
Structural Vihar: Abode of Buddhist Monks and Its Stages of Development

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Abstract: *Viharas is the place where Monk (Bhikhu) use to stay for the small period of three months during Varsavasa period. The purpose of the Vihara (monastery) was to provide residential facilities to the monks and during other times the monks were not expected to stay at a place for more than three nights. In the later period Vihara has played a long and distinguished role; they belong to different creeds, sects and religions, and differ widely in function and organization as well as in size and status. But they all have the common characteristic of collective living for the sake of a higher spiritual life. In the present research paper, it has been tried to show the developmental stages of the Viharas especially the structural Viharas in India, how the small Vihara step by step evolved into the planned Monasteries and later on into the big University.*

Keywords: Brick Structure, Architecture, Mahavihara, Sangha, Stupa, University, Buddhist Monks

Introduction

Monastic orders and institutions are found in different ages, countries, and systems of religion and in the religious and cultural history of India. Monasticism has played a long and distinguished role; they belong to different creeds, sects and religions, and differ widely in function and organization as well as in size and status. But they all have the common characteristic of collective living for the sake of a higher spiritual life. Its institutional types in India dating back to various ages in their origin are represented by the Viharas, Asramas, Mathas, Gurudvaras, and Akhdas etc. Monastery or Pali word *Avasa* (Skt-Dwelling), *Arama* (Skt-Resting) or *vihar* or *Sangharam* are Synonymous i.e. resting places of the *Sangha*. According to *Vinaya-pitaka* *Vihara* meant a dwelling place or a private apartment for the monks and nuns (Vinayapitaka IV; 383). *Buddhaghosha* explains *Vihara* as a dwelling house with a chamber in it, well protected and containing private lodgings. *Vihara* is either of cave or group of rock shelter or brick structure which was made for dwelling purpose of Buddhist monks. *Viharas* have always been a symbol of the strength and spread of Buddhism reflecting thought,

culture, aspirations and intellectual development of a people. Monastic establishments grew up in abundance throughout India from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and Cutch to Tipperah revealing some significant architectural peculiarities. Emergence of such a large number of Viharas at a subsequent period was possible due to the primary need for residence of innumerable Buddhist monks and nuns. At a later time, however, these became transformed into educational institutions and still later as grand monastic universities. Besides influencing early monachism, these religious settlements also played important roles in the spheres of architecture, education, painting and sculpture.

As described in the legends the early monk settlements were *Avasa* and *Arama*. *Avasa* was a monk's colony staked out by the monks themselves. The monk built *Avasa* after all a temporary set-up, liable to be deserted robbed and dismantled after its evacuation by monks at the end of the *Aassa* period. Within its boundaries an *Avasa* had huts for the monks dwelling (Mahavagga, Volume No: VIII p. 15) which might be occupied by a single monk or by a small group of monks (Dutt, S; 1962; p. 58), Whereas *Parivena* is the allotted portion for each monk (Mahavagga, Volume No :VI p. 23). The accommodation comprised only what is termed as *Senasana* (bed-and sitting) and furniture of a simple kind such as a 'board to recline on' (*Apassena-phalaka*) a 'spitton' (*Khelamallaka*) and a 'seat' (*Pitha*) with perhaps jointed legs. These structures were insufficient for institutional rites and activities held in the premises such as sermon in large scale and *Pattimokkha*. Moreover, the provision of Permanent endowments of money and sometimes land made to the monasteries demanded a few monks at least to stay in these permanently to take care of the establishment and its assets. It is possible that at this stage additional structures like the refectory rest houses and such began to be added. For performing sermons, *Pattimokkha* and to take care of the entire establishment the *Sangha* needs permanent structures that accommodate large number of monks.

To build such huge structures of suitable dimensions with proper interior décor was a task too difficult for the monks to shoulder by themselves. Hence the donor came forward, constructs *Arama* and donated to the Buddha and his *Sangha*. *Arama* was an enclosed site usually a donation to monks by a wealthy lay man, in or near a town looked after by the donor himself (Dutt, S; 1962; p. 58). The *Arama* to all seeming was the superior kind of habitat for *Varsavasa*. The name, *Arama*, denotes a pleasure ground usually the property within a town or city or in the suburb of a well to do citizen laid out as an orchard or flower garden (Mahavagga, Volume No: I, pp. 18, 22,). When it was given to the monks by the owner, not for temporary use but permanently it was named as *Sangh-arama* the term meaning originally an *Arama* owned by the *Sangha*. The donor of the *Arama* continue to look after the *Sangha* property raise fresh buildings upon it according to the monk's need and keep it trim and in habitable condition. An *Arama* was more durable and worthwhile. It stood within an enclosure. In the legends there are many references by name to those Aramas which becomes famous *Sangha* centres.



Figure 1: Panel of Sanchi showing hut



Figure 2: Conjectural picture of Viharas built by Merchant of Rajgriha

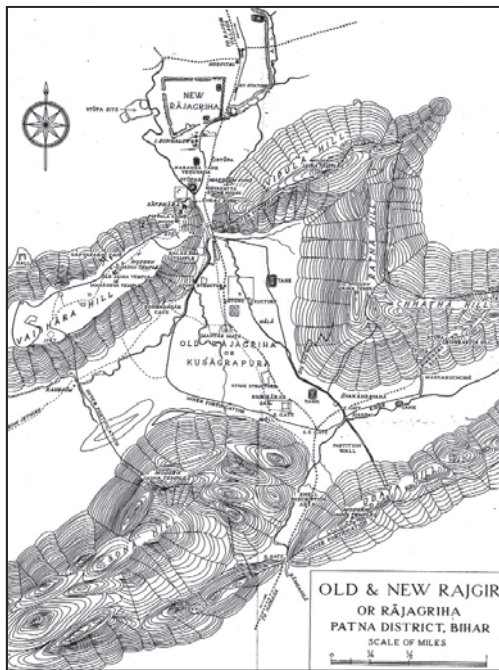


Figure 3: Rajgir Plan (Kuraishi 1951)

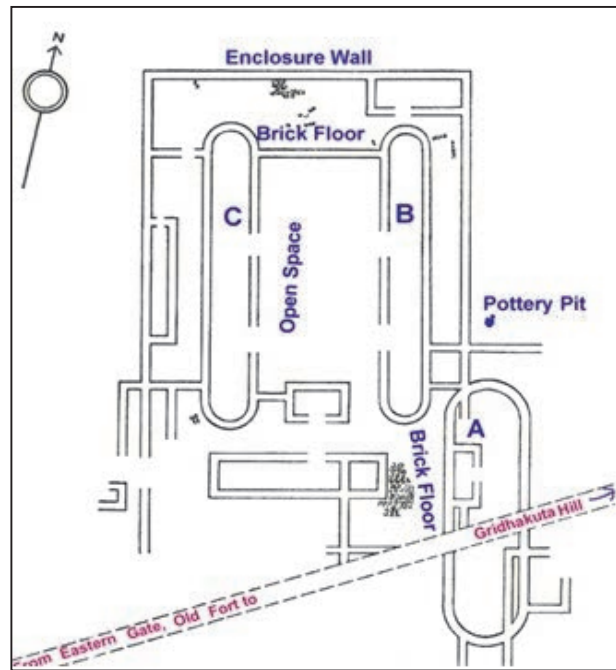


Figure 4: Plan of Jivakarama, Rajgir

Life in Vihara

Only during the three months period (the middle of aashadha or Sravana or the middle of kartika) of the Varshvassa, the Bhikkhu had the right to an accommodation (senasana) in an avasa. The particular of the custom however as it obtained among the brahmanical Parivrajakas are unknown and it is difficult to say whether they were required to live during the rain retreat separate from one another or collectively. But the Jains and the Buddhists at any rate spent their rain retreat in collective bodies. This practice gradually led to the essential of the wondering life and the beginning of Buddhist monasticism. Vinaya-pitaka largely reveals the various aspects of the lives of

the monks and the nuns in the Buddhist monasteries. Life in the Buddhist monastery was regulated by strict discipline. The varsavasa witnessed important activities and ceremonies such as the uposatha (recital of the monastic rules or patimokha), Upasampada (bhiksu ordinations), Pavarana (confessional), Kathina (distribution of or offering of robes) discussion of Buddha's teaching etc. Usually the Vassavasa (Rain-retreat) was followed by two ceremonies, viz, Pavarana and Kathina. The Pavarana was a solemn ceremony in which each bhikkhu had to confess his sins of commission and omission, committed, if any, during the Vassavasa. It was almost identical with the declaration of the Parisuddhi in the Patmokka ceremony. Kathina ceremony was generally held within a month of the Pavarana ceremony. In the ceremony the bhikkus who were proficient in cutting, sewing, dyeing, etc. of garments were usually appointed to prepare the robes in course of a single day and that is why the ceremony was called the Kathina ceremony. It was also special occasion to see bhiksus from the four corners of the country congregating in one place for a common religious purpose which consequently resulted in the heightening the spirit and cohesion of the sangha and communal consciousness of the noble monkish fraternity.



Figure 5: Representation of Hut in Bharhut Stupa



Figure 6: Aerial view of Sanchi (Courtesy: Google Earth)

Concept and Origin of Viharas

The purpose of the *Vihara* (monastery) was to provide residential facilities to the monks during *vassavasa* and during other times the monks were not expected to stay at a place for more than three nights. When Buddha announced the dharma he emphasized on wandering and spread of the dharma. But he did not tell the monks where to stay during monsoon season. Hence initially there was no *Viharas* and the monk stayed here and there, in a forest, at the root of a tree, on a hillside, in a glen, in a mountain cave, in a cemetery, in a forest glade, in the open air, on a heap of straw. The cullavagga of the *vinaya pitaka* narrates the incident of origin of Viharas. A merchant of Rajagaha once saw that the Bhikkhus were without buildings and they were forced to stay wherever they could, he expressed a desire to build dwellings for them. The Bhikkhus denied the offer because the Buddha had not given them permission to accept any such dwellings. The matter was reported to the Buddha who then accorded the necessary permission in the following words. "I allow you, oh Bhikkhus abodes of five kind's *Viharas*, *addhayogas*, *storied dwellings*, *attics*, *caves*." Thereafter the merchant of *Rajagaha* built sixty dwelling places put up in one day and donated to the '*Samgha* of the four quarters. Buddha blessed the donor for providing those shelters for them from rough wind and weather. They must have been mere cottages and convenient lodging places for the individual *Bhikkus*. Probably these cells were too small in size measuring twelve (Buddha's) spans in length and seven spans in breadth and had open space around them.

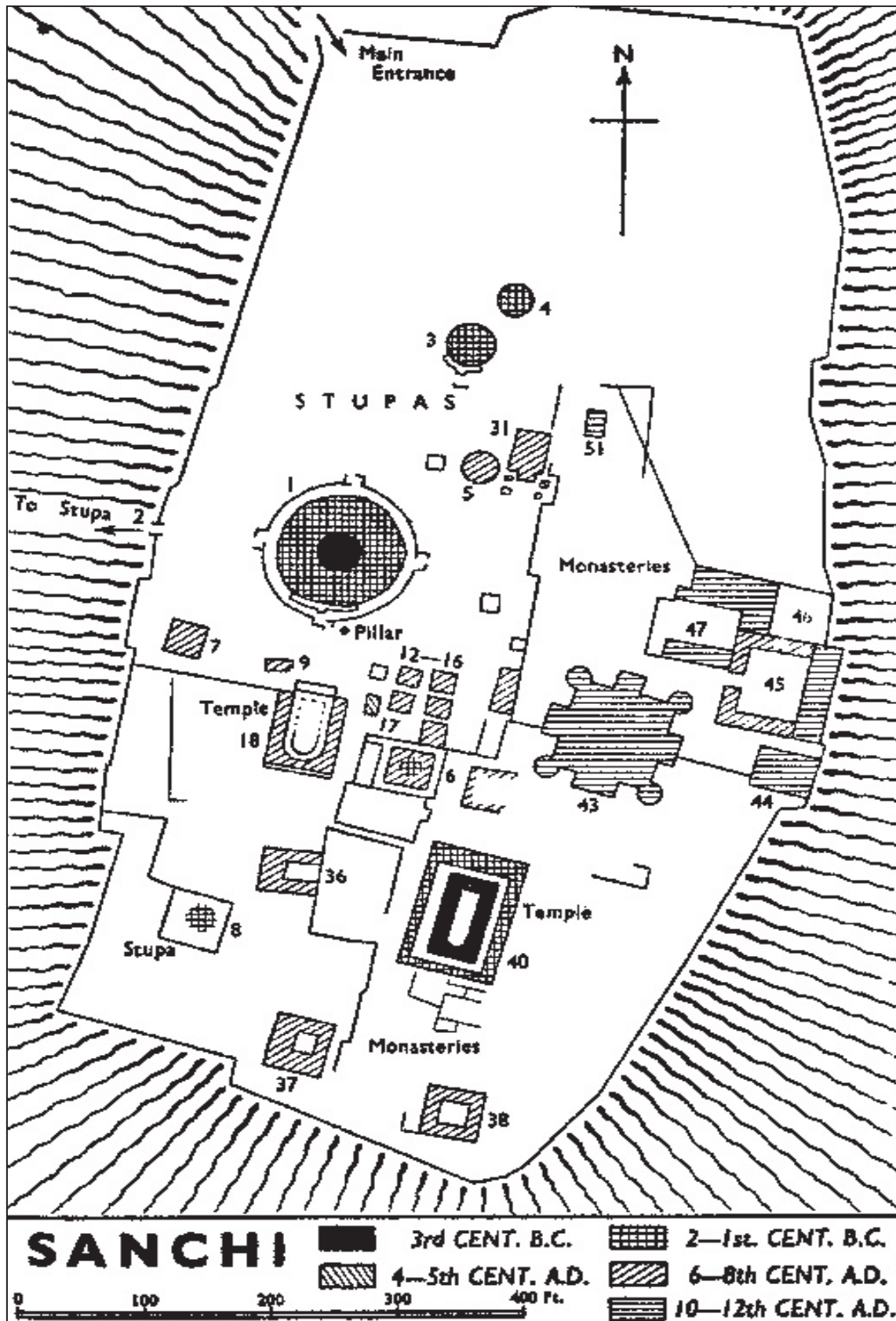


Figure 7: Sanchi Plan (Stuart Piggott, 1945:33)

It may be said that the Buddhist monasteries came into existence due most probably to bare necessity of living in dwellings as also to the inner urge felt by the monks for a settled life. The acceptance of the *Arama* at *Rajgriha* by Buddha for dwelling of monk marks a turning period in the history of early monasticism. Early dwelling houses of the monks were merely thatched bamboo huts or simple wooden constructions not different from secular cottages but very soon came into existence sumptuous Monasteries. One of the earliest of such Monasteries was built at Sravasti by the merchant Anathapindika. Liberal royal grants as well as public donations helped much to the establishment of the Buddhist monasteries from as early as the sixth century B.C.

Viharas found in rock cut architecture as well as in structural architecture. The *Vihara* has been the most popular structural style of the monastic architecture and it has been the common architectural in India. *Vihar* is divided into the following types in India.

- Communal Monastery without the Stupa, as in *Jevakavanarama*.
- Organic or unplanned Monastery centering a Major Stupa as Sanchi, Dharmarajaka in Gandhara.
- Unplanned and Unorganized Monastic complex
- Planned quadrangular Monastery with Vihara Stupas and image chapels located in the same site for example Nalanda.
- Monastic University or Mahavihar devoted to Theravadas, Mahayana and *Vajrayana* subject for example Nalanda in India.



Figure 8: Sanchi Monastery No. 51 (Debala Mitra 2001)



Figure 9: Remains of Stupa at Taxila, Pakistan (<https://en.wikipedia.org>)

Development of Structural Vihara Architecture

Let us now have a bird's eye-view at the architecture of the Buddhist monasteries as they represented one of the important forms of ancient Indian architecture. The development of Buddhist architecture can be traced from the archaeological remains of successive ages which are spread all over India in the form of paintings, sculptural depiction and archaeological remains. Scholars believed that the *Hinayana* architecture were inspired and copied existing structural architecture made of wood and bricks. The earliest Buddhist monasteries were probably simple dwellings made of wood rubble and mud or other perishable materials now disappeared. On the basis of rock cut architecture, the scholars thought that in the early Viharas the architectural plans were simple but in the Mahayana period the structures become complicated. This change represents from the individualistic life to the corporate life in the *Vihara*. The rough idea of the architectural details of monastic establishments of a very early age is offered by the Pali literature. These primitive simple monastic buildings developed into elaborate magnificent ones. As the monastic organization developed considerably, they were reduced to multi-storeyed brick structures with many adjuncts. None of the early structural monasteries now remain. The components of the structural monasteries can only be known from the excavation conducted at the sites. As far as the structures are concerned, they are reported only up to the foundation level, the superstructure is completely collapsed with the passage of time. Numbers of famous monasteries foundations are sunken in the earth and waiting to be disclosed their lost identities under the archaeologists spade and shovel. But only three of these aramas have been traced by archacologists, viz (i) Jetavana (ii) Jivakarama, (iii) Ghositarama;

The sites of these aramas (except for the first) were occupied by monks for many centuries and monasteries were built on them, some of their foundations are still traceable. Buddhist literature mentioned that Jetavana, Jivakarama, Ghoshitarama, Veluvana etc., donated to Buddha during his lifetime.

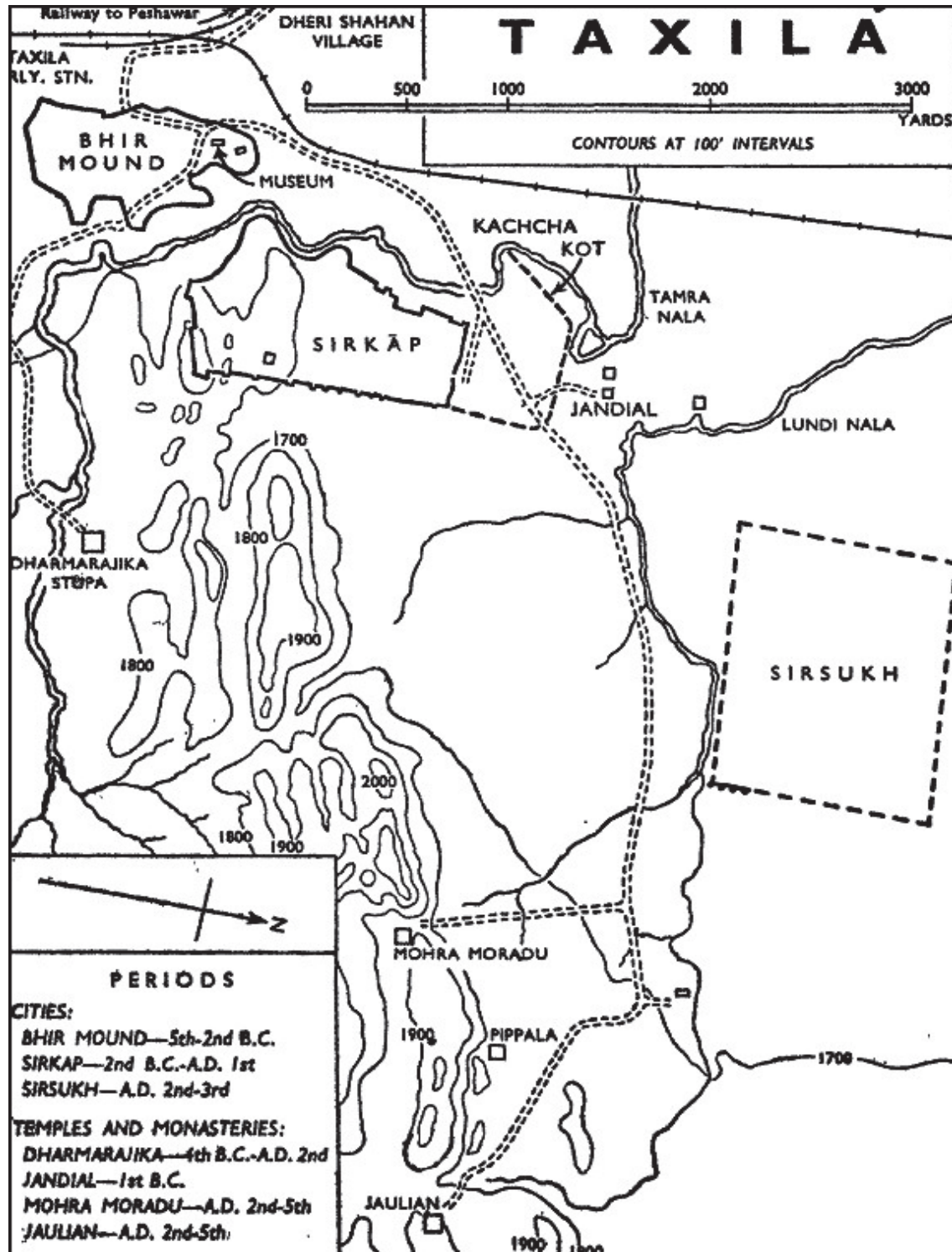


Figure 10: Taxila Plan (Piggott 1945: 20)



Figure 11: Somapura Mahavihara (<https://en.wikipedia.org>)



Figure 12: Aerial View of Mansar

Not only literary sources, there are various archaeological sources like structural architecture, paintings, coins and inscription which proves that various monastery donated to the Buddha and his Sangha during his lifetime. The construction pattern of the cave monasteries was quite unlike that of a Vihara made of brick structure. The structural architectural has quite different developmental stages from rock cut architecture.

Stage I: Monastic Complex Made of Perishable Materials

According to the literature and sculptural depiction found in the panels of Bharhut and Sanchi, the early dwelling or Viharas were made of perishable materials like wood thatched bamboo huts or simple wooden constructions, not different from secular cottages. They must have no set plan, most of them either perished or been renovated to such an extent in later periods that it is now difficult to identify their original nucleus. *Cullavagga* also refers that the merchant of *Rajagaha* built sixty dwelling places in one day and donated to the 'Sangha of the four quarters. Buddha blessed the donor for providing those shelters to them from rough wind and weather. They must have been mere cottages and convenient lodging places for individual *bhikkus*. Probably these cells were too small in size measuring twelve (Buddha's) spans in length and seven spans in breadth and had open space around them. It is to be noted that the Viharas built by the Setthi of Rajagaha had plastered walls; whitewashed or coloured, and were provided with doors, windows, verandahs, boundary walls, etc. A few inscriptions also supply us with interesting accounts about some architectural features of the Buddhist monastery. Such monastic establishments during its early period were generally built of wood. Thus, we find that a spotless Vihara was "made of wood for the Lord of the world in the vicinity of the Gangesvara temple".

Stage II: Small Communal Monastic Complex

The earliest monastery belongs to this type. These monasteries were probably meant for communal living where the object of worship is made of perishable material and Buddha himself used these monasteries that's why the object is worship of not needed e.g., Jivakarama-arama, Veluvana, Paribhajak-arama in Rajagriha. The ruins of rubble-built structures at the site of the Jivakarama are considerably old, perhaps older than any monastery hitherto unearthed in India. Jivakarama-arama in Rajagriha (circa 530 BC) one of the earliest monasteries of India donated by renowned and royal physician Jivaka, contemporary with the Buddha. It was a great orchard of mango trees (ambanana) on the outskirts of Rajagrah at a short distance from the foot of the Grdhrakuta Mountain. Archaeologist discovered and partially exposed the buried foundation of the complex, is interesting as it includes among other structures mostly oblong four long and somewhat elliptical halls with their two longer sides and shorter sides semicircular. Three of the halls have openings presumably for doorways, in their longer sides. The halls were probably meant for communal living. A trace of Stupa (votive, commemorative) was not noticed during the excavation, may be the object of worship was made of perishable material. Another example in this series is the

Girdhakuta (Vulture Park) in Rajagriha, Bihar, one of the most favorite spots frequently visited by Buddha. Veluwana-arama at Rajagaha (circa 531 BC) was a royal park or garden belonging to the Magadha king of Bimbisara. Paribhajak-arama near Rajagriha this was not a special Buddhist Sangharama, but for the general use of Parivajrakas, situated on the bank of a stream named Sarpini. It is also called by the general name Paribbajak-arama, i.e. Arama for 'wonderers'. Ambapali-vana at Vesali donated by Ambapali, the city courtesan of Vesali and devotee of the Buddha. A double storeyed pasada of brick and stone with five hundred rooms on each floor (an exaggeration) erected by Visakha and Rajakarama in the neighbourhood of Sravasti, the Ghoshitarama and Kukkutarama at Kausambi. The Kalakarama donated by the banker Kalaka at Sakata and the Vihara attached to venuvana Jivakanravana and Maddakuchchhi-Migadaya in the suburbs of Rajagriha, Nigrodharama at Kapilvatthu, etc.

Stage III: Unplanned and Unorganized Monastic Complex

Unorganized or unplanned monasteries are the bigger one from the earliest monastic complex. It includes monasteries, walkways, store houses, room, library, mandapa and sometimes centering in a major Stupa as Sanchi, Sarnath (Dharmarajika). All the component structures of a big monastic settlement were not built at a time. First of all, residential caves (bhikkhu griha) for the monks were constructed then later on step by step different components like library, mandapas were added. These monastic complexes used for centuries hence various structures in this complex added later, according to the need and donation given by the laymen or Royal support. The famous examples in this series are Jetvana Viharas, Buddhist complex in Sanchi and Sarnath etc. This stage came into vague, in which well protected self-sufficient Monasteries of two or more storey enclosed by high walls no openings except the entrance. These monasteries were quadrilateral on plan having open courtyard in a centre which was resting on pillars, the pillared verandha surmounted by series of cell on all four sides. The staircase was sometimes lighted by skylights. Apart from main building (assembly hall) refectory kitchens, storeroom, washing place etc sometimes were adjuncts outside but within the main complex. Covered drains also provided in the courtyard. On either side of the entrance of a fully developed monastery were introduced two projecting pylons like structures found in Nalanda. Such quadrangular monasteries were eminently suitable to the needs of the congregation as they afforded the inmates privacy and seclusion, protected them against the sun and rain and at the same time with their open courtyard, admitted ample light and air.

Anathapindika built, the Jetavana Vihara (circa 530BC). It was the largest and most famous of all aramas of antiquity. Anathapindada invited Buddha and his followers at Savatthi (Shravasti) to spend the next vassa at Savatthi. He was very happy when Buddha accepted his invitation (Cullavagga, volume 6: VI: 4,8). He found Jeta's pleasure garden could be ideal to accommodate the Buddha and Sangha most comfortably. He purchase that garden by paying a huge amount, these scenes are depicted on the railing of Barhut(Barua and Sinha; 1926; 59) and northern gateway of

Sanchi. In the initial stages Jetavana became a grand and perfectly planned Sangharama. He converted the pleasure garden into a Sangharama and provided all the amenities a monk settlement requires (Mahavagga, Volume No: III pp. 5, 6) viz dwelling rooms cells gate chambers service halls, halls with fireplaces, storehouses, closets, cloisters, rooms for walking exercises wells sheds for the well bathing places, bathrooms tanks pavilions (Mahavagga, Volume III; 5, 6). All the component structures of a big monastic settlement were not built at a time. first of all, residential caves (bhikkhu griha) for the monks were constructed then later on step by step different components like library, mandapas were added. To maintain the privacy of the monks due arrangements were made for 'inner chamber' which were in "shape like palanqueens, or chambers on an upper storey. Some Viharas were also covered terraces big halls for the kathina ceremony with high basement service halls separate waiting rooms, bathrooms supplied with door, bolt, lock and key arrangements for hot baths suitable furniture and solid flooring. Various structures in this monastic complex added later on according to the need and donation. The legends say that the Buddha spent as many as nineteen varsavasa periods here. The ancient Jetavan site was continuously occupied till the last days of Buddhism.

Fa-hien visited Jetavanarama (circa 5th century A.D.) when Viharas is still in use but when Huiian-tsang visited it in 636 A.D., it was all ruined. Another example of the unplanned monastic complex is the famous Sangharama Ghositarama donated by Ghosita the merchant and banker of Kausambi. Ghosita, who had two colleagues or partners in the city named Kukkuta and Pavariya listened the sermon of Buddha at Sravathi, thereafter they became his followers and invited Buddha and his party to Kosambi. They started building aramas for the accommodation of the Buddha and his large following. Ghosita, Kukkuta and Pavariya built aramas known as Ghoitarama, Kukkutarama, and Pavarikambarama of which the one built by Ghosita was probably the largest. Buddha usually stayed at Ghositarama during his visit in Kosambi. The site of this arama has been definitely located. An inscription discovered on the site mentions it by the same ancient name Ghositarama. The inscription of the first century A.D. was discovered by G.R. Sharma gives the correct location of the monastery which remained continuously under occupation from circa sixth century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. (IAR;1955-56;20-21). When Huiian – tsang visited it in A.D. 636, he describes it as an old habitation, the ruins only of which exist the course (i.e. monastery) of Ghosita, the noble man. The excavation revealed the extensive remains of Ghositarama Viharas within the courtyards, main Square shape Stupa with double-recessed corners (IAR;1955-56;20-21), a number of smaller Stupas, Ghoshitaram monastery and number of small cells adjoining to the prakara wall were exposed.

Excavations also revealed foundations of a large number of small Stupas and pavements with numerous roughly circular post-holes. It appears that ordinary monks were memorialized by the erection of small pillars, their relics being buried in earthen pots in the floors adjoining the small Stupas (IAR 1953-54;10). The most important structure, however, was the southern boundary-wall of the Ghoshitarama monastery,

standing to a height of 15 ft. at places. The walls were built of bricks where traces of lime plaster noticed. This monastery was considerably enlarged when cells, together with an inner verandah, were built for monks all along the perimeter of the quadrangle. Later on, an extensive boundary-wall was erected to enclose the entire Monastery. The wall was 6 ft. wide on the northern, eastern and western sides but 13 ft. wide on the southern. An 11-ft. wide pavement flanked the southern wing. Furthermore, two parallel walls, 79 ft. apart, were erected in the south-eastern and south-western corners of the monastery for enclosing two newly built *Stupas* by rectangular enclosures. These Stupas measured approximately 40ft x 36 ft each. The monastic establishment was destroyed by the Hunas, under Toramana, as a result of this; no clear traces could be obtained of the plan of the monastery as it had stood at that time. Though dedicated to Buddhism, it is loosely referred to be the dedicated to Ashoka, who built this great Sanchi, was once considered to be the ancient seat of Buddhist learning. Sanchi is one of those places that were custom-made for black and white history textbooks. Revolving around the chapters of Buddhism, this evocative site has been a milestone of Buddhist art for nearly 1,300 years. Within the Sanchi Stupa complex, there are around 50 structures in totality and that includes pillars, toranas (typical gateway of Buddhist architecture), temples and monasteries. In these magnanimous structures from ancient India, the glory is still restored in the complex structures of the monument. The full developed monastery includes rectangular open courtyard enclosed by brick wall. In some cases, in the centre of the courtyard, pillared Mandapa is also noticed. Around the enclosure on three sides were noticed rows of rooms on each side for the monks. The example of such Vihara is Aparamahavinaseliya Vihar at Nagarjunkonda. The cells were sometimes fitted with doors and windows and their uneven surfaces were often plastered and whitewashed.

In Mahayana period came into vague, well protected self-sufficient monasteries of two or more storey enclosed by high walls, no openings except the entrance. These monasteries were quadrilateral on plan having open courtyard in a centre which was resting on pillars, the pillared verandha surmounted by series of cell on all four sides. The staircase was sometimes lighted by skylights. Apart from main building (assembly hall) refectory kitchens, storeroom, washing place etc sometimes were adjuncts outside but within the main complex. Covered drains also provided in the courtyard. Such quadrangular monasteries were eminently suitable to the needs of the congregation as they afforded the inmates privacy and seclusion, protected them against the sun and rain and at the same time with their open courtyard, admitted ample light and air.

Takshashila was an early Buddhist centre of learning. It became a noted centre of learning back to the 6th century B.C. and continued to attract students until the destruction of the city in the 5th century AD. Takshashila is considered a place of religious and historical sanctity by Hindus and Buddhists. Takshashila is perhaps best known because of its association with Chanakya (or Kautilya), the Maurya Emperor Chandragupta and the Ayurvedic healer Charaka who studied at Taxila. The Vedas and the Eighteen Arts, which included skills such as archery, hunting, and elephant

lore, were taught, in addition to its law school, medical school, and school of military science. The institution is very significant in Buddhist tradition since it is believed that the Mahāyāna sect of Buddhism took shape there. The main ruins of Taxila are divided into three major cities, each belonging to a distinct time period. The oldest remains belong to the Bhir Mound, datable from the 6th century B.C. The second city located at Sirkap and was built by Greco-Bactrian kings in the 2nd century B.C. The third is at Sirsukh and relates to the Kushan kings. In addition to the ruins of the city, a number of Buddhist monasteries and Stupas, Chaityas unearthed from excavation. Some of the important ruins of this category include the ruins of the Stupa at Dharmarajika, the monastery at Jaulian, the monastery at Mohra Muradu in addition to a number of Stupas. There is some disagreement about whether Takshashila can be considered a university. While some consider Taxila to be an early university or centre of higher education, others do not consider it a university in the modern sense, in contrast to the later Nalanda University.

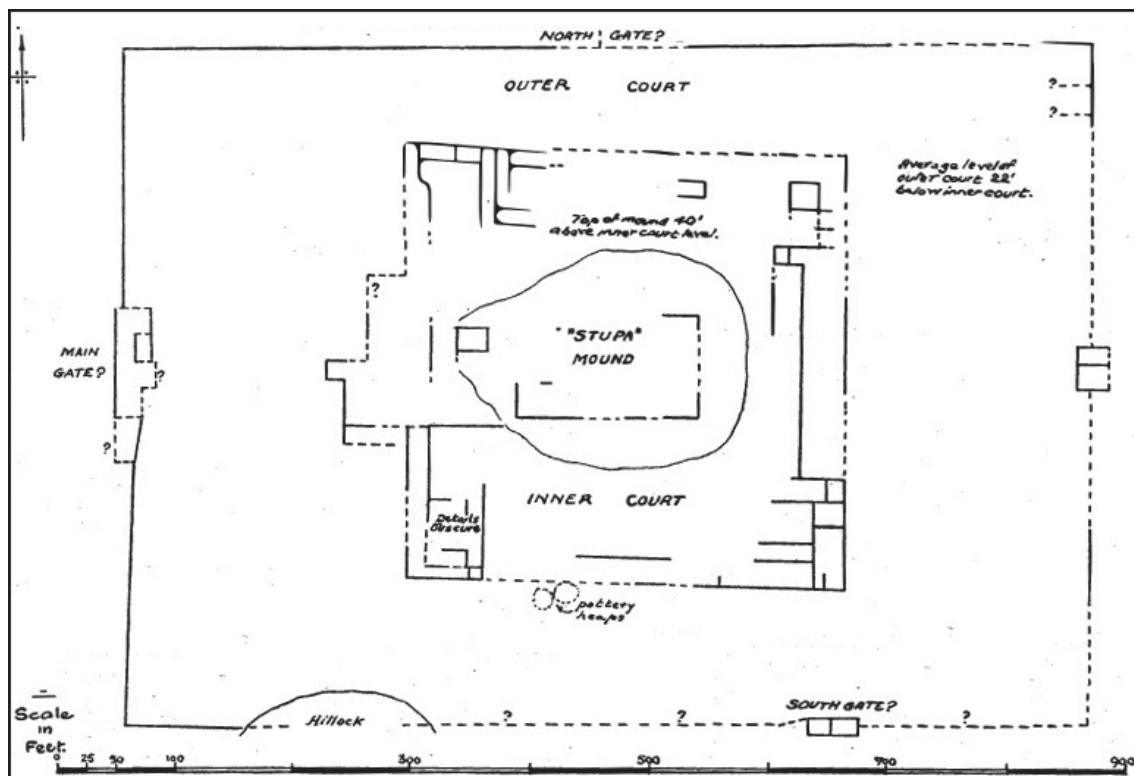


Figure 13: Wellsted's plan of Mansar (JPASB XXIX, 1933: pl.8)

Stage IV: Planned Monastery

Paharpur a small village in the Naogaon district, Bangladesh holds the remains of the most important and the largest known monastery to the south of the Himalayas known as Somapura Mahavihara. A number of monasteries grew up during the Pāla period (circa. 750-1174 A.D.) in ancient Bengal and Magadha. According to Tibetan sources, five great Monasteries stood out: *Vikramashila*, the premier university of the era; *Nalanda*, past its prime but still illustrious, *Somapura Mahavihara*, *Odantapurā*, and

Jaggadala. The five monasteries formed a network under state supervision and a system of co-ordination. Sompura Mahavihar covers approximately an area of 27 acres (110,000 m²) of land. The entire establishment occupying a quadrangular court, measuring more than 900 ft (270 m) and from 12 ft (3.7 m), to 15ft in height. With elaborate gateway complex on the north, there are 45 cells on the north and 44 in each of the other three sides with a total number of 177 rooms. A traditional Buddhist Stupa built in the centre, reproducing the cruciform basement, terraced structures with inset chambers and gradually dwindling pyramid form. The rooms were used by the monks for accommodation and meditation. It was an important intellectual centre for religious tradition such as Buddhist, Jains, and Brahmins (Sanatana Dharma). The outside walls with ornamental terracotta plaques still display the influence of these three religions. During the rule of the Sena dynasty, in the second half of the 12th century the Vihara started to decline for the last time.

It was finally abandoned during the 13th century, when the area came under Muslim occupation. It was quite unusual architecturally. As one of the scholars described that the complex dominated by Brahmanical temple structure although the plan of the temple is not typical. But the complex is not similar to Brahmanical temple structure. According to the scholars none of the characteristic features of Indian temple architecture is similar to this complex. The nearest approximation to the plan and pyramidal cruciform superstructure is profoundly influenced by those of South-East Asia, especially Myanmar and Java. According to the Scholars the Somapura Mahavihar represent solitary example became the standards of Buddhist temple architecture is not known. But the scholars view not seems to be convincing. Although the remains unearthed represents the Buddhist monastic complex, but it was not influenced by Burma, Java or Combodia. The influence is very much indigenous. Remains of large monastic complex were scattered throughout India. Hence the majestisity of Sompura Mahavihara has an Indian influenced. According to various scholars' approximation to the plan and pyramidal cruciform superstructure in Sompura Mahavihar is profoundly influenced by those of South-East Asia, especially Myanmar and Java. But it seems that the plan and superstructure is very much of indigenous in origin. We have found various Buddhist superstructures (terrace structures) in Ahhichhatra, Kaushami, Sravasti, Kesaria etc which are quite similar to Sompura Mahavihar.

Excavators also noticed planned monastic complex from Mansar, district Nagpur, Maharasthra. Mansar excavation remains also cover an area of 11 acre. The entire establishment occupying a quadrangular court measuring more than 124 m East-West and 110m North – South. With majestic gateway on the west fronted by pillared mandapa there are various complexes at east, north and south comprising various cells. The main structure is also having cells on Eastern, Northern and Southern sides. The Mahavihara unearthed from Mansar is quite similar to the plan and superstructure of Sompura Mahavihara. After the downfalls of Buddhism in Maharasthtra and lack of Royal supports may be the scholars migrated to Bihar where the Buddhism still

existed. May be migrated Buddhist scholars implemented their idea, of planned monastic complex which they have seen earlier at Mansar in to the Sompura Mahavihara. The Mansar Mahavihara datable from the Satavahana upto post Vakataka period (i.e. 2nd century B.C to 6th Century A.D.), and the Sompura is datable to 7th – 13th century A.D. which clearly shows that the Planned Monastic complex have indigenous root which we found at Mansar, may be the layout of Sompura Mahavihara inspired by Mansar Mahavihara. A planned Monasteries are also found at different Buddhist centers which include Odantapuri (from the Gupta period to the to the Muslim conquest), in Bihar (circa 550 – 1040 A.D.), Somapura (Pal period to Muslim conquest), Jagaddala in Bengal, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, Vikramaśīla in Kashmir, Valabhi, in Gujarat, Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh (8th century to modern times), Manyakheta in Karnataka, Puspagiri in Orissa.

Stage V: Planned Monastic Universities

Monastic university or Mahavihar devoted to the religious and scholastic respites of Theravadas, Mahayana, and Vajrayana subject for example Nalanda in India, Sompura in Bangladesh (Phoue;2010;46). In this stage the layouts of the monastery remain same, only a progressive attempt was initiated towards elaboration and ornamentation of the shrine into a fully fledged temple. Sometimes the sanitary occupied an independent position in the centre of the open courtyard as at Mainamati and the Somapura mahavihara at Paharpur(Epigraphia Indica ; Vol IX ;36-41) It was in the 1860's that the great archaeologist Alexander Cunningham identified the site as the Nalanda University and in 1915-1916 the Archaeological Survey of India began excavations of the site. The ruins of Nalanda cover 14 hectares of land which is in fact only a portion of the huge area, much of the ruins are beneath existing villages and are unlikely to be revealed. Nalanda is an ancient centre of higher learning in Bihar, India. Nalanda is the first Residential International Universities of the World and was the centre of scholarship and Buddhist studies. Although the site was a pilgrimage destination, it has a link with the Buddha as he often came here and two of his chief disciples, Sariputra and Moggallana, came from this area. During Gupta period Nalanda was flourished as a university. It was crowned as jewel of the development of Buddhist teaching and learning in India. University was flourished with Stupas, Monasteries, Chaityas, Temples, hostels, staircases, meditation halls, lecture halls, lakes, parks and many other structures. It had a nine-storied library where monks meticulously copied books and documents so that individual scholars could have their own collections. It had dormitories for students, perhaps a first for an educational institution, housing 10,000 students in the university's heyday and providing accommodations for 2,000 professors. Nalanda University attracted pupils and scholars from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey. It was devoted to Buddhist studies, but it also trained students in fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, politics and the art of war. The large Stupa is known as Sariputra's Stupa, marking the spot not only where his relics are entombed, but where he was supposedly born. The site has a number of small monasteries where the monks lived and studied and many of them were rebuilt

over the centuries. Dating back to the Gupta age, the study was based on the practice and study of the Mahayana. After then, the study and propagation of the tantric teachings has been increased from 750 AD. A great fire wiped out the university at the beginning of the 12th century A.D., the Muslim invader Bakhtiyar Khalji sacked the university.



Figure 14: Nalanda University

Conclusion

During the period of the Buddha the Buddhist monks were wandering from one place to the other without having any permanent place to stay. During rainy seasons it became very difficult for the Buddhist monks to wander one place to the other hence the Buddha allowed his disciple to have temporary place for the residence purpose. The earliest form of the viharas might be of the perishable material about which we do not get the evidences. Later period the construction of the viharas started in rock, bricks and stone. The inner urge and enthusiasm of the Monks to have some kind of permanent residence helped in the construction of the Vihara. Emergence of large number of the viharas in the ancient period was possible only because of the residence need for the Buddhist monks. Later period these viharas have been transformed into the educational institutions and in still later period into the big Monasteries. These temporary abodes as the time went on became more permanent place to stay. The Viharas got transformed from the temporary structures to the big Universities such as Nalanda.

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