

Kausambi: Buddhist Heritage Site of Sanctity and Divinity

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Abstract: The ancient city of Kausambi, the capital of VatsaJanpad in ancient India, was bestowed with a unique heritage and cultural traditions accumulated through the ages. It was not only linked to Hindu kings and Sanskrit literature but also to important Buddhists and Jain kings. Lord Buddha had visited Kausambi in the 6th and 9th year after attaining the enlightenment. Buddha lived in Kausambiduring two rainy seasons and preached to the people. Thus the place is special and linked to many sermons that were delivered by Lord Buddha and acquired the position of being seat of Buddhist teachings. King Asoka also held a deep affection for the city and as a testimony placed one of the famous Asoka Pillars here. In the wake of this development Buddhist art developed in and around Kausambi from the 3rd century BCE and before 6th century CE. Kausambi, being situated on a geo-strategic position had become metropolis in the ancient time. Being connected with all major trading and cultural cities like Gaya, Sarnath, Patna, Mathura it had become a hub of all the traders, scholars and artists who patronized the city and contributed in the areas of art, architecture and literature. The mobility in the population brought them in contact with foreign countries which speeded up exchange of ideas, religion, philosophy, technologies related to art and crafts, trade and commerce etc. particularly among India and other countries. The place is of great significance as it also witnessed schism in Buddhism. In the SuttaChtukkaNipata of AnguttaraNikaya it is stated that while the Lord Buddha was staying at the monastery of Ghositrama, where a monk named Bahiya, the disciple of Annuradha, was bent upon creating a schism in Sangha. The archaeological excavations have yielded a large number of sculptures of metals and terracotta, figurines, punch-marked and cast coins, which show the importance of the city, which was held in by the devout, traders and foreigners. The art of Kausambi has manifested itself in a variety of ways for a period of 900 years. The collection of art objects from Kausambi is now spread in various museums (Allahabad State Museum, Lucknow) and is rich but the antiquities related to Buddhism is limited. The places related to Buddha's life directly like Gaya, Sarnath, Kusinagar have been given a lot of prominence. The art and architecture of these places have been highlighted and a lot of work has been done but Kausambi despite being place of prominence remains in oblivion.

The present monograph will emphasize on the Buddhist philosophy and the development of art based on the stone sculptures connected with Buddhism recovered mainly from Kausambi and a few other neighbouring sites such as Bihta, Mainhai, Mankunwar and Deoria. Fa Xian¹ has mentioned the shrine of Kausambi where Buddha once dwelt and has named it Garden of

¹Editor's note: Fa Xian (法显) was also spelled as Fa-Hien, Fa-Hsien but the internationally accepted standard is Fa Xian.

Gosira which historians believed he must have meant Ghositarama. The excavations had been carried out by G.R.Sharma and the excavation report will also help in constructing the research design. The Methodology adopted in this paper is analytical as well as comparative. Efforts have been made to make the analysis as objective as possible. The remnants of the stūpas and the artefacts related to Buddhist art at Kausambi are of eminent importance from not only religious point of view but also from economic and social standpoint. A number of Suttas and Jatakas narrated by Lord Buddha such as KosambiSutta, UpakkilesaSutta, SekhaSutta, JaliyaSutta, DalhadhammaJataka, KosambiJataka, SurpanaJataka will help in constructing the facts. The traveller's accounts of Fa Xian's FoGuoJi² translated by M. Abel Remusat, Samuel Beal's translation of Xuan Zang's³ book Xi You Ji⁴, who visited India in the 5th and 7th centuries respectively, will help in getting facts as they have left a good account on Kausambi. If history repeats itself, then taking examples of these evidences we can again think of making Kausambi a hub of culture and civilization. Kausambi again can leave imprint on faith and art. Thus Kausambi is a living testimonial of learning Buddhist history of what Santana had said that all those who do not learn the past intended to commit the mistakes of the past.

² Editor's note: FoGuoJi(佛国记) is the spelling according to the international standard. FoKyoki (author's spelling), Fo-kuo-chi also means the same text.

³ Editor's note: Xuan Zang (玄奘) is the accepted international standard and the author used HiuenTsiang which is an earlier form of spelling.

⁴ Editor's note: Xi You Ji (西游记) is the international standard. It can be spelled as Si-Yu-Ki as well.