

# An Analytical study on the Development of Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites

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## Abstract

Buddhist pilgrimage sites have been growing for millennia, and they are still changing in the current era. Buddhists visit these locations, which are revered as holy spaces, to pay respects, reaffirm their beliefs, and seek enlightenment. These places' evolution over time has been influenced by regional cultures, resources, and historical events. The process has frequently involved the building of temples, monasteries, and other buildings, as well as the production of Buddhist-related cultural and artistic works. Governments and corporate organisations have devoted a lot of money to promoting and enhancing these sites in recent years since they have grown to be significant components of tourism. Over commercialization and the effect of tourism on the spiritual and cultural significance of these monuments are also issues, though. As a result, when developing Buddhist pilgrimage sites, it is important to strike a balance between the needs of the tourism sector and reverence for the holy and cultural traditions of these locations.

**Keywords:** Buddhist pilgrimage, temples, spiritual, cultural

## Article Publication

 Published Online: 31-Mar-2023

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 [10.31305/rrjm2023.v03.n01.003](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjm2023.v03.n01.003)

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## Introduction

Buddhist pilgrimage sites hold significant importance and are highly venerated by Buddhists globally. The aforementioned locations hold a significant religious value and are linked to the existence, doctrines, and illumination of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhist pilgrimage sites hold great spiritual significance and serve as a destination for individuals to pay homage, strengthen their religious beliefs, and pursue spiritual enlightenment. The notion of pilgrimage holds significant value in numerous religious traditions, including Buddhism. Pilgrimage serves as a means for Buddhists to enhance their spiritual praxis and establish a more profound connection with their religious beliefs. Embarking on a pilgrimage to a sacred site is widely regarded as a means of purifying the mind and fostering desirable traits such as gratitude, mindfulness, and compassion.

The establishment and evolution of Buddhist pilgrimage sites has been a continuous process spanning several centuries, and it persists to undergo further transformations in contemporary times. The evolution of these locations has exhibited temporal fluctuations, contingent upon regional customs, available assets, and past occurrences. In numerous instances,

the procedure has encompassed the erection of edifices such as temples and monasteries, alongside the production of cultural and artistic artefacts that pertain to Buddhism. Bodh Gaya, located in India, is regarded as a highly significant pilgrimage destination for Buddhists. This is the purported site where the Buddha achieved enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. For more than 2,500 years, the aforementioned location has served as a significant destination for individuals practising the Buddhist faith and is widely recognised as one of the most frequented pilgrimage sites globally. The Mahabodhi Temple Complex located in Bodh Gaya holds the distinction of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is widely recognised as a significant destination for Buddhist pilgrims.

Lumbini, located in Nepal, is a significant destination for pilgrimage. The location under consideration is regarded as a holy place for Buddhists, as it is the native land of the Buddha. The aforementioned location encompasses various edifices such as temples, monasteries, and other architectural structures that have been erected throughout the ages to honour the birth of the Buddha. Additional significant pilgrimage destinations comprise Sarnath, India, which is recognised as the location where the Buddha delivered his inaugural sermon, and Kandy, Sri Lanka, where a venerated tooth relic of the Buddha is housed.

Tourism has increasingly recognised the significance of the establishment of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in recent times. Considerable resources have been allocated by governments and private entities towards the advancement and advertisement of these locations, with the aim of drawing in visitors and generating financial gains. Consequently, the tourism industry has prompted the development of novel hotels, dining establishments, and additional infrastructure. Although the establishment of these sites has resulted in economic advantages, apprehensions have been raised regarding the influence of tourism on the spiritual and cultural importance of these locations. The potential for excessive commercialization and the consequent erosion of the sanctity and cultural customs linked to these locations is a concern. Furthermore, the arrival of tourists may result in adverse effects such as environmental deterioration, congestion, and other detrimental consequences for the indigenous population.

Hence, it is imperative to strike a balance between the demands of the tourism sector and the preservation of the sanctity and cultural heritage of Buddhist pilgrimage destinations. The preservation of spiritual and cultural values associated with sites necessitates meticulous planning and management to ensure their sustainability. To conclude, pilgrimage sites that hold significance in the Buddhist faith and culture are of great importance. Buddhists visit sacred sites to venerate, strengthen their spiritual beliefs, and pursue enlightenment. The evolution of these sites has been a continuous process spanning centuries, persisting to this day. Although the establishment of these sites has yielded economic advantages, apprehensions have also arisen regarding the potential influence of tourism on the spiritual and cultural value of these locations. Hence, it is imperative to strike a balance between the demands of the tourism sector and the reverence for the sanctity and cultural customs of Buddhist pilgrimage destinations.

### **Archaeology of Buddhism**

The discipline of Buddhism archaeology investigates the tangible remnants of Buddhism, including relics, edifices, and additional archaeological data. The religion of Buddhism has its origins in India more than two and a half millennia ago, and has since disseminated to various regions across the globe. The analysis of the material culture pertaining to Buddhism provides insights into the historical religious customs, convictions, and societal settings of its adherents. Sarnath, an ancient city located in India, holds great archaeological significance in relation to Buddhism. It is believed to be the location where the Buddha delivered his inaugural sermon following his enlightenment. The Sarnath region has been subject to archaeological excavations, which have revealed a multitude of structures such as stupas, monasteries, and other edifices that can be traced back to the Mauryan era (322-185 BCE). These architectural formations offer significant perspectives on the initial evolution of Buddhist art and construction.

The ancient city of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka is a significant archaeological site in relation to Buddhism. From the 3rd century BCE to the 10th century CE, Anuradhapura served as a significant Buddhist hub in South Asia. The urban area encompasses a plethora of Buddhist stupas, temples, and other edifices that are indicative of the evolution of Buddhist art and architecture spanning multiple centuries. The examination of Buddhist material culture extends beyond the confines of South Asia. Archaeological sites associated with Buddhism are also prevalent in East and Southeast Asia. The city of Luoyang in China harbours numerous significant Buddhist temples and monuments, such as the renowned Longmen

Grottoes. The grottoes are home to an extensive collection of Buddhist sculptures and engravings that date back to the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 CE).

Apart from edifices and constructions, the field of Buddhist archaeology encompasses the examination of relics associated with Buddhism. The history of Buddhist art and iconography is extensive and diverse, encompassing numerous styles and traditions that have evolved over the course of time. Buddhist relics encompass an array of tangible items, such as sculptures, paintings, manuscripts, and various objects, that serve as a reflection of the religious convictions and rituals of Buddhists across different historical periods. In general, the discipline of Buddhist archaeology is a multifaceted and extensive area of research that offers significant perspectives on the evolution and progression of Buddhism as a faith and societal custom. By means of analysing material culture, archaeologists can acquire a more profound comprehension of the convictions, rituals, and societal circumstances of Buddhists across various historical periods.

### **Significance of Buddhist Architecture through teachings**

Buddhist architecture constitutes a crucial element of Buddhist doctrine, as it mirrors the fundamental tenets of the faith. The aforementioned is a graphical depiction of a set of convictions and functions as a mechanism for the advancement of one's spirituality and comprehension. The architectural design of Buddhist temples and monasteries places significant emphasis on the cultivation of mindfulness and meditation practises. The architectural layout of the edifices promotes an inward-directed focus, thereby diverting attention from external disturbances. Frequently, edifices are erected utilising organic elements like timber, rock, and soil, fostering a connection between the inhabitant and the planet, and encouraging a feeling of rootedness. The architectural style of Buddhism is a manifestation of the doctrine of impermanence and the ephemeral nature of existence. Temples and monasteries are constructed in a manner that ensures their seamless integration with the natural environment, thereby avoiding any intrusive impact on the surroundings. This statement is indicative of the Buddhist doctrine of non-attachment and the concept of impermanence, which posits that all phenomena are in a state of constant flux and transformation.

Buddhist architecture places significant emphasis on the values of compassion and interconnectedness, in addition to promoting mindfulness and impermanence. Numerous temples and monasteries are constructed with unenclosed central areas and shared zones, fostering a communal atmosphere and stimulating interpersonal interactions among individuals. The architectural design also manifests the significance of the Five Elements, namely earth, water, fire, air, and space. The incorporation of these elements into the architectural design of temples and monasteries is believed to promote harmony and balance, as they are considered essential components of both the physical and spiritual world.

Buddhist architecture functions as a tangible manifestation of the philosophical principles espoused by the Buddha. The elaborate sculptures and engravings discovered in numerous temples and monasteries portray significant Buddhist personalities and signify crucial notions such as enlightenment, empathy, and sagacity. To conclude, the significance of Buddhist architecture in disseminating the principles of Buddhism cannot be overstated. The aforementioned statement elucidates how the religious doctrine encapsulates the fundamental tenets and values of the faith, while also functioning as a mechanism for enhancing one's spiritual development and comprehension. Buddhist architecture serves as a potent reminder of the significance of living in harmony with oneself, others, and the natural world, by emphasising mindfulness, impermanence, compassion, interconnectedness, and the Five Elements.

### **Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites in India**

India is home to many important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists, as it is the birthplace of Buddhism. Here are some of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India:

**Bodh Gaya:** Bodh Gaya is one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India, as it is the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The Mahabodhi Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located here and is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

**Sarnath:** Sarnath is the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon, known as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, after attaining enlightenment. The site has several important Buddhist monuments, including the Dhamek Stupa and the Ashoka Pillar.

**Kushinagar:** Kushinagar is the place where the Buddha passed away and attained Parinirvana. The Mahaparinirvana Temple, which houses a 6-meter-long reclining Buddha statue, is the main attraction here.

**Lumbini:** Lumbini, located in Nepal but considered a Buddhist pilgrimage site in India, is the birthplace of the Buddha. The Maya Devi Temple and the Ashoka Pillar are important monuments at this site.

**Rajgir:** Rajgir was an important city during the time of the Buddha and is home to several important Buddhist sites, including the Vulture's Peak where the Buddha gave several important sermons, and the Gridhakuta Hill where he spent a lot of time in meditation.

**Sravasti:** Sravasti was an important Buddhist city during the time of the Buddha and is home to several important sites, including the Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha spent several rainy seasons, and the Anandabodhi tree, under which the Buddha is said to have meditated.

**Vaishali:** Vaishali was an important city during the time of the Buddha and is home to several important Buddhist sites, including the Kutagarasala Vihara where the Buddha stayed, and the Ananda Stupa, which is said to contain the ashes of Ananda, the Buddha's disciple.

These are just a few of the many important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. Visiting these sites can provide a deeper understanding of the life and teachings of the Buddha and can be a transformative experience for many pilgrims.

### **Development of Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites: Global view**

Buddhism is a religious and philosophical tradition that has its roots in ancient India and has since disseminated across Asia and beyond, ultimately attaining the status of a prominent global religion. Pilgrimage destinations hold significant value in the Buddhist faith, serving as a means for adherents to establish a connection with the Buddha and his teachings, and to enhance their spiritual discipline.

There are numerous Buddhist pilgrimage sites around the world, each with its own unique history and significance. Some of the most famous pilgrimage sites include:

**Bodh Gaya, India:** This is the site where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists worldwide.

**Lumbini, Nepal:** Lumbini is the birthplace of the Buddha, and is located in modern-day Nepal. The site contains several important Buddhist temples and monasteries.

**Sarnath, India:** Sarnath is the site where the Buddha gave his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. The site contains several important Buddhist temples and monasteries.

**Kandy, Sri Lanka:** The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy is home to a relic of the Buddha's tooth, and is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

**Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar:** This is one of the most famous Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Myanmar, and is home to a large golden pagoda that contains relics of the Buddha.

**Mount Kailash, Tibet:** Mount Kailash is considered one of the most sacred mountains in Buddhism, and is a popular destination for Buddhist pilgrims from around the world.

**Wat Phra Kaew, Thailand:** Wat Phra Kaew is a temple in Bangkok that houses the famous Emerald Buddha statue, which is believed to have been carved in the 14th century.

The aforementioned instances are merely a handful of the numerous Buddhist pilgrimage destinations dispersed throughout the globe. The evolution of these sites has exhibited diversity contingent upon their geographical placement and past. Certain locations, such as Bodh Gaya, have undergone gradual development over a prolonged period of time, whereas others, such as the Shwedagon Pagoda, have undergone substantial refurbishments in more recent times.

The impetus behind the establishment of Buddhist pilgrimage sites is primarily rooted in the preservation of Buddhism's cultural and religious legacy, in addition to the provision of amenities for both pilgrims and tourists. Numerous locations have been officially recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, thereby contributing to the advancement and safeguarding of these sites.

In general, the progression of Buddhist pilgrimage locations is a continuous undertaking, as novel sites persistently come to light and pre-existing sites undergo modifications and refurbishments. The aforementioned locations hold significant value in the observance of Buddhism and draw in a substantial number of tourists annually from various regions across the globe.

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## How Cite this article?

Singh, R. (2023). An Analytical study on the Development of Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites. *Revista Review Index Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 3(1), 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm2023.v03.n01.003>