**INTRODUCTION**

Lumbini is the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, the Sakya prince, and the ultimate Buddha, the Perfectly Enlightened one. The site of his nativity is marked by the commemorative pillar erected by Indian Buddhist emperor Ashoka over 2,200 years ago and was rediscovered in 1896. Thus, as Ashoka himself acknowledged, Lumbini is a quintessential Buddhist heritage site, currently undergoing a renaissance by the internationally supported Lumbini Development Project.

Across the world and throughout the ages, religious people have made pilgrimages. Many great teachers of the Buddhist tradition maintained the practice of pilgrimages, paying respect to the holy sites.

The Buddha himself exhorted his followers to visit what are now known as the four original places of Buddhist pilgrimage: Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. The purpose of my presentation is to highlight the Lumbini, and its environs as the pilgrimage center for all the peace loving people and the Buddhist alike.

There are several sites in Lumbini and environs concerning Buddha's life. Some of these sites are as follows.

**MONUMENTS AT LUMBINI**

The grove of Lumbini changed into a religious site soon after the parinirvana of the Buddha. A monastic site evolved around the sacred spot of Buddha's birth. The birthspot being the most sacred point in the whole of the holy land of Lumbini drew the attention of generous devotees who erected structures to pay homage to the great master. These constructions were religious in nature.

Alongside the religious complex, a civic settlement also sprang up to meet the growing need of the religious community visiting or living in the holy complex from 5th/4th c. B.C. A cultural deposit now exposed by recent archaeological excavation in the complex confirms this fact.

**Mayadevi Temple**

The holy site witness the construction of a burnt-brick structure that later on became famous by the name of Maya Devi Temple. The famous Maya Devi stone sculpture,
known as the Nativity Sculpture was installed here in c. 4th century A.D.

The exact spot of Buddha's birth was developed into a worship place by providing a brick platform and circumambulatory path to the shrine as early as 3rd century BC. Devotees visiting the site continued their efforts in maintaining the sanctity of the holy place by repairing and rebuilding the monuments of reverence. The Holy spot of birth has been preserved in the form of the present day Maya Devi temple

**Nativity Sculpture**

The other monument of importance is the image of Maya Devi, also known as the Nativity Sculpture. Enshrined in a small structure, the image shows Maya Devi, mother of the Lord Buddha, supporting herself by holding the branch of a tree with her right hand. The newly born Siddhartha is standing upright on a lotus pedestal. Two other celestial figures are seen in an act of pouring water. Lotus flowers are also seen being scattered from heaven.

**Marker Stone**

The single most important spot at Lumbini is the stone slab located deep in the Sanctum Sanctorum. Revealed after hard and meticulous excavations under the three layers of ruins on the site of a famous Maya Devi temple, the stone slab foundation pinpoints the precise location of the original place.

Marking the exact spot of the birthplace of Lord Buddha, on February 4, 1996, an official declaration was made by the then Prime Minister of Nepal about the discovery of the spot marked by a stone conglomerate. This spot being the most sensitive, proper conservation and exposition required to allow pilgrim/visitors to observe in situ the Marker Stones here.

**Sacred Pond**

Close to the Ashokan pillar is the famous sacred pool Puskarini believed to be the sacred pond in which Maya Devi took a holy dip just before giving birth to the Lord and also where the infant Buddha was giving birth to the Lord and also where the infant Buddha was given his first purificatory bath. The pool has there projecting terraces in descending order and is riveted with brick masonry.

The Sakya Puskarini has been there even before the birth of Buddha. It still exists with an embankment consisting of bricks marked 1939 A.D. The holy site is surrounded by a row of stupas. The stupas were also built as early as 3rd century B.C. Some stupas with square, rectangular and circular bases were added in the medieval period.

**Ashoka Pillar**

Discovered by the then Governor of Palpa, Khadga Shumsher Rana, and the German archaeologist Dr. A. Fuhrer, the Ashokan pillar is the first epigraphic evidence relating to the life history of Lord Buddha. The stone pillar erected by Ashoka in 249 BC is one of the most noteworthy monuments and an authentic historic document of Lumbini. The
inscription engraved by Ashoka is still intact and testifies to the authenticity of the birth-
place. The text written in Brahmi script and Pali language is translated as follows:

King Piyadasi (Asoka), the beloved of Devas, in the twentieth year
of the coronation, himself made a visit to Lumbini and paid his
homage. Realizing that the Buddha Sakyamuni was born here, a
stone railing was built and a stone pillar erected. Because the Lord
was born here, the Emperor had the people of Lumbini village
freed from some tax and entitled them to the eighth part only.

BACKGROUND OF MASTER PLAN

On the occasion of the Fourth World Fellowship of Buddhist conference in 1956, late
king Mahendra took personal interest in providing basic facilities and recreating
Buddhist environment by constructing a vihara, a rest house, and a road to link Lumbini
with nearby towns.

United Nations Secretary General U Thant's pilgrimage to Lumbini in 1967 beame a
milestone in the history of the development of Lumbini in recent times.
Deeply influenced by Lumbini's sanctity, he discussed the matter with king Mahendra
and suggested HMG/Nepal develop Lumbini as an International pilgrimage and a tourist
center. An international committee to help the development of Lumbini was formed in
1970 at the UN headquarters. Prof. Kenzo Tange of Japan was assigned the task of
designing a Master Plan for the development of Lumbini.

In 1978, a Master Plan for the development of Lumbini was finalized and approved
by the UN and HMG of Nepal. In the mean time, HMG was directly involved in the
planned development of Lumbini through Lumbini Development Committee.
The committee was successful in acquiring the land, relocating the villages,
commencing the basic infra structure including the afforestation programme.

In 1985, Lumbini, Lumbini Development Trust Act came into existence and
Lumbini Development Trust was formed accordingly. The Trust is responsible for the
implementation of the Master Plan and for the overall development of Lumbini.

The Master Plan

The Master Plan covers an area of three square miles on north south and encompasses
three zones each covering one square mile (2.56 sq. km). The three zones are united by a
1.474 meter long walk way and a canal. The zones are:

1. The Sacred Garden
2. The Monastic zone and
3. The New Lumbini village

The heart of design is the sacred garden located in the southern part. The ultimate
objective of the design here is to create an atmosphere of spirituality, peace, universal
brotherhood and non-violence consistent with the time and Buddha’s message to the
world. The sacred garden shelters the ancient monuments at the center in a freshly
restored atmosphere of serene and lush forest all around the complex. In keeping with
the goal of protecting the sites of archaeological significance, no new construction is
permitted in the sacred area surrounded by a pond and the circular levee.

The monastic zone is situated in the forest area north of the Sacred Garden. Divided by a canal, there are East and West Monastic enclaves having 42 plots each allotted for new monasteries of Theravada and Mahayana sects of Buddhism. Nearby, across the central link bridge, a research center, a library, an auditorium and a museum provide facilities for research and study on Buddhism.

The northern part of the site is being developed as the new Lumbini Village, which is also a gateway to the outer world where visitors can find comfortable lodges and restaurants offering high standard facilities.

CHANGING FACES IN LUMBINI: MONASTIC ZONES

- Gautami Vihara: Nunnery
- Golden Stupa of Myanmar
- Thai Monastery
- Mahabodhi Monastery
- Vietnamese Temple
- Chinese Monastery
- Tara Foundation Temple
- Panditarama Vihara
- Nepal Vipassana Center
- Shanti Stupa
- Lumbini International Research Center
- Museum

Ramagrama Stupa

Ramagrama is the maternal home of queen Maya Devi and the country of the Koliyas and situated in Nawalparasi district and some 76 kilometers from Lumbini. A huge, ten-meter high brick stupa, one of the eight dhatu stupas containing the relics of the Buddha Shakyamuni stands on the bank of the Jharahi river.

Legend has it that after the parinirvana of Lord Buddha his relics were divided between eight states- Magadh, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Alkappa, Ramagram, Vediwa, Pawa, and Kushinagar. Ajatasatru, the king of Magadh is said to have grabbed the relics of Lord Buddha from other states and built another stupa but he could not grab the relics at Ramagram as it was believed to be protected by Naga rajas or serpents.

It is said that the relics of Lord Buddha is still in the ovum of the present stupa of 9 meters in height. A research recently done by LDT and Department of Archaeology also proved that the different artifacts and antiquities are laid in the ovum of Ramagram Stupa.

Devdaha

The country of Koliyas, where Mayadevi, the mother of Gautama Siddhartha, was born, is certainly a holy place of pilgrimage and a household name for the buddhists. In Buddhist literature the Koliyan Kingdom where Mayadevi was born, is mentioned by
various names-Koliyanagar, Vyaghranagara, and Devadaha. The Koliyas of Devadaha are known as the maternal tribe of Gautama Buddha, and the Koliyans of Ramagrama are known as the famous claimants to the relics of the Buddha Master in Kusina.

**KAPILAVASTU: BUDDHA’S HOME TOWN**

Located at a distance of about 27 kilometers west of Lumbini lies the ruins of the historic town of Kapilavastu. Believed to be the capital of Sakya republic where the Lord Buddha lived and enjoyed his life until his 29th year, ancient Kapilavastu has been identified with Tilaurakot by the archaeologists.

There are ruins and mounds of old stupas and monasteries made of kiln-burnt bricks and clay mortar. The remains are surrounded by a moat and the wall of the city is made of bricks. In fact, the sight of the city of Kapilavastu visualizes a seat of high culture.

**Gotihawa**

This site is identified with the nativity of past Buddha Krakuchanda's stupa exists. At about five kilometers south-west of Taulihawa, there is a village called Gotihawa. In the village there is an Ashokan Pillar standing on a slab. The upper portion of the pillar is lost and only the lower portion about 3.5 m. high is still intact. Adjoining the pillar towards its north-east side, there is a huge stupa with successive rings of wedge-shaped Mauryan bricks.

**Nigilhawa**

At about eight kilometers north-cash of Taulihawa, there is another site of archaeological importance. The site has a quadrangular pond locally known as Niglisagar and surrounded by bushes. On the western bank of the pond there are two broken pieces of the Ashokan pillar, the longer one lying flat and the shorter one stuck into the ground.

The shorter portion of the pillar which is partly buried in the ground measures 1.52m in length and bears four lines of Ashokan inscription in the Brahmi script which roughly translates as "King Piyadasi beloved of the gods, after 14 years of his coronation enlarged for the second time the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni and after 20 years of his coronation he came himself and worshipped and he caused this stone pillar to be erected.

**Sagarahawa**

At about 12 kilometers north of Taulihawa there is a forest area called Sagarahawa. In the midst of the forest there is a huge rectangular pond popularly known as Lumbusagar, or a long lake. The ruins of the ancient pond which was excavated and identified by Dr. A. Fuhrer as the site of "massacre of the Sakyas can still be located on the south-west bank of the sagar.
**Kudan**

This site is identified with Nyagrodharama vihara, the site of the monastery built by King Suddhodana. In this monastery queen Prajapati Gautami offered kasayavastra yellow robes to Lord Buddha. In this very monastery Buddha's son Rahul entered into monkhood.

**Arorakot**

At about nine kilometers north-east of Taulihawa there is a large rectangular fortified area which is popularly known as Arorakot. The fortified area is identified by the famous Indian archaeologist P.C. Mukherji as the natal town of Kanakmuni Buddha. Remains of the ancient moat and brick fortification around the Kot can still be clearly seen. A brick line is seen to the south and an elevated mound towards the north-west corner.

**CONCLUSION:**

This is only a cursory glance at the main historic sites of the Lumbini area. The area has many more archaeological/historical sites partly explored and many other completely unexplored.

We could boldly state that birth places of two past Buddhas viz. Kanakamuni and Krakuchchand also located in Tilaurakot district of Nepal.

Therefore as conservation and construction activities continue in the main complexes at Lumbini and Kapilavastu, other sites also need proper treatment in order to fully exploit the vast richness of the region and enhance the glory of Lumbini.