra with 32 spokes was found in the excavation on the eastern side of the Mayadevi temple. The piece seems to be the part of a big panel of a Dharmachakra sculpture which was worshipped there by the devotees in the past. Among the other accessories of the panel are the two animals, possibly representing a bull and a deer.⁷⁷ The most important

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 201

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 201-202

⁷⁴ Rijal, op. cit., n. 28, Pl. V. B.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 33, Pl. V. B.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 32-33, Pl. VI. A.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 33, Pl. VI. B.

discovery of Mr. Rijal is fragments of the horse-capital mentioned earlier in this paper. A short report which was published from the side of Lumbini Development Project contains illustrations of 41 chips of this horse-capital. One of them is quite big in size and bears distinctive Mauryan polish.⁷⁸

Miscellaneous Remains

Lumbini has provided us with many other assets in its various explorations and excavations by the archaeologists. The most important among them are the Mauryan and post-Mauryan silver punch-marked coins discovered recently by Uesaka in course of the excavations of the Mayadevi temple. Their detailed study has not been done so far. Uesaka found out a copper coin of Kuzul Kadaphisis, some red Chunar sandstone pieces with Mauryan polish and peculiar N.B.P. shreds with bichrome paintings which may he described as significant discoveries of Lumbini; however their relevance and significance has not been yet ascertained.⁷⁹ One copper coin of the Kushana period published by Debala Mitra in her report is an important object of the Lumbini Garden. The obverse of the coin depicts the king facing on the left side and he wears a long coat. With his raised left hand he is offering something on the altar. The deity standing on the obverse is too much defaced to be identified correctly. "The diameter of the coin is 2.5 cm. the thickness being 6.3 cm."⁸⁰ Two copper coins of Lumbini are preserved in the personal collection of Mr. Surendra Singh of Kapilvastu.⁸¹ Although several kinds of objects have been found in the excavations of Lumbini after 1970, nothing is mentioned in the reports which came out from the Department of Archaeology and Lumbini Development Project (Trust). Only Mrs. Mitra has given the details and illustrations of a few such antiquities from the site. Of the five beads referred to by her one is long and bean-shaped and made of semi-precious stone while the rest are of terracotta "stimulating the shape of areca nut".⁸² One cylindrical ear-stud of jasper was also found at Lumbini.⁸³ A large number of decorated bricks and tiles have been found in the excavations of Lumbini. Designs of lotus petals, chaitya-windows, grids, floral and plant-motifs and stepped patterns, as on the bricks of Kudan, are very commonly seen impressed on them.⁸⁴

Various monuments and antiquities reveal that Lumbini was under continuous habitation till the fourteenth century A.D. since the sixth century B.C. This fact is elucidated by the shreds of the degenerate grey-ware, northern black-polished ware and several varieties of red wares too. The pottery of Lumbini is comparable to the pottery types of Tilaurakot (Kapilvastu) and Kudan in Nepal and period III and IV at Hastinapur in India.⁸⁵ Recently a large number of spouted vessels have been found deposited in a well and their ceremonial use

⁷⁸ H. M. G. Nepal (Pub.), op. cit., n. 29, p. 16, Pl. VI.

⁷⁹ Mr. B. K. Rijal provided this information to the author in an informal discussion at his residence in Thapathali.

⁸⁰ Mitra, op. cit., n. 16, p. 203, Pl. C XXIX A, 7.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 203, Footnote 1.

⁸² Ibid. Pl. C XXIX Z, 5.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 204.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 204-205.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

is clear from their shapes. The surface finds of the site include some beads of terracotta and semi-precious stones, mullets, flesh rubbers, fragments of iron-nails and small bits of bronze objects.⁸⁶ A large portion of Lumbini Garden still remains unexcavated. Therefore, I am confident that on excavation many important and interesting antiquities would come out to light and they will be of great help in revealing the history and grandeur of the site.

Lumbini Development Master Plan

Since 1968 various works have been carried out at Lumbini according to the master-plan of the site. The master-plan comprises three main elements namely the Lumbini Village, the Monastic Enclave and the Sacred Garden. Emphasis has been given under the master-plan to create the atmosphere of tranquility, universality and clarity in consistent with the idea of serene environment of the time of the Birth of Lord Buddha. Several Buddhist countries have generously contributed for the physical growth of the site and now besides some monasteries and rest-houses the Buddhist Research Centre and the Building of the Museum are also ready and soon they would be made alive for comprehensive research and display of the cultural repositories related with Lumbini Garden and Lord Buddha. Days are not far away when Lumbini, will again glisten aloft while showing path to the bewildered men for their peace of mind in this life and enlightenment of the soul in the end.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 206.