



*Nativity of Buddha.* 9th century CE. Stone. National Museum, Chhauni, Kathmandu.

# NEPAL'S LUMBINI IS MORE THAN A BIRTH PLACE OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA

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## Abstract

*Lumbini is so far unrecognized for its importance and significance by placing all attention to it as Siddhartha Gautam's (Buddha) birth place. It is this very place where all three schools of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana come together. Buddha's message of peace and harmony is practiced in daily life by the local inhabitants professing different religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Ancient Kapilvastu covers such a wide area that it has become a goldmine for archaeologists for far and wide to have an opportunity to study civilizations and cultures which date back the pre Christian Era. United Nations Secretary General U Thant spearheaded the development of present Lumbini with help from an International Committee for the Development of Lumbini which he formed and saw that the task of a Master Plan for Lumbini was given to one uniquely qualified architect Kenzo Tange, a person with a vision. With many changes and adjustments from the original Master Plan, Lumbini is fast losing its luster by the construction of physical structures that hardly conform to the bylaws written during the approval of the Master Plan. Yet by the sheer strength of Buddha himself Lumbini retains its un-parallel beauty, serenity, tranquility, and universality. Lumbini has reached this stage of development amidst several unwarranted controversies and mismanagement, but not all is lost. Lumbini can offer three distinct services to humanity as Buddha would have wanted: Guide those who believe in Buddha as God as they can find the almighty in every inch of the Sacred Garden; Lessen the pains and sufferings of others who seek to have a better life through meditation and prayers; and create a congregation of peace lovers who are in search of peace for themselves, their communities, their countries and the whole world.*

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## Background

Lumbini of Nepal has become so popular in recent days that some scholars have started equating this place with Vatican (for Christianity), Mecca Medina (for Islam) and it is increasing day by day. Lumbini, the birth place of Siddhartha Gautama – the principal Buddha among many Buddhas, is famous for followers of Buddhism as well as

other religious groups and even those non-believers of religion. No other place on earth emits such serenity, harmony, and peace than Lumbini, especially in today's world engulfed in conflicts, miseries, pains and sufferings mostly caused by manmade misadventures. In Lumbini, all the vehicles of Buddhism – *Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana*, come together to give this special place an added importance and immense

value as stated by Rinpoche of Bhutan, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (Dixit, 2019). Besides, within a very short distance from Lumbini, Buddha's natal towns such as Kapilvastu, Tilaurakot, Kudan, Goihawa are located. A full understanding of Gautama Buddha's early life would not be complete without a visit to these places. Additionally, other Buddhas, namely, Krakuchhanda Buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha belong to these very places.

The recent UNESCO publication (2019) entitled 'The Sacred Garden of Lumbini' traces its origins to Late Chalcolithic Lumbini (c.1300 to sixth century BCE) – investigations carried out by the Lumbini Development Trust, Durham University and Department of Archeology (Nepal government) between 2011-2013. Yet Early Historic Lumbini (6<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE) as is known today, provided evidence that a tree grew at the center of the mound where Mayadevi temple occurred during the middle of Sixth Century BCE (Robin Cunningham, 2019).

These researchers, after careful and thorough scientific study, have provided a verlar picture of Lumbini through the ages in nine parts (periods): (i) Late Chalcolithic Lumbini (c.1300-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE); (ii) Early Historic Lumbini (6<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE); (iii) Mauryan Lumbini (3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE); (iv) Sunga Lumbini (2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BCE); (v) Kushan Lumbini (1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE); (vi) Gupta Lumbini (3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century CE); (vii) Medieval Lumbini 9<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century CE); (viii) Early Modern Lumbini 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century CE); and (ix) Modern Lumbini 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century CE).

They concluded that three major discoveries were made during that

project, and they are: the first scientific and archaeological evidence to contribute to the debate surrounding the dates of the Buddha's life, the Identification of a Tree Shrine, and the identification of pre-Ashokan monumental Buddhist architecture.

The surrounding areas, some of which are directly associated with Buddha's life, are called 'Greater Lumbini Area' comprise Lumbini (where Buddha was born), Tilaurakot-Kapilvastu (where Buddha spent 29 years of his life) and Ramagrama (where Buddha's ashes are kept – nirvana). Besides, Dohani, Karma, Chatradehi, Niglihawa, Araurakot, Sagrahawa, Kudan, Gotihawa, Sisaniya are within the three districts of Rupandehi, Parasi and Kapilvastu of Western Terai of Nepal (Robin Cunningham, 2019).

While Ramagrama is about 32 km east of Lumbini proper, the rest including Tilaurakot lay on the western side of Lumbini sacred garden. Hari D. Rai of Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) states that the ancient Kapilvastu extended to the Himalayas in the North, Pava and Kushinagar in the South, Rohini river in the East and Rapti river to the West. Of the two sites first indicated in Tilaurakot (Nepal) and Piprahawa (India) and following one hundred years of intense discussions and archaeological works it was finally confirmed that Tilaurakot indeed is the ancient Kapilvastu where Siddhartha spent 29 years of his princely life (Rai, 2019).

Chinese pilgrim Huiyen Tsiang, during his visit in 629 AD described Buddhist sites in the following manner: Kapilvastu an area covering about 4 km (14-15 li) has ten deserted cities; Kudan (south of the

city), about 1.5 km area where Buddha after enlightenment (Sakya Tathagata) met his father Shuddodana; Gotihawa (south east of the city) where Tathagata's relics are placed in a stupa with a 30 feet high stone pillar with a carved lion atop; Niglihawa (north east of the city) of Krakuchhanda Buddha (about 8.64 km) houses a stupa where in the Bhadrakalpa era (when men lived for 40,000 years) Kanakmuni Buddha was born; Sagarhawa (north of Niglihawa), several hundreds and thousands of stupas indicating the spot where members of Sakya clan were slaughtered by Virudhaka-rajā; Sarakupa (8 km south east of Sagarhawa) where arrow fountain (Sarakupa) exists where people's health is restored simply by drinking this water; Lumbini (north east of Arrow Well and about 24 km) Lavani (lumbini) garden where Bodhisattva was born (Tsiang, 629 A.D.).

A slightly expanded version of ancient Kapilvastu and Devadaha is described in a publication named "Nepal-China Relation LUMBINI" by Prof. Giti Giri whereby Prof. Giri has covered Chetradai (2 km north-east of Tilaurakot – Vajracharya, VS 2029:39) a flat rectangular site has yielded potsherds, human and animal figurines of terracotta, bangles fragments; Rehara mound, about 160 m to the south-west of Tilaurakot, is supposed to be the Royal precinct of Kapilvastu involved in metalworks; Sivagadha, west to the western gateway of Tilaurakot, is a habitational site; Lohasaudia Mound, about 250 m south-west from eastern gateway of Tilaurakot complex, indicates that this site might have been used for iron smelting and casting; Dhamnihawa, around 377 m. to the north of Tilaurakot, having two stupas known as 'commemoration stupas of Suddhodhan

and Mayadevi (parents of Siddhartha Gautam); Araurakot, about 1.5 km on the south-east of Nihalisagar and about 8 km from Tailihawa bazar, is supposed to be the natal site of Kanakamuni Buddha; Jahadi, about 1.5 km from Nigali sagar and 5 km northeast of Taulihawa bazar, this site being very important to locate the original place for Nigalisagar Asokan pillar; Sisnahaniyakot, about 12 km south east of Tilaurakot – between Piprahawa (India) and Taulihawa, an ancient town of the region dating back to Sunga period immediately following the Christian Era (Giri, 2017).

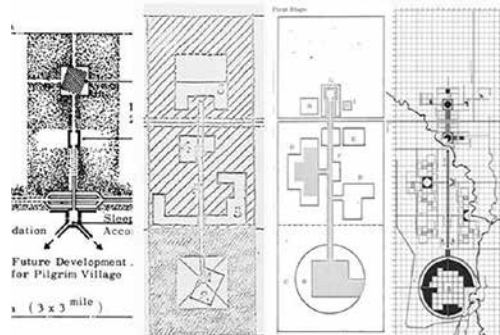
Development of modern Lumbini took place with the visit of United Nations Secretary General U Thant of Myanmar (formerly Burma) in April 14, 1967.

True to the principles and purposes of the United Nations – a global organization set up for securing international peace and security for succeeding generations and founded after the devastating World War II, several missions to Lumbini were carried out from UNESCO and UN resident representative in Kathmandu prior to Secretary General U Thant commissioning a team of experts for Lumbini. Through the auspices of United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Frank Raymond Allchin (lecturer on Indian studies at Cambridge University, England) and Kazuyuki Matsushita (an architect and planner with firm Tange and URTEC, Tokyo) were selected to begin work on Lumbini (1969). The conceptual framework worked out by Allchin-Matsushita report formed the initial basis of the Master Plan that incorporated much of the elements and features outlined therein (Yukio Nishimura, 2019).

Allchin and Matsushita report clearly stated that “the essence of Sacred Garden must be to create tranquility, universality and extreme clarity consistent with the idea of the birth of Buddhism” and therefore of the ‘highest quality of design, reflecting as it were the whole spirit of man, rather than any sectarian or national bias’ (Frank Raymond Allchin, 1969). In 1970, Secretary General U Thant formed an International Committee for the Development of Lumbini (ICDL) under the chairmanship of Nepal’s Permanent Representative to UN with initial 13 members (Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) later joined by Bangladesh, Bhutan and Republic of Korea making it to a 16-nation body.

A brochure named “Lumbini. The Birthplace of Buddha” was prepared by ICDL which not only reiterated the essence of Lumbini development but also outlined the necessity of maintaining The Green Areas, The Pilgrim Village, The Monastic Enclave, and The Sacred Garden. Following the conceptual Master Plan Design prepared by Kenzo Tange and his study team in 1971 and subsequent comments and review of the Plan, final outline design for Lumbini was adopted in 1972.

The geometric interpretation of the Master Plan is based on religious symbolism with 5x5 miles taken as a Mandala and Sacred Garden at focal point at the center. Kenzo Tange recommended integrating Master Plan into the wider economic context to have a positive impact not just through tourism but also service facilities such as high school, medical center and cultural facilities. Much remains to be done even today.



*Kenzo Tange Master Plan development over the years.  
(source: UNESCO record/presentation of key concepts by Yukio Nishimura)*



*1 mile x 3 mile project area  
(from UNESCO website)*

## **Lumbini is for peace, peace and peace**

Lumbini, Nepal itself is a sacred place where Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims live side by side in harmony and look forward to its timely development. Excuses galore, and even after 38 years of preparation of detailed architectural drawings, the site lacks the ambience, serenity, and tranquility from the man-made structures. If not for the blessed one, the Buddha, and his moral strength and invisible presence, Lumbini might have been shelved in the annals of history.

Nepalese are fortunate to have found U Thant, Secretary General of the

## Lumbini Today in pictures



*Maya Devi Temple with Asoka Pillar and the pond  
(from Government of Nepal website)*



*Lumbini Cultural Center (from LDT website)*



*Lumbini West Monastic Zone (from LDT website)*



*Lumbini East Monastic Zone (from LDT website)*



*Mayadevi Temple at Night (from LDT files)*

UN, at the right time who not only floated the idea of a modern Lumbini but also put it into motion by forming the International Committee for the Development of Lumbini under Nepal's own stewardship. What else could he have done. It was another good fortune to

have distinguished architect Kenzo Tange who not only was available at the time to prepare a Master Plan for Lumbini but he went many steps ahead by offering his farsighted vision as a token of his deep reverence to Tathagata – the Buddha.

Although Nepal as well as others around are rushing to turn this place of peace, wisdom and tranquility into a tourist hub, whether pilgrimage or otherwise, it would not be appropriate to disturb the tranquility and serenity of the sacred garden and Mayadevi temple.

Earlier, policy makers and visionaries including U Thant referred to also adopt tourism not for the sake of making this place a resort or something of that sort for



promoting tourism but for its self-sustainability. It was seen clearly by all involved in the development of Lumbini that Nepal, an impoverished nation still struggling to make ends meet of its people, would have hardly any surplus resources to develop and maintain the sanctity of Lumbini thus the element of tourism.

Architect Kenzo Tange wanted the government of Nepal to integrate Lumbini Master Plan into wider economic context and regional development plan of Gandaki-Lumbini area. He wanted development of educational, health and cultural facilities, having good access from regional artery, the Taulihawa-Bhairahawa Highway. It is never too late to start a good thing for the welfare of the people, and obviously by serving the people you serve the great Buddha.

For all that counts, Lumbini is destined to serve the entire humanity and without any bias. It is a unique place that can satisfy the needs of three distinct categories: Those who believe in Buddha as god are welcome to have a face to face with the Tathagata in every inch of the lumbini garden; Others who come to learn Buddha's ways of getting rid of life pains

and sufferings through meditation and prayers would find the right environment in Lumbini; and yet others who search for peace in themselves, their societies, countries and globally would find scores of like-minded persons from all over the world.

What it needs now is to develop the right institutions, facilities and trained manpower to support the needs of the needy. Lumbini Buddhist University can be developed, besides the present teaching, into a place for peace discourses hosting regular seminars and conferences for peace at all levels; National, regional and global. The United Nations, with its present Secretary General Antonio Guterres, can set up a peace center at Lumbini in collaboration with Lumbini Buddhist University and Lumbini Development Trust. Nepal's and other research centers around Lumbini (India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, Korea etc.) can join in a new endeavor of better understanding of Buddha's message of lessening sufferings and pains from human beings through various means including meditation.

Nepal's 'Lumbini Research Center for Understanding and Peace' is hosting an international conference in December 2019

for an extensive discussion on peace as a humble start for creating awareness of the worth of Lumbini's Third Eye.

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### **Dr. Binod P. Bista**

*Of about 46 years of professional experience in the fields of development, education, corporate governance and international relations, Dr. Binod P. Bista has given focus on bilateral, regional and international affairs in past 29 years. In addition to serving in the capacity of Deputy Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations (NY) in the latter part of 1990, he spent five years in China as Director of Research and Chief Economist of Boao Forum for Asia (BFA/2002-2007). Earlier, Dr. Bista served in the office of Nepal's Prime Minister as foreign policy specialist (1995). Currently, he is a convener of 'Immediate Neighborhood and Neighborhood Relations Committee' of Nepal Council of World Affairs, and a visiting faculty of Institute of Crisis Management Studies (Tribhuvan University, Nepal). He serves as Secretary General to Nepal based Lumbini Research Center for Understanding and Peace. He is also a Vice Chairperson of Clean Perspectives, a Nepal based think tank engaged in advancing Nepal's relations with its closest neighbors, India and China. Dr. Bista is a regular participant of Education Forum for Asia. Dr. Bista has obtained a Bachelor of Architecture degree (Mumbai, India), Masters of Business Administration (Atlanta, US), and a Ph.D. (Management with Peace Research Study from BHU, India).*