Title
Buddhism and the Making of Modern India

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Publication Date
2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

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By
Padma Dorje Maitland

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Architecture
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Greg Castillo, Chair
Professor Andrew Shanken
Professor Sugata Ray

Fall 2018

Abstract

Buddhism and the Making of Modern India

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation is a study of the modern Buddhist art and architecture of India. It focuses on the aesthetics and architectural practices that developed as a result of the intersection of Buddhism and various nationalist movements in India over the course of the twentieth century. More than an incidental aspect of India's development, Buddhism was central to crafting key narratives around Indian modernity and national identity. Architecture became an important index of that process, defining a longer history of Buddhism in the region and generating spaces in which to imagine and realize new social, political, and religious conceptions of India.

Chapter 1 attends to the development of modern Buddhist art and architecture within the context of an emerging Hindu nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. It begins with Mahatma Gandhi's entrance into a new Hindu temple complex in New Delhi, looking at how Buddhism was reimagined within a more inclusive understanding of Hindu culture as the Arya Dharma. The chapter focuses on how Buddhism was expressed as part of a Hindu revivalist aesthetic championed by the architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee. Developed as a network of institutions, pilgrimage centers, and temples across India, the public of these projects was similarly novel, working to construct an image of the subcontinent as "all-India," and framing Buddhism as part of a modern religious commons defined by the confluence of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Chapter 2 focuses on Buddhist art and architecture constructed after India's independence in 1947. Under the direction of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Buddhism informed several national and international policies, guiding the creation of projects that sought to position India as a global hub for international understanding and peace. Rather than one unified style, the modern Buddhist art and architecture of this period is typified by a variety of approaches. Projects include a Japanese-funded monument for world peace, a memorial to the seventh century traveler Xuanzang in Nalanda, and the work of artist-architect Upendra Maharathi. Each project embodies an understanding of Buddhism as an antidote to imperialism and an embedded aspect of Indian culture, setting the stage for later developments in modern Buddhist art and architecture as a response to social and political issues, especially caste.

Chapter 3 marks a break from earlier approaches to modern Buddhism in India. The mass conversion to Buddhism led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1956 resulted in a new Buddhist tradition known as Dalit Buddhism or Navayana Buddhism. The art and architecture associated with the movement developed to express its religious and social ideals, fusing historical references with modern forms that celebrated Dalit Buddhism as an escape from the Hindu caste system. By contextualizing the aesthetic trends and developments of the Dalit Buddhist movement within the social and political ambitions of Ambedkar and the Dalit Buddhist movement, it is possible to see how ancient Buddhist architectural precedents and later nationalist approaches to Buddhism were coopted to create modern spaces that celebrated the social, religious, and political emancipation of Dalits in India.

Acknowledgements

This work has benefited from more help and support than I could ever mention. The chance to study what I love and to write about it has been an incredible gift and I am thankful for all the friends, family, professors, and colleagues who have made that possible. A special note of gratitude is due to my advisors Greg Castillo, Andrew Shanken, and Sugata Ray who challenged and inspired me along the way; my family, without whom this would never have been possible; and the friends who read numerous drafts and chapters. I would especially like to thank Trent Walker, Chenxing Han, Janet Um, Arathi Menon, Katie Sisneros, Siddarth Shah, Martha Figerlowicz, and my mother, Iris Maitland, for reading chapters, discussing ideas, and encouraging me as I finished my dissertation.

For their support in funding my research, I am thankful for the Fulbright-Nehru Student Award Program, the American Institute for Indian Studies, the Global Urban Humanities program at UC Berkeley, the UC Center for New Racial Studies, the Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, the Scott Opler Graduate Student Fellowship, and the Spiro Kostof Fellowship. Each broadened and deepened my research in ways that I could never have imagined. I am also thankful to the support of the Society of Architectural Historians, the Association for Asian Studies, the Townsend Center, and the Arts Research Fellowship Program for the opportunity to attend conferences and workshops where I shared early drafts of this project.

There are many more people than I can name here, but a few others that deserve special mention are Alexander von Rospatt, Jeffrey Hadler, Penelope Edwards, Y.S. Alone, Priya Choudhary, Ajay Choudhary, Ashok Mokha, Navneet Raman, Tsering Gellek, Aviram Sharma, Sraman Mukherjee, Douglas Ober, Gitanjali Surendran, Ajay Pandey, Mahashwetha Maharathi, Neeraj Goswami, Kalden Shingla, Ethan Stein, Kyle Gardner, Kashi Gomez, Adhitya Dhanapal, Raj and Helen Rewal, and Puneeta Kala. They made this project not only possible, but meaningful and rewarding.

Conventions

For the transliteration of certain terms, I have opted not to use diacritics. Instead I have sought to write them in their most popular or common forms. The term *bhūmi*, for example, is written as *bhumi*, and not *bhoomi*. As much as possible, I have attempted to be consistent. In some cases, however, the names of specific institutions have required alternate spellings.

Images

Unless otherwise stated, images in this dissertation are my own, taken in India between 2011 and 2017. In those cases when I have used the images or maps of others, I have indicated their source.

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Introduction

Introduction

Buddhism and the Making of Modern India

Popular and scholarly accounts will tell you that Buddhism is one of the world's major religions, that it began in India, and from there it spread across Asia and around the world.[1] But what does it mean to talk about modern Buddhism in India and what are its built expressions? This dissertation grew out of a desire to answer those questions. Initially, it seemed rather straightforward. There are a set of well-known Buddhist sites in India linked to the life of the historic Buddha and the dissemination of Buddhism across the region (fig. 0.1). They include places like Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, his first sermon, and *parinirvana* respectively, as well as a set of subsidiary sites linked to other events and periods in the Buddha's life (figs. 0.2, 0.3, 0.4).[2] These sites represent what are commonly referred to as the major and minor Buddhist sites of India, along with Lumbini in Nepal, which is famed as the site of the Buddha's birth. There are other sites in India that memorialize Buddhism's rich cultural and artistic legacy in the subcontinent. They include the Buddhist caves of Ajanta, the Great Stupa at Sanchi, and Nalanda, all of which are famous not just as ancient Buddhist centers, but for their role in the study of Buddhism and the development of architectural history as a discipline (figs. 0.5, 0.6, 0.7).[3]

[1] Robert E. Buswell Jr.'s preface to *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), vii.
[2] There are numerous popular guides to the major Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. One of the most recent is Dzongsar Jamyang Kyentse's *Best Foot Forward: A Pilgrims Guide to the Sacred Sites of the Buddha* (Boulder: Shambala, 2018). For a specific discussion of the modern revival Bodh Gaya as a pilgrimage place, see: Alan Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949): Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahabodhi Temple* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 2006).
[3] See: Vidya Dehejia, *Unseen Presence: The Buddha and Sanchi* (Marg Publishers, 1996); James Fergusson, *The*

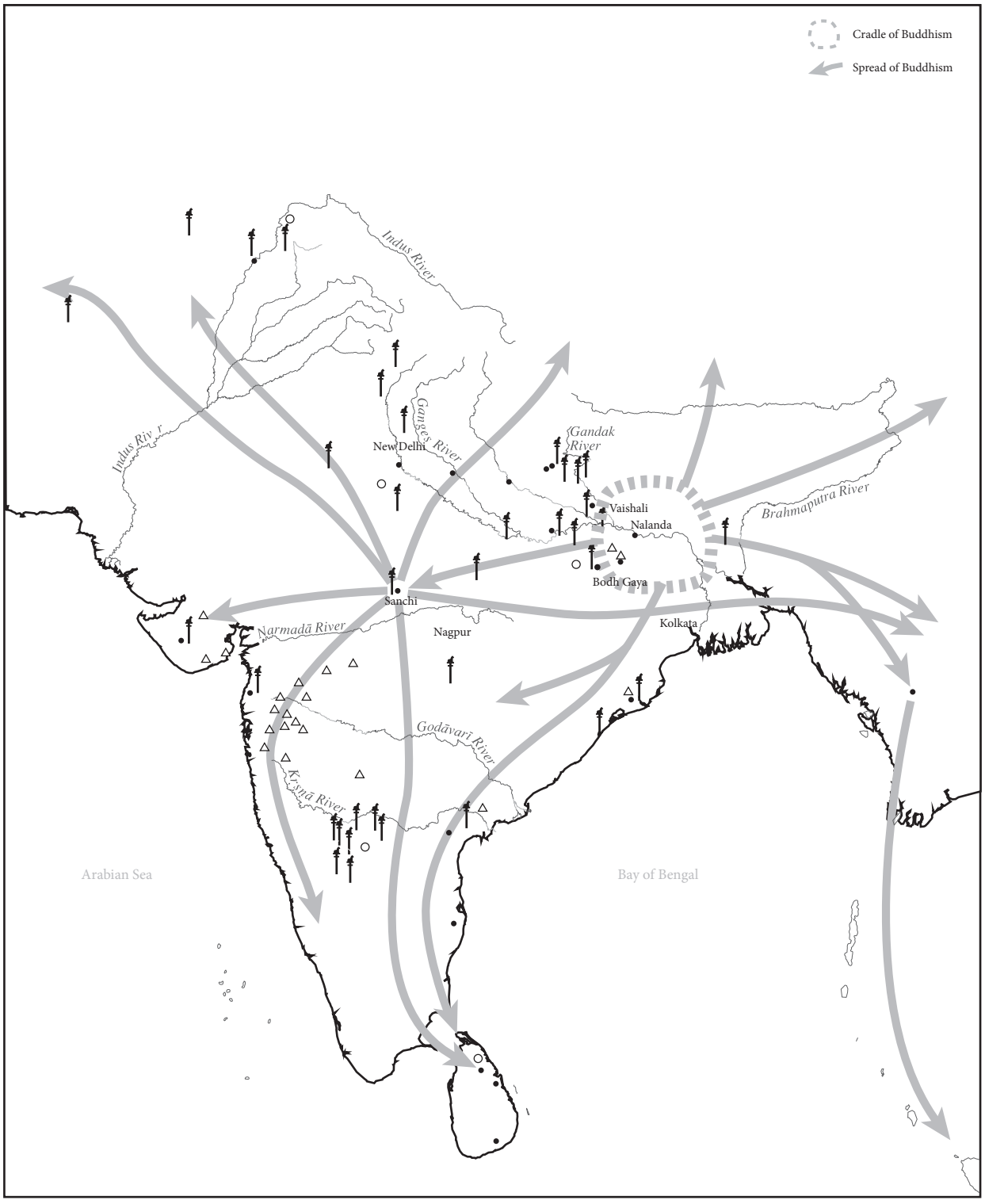


Figure 0.1: Map of the Indian subcontinent showing the spread of Buddhism.
Based on a map by XNR Productions, Inc. Gale Group. Repreduced from Encyclopea of Buddhism, xxxviii.

Figures 0.2, 0.3, 0.4 - clockwise, left to right: Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar

My plan was to chart the modern development of the well-known Buddhist sites of India, examining how they transformed from pilgrimage places and archaeological ruins to bustling religious and tourist centers with hundreds of thousands of visitors traveling to them each year.[4] It soon became clear, however, that the history of modern Buddhism in India was much more complex and involved a more extensive network of places than the traditional collection of Buddhist sites.[5] This dissertation is a study of those sites, presenting an overview of the major themes guiding the construction and design of projects beyond the traditional network of Buddhist places in India during the twentieth century.

The famous Buddhist pilgrimage and archaeological sites of India remain important centers for modern Buddhist revival. A history focused solely on their growth over the last

Illustrated Handbook of Architecture (Murray, 1855); Walter M. Spink, *Ajanta: A Brief History and Guide* (Asian Art Archives, University of Michigan, 1987).

[4] David Geary opens his study of Bodh Gaya by pointing out that by 2009 the small pilgrimage town had become one of India's most popular tourist destinations. David Geary, *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site* (University of Washington Press, Kindle edition, 2017), kindle locations 85-87.

[5] In his study of Tibetan engagements with India's Buddhist pilgrimage sites, Toni Huber has shown how the religious landscape of India is constantly shifting according to political and religious developments both inside India and abroad. Toni Huber, *Holy Land Reborn* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Figures 0.5, 0.6, 0.7: Cave at Ajanta, Stupas at Sanchi, and ruins of the library at Nalanda

hundred years, however, would present an incomplete history of modern Buddhism in India. It would be a history heavily weighted towards the impact of foreign communities and organizations on Buddhist sites, rather than on local and national approaches to their growth and planning. In order to understand modern Buddhist art and architecture in India, it is necessary to consider how Buddhism figured into various cultural, social, and political movements over the course of the twentieth century and how those engagements informed the design and construction of new structures intended to represent India as an independent nation.

Modern Buddhism in India is, and always has been, about more than religious revival. It is tied up with questions of politics, culture, and identity, playing a fundamental role in discourses around Indian civilization and development.[6] Shifts in style and form index changes in how Buddhism figured into evolving nationalist visions of India. As I will show throughout this dissertation, there are moments when new works emphasize Buddhism as a religious tradition. In other cases, Buddhism is celebrated for its cultural legacy or its political significance, rather than as a religious tradition. This is, in a large part, due to the common belief that Buddhism

[6] Heinz Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies." *Daedalus* (1973): 85-95.

ceased to be a living tradition in India after the 12th-century.[7] Buddhism was revived in India as a response to archaeological discoveries, new historical studies, encounters with Buddhists from other parts of Asia, and burgeoning notions of India's national aesthetics.[8] Modern Buddhist art and architecture reflects that history, incorporating new archaeological and historical studies into modern Buddhist architectural sensibilities that reflect the pressing social and political issues of their day.

Buddhism in India has come to embody very specific ideals of modernity, especially in art and architecture.[9] While I will make references to Modernism as a specific period and style, more often than not, I will use the term "modern" as a way to refer to pervasive attitudes or social reforms. Rebecca Brown offers a helpful explanation of the specific connotations of "the modern" in the context of Indian artistic and architectural practices, one that I will follow in this study. As she writes,

> …the term *modern* does not indicate a periodization; I eschew the usage sometimes employed in art history and literary studies in which *modern* indicates either a specific period or a specific genre of art. Instead, *the modern* or *modern* indicates a particular approach to the world embodied in an epistemology of progress, a faith in universals, the primacy of the subject, and a turning away from religion towards reason.[10]

Brown's study highlights a desire to find forms and styles that could be "modern *and* Indian."[11] Buddhism played a vital role in that process, bridging national narratives around India's past and its future. Lauded for its universality, emphasis on the subject, and rationality—the same qualities of modernity that Brown emphasizes above—Buddhism became a historically imbedded aspect of India's past on which to begin imagining its future.

There have been numerous studies on nationalism, and Indian nationalism in particular, all of which stress the importance of modern modes of imagining community beyond the limits

[7] It is highly debated whether or not Buddhism actually ceased to exist in India. It is especially questionable if one considers parts of the Himalayas and areas in the northeast of India such as Sikkim and Assam. For an early colonial account of Buddhism's material legacy in South Asia, see: Alexander Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes: Or, Buddhist Monuments of Central India: Comprising a Brief Historical Sketch of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Buddhism; with an Account of the Opening and Examination of the Various Groups of Topes Around Bhilsa* (Smith, Elder, 1854). For more recent studies see: R.C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism in India* (Visva-Bharati Research Publishing Committee, 1981); and, Douglas Fairchild Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism: conversations and encounters in modern India, 1839-1956," (Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2016).

[8] Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); PR Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting* (Rachana, 1953).

[9] David L. McMahan describes the formation of a global Buddhist modernism as follows: "an actual new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform…" David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[10] Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980* (Duke University Press, 2009), 4.

[11] *Ibid.*

of traditional social and geographic networks.[12] In studies of India, there has been a specific interest in how modern understandings of the nation developed in contradistinction to European ones, or rather, through narratives that could challenge colonial discourses that characterized India as "not-yet" modern.[13] Other studies focused on efforts to visualize India as a religious and political territory, addressing new works of art that imagined India as a divine "geo-body."[14] Buddhism's place in such studies is curious. In some cases, it has played a key role, defining a vast pre-modern territory and the historical evidence for very specific nationalist interpretations of Indian culture and society. At other times, Buddhism's past in India is marginalized and subsumed within other discourses, especially those that imagine India as a Hindu nation.[15] The ability to approach Buddhism as both a major and minor aspect of Indian nationalism is, at least in part, what has made it so important in modern figurations of Indian culture and identity. It moves between the universal and the national, the past and the present. It can be read as intrinsically Indian or as foreign, as modern or not-yet modern. Buddhism's ability to bridge national and international frameworks, as well as the past and the present, has made it a powerful element in Indian nationalist narratives, providing a way to imagine the nation as something timeless, but also contemporary and globally relevant.[16]

References to Buddhism in art and architecture similarly allude to an idealized vision of India's past. Specific architectural elements drawn from the rich material legacy of Buddhism in the region became cues of a building's perceived "Indian-ness," but also its relevance in modern times. Some of the most repeated elements are the *chaitya* arch or *chandrashala,* from the caves of Ajanta; the dome, *torana* or gateways, and the railings of Sanchi; and references to the Mahabodhi Temple as the center of Buddhism in India. These symbols of Buddhism's material legacy in India not only reference India's ancient past, they also embody the colonial process of mapping and studying India, which transformed ancient architectural references into symbols of cultural and ethnic identity.[17] Systematic methods for studying and mapping Buddhist

[12] For example, see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Aleksandŭr K′osev, *Nationalism and the Imagination* (Seagull Books, 2010). Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2012).
[13] Brown, *Art for a Modern India.* See also: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "From Civilization to Globalization: The 'West' as a Shifting Signifier in Indian Modernity," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2012): 138-152;
[14] Sumathi Ramaswamy, "Visualising India's geo-body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1-2 (2002): 151-189. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. (Princeton University Press, 1996).
[15] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building." *Economic and Political Weekly* (1993): 517-524.
[16] Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (1998): 6-37.
[17] Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation* (Routledge India, 2014).

sites in India led to some of the first architectural surveys, including James Fergusson's studies of Indian architecture, which celebrated Buddhist art and architecture as a significant index of Indian civilization.[18] A series of public exhibitions and displays of Buddhist architecture further established certain architectural forms as representative of Buddhist art and architecture in India. The *toranas* at Sanchi are one of the most famous examples, copied repeatedly in illustrations and publications. The north *torana* at Sanchi was even cast in life size plaster replicas and displayed in world exhibitions in Europe.[19] A *torana* at Sanchi was also included in Sir Banister Fletcher's "Tree of Architecture" as the symbol of Indian architecture (fig. 0.8).[20] Such graphic representations of global architecture emphasize an evolutionary model of civilization and development. It was in this context that Buddhist architecture was revived as a paradigm of classical Indian culture.

Indian art historians seeking to challenge Eurocentric models of architectural history turned to a history of Buddhist art and architecture. Ananda Coomaraswamy's studies are a famous example, emphasizing the "internal development of Buddhist art and architecture," rather than the impact of foreign influences.[21] India, in other words, had its own "classical" roots on which to base its modernity. Coomaraswamy was not alone in his effort to develop alternative models for the study of art and architecture in India. British administrators like E.B. Hawell and Percy Brown similarly advocated for a more sympathetic approach to Indian art, celebrating its inherent qualities and encouraging Indian artists and intellectuals to return to earlier practices and images in the making of new and modern works of art. This inspired a sort of cultural renaissance in India, sometimes referred to as the Bengal Renaissance, with artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and Rabindranath Tagore experimenting with traditional forms as the basis for new modern works of art.[22] The style they developed fused elements of miniature paintings with Japanese wash techniques to create evocative and dreamy works of art, imagining India's unique cultural sensibility as part of an emerging pan-Asian universalism (fig. 0.9).[23] Buddhist images, architectural fragments, and legends feature prominently in works

[18] James Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*.
[19] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument: The Many Lives of the Sanchi Stupa." *South Asian Studies* 29, no. 1 (2013): 77-109; Peter H. Hoffenberg's *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[20] Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1896); Fergusson, James. *A History of Architecture in all Countries: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Murray, 1862).
[21] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image." *The Art Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1927): 287-328.
[22] Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*; Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-1947* (Reaktion Books, 2007); Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New" Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, "'An Indian Renascence' and the Rise of Global Modernism: William Rothenstein in India, 1910-11, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 152, No. 1285, Art in Britain (April 2010): 228.
[23] Shigemi Inaga, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth

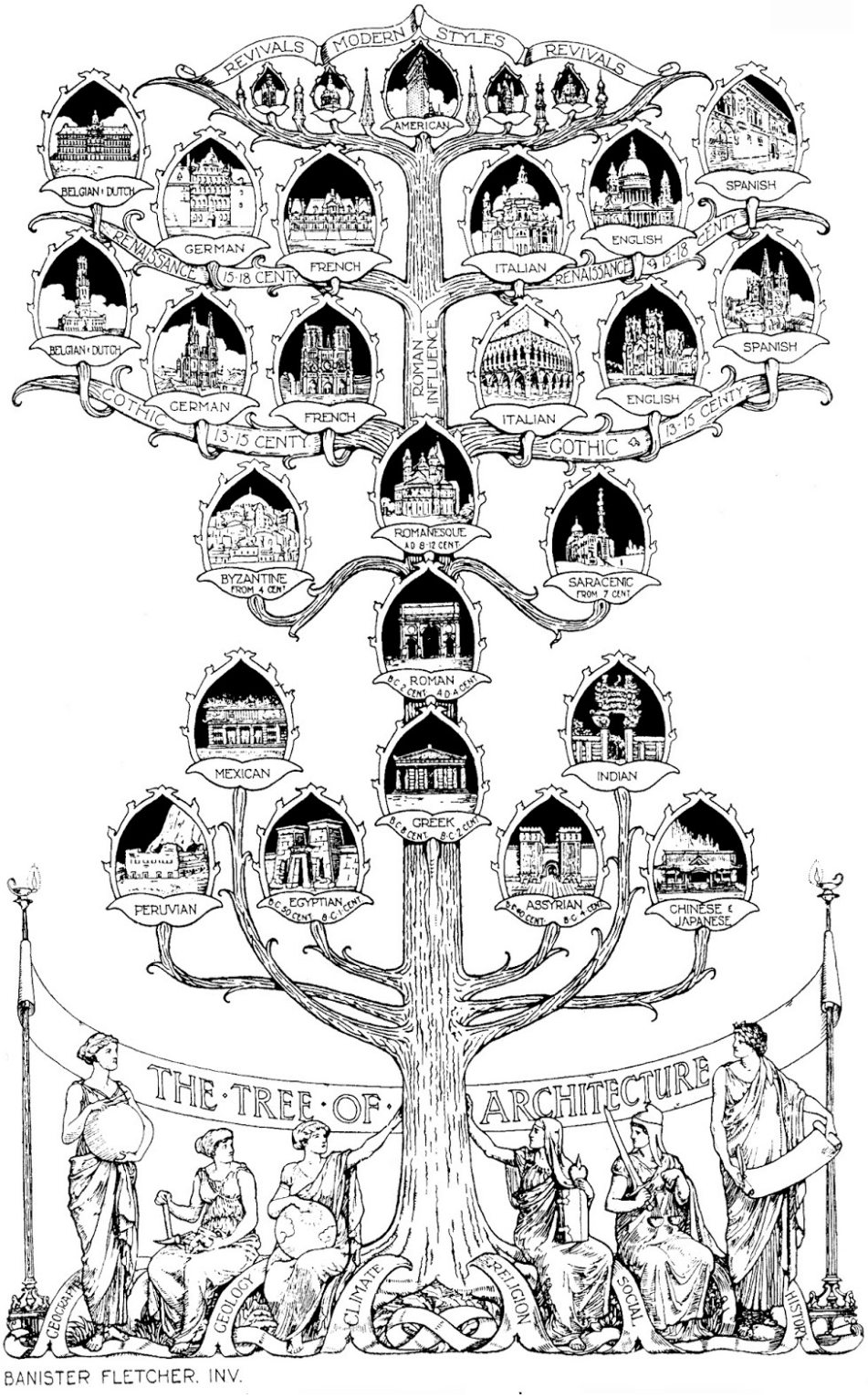
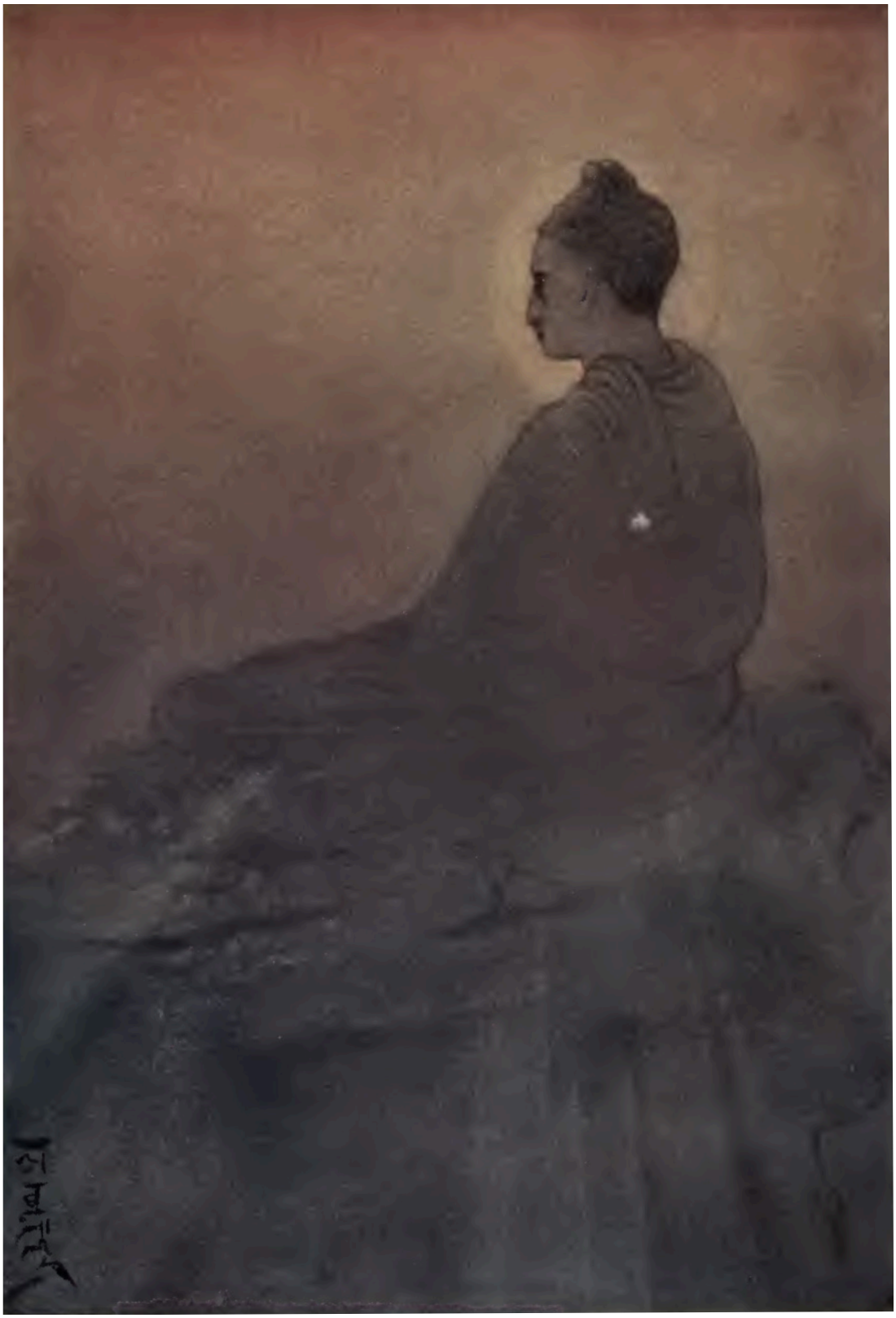


Figure 0.8: Banister Fletcher's "Tree of Architecture," from the 16th edition of *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman, and Amateur*, 1954.
Source: http://phylonetworks.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-tree-of-architecture.html, accessed September 29, 2018



Figures 0.9: "Victory of the Buddha," Nandalal Bose
Source: *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* (1914)

Figures 0.10: Shyamali, Santiniketan
Source: www.santiniketan.in, accessed September 29, 2018.

from this period, sitting alongside references to Hindu, Jain, Sikh and other religious traditions in the production of a modern Indian aesthetic. The same architectural features that were incorporated into many of these early works were folded into the designs of new institutions like Shantiniketan, founded by the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, which sought to develop an indigenous model for the modern education of Indians (fig. 0.10).[24] In all of these examples, Buddhist architecture, especially as part of a broader cultural revival of Indic cultural practices, was imagined as vital to the revival of India's core identity in modern forms, styles, and practices.[25]

Published in 1953, P.R. Ramachandra Rao's *Modern Indian Painting* offers an early study of modern Indian art, introducing audiences to "its directions and its hopes," through a

Century (1901-1945): Rabindranath Tagore, Arai Kanpō, and Nandalal Bose," *Nichibunken Japan Review* (2009): 149-181; Sugata Bose and Kris K. Manjapra, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[24] William Winstanley Pearson and Rabindranath Tagore, *Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranath Tagore* (Macmillan, 1916); U. Dasgupta, "Rabindranath's Experiments with Education, Community and Nation at His Shantiniketan Institutions," in *Tagore: At Home in the World* (Sage, 2013). I take the idea of "folding in" architectural references from Rebecca Brown's "Reviving the Past: Post-Independence Architecture and Politics in India's long 1950s." *interventions* 11, no. 3 (2009): 293-315.

[25] Osman Jamal, "EB Havell: The Art and Politics of Indianness," *Third Text* 11, no. 39 (1997): 3-19; Banerji, Debashish, "The Orientalism of EB Havell," *Third Text* 16, no. 1 (2002): 41-56; Richard D. Mann, "Material Culture and the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 8 (2014): 264-273.

discussion of works by some of the most well-known painters of the century.[26] Even on a quick inspection, it is clear that Buddhism is an important and prevalent theme. Images drawn from ancient Buddhist legends and precedents fill its pages, including a stylized etching of a Buddha's head at the start of the preface and modern works based on Buddhist themes. The text itself emphasizes Buddhism as a driver of modern and pre-modern Indian art, outlining its rich cultural heritage and impact on artists across Asia; "a golden age of painting as in being, centered in India but truly Asian in its orbit."[27] Even after the decline of Buddhism in India in the 12th-century, Rao continues, Buddhism exerted an important influence in the region, inspiring local practices and later styles.[28] In a few short pages, Rao manages to trace the dominant discoursers around Buddhism in India at the time and its links to modern artistic and aesthetic practices: Buddhism expressed a core aspect of India's "national cultural heritage," one which could be mined and adapted for the production of new works of art and architecture, even if it travelled and evolved through practices in other parts of Asia.[29]

Despite early studies that clearly identify the importance of Buddhism in the construction of national art and architectural aesthetics, the idea of modern Buddhist art and architecture—an Indian Buddhist modern—remains something of an anachronistic idea. There is a common perception that there is no such thing as a modern Indian Buddhist tradition, and thus there can be no national Buddhist forms of expression. Recent studies have challenged such perceptions. In their work on the subject, Gitanjali Surendran and Douglas Ober have both revealed a much longer and richer history of modern Buddhism in India than was previously thought. Their work also sheds light on the ways in which modern Buddhism in India is often connected with other social and political movements.[30] Modern Buddhist architecture in India developed in conversation with nationalist projects in India. Projects that embody the close association of Buddhism and Indian nationalist movements, however, have received little attention. Those structures that have been studied have largely been subsumed within other discourses, appearing as part of histories of modern architecture in India or in discussions of Buddhism's role in the creation of new institutional understandings of India.[31] While such studies offer important insights into the construction of modern nationalist ideologies, forms of representations, and

[26] Rao, *Modern Indian Painting.*
[27] *Ibid.,* 3.
[28] As Rao continues, "The brilliant chapter of Moghul painting did not altogether obscure the indigenous graphic expression; lineally descended from the frescoes of Ajanta, a miniature art flourished in the kingdoms of Rajashatan, in Bikaner, Jodhpur and Udaipur, but centered chiefly in Jaipur." *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.,* 9.
[30] Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism"; Gitanjali Surendran, "'The Indian Discovery of Buddhism': Buddhist Revival in India, c. 1890-1956," (Dissertation, Harvard University, 2013).
[31] Jon T. Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai, Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity--India 1880 to 1980 (Oxford University Press, 1997).

social and political practices, they do not always allow for a closer reading of how new spaces were designed and planned to reflect modern notions of Buddhism in India.

The lacuna that exists around modern Buddhist architecture in India suggests a gap in how we understand its role in the making of modern India. This is in part because of the enduring sense that Buddhism has no living presence in India. Buddhism is not, however, only a thing of the past. It has a modern life in India and around the world. In addition to the fact that there are modern Buddhist communities in India, Buddhism continues to be an important cultural and religious reference in ongoing debates over what defines Indian culture and identity.[32] Modern Buddhist art and architecture incorporates all of these influences into national and international forms of representation, engaging with the past while imagining the future. Consequently, Buddhist architectural references can often appear in unexpected places, from Hindu temples and shopping centers to government offices and national memorials.

This dissertation attends to the formalization of modern Buddhist art and architecture in India. It is not, however, a comprehensive survey. Instead, it focuses on the architectural developments that resulted from the intersections of Buddhism and Indian nationalist movements. At the core of this project is an understanding that the modern forms of Buddhism in India are connected to questions related to the nature of modernity in Indian. More than an incidental aspect of India's development, Buddhism was central to crafting key narratives around Indian modernity and national identity. Architecture became an important index of that process, defining a longer history of Buddhism in the region and generating spaces in which to imagine and realize new cultural, political, and religious approaches to India as a modern nation.

The Present History of India's Buddhist Past

There have been a number of insightful studies into the modern history of Buddhism in India. Many offer a rich analysis of the history of major pilgrimage sites and the curation of archaeological zones, delving into their history and modern significance. The work of Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Himanshu Prabha Ray are exemplary in this respect, exploring how the formation of modern institutions and core national identities were informed by the study of ancient Buddhist monuments and sites.[33] Scholars like Sraman Mukherjee have further built on such studies, highlighting how India's transformation from a colony into an independent nation resulted in new affective and structural engagements with Buddhism's material legacy

[32] Catherine B. Asher, "Belief and Contestation in India: The Case of the Taj Mahal," ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts 17, no. 1 (2009).
[33] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-colonial India* (Columbia University Press, 2004); Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*.

in the subcontinent.[34] Art and architecture feature prominently in the works of these scholars, embodying a process of incorporating elements drawn from ancient sites in order to construct modern spaces that reflect new cultural sensibilities.

Several important studies have also been done on specific Buddhist sites. Rick Asher has written about Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, and Sarnath, while Alan Trevithick and David Geary have focused specifically on Bodh Gaya and the Mahabodhi Temple as a site of interest for Buddhists around the world.[35] David Geary, Matthew Sayers, and Abhishek Singh Amar's volume of collected essays on Bodh Gaya stresses the importance of understanding the long history of Bodh Gaya as a contested site, approaching its modern history as part of ongoing debates over its status and role as a Buddhist pilgrimage center. Tara Doyle and C. Robert Pyror's articles in that collection focus on the unusually personal investment of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, in the development of Bodh Gaya after India's independence in 1947.[36] Such studies draw attention to the ways in which major political and nationalist leaders in India have engaged with Buddhism and Buddhist sites as fundamental elements in the making of modern India. They do not, however, always attend to the development of Buddhist sites as networks, or to the ways in which different structures were designed to emphasize connections between different Buddhist centers. Presenting a cohesive image of Buddhism in India was an important aspect of modern Buddhist art and architecture. It helped reify an idea of India as a united territory. New Buddhist networks also facilitated travel to different Buddhist sites. The network of guesthouses, transportation centers, museums, and institutions that developed over the course of the twentieth century made it easier to visit key sites, fostering a greater national and international appreciation of India's Buddhist past.

Modern Buddhist revival efforts in India have largely been framed as a cultural return to India; a Buddhist renaissance linked to India's independence. This was coupled with a growing global appreciation of Buddhist sites in India, which resulted from popular accounts of Buddhism in India and the wide circulation of photographs, publications, and exhibitions featuring examples of Buddhist art and architecture.[37] New methods for historically validating significant religious centers associated with the life and legacy of the Buddha and the unearthing

[34] Donald S Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[35] Tara Nancy Doyle, "Bodh Gaya: Journeys to the diamond throne and the feet of Gayasur," (Dissertation, Harvard University, 1997); Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya*; Frederick M. Asher, *Bodh Gaya: Monumental Legacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2008); Geary, David. *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site* (University of Washington Press, 2017).
[36] See Tara Doyle and C. Robert Pyor's essays in: David Geary, Matthew R. Sayers, and Abhishek Singh Amar, eds., *Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site: Bodh Gaya Jataka* (Routledge, 2012).
[37] Maria Antonella Pelizzari, ed., *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1900* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2003).

of relics further fueled foreign interest in India's Buddhist sites. Between 1851 and 1910, a series of relics were excavated in India. At first, relics were believed to hold no intrinsic historic value, and so they were presented to Buddhist representatives in other countries, while the caskets that contained them were kept in museums. Later, recognizing the potential of relics to foster cultural and political affiliations, the decision was made to keep the relics in India, leading to the creation of new temples built to facilitate the religious appreciation of the material remains of Buddhism in the subcontinent.[38]

Perhaps the most influential work in garnering global attention in India's Buddhist past was Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia.* Published in 1879, it had an incredible impact on how Buddhist sites in India were understood and how Buddhism was appreciated more generally. Just as importantly, it emphasized a disjuncture between India's Buddhist "golden age" and the current condition of Buddhist sites in need of restoration, reinforcing Orientalist perspectives of India as a land of forgotten ruins.[39] In 1886, Arnold's *India Rediscovered* was published, highlighting the poor condition of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya. Such works inspired the Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala from Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) to visit Bodh Gaya. In 1891, Dharmapala made it his life's work to restore the Mahabodhi Temple and revive it as an important Buddhist pilgrimage site.[40] To further that mission, he founded the Mahabodhi Society in India with the goal of raising awareness about the condition of Buddhist places in India through publications, tours, and lectures. The Mahabodhi Society would go on to construct some of the first modern temples in India, playing a significant role in the curation and management of important Buddhist centers in India. As Steven Kemper has shown, Dharmapala's efforts to revive Bodh Gaya as a major Buddhist pilgrimage site were highly personal. They also navigated competing universalist and nationalist readings of Buddhism, resulting in a peculiar and uniquely modern approach to Buddhism in India.[41]

While specific to its context, modern Buddhism in India developed in conversation with

[38] Sraman Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples: Relics, Ruins and New Buddhist Viharas in Colonial India," Archive Series 5 (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, January 2014). As one government official wrote in a memorandum related to the handing of a relic excavated in 1897 at Piprahawa (in the Basti District of northeast India, the relics were, "as rare as they are unique and would be regarded by all Buddhists as the most sacred and holy objects of devotion, and may be said to be the 'materialized" religion of Buddha in the world.'" Memorandum, National Archives 1898. Foreign Dept., External A, April 1899 (8?) Nos 92-117.

[39] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (*New York: Pantheon*, 1978); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (Routledge, 2013); Maria Antonella Pelizzari, ed., *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1900* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2003).

[40] Steven Kemper writes poignantly about this, drawing comparisons between the Buddha's vow not to rise from his seat in Bodh Gaya until he achieved enlightenment, and Dharmapala's vow at the same site not to rest until he had returned the site to Buddhist control. Kemper, *Rescued from Nation*, 51.

[41] *Ibid.*

broader trends towards Buddhist modernism. The term "Buddhist modernism" was coined by Heinz Bechert in the 1970s as a way to describe the religious reforms he noticed in South and Southeast Asia. In a similar vein, David McMahan describes the formation of global Buddhist modernism as follows: "an actual new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform…"[42] Heinz Bechert, Donald Lopez, David McMahan, and others have all written about the dramatic transformations Buddhism underwent as a consequence of colonial engagements with material and textual studies of Buddhism, and, just as importantly, how those encounters led to new, more localized approaches to Buddhism. As Buddhism become increasingly global, it prompted increasingly nationalist interpretations.[43] And while foreign influences have played a crucial role in Buddhist reform efforts and the development of Buddhist sites, as the work of Anne Blackburn and Steven Kemper have revealed, Buddhist reforms in Asia have also been driven by internal, rather than external, forces and agendas. Work still needs to be done, however, on the aesthetic developments attached to these different reform movements, and how they helped solidify or challenge emerging nationalist understandings of Buddhism and its historic landscapes.

Foreign interest in India's Buddhist sites stimulated a greater interest in Buddhism amongst Indians.[44] Despite the lack of an unbroken Buddhist tradition in much of India, a core group of intellectuals and social activists became interested in Buddhism's unique relevance for India and its implications for the country's national development. Similar to the kinds of reforms Buddhism experienced in other countries, Buddhist revival efforts in India participated in reform movements already underway. New Buddhist organizations facilitated alternative ways of defining the contours of Indian society, resulting in architectural forms designed to express shifting ideologies around India and Buddhism's place within it. The intersection of Indian Buddhist organizations and foreign communities resulted in a landscape populated by multiple structures, all embodying different approaches to Buddhism, but unified by a common emphasis on India as the land from which Buddhism originated and then spread across Asia.

Buddhism's historical spread across Asia played a key role in Indian nationalist narratives. This reached its height in notions of Greater India, which emerged as a popular idea about India's cultural impact abroad at the start of the twentieth century. Histories of Greater India remapped India's cultural impress around the world. As Susan Bayly argues in her study of the Greater India Society, it was the colonial survey of archaeological sites across South and

[42] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 4.
[43] Ray, *The Return of the Buddha.*
[44] See H.P. Ray's Chapter "Footsteps of Ashoka" in *The Return of the Buddha* for a thorough discussion of the excavation of Buddhist relics in India between 1851 and 1910 and the interest they garnered through publications around the world.

Southeast Asia that first stoked an image of India as the center of an expansive cultural field. The image of Buddhism's spread and impact abroad had a powerful effect, helping to craft nationalist identities through public engagements over archaeologically and religiously significant places.[45] Rooted "in narratives of collective loss and displacement",[46] appraisals of an Indic past "were shaped and debated in a rapidly changing context involving diverse and often painful interactions between the public and private spaces of the overseas Asian diasporas and those of the colonial metropoles." As Bayly continues, these debates centered on the re-appropriation of "critical engagements with anthropological theories of race, culture and civilization."[47] In other words, they harnessed the apparatuses of culture and knowledge production at the heart of the Indian empire to inform new localized identities. Buddhism played a surprisingly central role in such debates, providing an intellectual and material counterpoint to the impact of Mughal and Colonial influences in India.[48]

The increase in travel to India over the last hundred years has resulted in a new confluence of ideas around the nature of Buddhist sites in India and how they should be managed and developed. At times, such perceptions clash with local realities or interests. At other times, local and foreign ideas align, resulting in new architectural developments that reflect historic and modern cultural affinities between India and other parts of the world. Toni Huber's study of Tibet's shifting perceptions of India's Buddhist sites underscores the incredible impact foreign communities have had on defining the contours of India's Buddhist landscape, even from afar, and how conceptions of India that were nurtured for centuries by communities abroad have influenced the modern development of Buddhist centers in India.

The Tibetan impact on India's Buddhist landscape has been substantial, especially since the Cultural Revolution in China and the establishment of the Tibetan Government in Exile in India in 1960. Tibetan communities have played an important role in the construction of new Buddhist spaces in India, both at historical sites associated with the life of the Buddha and at new sites across India. An argument could be made that they represent an important component of modern Buddhist art and architecture in the region. I have, however, chosen not to address them in this dissertation, largely because of their enduring link to Tibet and the way the architecture of Tibetan Buddhist communities in India continues to reference Tibet as a political and religious space. While a study of Tibetan architecture in Indian would make for an interesting study, it is not the focus of this project. Instead, it is the purpose of this dissertation to explore those projects

[45] Susan Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 706.
[46] *Ibid.*, 707.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India* (Primus Books, 2010).

that imagine Buddhism as part of nationalist visions of India.

Buddhism has had more than a fleeting engagement with Indian nationalist movements. It has been fundamental to crafting national understandings of India's past and its modern role in the world. In her work, *The Return of the Buddha,* Himanshu Prabha Ray offers a compelling discussion of how major nationalist leaders in India engaged with Buddhism as part of their individual approaches to India as a nation. She pays particular attention to Mahatma Gandhi, often referred to as the father of modern India; Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India; and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the great social activist and hand of the Indian constitution. Often referred to as the trinity of modern Indian politics, Gandhi, Nehru, and Ambedkar each played a seminal role in shaping modern notions of India. They are the same three figures I focus on in this dissertation, using their engagements with Buddhism as a way to frame the broader periodization of this study.[49] Buddhism was not the sole focus of each man's political, social, and religious ideologies. However, Buddhism played a role in refining their distinct approaches to India as an emerging nation, articulating a specific understanding of India's past and the importance of that past for its future. As Ray continues, "For Gandhi, Buddhism was a cohesive force—dharma; for Nehru, it was a catalyst for change a progressive force; and for Ambedkar, it was the path to a caste-less society."[50] Even though there was some historical overlap between these three figures and their impact on Indian politics, culture, and society, it is possible to define distinct periods during which each figure's approach typified the dominant discourses around Buddhism in India at the time. Their approaches to Buddhism should not, however, be considered as totalizing. Instead, multiple and sometimes competing visions of Buddhism for India developed in conversation with each other during any given period. While organized around Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar, to emphasize the relationality of each period, the chapters are marked with a preposition: *with* Gandhi, *under* Nehru, and *after* Ambedkar. This was done in an effort to suggest that modern Buddhist architecture developed in relationship to the ideas and legacy of each nationalist leader, but also independently of them, marking a specific approach to Buddhism, but just as importantly, the effect that approach had on guiding the development of Buddhist architecture in India.

The centrality of Buddhism in nationalist art and architecture was crystalized in the use of Buddhist imagery for the official paraphernalia of the Government of India after independence in 1947. These symbols include the *chakra* or wheel in the center of the national flag and the

[49] As she writes, "Of importance to our narrative is the trinity of Indian politics, viz., Jawaharlal Nehru (1889– 1964) who had evolved a commitment to history and particularly that of the Buddha, Mohandas K. Gandhi who thought deeply about the relationship of Buddhism and Hinduism, but for whom the Bhagavad Gita was the cornerstone of his non-violence or ahimsa and B. R. Ambedkar (1891– 1956) who approached the past as a means of building a better future for the depressed classes." Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*, 213.
[50] *Ibid.,* 233.

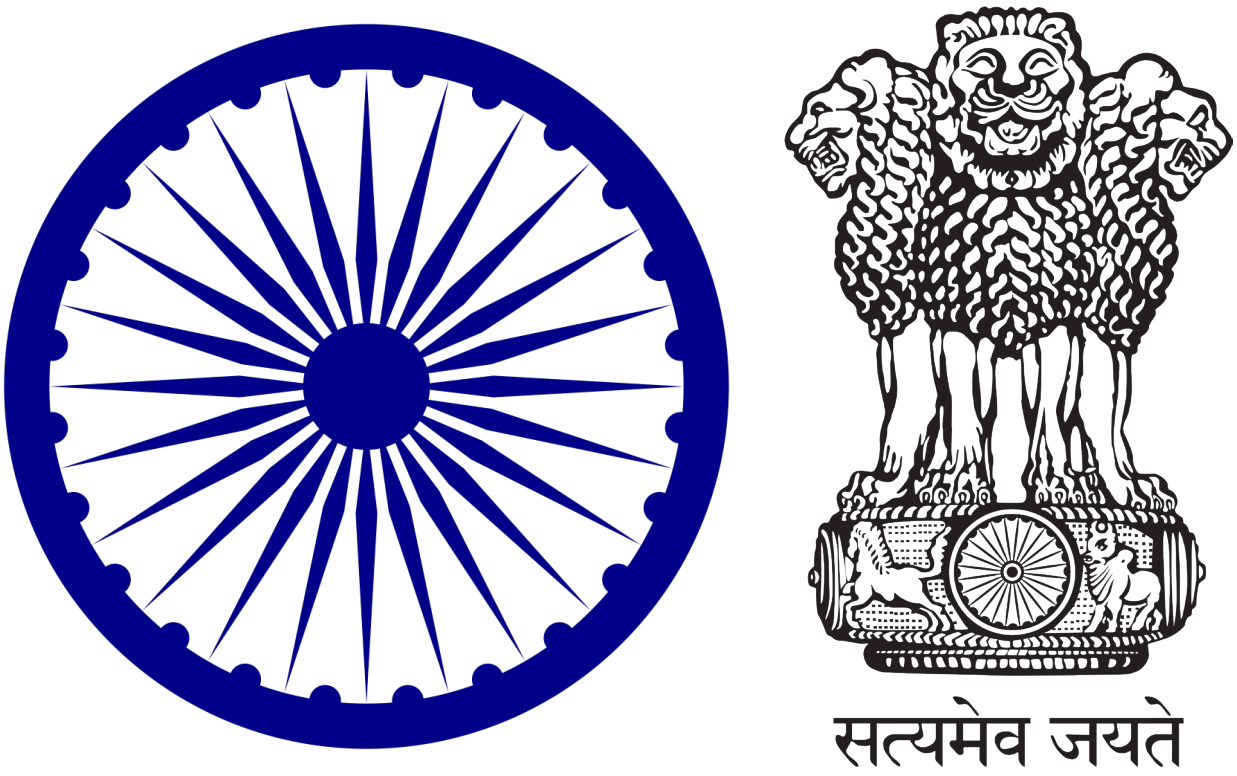


Figure 0.11, 0.12: Chakra on the Indian national Flag; Emblem of India
Source: Wikimedia commons

lion capital as the government's seal. Both are drawn from the famous lion pillar erected by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd-century BCE at Sarnath, the site of the Buddha's first teaching (fig. 0.11, 0.12). Buddhist symbols and imagery were similarly included in the Indian constitution itself.[51] The illustrations were produced by the well-known artist Nandalal Bose, who is sometimes credited as the founder of modern Indian art and whose work belies a deep interest in Buddhist art and themes.[52] Bose even travelled to the famous Buddhist caves of Ajanta just outside of Aurangabad, copying the murals there and the site as an important source of artistic and architectural inspiration.

The process of studying and copying ancient sites, especially Buddhist sites, became a hallmark of modern Buddhist art and architecture in India. The caves of Ajanta, like the architectural elements of Sanchi, were especially important artistic and architectural references, providing a historical basis for modern Indian aesthetics.[53] A clear example of this was the design of the Dharmarajika Vihara in Kolkata (then Calcutta). Inaugurated in 1920, the *vihara* was built

[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Dinkar Kowshik, *Nandalal Bose, the Doyen of Indian Art* (National Book Trust, India, 1985); Arundhati Dasgupta, "Buddhist Roots in the Art of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij," *Indian* 63, no. 1: 25.
[53] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*.

Figure 0.13: Dharmarajikha Vihara, Kolkata

by the Mahabodhi Society to house a set of relics excavated at Bhattiprolu. The building is an early attempt at an Indian classical architecture based on Buddhist precedents (fig. 0.13).[54] Clad in sandstone, the façade is dominated by two large *chaitya* arches referencing the famous design of the caves of Ajanta.[55] Inside, the main shrine room is designed after one of the *chaitya* halls at Ajanta, complete with murals by the artist Sri Sunil Chandra Datta.[56] Embodying the complex set of influences that resulted in the construction a modern Buddhist structure in India, the plans for the Dharmarajika were developed by a team of experts from different institutions and fields. The conceptual design was developed by Sir John Marshal, the director General of the ASI. A. Page, Superintendent of Monuments, Northern Circle, prepared the drawings for construction. Percy Brown, the Principle of the Calcutta Art School is said to have added some decorative touches, while Monomohan Ganguly, author of *Orissa and Her Remains* supervised construction.[57] Anagarika Dharmapala and other members of the Mahabodhi Society almost certainly weighed in on the design as well.[58] While the design of Dharmarajika Vihara developed several important artistic and architectural strategies that would influence later projects, it does not reflect an effort

[54] Tarit Kanti Roy, *The History of the Sri Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2012).
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] For a longer study of the survey and influence of Ajanta, see: John Keay, *India Discovered* (Harper Collins, 1988); Richard Cohen, *Beyond Enlightenment: Buddhism, Religion, Modernity* (Routledge, 2006); Vidya Dehejia, *Looking Again at Indian Art* (Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2017). For a more general discussion of the caves at Ajanta, see: Walter M. Spink, *Ajanta to Ellora* (Marg Publications, 1967).
[57] Roy, *The History of Sri Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara,* 11.
[58] Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples."

Figure 0.14: Plaque at the Bengal Buddhist Assocaition, Kolkata

to imagine Buddhism as part of a nationalist vision of India. Instead it reflects the complex set of negations around the handling of material remnants of Buddhism in India and how best to express them in new architectural designs. It also reflects a growing need to create spaces for religious observances of Buddhist sites in India, which would come to define later Buddhist projects.

The design of the Bengal Buddhist Association's headquarters in Kolkata represents a more overt production of a new national Buddhist aesthetic. The Association's Dharmankur Vihar was inaugurated in 1903 and is an early example of the revivalist style of architecture that would be developed by the architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee as part of a rising Hindu nationalism discussed in Chapter 1. Rather than a "classical" architecture used for the Dharmarajikha Vihara, the design of the Dharmankura Vihara brought together architectural references from different religious traditions, reflecting a new understanding of Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma—a popular idea at the time that all Indic religions were essentially different expressions of a single Indian ethos or philosophy (fig. 0.14).[59] Furthermore, the building celebrated a modern Buddhist community in India itself. This is attested to in a plaque next to a statue of the Bengal Buddhist Association's founder Mahasthavir Kripasaran installed in 1915. In its opening line, the plaque remembers Kripasaran as "the maker of modern Buddhist Bengal,

[59] John Zavos, "The Arya Samaj and the Antecedents of Hindu Nationalism," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 57-81; Kenneth Jones. "Arya Dharma: Hindu Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform." (1976); Anand A. Yang, "Sacred symbol and sacred space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riot of 1893," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 4 (1980): 576-596.

Figure 0.15, 0.16: Bengal Buddhist Association, front gate; Statue of Mahasthavir Kripasaran with plaque

whose advancement as a community is due entirely to his bold initiative and indefatigable energy" (figs. 0.15, 0.16).[60] The designation of a "modern Buddhist Bengal" is important because it signals the formation of a modern Indian Buddhist community. It is, perhaps, a small point, but in many ways, it indicates an important moment in the modern resurgence of Buddhism in India. The Maha Bodhi Society had never positioned itself as a representative of Indian Buddhists, or even of Buddhists in Bengal. Rather it had always presented itself as the representative of Buddhist interests around the world. The Bengal Buddhist Association, however, was established to foster a sense of a modern Buddhist communities in India, and to cater to the needs of that community, providing a space to meet and congregate, as well as a space that could express the unique cultural and religious history of modern Buddhists in the region.

It is important to understand that the debates over Buddhism in India were not isolated to India alone. Instead, the condition of Buddhist sites became an allegory for the condition of Asian communities under colonial rule. In other words, the rediscovery of Buddhism and its revival was one way of articulating an anti-colonial, and later post-colonial, rhetoric around emancipation and independence. As a result, modern Buddhism in India came to embody

[60] Plaque installed in 1915 at the Bengal Buddhist Association, Calcutta.

the unique tenor of the social and religious reforms taking place around it. Perhaps the most noteworthy for this discussion are the nationalist reform efforts that saw Buddhism as part of an expanded understanding of Hindu culture. This was not an entirely new approach to Buddhism. As Jacob Kinnard has written about, there is a long and surprisingly overlooked connection between Buddhist sites and Hindu ones, suggesting a complex relationship between the two traditions in modern and pre-modern times. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, however, Buddhism became part of modern nationalist narratives around India as a Hindu nation, signaling a new mode of articulating Buddhism's place in India and its relationship to Hinduism. Hindu reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj and later the Arya Samaj were popular drivers of social and religious reform and played a role in advocating for new approaches to Buddhism as part of a modern take on Hinduism.[61] As part of the call for a united Hinduism, Buddhism became an important element in an understanding of India as the land of the Arya Dharma or Noble Law. Modern understandings of the Arya Dharma in India held that Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism were all essentially different expressions of one core Indic religion, imagining the nation as both a political and religious territory linked through religious, racial, and geographic affinities. As Christophe Jaffrelot has discussed in his study of Hindu nationalist movements, the perception of different religions as part of the Arya Dharma bolstered anti-colonial rhetoric around framing the diverse cultures and regions of the subcontinent as All-India.[62]

Tracing various systems of state machinery that have defined India, Christophe Jaffrelot has written about how Indian nationalists sought to return to more antiquated notions of India. Considering the use of the term *bhumi* (literally "ground") as a term referring to both physical and conceptual notions of territory, Jaffrelot makes an argument for how the ground of India became a sacred and political entity; the *bhumi* of the nation. We see this in modern Buddhist art and architecture in which India is presented as an evolving landscape—a *bhumi* transformed by different readings of Buddhism within evolving notions of the nation. At times, India is understood as a playground or battlefield, the *ranga-bhumi* of Hindu epics. At other times, it is imagined more explicitly as the land of the Buddha, a *Buddha-bhumi.* The material legacy of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka has been one of the most important references in defining India as a modern Buddhist religious and political territory. The emperor's turn to Buddhism and extensive building campaign came to serve as an important pre-modern imperial vision of India, one that,

[61] Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, *The Origin, Scope and Mission of the Arya Samaj* (Arya Samaj, 1954); Dhanpati Pandey, *The Arya Samaj and Indian Nationalism, 1875-1920* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1972); Norman G. Barrier, "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894–1908," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 3 (1967): 363-379.
[62] Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

importantly, predated Mughal and colonial rule in India.[63] Ashoka's famous edicts—etched in tall stone pillars and erected across the subcontinent—defined an expansive religious and political terrain, reified through architectural elements and monuments. It was understood, in other words, to represent a proto-nationalist space that could serve as a model for India as an emerging nation. Nehru, especially, came to adopt the role of a modern-day Ashoka, infusing his policies and development schemes with Buddhist principles and designs drawn from structures associated with Ashoka and the Mauryan Empire.

Despite the importance and recurrence of Buddhist architecture in India, there have been no thorough studies of its modern architectural expressions. Examples of Buddhist architecture do appear in surveys of modern Indian architecture such as Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai's *The Architecture of India* and Rahul Mehrotra's *Architecture in India Since 1990*. Such works consider modern Buddhist structures within a broad survey of the development of modern architectural practices. They do not, however, reflect on the unique transformations that took place in modern Buddhist art and architecture or their role in defining new religious and political visions of India as a cultural field, nation, or *bhumi*. Gary Tartakov's work on the visual and material cultures of new Buddhists in India is a rare exception. The focus of his study is, however, exclusively on the architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement—a form of Buddhism established in 1956 when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and several hundred thousand ex-Untouchables converted to Buddhism as a way to escape the caste system. Gary's study does not offer a longer narrative around the development of modern Buddhism in India. This project takes a broader view, addressing the development of modern Buddhist art and architecture as part of debates over Indian national identity and evolving national styles.

Organization

This dissertation is framed around a series of entrances into the modern Buddhist spaces of India by nationalist figures who impacted the development of new Buddhist spaces in India. Each entrance is imagined as a physical and ideological engagement with Buddhism related to specific visions of India. To ground each chapter, I focus on the development of new Buddhist works in art and architecture in conversation with the national agendas of Gandhi, Nehru, and Ambedkar.

Chapter 1 attends to the development of modern Buddhist art and architecture as part of

[63] Romila Thapar has written extensively on the emperor Ashoka, often in the context of remembering Ashoka in the present. Her works include: "Ashoka—A Retrospective," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2009): 31-37; "The Mauryan Empire in Early India," *Historical Research* 79, no. 205 (2006): 287-305; "Historical Memory Without History," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2007): 3903-3905; and *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History* (Aleph Book Company, 2014). See also: Charles Allen, *Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor* (Hachette, 2012).

a budding Hindu nationalism. It begins with Gandhi's role in the inauguration of a new Hindu temple complex in India, looking at how Buddhism was reimagined within a more inclusive understanding of Hindu culture as the Arya Dharma. Moving beyond recreations of ancient monuments as the expression of empire to the production of modern typologies as the basis of a rising nationalism, the chapter surveys the development of Buddhist art and architecture as part of a Hindu revivalist aesthetic championed by the architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee. New works from this period, related to, yet ideologically differentiated from Indo-Saracenic architecture, attempted to make the past modern by reading ancient precedents as the basis for new contemporary approaches to vernacular art, design, and urban engagement. The public of these projects was similarly novel, informing an image of the subcontinent as "all-India," and framing Buddhism as part of a modern religious commons defined by the confluence of Hinduism and Buddhism within a mapping of the region as "Greater India."

Chapter 2 focuses on Buddhist art and architecture constructed in India after its independence in 1947, framing their development according to Nehru's national and international policies. Premised on the idea of fostering cultural unity and world peace, designs were laid for positioning India as a hub for religious pilgrimage, tourism, and international understanding. Rather than one unified style, this period of India's Buddhist modern was typified by a variety of projects, including Japanese funded monuments for world peace, the construction of a memorial to the 7th-century traveler Xuanzang in Nalanda, and Upendra Maharathi's designs for Nav Nalanda Mahavihar. These projects marked a pivot toward an international reading of Buddhism as an antidote to imperialism, setting the stage for later developments in modern Buddhist art and architecture in India as a response to social and political issues, especially caste.

Chapter 3 marks a break from earlier approaches to modern Buddhism in India. It opens with a description of the mass conversion Dr. B.R. Ambedkar led to Buddhism in 1956. In a shift away from earlier approaches to Buddhism as part of more inclusive vision of India as Hindu nation, Dalit Buddhist art and architecture was defined in contradistinction to Hinduism. New aesthetic practices developed to express this break, proposing alternative building typologies and visual strategies that drew from national and international sources to generate highly visible public displays of Dalit and Buddhist identity. By contextualizing the aesthetic trends and developments of the Dalit Buddhist movement within the social and political ambitions of Ambedkar, it is possible to see how ancient Buddhist architectural precedents were used as part of the Dalit Buddhist movement's effort to create alternative social, political, and religious spaces in India.

While many of the Buddhist centers and structures discussed throughout this dissertation suggest multiple separate networks, they are increasingly linked through new political alliances

and through the movement of people between them. By way of conclusion, I consider how pilgrimage, especially by foot, has become an important statement of both political and religious affiliation, linking previously disparate collections of sites in new constellations across India. Opening with a brief discussion of a group of Buddhists I encountered in Nagpur as they were setting off on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, I conclude with a discussion of how new pilgrimage practices in India are being used to remap existing Buddhist networks and as the basis for alternative approaches to heritage and conservation practices. Reflecting a shift in scale, Buddhist communities are increasingly looking at reviving entire landscapes, not just individual buildings or sites. Plans to develop these landscapes through new pilgrimage routes, emphasize an experience of those areas as the terrain where the Buddha lived and travelled by foot thousands of years ago. As pilgrims move between different Buddhist centers, and across increasingly large Buddhist heritage zones, they invariably encounter different structures and styles, many of which I discuss in this dissertation, suggesting a way to think about the disparate expressions of modern Buddhism in India as linked by a common interest in celebrating India's Buddhist past.

Chapter 1

With Gandhi

Chapter One—With Gandhi

Buddhism in the Playground of the Arya Dharma

On March 18, 1939, Mahatma Gandhi stepped across the threshold of the Sri Lakshminaryan Mandir, popularly known as the Birla Mandir, inaugurating New Delhi's latest temple (fig. 1.1).[64] He was accompanied by one of the temple's main sponsors, Seth Jugal Kishore Birla (J. K. Birla), the well-known industrialist and supporter of the Indian nationalist movement.[65] A large crowd had gathered there for the occasion and the grounds were filled with the prayers of priests broadcast over loudspeakers.[66] Gandhi had agreed to inaugurate the temple on the condition that it was open to all, regardless of caste or religion.[67] Plaques placed throughout the temple made the terms of this welcome explicit, stating: "This temple is open to all Hindus (including Harijans) subject to the proscribed conditions of cleanliness, full faith, and devotion." Translated as "children of God," the term Harijan was popularized by Gandhi as a new moniker for the lowest castes of Hindu society. Formerly known as Untouchables or the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and known today as Dalits, they were historically denied entry into temples and other public spaces.[68] The Lakshminarayan Mandir was one of the first temples to allow Dalits to enter.

[64] The temple's name appears in a variety of forms. On plaques at the site, it is referred to as the Sri Lakshmi Narain Temple. I will refer to it as the Lakshminarayan Mandir.
[65] For more on the history of the Birla family, see: Medha Kudaisya, *The Life and Times of G. D. Birla* (London. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Alan Ross, *The Emissary: GD Birla, Gandhi and Independence* (London: Collin Harvill, 1986); Madan M. Juneja, *The Mahatma and the Millionaire: A Study in Gandhi-Birla Relations* (New Delhi: Modern Publishers, 1993).
[66] Ober, *Reinventing Buddhism*, 222.
[67] See: http://www.delhitourism.gov.in/delhitourism/tourist_place/birla_mandir.jsp, accessed July 21, 2018.
68 I will use the term Dalit throughout this dissertation, unless it appears as part of a quote. For more on the term "Dalit" see: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, ed. by S. Anand with an introduction by Arundhati Roy (London: Verso. 2014), and Simon Charsley, "'Untouchable': What Is in a

Figure 1.1: Lakshminarayan Mandir, New Delhi
Source: Salil Sharma, 2013, wikimedia.org

Their welcome into its grounds and inner sanctums marked a concerted effort to rethink the contours of Hindu society as part of a growing nationalist movement.[69] The broadening of the temple's community to include "all Hindus" also reframed different religious traditions within an expanded reading of "Hinduism" as the Arya Dharma (fig. 1.2). Approaching Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism as offshoots of a single Vedic tradition or Arya Dharma, the temple expressed an amalgamation of cultures, traditions, and religions from across the subcontinent through designs intended to represent "all India."[70] This clustering of multiple traditions within a modern building designed to reflect an imagined community—an ethnically and religiously defined public—was vital to the revivalist architecture of the Lakshminarayan Mandir.[71]

Name?" *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 1 (1996): 1–23.

[69] In his dissertation, Ober goes on to argue that these temples might also have been built as a way to curb conversions to Buddhism by Dalits in towns such as Kushinagar. Ober, *Reinventing Buddhism*, 214.

[70] *Sampradaya* means "community" or "sect" but caries it with it the notion of a tradition as well. Mahendra Caturvedi, *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 197), 726, accessed online July 21, 2018.

[71] Christophe Jaffrelot writes compelling about the formation of different religious publics in India related to evolving religious and political discourses. For more see: Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2005), and *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation (with Special Reference to Central India)* (Penguin Books India, 1999). For more on discourses of the "public" see: Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public

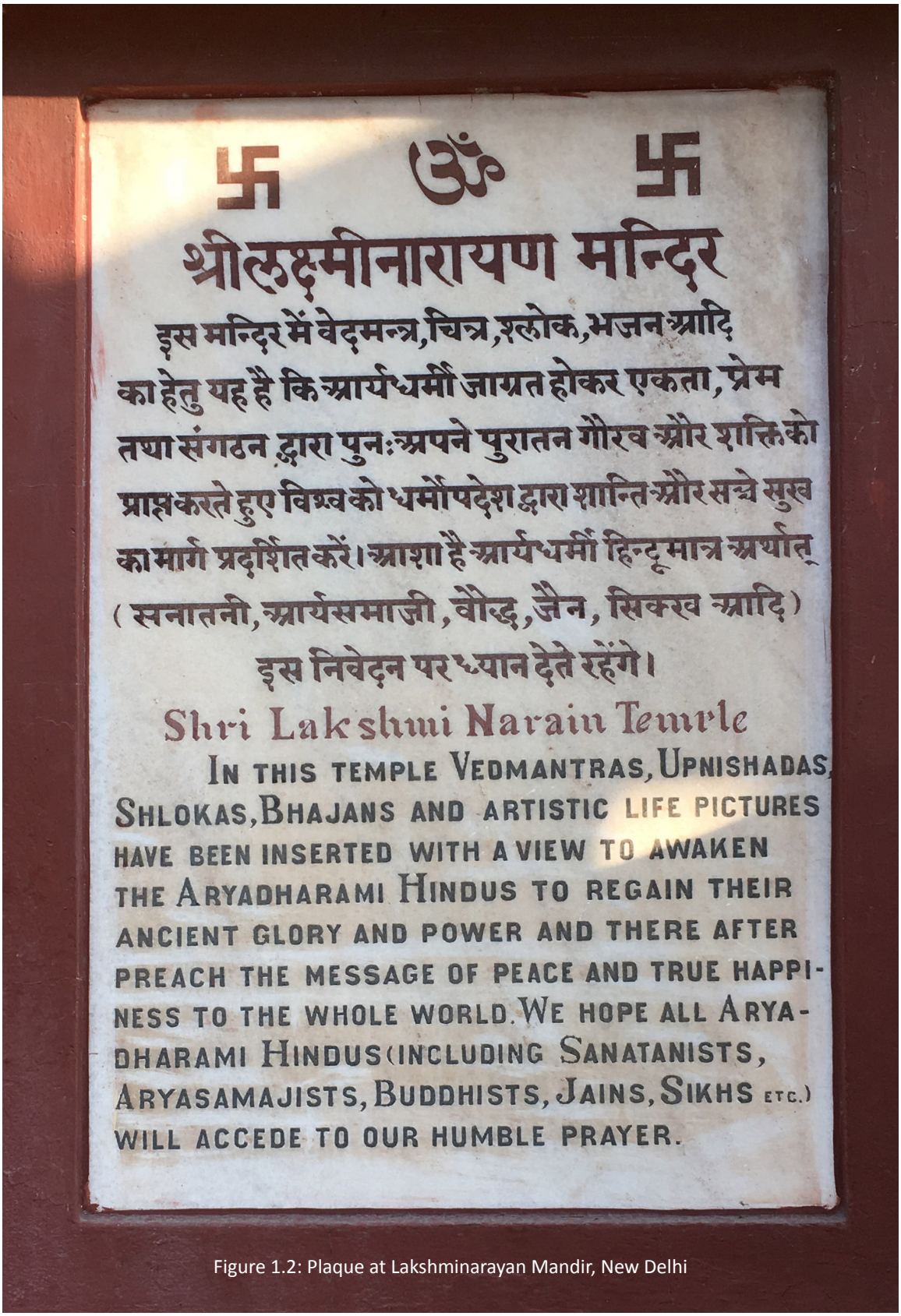


Figure 1.2: Plaque at Lakshminarayan Mandir, New Delhi

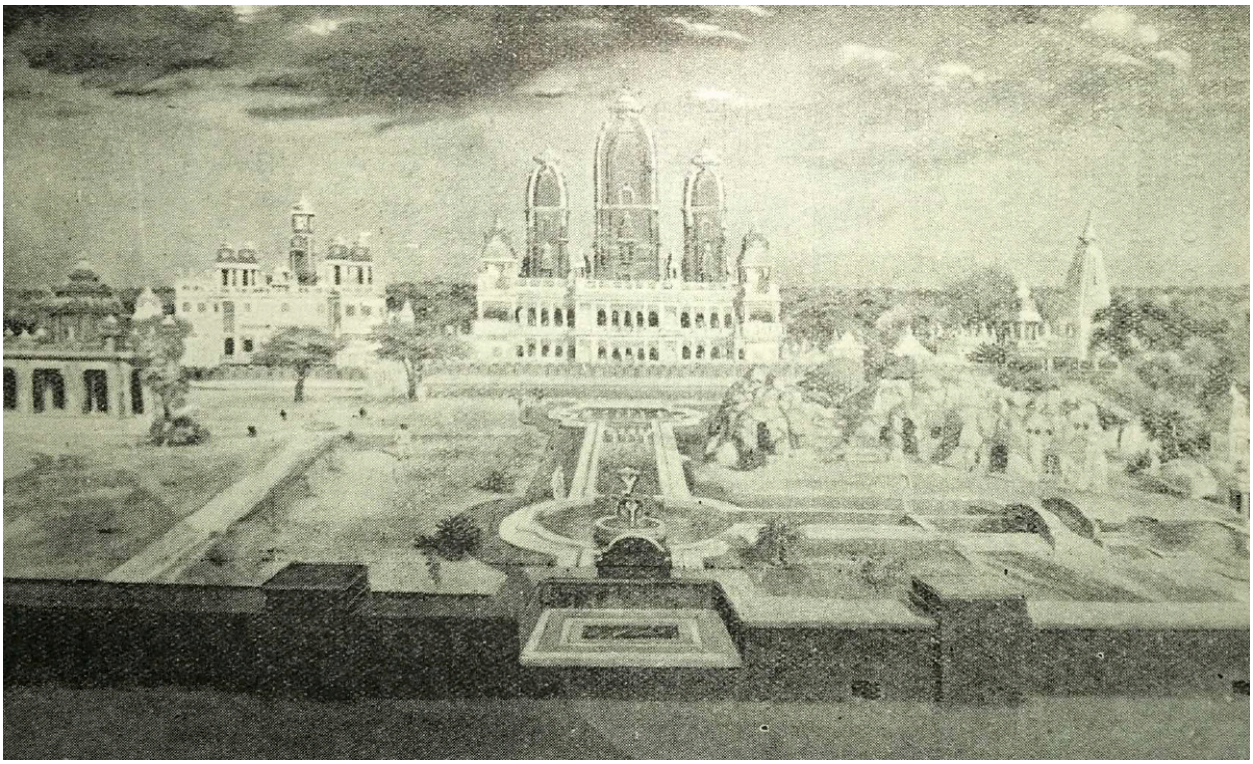


Figure 1.3: Lakshminarayan Mandir with the Buddha Vihar on the right and the All Hindu Mahasabha on the left
Source: *Glimpse of The Laxminaryan Temple, New Delhi: A Hindu Temple*. Arjun Press, n.d.

Expressing a "proud history" of Hinduism, the Lakshminarayan Mandir is immense. Inspired by Orissan temple architecture—such as the Ananta Basudeva Temple from the 13th-century CE—the temple's edifice is dominated by three spires or *shikaras*, rising above numerous smaller towers, domes, archways, courtyards, and covered walkways (fig. 1.3).[72] In pamphlets produced by the temple's management committee, the temple is praised as a modern symbol of religious and national pride linked to the Birla family itself: "The combination of the arts of sculpture, picture and idols are magnificent…there [are] no words to express…their uniqueness. The name of [the] Birla family in the field of [the] modern spiritual world will be as high as the sky scrapper head of the temple."[73] The celebration of the temple's height is a mark of its designer Sris Chandra Chatterjee's approach to a modern Hindu architecture. Called out in red, the main towers float above a lower level of highly ornamented covered walkways painted yellow and detailed with reliefs of lotuses, hanging bells, animals, and scriptures, including

Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* (25/26) (January 1, 1990): 56–80.; and, Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

[72] For a longer discussion of the architecture of the Laksminarayan Mandir, see Jon T. Lang et al., *Architecture and Independence,* 136.

[73] There is no date or author given on the handout produced by the management of the Lakshminarayan Mandir. I was given the file during a visit to the temple in 2016.

passages drawn from the scriptures such as the *Upanishads* and the *Dhammapada*.[74] The central spires of the temple give way to a cascade of finials and miniature kiosks, large rounded domes and curved roofs, and a maze of courtyards and passageways. The effect is an impression of scale: The temple reads almost like a condensed city.

Inside the temple grounds, plaques and friezes facilitate a reading of the temple as a complete representation of India's different communities and religious traditions, including representations of the Buddha and Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. One plaque placed on the exterior of the temple explains the temple's scriptural and iconographic program as follows: "In this temple Vedmantras, Up[a]nishadas, Shlokas, Bhajans, and artistic life pictures have been inserted with a view to awaken the Aryadharami Hindu to regain their ancient glory and power and thereafter preach the message of peace and true happiness to the whole world."[75] Buddhist architectural traditions are referenced through the pervasive use of *chaitya* arches and banded railings, as well as a set of small stone friezes at the entrances to the temple's gardens that depict multi-tiered pagodas with Buddhas shown seated within them. Inside the temple there are also large marble friezes depicting the Buddha.

The iconography and program of the Lakshminarayan Mandir work together to suggest an urban temple as a modern typology.[76] Its main elevation presents a preview of the building's program and varied parts: Two small temples ornamented with *chaitya* arches—the detailing of which suggests an interior vaulting designed to look like rays of the sun—are connected by a low railing that connects them to the temple's central gate. Called out in white, the entrance to the temple is emblazoned with plaques advertising its more inclusive definition of Hinduism and welcoming all "Arya Dharami Hindus."[77] The name of the temple is written above the main gate in Devanagari, another indication of the public imagined for the temple. Such gestures position the temple's construction within nationalist efforts to define Indian culture as Hindu culture, distinguishing it from Islamic and Christian traditions linked to the Mughal empire in India and later colonial rule by the British.[78] The main entrance leads visitors up a set of steep steps, past the shoe lockers and an office for "foreign visitors" to a court on the upper level.

[74] The contrast between the main towers and lower level is particularly striking in early black and white photographs.
[75] Plaque on the rear of the Lakshminarayan Mandir, New Delhi.
[76] There is of course a long history of approaching temples as public spaces and urban centers. What I hope to highlight here are the ways in which modern programs are brought into the temple complex and how those participate in the modernization of forms and structures.
[77] Plaque by the garden entrance to the Lakshminarayan Mandir. Included in figures.
[78] For more on debates over Devanagri as part of Indian nationalist movements, see: Christopher Rolland King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in the Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994); Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997); and, Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi public sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Figures 1.4, 1.5: Buddha Vihar, New Delhi; Inauguration Plaque, Buddhist Vihar, New Delhi

The Lakshminarayan Mandir is, in fact, not just one temple, but a series of temples brought together within a single compound. The main shrine room or *garbha griha* is dedicated to Vishnu and Lakshmi. Next to that are shrines for Shiva, Durga, Ganesh, Hanuman, and the various avatars of Vishnu. There is even a separate hall for Radha and Krishna, which includes a room of mirrors around a small idol of Krishna playing a flute. There are also shrines dedicated to Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain icons.

Buddhism is afforded a particularly prominent place in the Lakshminarayan Mandir. Images of the Buddha and quotes from the *Dhammapada* adorn the walls around the temple's innermost sanctum—lining the main *pradakshina*—alongside gifts from "[Buddhist] brothers," including a bronze bell from China and a large drum from Japan.[79] Further emphasizing Buddhism in the temple's larger iconographic program, a separate Buddhist temple known as the Buddha Vihara sits on the grounds adjoining the Lakshminararyan Mandir (figs. 1.4, 1.5, 1.6). Sharing a common wall, the grounds of the Lakshminarayan Mandir and Buddha Vihara were once linked by a walkway—since closed (fig. 1.7). When viewed from across the street—a view befitting the Lakshminarayan Mandir as a modern urban temple—the Buddha Vihara reads as another shrine inside the compound of the main temple complex, the station of the Buddha as

[79] Those gifts are still inside the temple. They are called out in the pamphlet "World Famous Birla Mandir," n.d.

Figures 1.6: Buddha Vihar with a view of the Lakshminaryan Mandir behind it, New Delhi

the ninth avatar of Vishnu perhaps, or a related outpost of the temple's complex.[80] In terms of its design and placement, the Buddha Vihara evokes a sense of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, inverting the relationship at that site where the graves of Hindu *mahants* are located next to the Maha Bodhi Temple,[81] blurring an easy reading of the site as either Buddhist or Hindu. In New Delhi, the Vishnu shrine is made the clear center of the religious compound, positioning Buddhism historically and religiously secondary to Hinduism.

The Buddha Vihara was given over to the Mahabodhi Society upon its completion in 1939, but it was funded by the Birla family as part of their construction of the Lakshminarayan Mandir. The *vihara* was also inaugurated by Gandhi the same day that he inaugurated the Lakshminarayan Mandir, suggesting they were planned as part of a single religious zone in New Delhi dedicated to the Arya Dharma. Meaning "noble law," Arya Dharma is often used to refer to different religious and philosophical traditions that originated in South Asia, specifically

[80] John Holt, *The Buddhist Visnu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004).
[81] Jacob N. Kinnard, *Places in Motion: The Fluid Identities of Temples, Images, and Pilgrims* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Figure 1.7: Closed walkway to the Buddha Vihar

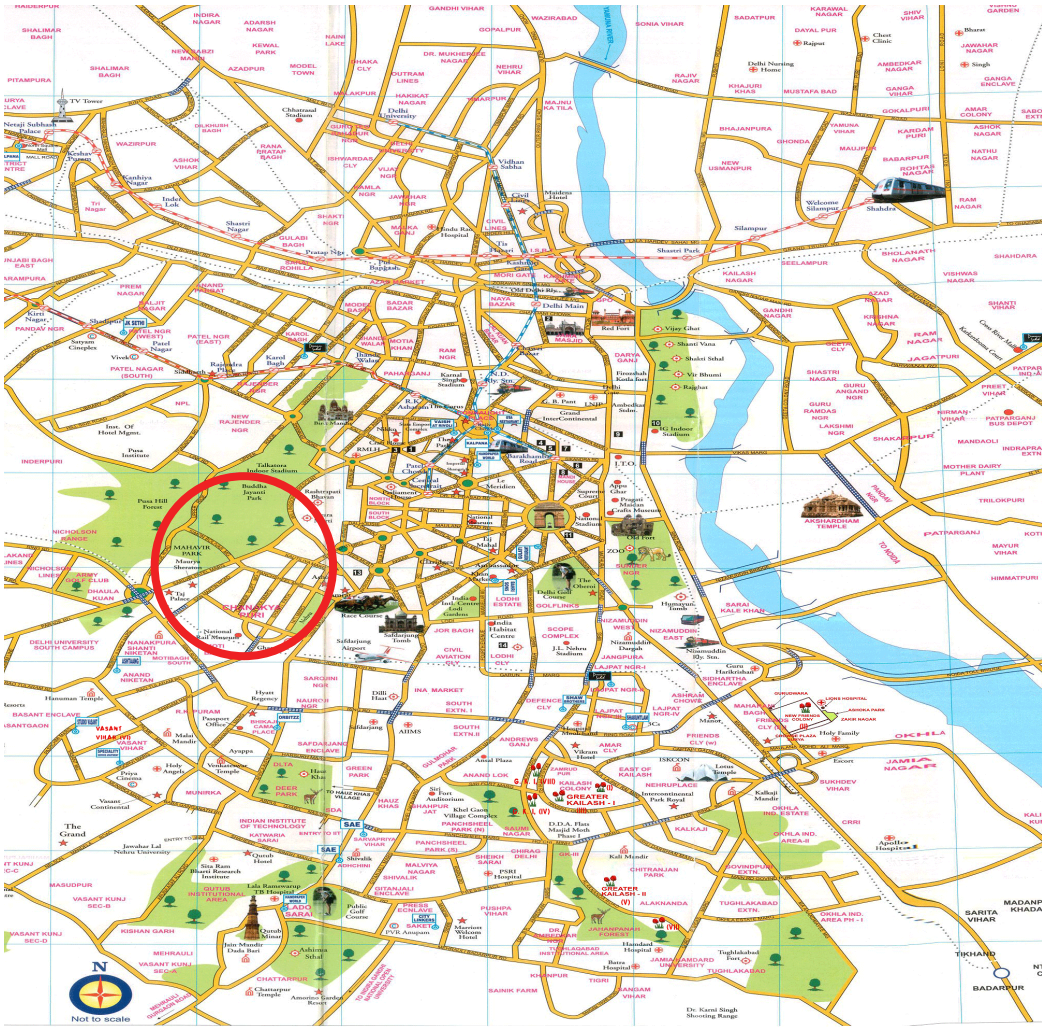
Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. At times during the twentieth century, it was used exclusively to refer to specific religious traditions, in which case Buddhism or Hinduism might be called out as a specific "Arya Dharma."[82] At other times, the term designated a reform model Hindu nationalism linked to the formation of societies like the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 and the Arya Samaj in 1875. In the context of the Lakshminarayan Mandir and adjoining Buddha Vihara, the use of Arya Dharma has a specific conation related to a search for core Indic cultural ideologies that could be used as the basis for imagining India as a Hindu nation.

During the inauguration of the Buddha Vihara, an expanded understanding of the Arya Dharma to include Buddhist communities in other parts of Asia was also emphasized. This was expressed in the opening ceremony, during which Mr. K. Yonezawa, Consul-General for Japan laid the first foundation stone in 1936. The opening ceremony was also attended by J. K. Birla, representatives of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, members of the Mahabodhi Society, the Reverend Fujii of the Nichiren Sect, and numerous others including "the scouts of the Birla High School in Subzji Mandi."[83] Speeches given during the ceremony emphasized the historic nature of the event and the close bonds between Buddhists and Hindus as "spiritual brothers." Speaking on behalf of "all Hindus," Mr. Harish Chandra, the Senior Vice President of the Delhi Municipal Committee and the president of the Delhi Provincial Hindu Sabha, stressed the large populations of Hindus he represented, while Mr. K. Yonezawa spoke on behalf of "all Buddhist," articulating the critical mass achieved by imagining the two populations as a single community.[84]

Buddhism was vital to imagining modern cultural and political alliances between India and other Asian countries. Links to Japan were especially celebrated during this period and nurtured through the construction of Buddhist viharas like the Buddha Vihara adjoining the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi. The power of Buddhism to suggest historical affinities between India and other parts of the world is one reason it was given so much prominence in the Lakshminarayan Mandir. The other is that it facilitated a broader effort to co-opt the historical and cultural legacy of Buddhism India, framing it as a more expanded Hindu nation or land of the Arya Dharma.

The Laksminarayan Mandir and Buddha Vihara in New Delhi were constructed as a way to bolster national pride in India by constructing prominent Hindu centers in major metropolitan centers.[85] Constructed at the edge of Edwin Lutyen's plan for New Delhi on Reading Road

[82] Anagarika Dharmapala, *The Arya Dharma of Sakya Muni, Gautama Buddha or The Ethics of Self Discipline* (Calcutta: The Maha Bodhi Society, 1917). Reprint from the University of Michigan Libraries collection.
[83] "Buddhist Vihara in New Delhi: Laying the Foundation Stone," *The Maha-Bodhi*, Vol. 44, No. 12 (December 1936): pp. 548-557.
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] J. K. Birla's speech during foundation laying ceremony of the Buddha Vihara stresses the importance of constructing the temple in New Delhi itself and the authority that gesture was afforded through an affiliation with Japan: "It



Figures 1.8, 1.9: Maps of New Delhi with Mandir Marg and the Lakshminarayan Mandir
Sources: Tulip House and Google Maps

(present day Mandir Marg or "Temple Boulevard"), the Lakshminarayan Mandir and Buddha Vihara define the boundary between the manicured boulevards of the "garden-city" and the ridge beyond the capital. Following the trajectory established by the Sikh *Gurudwara* that had been expanded by the General Sardar Bhagel Singh in 1783, the Lakshminaryan Mandir anchored a corridor of temples and religious centers that stretched from Connaught Place to the Buddha Vihara. Planned as a new epicenter of religious life just outside the capital city, the Lakshminarayan Mandir challenged the growing presence of Christian centers in the area, such as the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, a large red and yellow cathedral designed Henry Medd established in 1930, and St. Thomas Church and its related school established in 1933.[86] Under British rule, the Indian Government did not grant funds for the construction of India's religious centers, and so it fell to families like the Birla family to fund spaces for Hindus and other "Arya Dharmists."[87] In addition to funding the Lakshminarayan Mandir and Buddha Vihara, the Birla family also sponsored the construction of the All India Hindu Mahasabha on a property adjacent to the Lakshminarayan Mandir. The collection of structures they established along Mandir Marg was later extended to include an Arya Samaj Mandir, the Bhagvan Valmiki Mandir, and the New Delhi Kali Bari, creating a religious commons in New Delhi dedicated to the Arya Dharma. The presence of these buildings in the city was amplified by their unified aesthetic, ensuring that each building read as part of a collection of religious centers, rather than as individual religious intuitions (fig. 1.8, 1.9).

Over the course of several decades, the Birla family embarked on an ambitious building campaign across India. In addition to the temples and schools they funded in New Delhi, they also sponsored temples, guesthouses, hospitals, universities, and schools in places like Pilani (the home town of the Birla family), Mumbai, Kolkata, Varanasi, Bhopal, and Jaipur, to name but a few. In total, the Birla family has sponsored at least 14 major "Birla Mandirs" across India and numerous other projects. Those projects built before 1947 tended to follow a Hindu revivalist architecture style popular at the time as an alternative modern architecture for India. The architect behind most of the Birla funded projects before India's independence was Sris Chandra Chatterjee, "the prime mover" behind the Modern Indian Architecture Movement.[88]

is a matter of gratification and pride that for the first time in the history of India the foundation-stone of a Buddhist temple is being laid in the metropolis, the ancient and historic city of Delhi by the Consul-General of a powerful country like Japan." *Ibid., 555*. For a rousing discussion of Japan's influence on India see Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire* (New York: Picador, 2012).

[86] I. Vandevelde, "Reconversion to Hinduism: A Hindu Nationalist Reaction Against Conversion to Christianity and Islam," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *34*(1), 2001; 31-50.

[87] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 22.

[88] Lang et al., *The Architecture of Independence*, 131. Documents from the management committee of the Lakshminarayan Mandir temple emphasize the role of a traditional "shastri" in planning the temple, rather than Sris Chandra Chatterjee. As they write, "The foundation stone of this temple was laid by Maharaja Udaybhan Sing on 26th of

Chatterjee developed a Hindu revivalist architecture based on a pan-Hindu aesthetic that could speak to the political and cultural affinities between Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Hinduism. In *The Architecture of Independence* (1997)*,* Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai describe Chatterjee's work as "more of a pastiche than a synthesis of ideas," developed as a response to the work of "Anglo-Indian architectural firms," and especially Art-Deco, the International Style, and Indo-Saracenic architecture. Chatterjee had a long and distinguished career, designing structures for the Tagore's in Kolkata, serving as an advisor on the National Planning Committee, and working for the Public Works Department of Bengal and Bikaner.[89] His work for the Birla family, though, formed a particular cluster of structures related to a rising Hindu nationalist movement and a new framing of Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma. A study of Chatterjee's designs for the Lakshminarayan Mandir, for example, suggests a concerted effort to define a cohesive architectural style related to the Arya Dharma as a syncretic approach to Indian culture and religious practices. Chatterjee's goal was to create an architectural sensibility that could "reflect the soul of India'," bringing together Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist references.[90]

Chatterjee's designs for the Birla family are instantly recognizable. Distinguished by his use of bold colors and unique combinations of forms, they emphasize the Hindu temple as the ideal center of modern life and town planning in India. The detailing of spires and kiosks, and especially the use of *chhatri* as a repeated ornament on walls and roofs, are telltales of his work. They also reveal a certain indebtedness to Indo-Saracenic architecture. In what follows, I focus on Chatterjee's partnership with the Birla family to design and construct new Buddhist sites as part of a larger project to develop new Hindu centers across India. Exploring the development of Buddhist art and architecture within the advent of a Hindu revivalist architecture at the start of the twentieth century sheds light on Buddhism's changing context at the time. It also helps elucidate how the agenda of Buddhist revivalist missions such as the Mahabodhi Society began to overlap with Hindu nationalists movements as part of a growing anti-colonialism in Asia.

Modern Buddhist architecture in India underwent a dramatic shift during the first half of the twentieth century. A new alignment with the Hindu nationalist movement led to both aesthetic and spatial changes, resulting in a new style intended to reflect the confluence of Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions under the banner of the Arya Dharma. Beginning with an examination of Hindu nationalist architecture and the designs of Sris Chandra Chatterjee in Varanasi, I proceed to a discussion of the planning of Banaras Hindu University and its

March, 1933, under the guidance of eminent scholar pandit Vishwanath Shastrit with 101 other scholars the idol was laid with proper rites and rituals." From "World Famous Birla Temple," n.d. This narrative was corroborated in a meeting I had with S. K. Birla at the Birla Headquarters in Kolkata on December 12, 2015.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Lang et al., *The Architecture of Independence,* 132.

relationship to Sarnath, the site of the Buddha's first sermon.[91] In my discussion of Sarnath, I focus on the designs of the Mulagandhakhuti Vihara and neighboring structures, highlighting their role in transforming the small town and its archaeological site into a religious playground. I end by reflecting on "Greater India" as an expanded notion of India's cultural and moral territory.

The Playground of the Arya Dharma

The idea of India as a "playground" was a popular motif at the turn of the twentieth century. It provided an important metaphor of the subcontinent as an arena in which different "players"—colonial stake holders, Indian nationalists, farmers, and industrialists—vied for the right to determine the fate of the land and its people.[92] A famous example is Munshi Premchand's 1925 novel *Rangbhoomi* (Playground). As Manju Jain writes in the introduction to his English translation, exploring the novel as an allegory for the nation, "*Rangbhoomi* (which can variously be translated as playground/theatre/arena/stage/battlefield) is quite literally a veritable playground or battlefield of conflicting perspectives, ideological positions, discourses, genres, voices and linguistic registers that crisscross the novel."[93] Originally written in Urdu under the title *Cahugan-e-Hasti* (Arena of Life), the novel was renamed after its publication in Hindi. As Jain's discussion of Premchand's work makes clear, the notion of a cultural playground or *rangbhumi* moves between a variety of registers.[94] While "battleground" and "arena" are both alternative translations of "rangbhumi"—and indeed the notion of a conflict or battle underscores the idea of India as a playground during this period—Jain's choice of "playground" for his translation highlights the performativity of each character. For consistency, I will similarly tend to use "playground" throughout this chapter, even though at times terms such as battleground or arena might seem more appropriate. In each case, I use the term to emphasize a certain abstractness to the idea of "India" as a religious and political space, an arena in which a quest for independence could be enacted or waged not just in politics, but also in religious choices, quotidian life, and aesthetic decisions related to art and architecture.

There is a long history of appreciating the different landscapes of India as a religious playground; a terrain animated by the dalliances of gods and men. From the *Ramayana* enacted across India in plays known as *Ramalilas*, to the depictions of Krishna drawn from the *Bhagavata Purana* in performances and images known as *Raslila*, an intimate relationship is

[91] Dharmapala, *The Arya Dharma of Sakya Muni.*
[92] Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (University of California Press, 1994), 71-72.
[93] Munshi Premchand, *Playgound: Rangbhoomi*, translated by Manju Jain (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), xiii.
[94] Jain's translation of Premchand's work transliterates "*rangbhumi"* as "*rangbhoomi*." For consistency, I will use *rangbhumi* throughout this dissertation, unless referring directly to the title of Jain's translation.

Figure 1.10: Gita Mandir, Mathura
Source: brajdiscovery.org

imagined between the divine and the terrestrial grounds they move through. The most famous example of this is, perhaps, the landscape of Braj and its association with the life of Krishna. His entire life is mapped out in the cities and countryside, from his birth near Mathura and his youthful escapades with the *gopis* (cowherd women) in the forest to his life as an urban gentleman in Vrindavan.[95] Reenactments of these events in staged productions and daily rituals are a way of increasing one's devotion to Krishna and to the land itself.[96] It is not coincidental that one of the first Birla Mandirs dedicated to the Arya Dharma was a Gita Mandir near Mathura, the city famed as the site of Krishna's birth. Constructed one year before the opening of the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi, the temple is easily recognizable as a Birla Mandir, establishing many aesthetic precedents that will be followed in later projects (fig. 1.10). These

[95] See: John Stratton Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and, Cynthia Packert, *The Art of Loving Krishna: Ornamentation and Devotion* (Indiana University Press, 2010).
[96] "*Lila:* (*nf*) sport, play; amorous sport; fun and frolic; stage representation [of the deeds of divine incarnations]." Mahendra Catuvedi*, A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary,* 677.

include painting the temple red and yellow, ornamenting the building with motifs of hanging bells, lotuses, and *chaitya* arches filled with rays of light, as well as incorporating numerous spires and kiosks that are the hallmark of Chatterjee's designs for the Birla family.

Chatterjee's designs were an attempt to create immersive environments in which visitors could experience India as a sacred playground. In that sense, they fulfill a very traditional role as mediating zones between the sacred and the mundane. In *India: A Sacred Geography*, Diana Eck focuses on early conceptions of "India" as a unified terrain in art, architecture, and literature. Focusing on pilgrimage sites known as *tirtha* or crossings—places that bridge the sacred and the mundane—she explores the formation of a "three-dimensional" understanding of the subcontinent through different religious and aesthetic modes, resulting in a conception of a territory predating a conception of modern India.[97] Drawing on the work of Sheldon Pollock, Eck goes on to discuss how early Indian literature generated a "geographic mode" through repeated references to specific areas and features of the landscape, creating "a basic framework for structuring cultural knowledge."[98] While this "sacred geography" may not align perfectly with the modern political territory of India as a nation-state, it does suggest a certain cohesive image of the subcontinent as a cultural zone. Chatterjee's designs for the Lakshminarayan Mandir evoke a sense of this pre-modern space. More than that, they attempt to actualize it through buildings that can be moved through and imagined, bridging not just the sacred and the mundane, but also the past and the future.[99]

Under colonialism, the different religious and literary understandings of the subcontinent were brought into conversation with new archaeological, historical, ethnographic, and geographic studies, resulting in a modern understanding of India as a culturally, ethnically, geographically, and religiously reified territory.[100] In *The Goddess and the Nation* (2009), Sumathi Ramaswamy writes compellingly about how these multiple figurations of the subcontinent led to a new trend to picture India as a divine figure known as Bharat Mata or Mother India.[101] Exploring the relationship between modern aesthetic practices and religious beliefs gave rise to a vision of the nation as a divine "geo-body," Ramaswamy lays out the various visual strategies that developed to represent the nation as a goddess. The Bharat Mata Mandir in Varanasi is a clear example of how understandings of India as a divine "geo-body" were celebrated in the construction of new temples (figs. 1.11, 1.12). Inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1936, the temple was built to

[97] Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (Harmony, 2012), 43.
[98] *Ibid.*, 54.
[99] Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," 6-37.
[100] As Eck writes, "The important point is not that there is an all-India unanimity on India's sacred geography, but rather that for well over two thousand years the landscape of India has been made three-dimensional by the power of myth, narrative, and pilgrimage." Eck, *India*, 57.
[101] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Duke University Press, 2009).

Figure 1.11, 1.12
above: Bharat Mata Mandir, Varanasi
Source: Manuel Manel, 2011
below: Bharat Mata Mandir, exterior
Source: Hiroki Ogawa, April 5, 2015

house a large marble relief sculpture of the subcontinent. Providing multiple viewing platforms, the temple encourages visitors to approach the nation as a religious icon. While it presents a clear image of the geography of India, the temple does not present a nuanced reading of India as a collection of sites related to different religious traditions. In other words, it does not create a space where India can be entered into as a religious playground or arena.

The Lakshminarayan Mandir and other temples constructed by the Birla family offer a chance to enter a space imagined as an idealized vision of India; the grounds of the Arya Dharma. Working to form an image of all-India as the amalgamation of different cultures and religious traditions, the incorporation of a diverse set of architectural styles into each temple allows visitors the chance to move through the varied arenas of India's geography and past, experiencing them as religious grounds. The mirrored shrine room dedicated to Krishna at the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi is an example of how visitors are invited to see themselves as part of a religious field, seeing their own image reflected alongside multiple reflections of the icon. The gardens around the Lakshminarayan Mandir are an even more explicit example of the temple as a playground, incorporating structures designed for performances and for children to play and wander.[102]

In 1943, the gardens around the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi were expanded into a garden known as the Indraprashta Dharma Varika. The garden's layout and planning emulate the shape of India itself. While the plot does not actually follow the contours of India, the landscaping emphasizes the correlation between a map of India and the gardens. Two groves of trees, planted at the western edge of the garden, transform the simple *char-bag* garden into a rough outline of the subcontinent. Approaching the garden as a map of India, the fountain running through the garden acts like the cardinal markers of a map, or the longitudinal and latitudinal lines that bisect maps of the subcontinent.[103] In a site directly facing the Lakshminarayana Mandir—in what is the true west of the garden, but presented as the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent—is a temple designed to look like a South Indian temple. Not far from the garden's "South Indian temple," there is a small replica of a temple built in Java in the 8th-century. A small inscription at the base of the temple identifies it as "A view of an old Hindu temple of Vishnu in Java (Yavadweep) built by Maharaj Kirtivarma who was the king

[102] In *The Nationalization of Hindu Tradition,* Vasudha Dalmia writes about how Hinduism was reimagined as part of the nationalist movement. Surveying a larger reform of artistic and cultural practices, especially in Varanasi, she describes how new literary practices were developed to inspire national pride, or an aesthetics of "the love of nation." Birla funded monuments approached that issue architecturally. They were designed to inspire national pride through architectural strategies designed to rouse religious devotion and a sense of civic grandeur.

[103] There is an interesting relationship between efforts to map India and religious reform movements that deserves longer study. In Mussourie for example, the site of the GSI sits next to an Arya Samaj Mandir. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

of Java those days." Situated within a grove of trees planted to suggest the Indian Ocean, the miniaturized temple is similar in design and style to the South Indian temple nearby, highlighting the strong historical connections between India and other parts of Asia, and mapping out a cultural territory referred to at the time as "Greater India" (fig. 1.13).

Emphasizing a sense of playfulness and adventure inside the gardens, architectural features like the small replica of the Hindu temple in Java were not intended to be viewed from afar. Instead they were positioned so that visitors would discover them while exploring the garden, heightening a sense of the temple gardens as a playground. This aspect of the garden is even more apparent in "Shiva's abode," which was designed as a set of "mountains" and "caves" that children could run through and climb over. Representing the "North" of the Indian subcontinent, at the top of the garden—true East—there are a set of concrete "mountains" built to represent the Himalayas as the abode of Shiva. Their religious significance is made explicit through signs and images, as well as through the inclusion of a shrine dedicated to him in one of the caves. The "Himalayas" constructed in concrete at the top of the garden give way to the "plains of India," complete with a shrine dedicated to the Buddha and a *lingam.* This sequence of shrines and icons recreates the trajectory of the Ganges River from the Himalayas through the Gangetic Plains to Varanasi and out to the sea, mapping an evolutionary and geo-spatial approach to Hinduism that traces the development of the Arya Dharma from its presumed early Vedic origins through Buddhism to its practice as part of a modern reform Hinduism.

Throughout the garden of the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi, religion and history are brought together through a sense of play. Visitors are encouraged through architectural features and planning to explore, enjoy, and relax in the garden, seeing themselves as part of the epic landscape of India. In addition to the features mentioned above, there is also a site for ritual sacrifices, a drama house, and numerous large sculptures of elephants, chariots, and historical figures throughout the garden. The effect is a space that is both playful and informative, religious and mundane. In her study of the garden behind the Lakshminarayan Mandir, Kajri Jain draws particular attention to the use of material and visual cues to convey "a sense of archeological historicity through abundant inscriptions in the manner of ancient monuments, and freestanding red sandstone signs reminiscent of Archeological Survey of India signage."[104] These cues to the garden's "historicity" are brought to bear on allusions to Indian epics, especially the history of the Pandavas, or the five brothers who are important characters in the *Mahabharata.* The garden's name is a direct reference to Indraprastha, the famed capital city of the Pandavas, believed to be located near to the modern city of New Delhi. The gardens are filled with

[104] Kajri Jain, "Tales from the Concrete Cave: Delhi's Birla Temple and the Genealogies of Urban Nature in India," *Places of Nature in Ecologies of Urbanism*, edited by Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2017), 122.

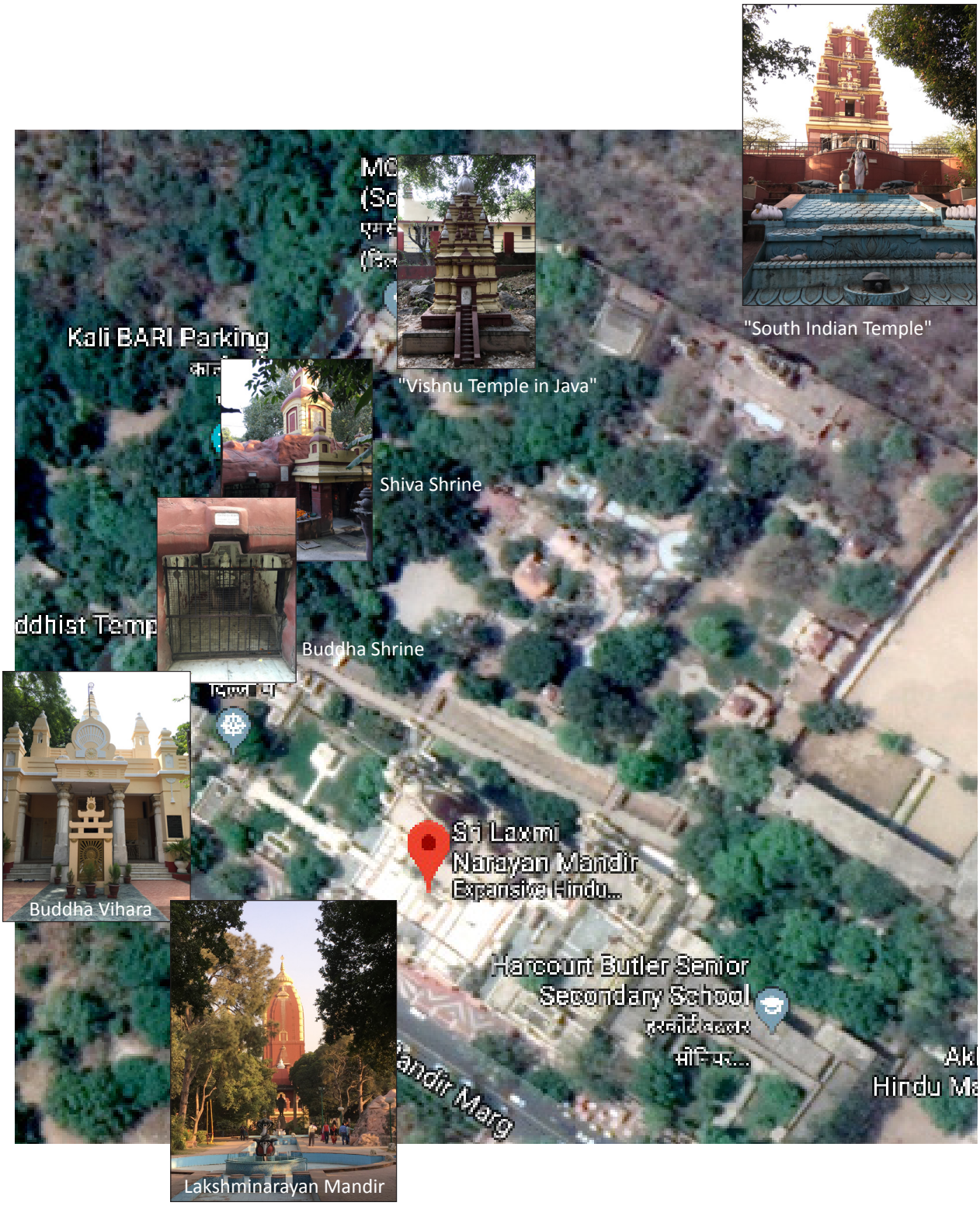


Figure 1.13: Lakshminarayan Mandir and Indraprashta Dharma Varika
Source: Google map; photos by author

sculptures and plaques commemorating the activities of the Pandavas, further immersing visitors into an approach to the landscape as playful, historical, and mythical.

The experience of the Lakshminarayan Mandir as a site for devotional training and leisure is amplified by its position outside of the city center. The temple complex lay far enough outside the main areas of Delhi at the time of its construction to require a day trip for most visitors, something like a mini-pilgrimage.[105] Through designs that transformed the temple and garden into a space of "play,"—where visitors could enact different visions of themselves and the nation—temples like the Lakshminarayan Mandir were designed to afford visitors the chance to experiment with different visions of themselves as part of modern and premodern imaginaries of India. Drawing on the work of Christopher Pinney, Jain goes on to discuss how visitors to the garden often engage with local photographers to recreate a vision of themselves in alternative settings, making it as much a space of "fun" as a space of worship.[106] Christophe Jaffrelot writes about this as a mimetic dimension that moves between the co-option of certain modern Western practices and a presumed historic Golden Age, creating spaces for discovery and education.[107] In other words, the gardens serve as a space in which an idealized vision of India as a mythic land can be experienced as a real and modern space. The garden and temple work together to project an image of a timeless territory, interjecting elements designed to foster a religious devotion to the nation as a sacred and political space.

In his study of the Hindu nationalist movement, Jaffrelot writes explicitly about the Lakshminairayan Mandir as an example of a new type of temple known as a "Hindu Rasthra Mandir" or "Temple of the Hindu Nation." It was a typology developed by the Arya Samajist Swami Shraddhananda as a response to the growing influence of Muslim *Kalifats* and Christian missions in India.[108] The Hindu Rashtra Mandirs proposed by Shraddhananda were imagined as spaces for training the next generation of Indians, allowing visitors to experience a pan-Hindu vision of India through an engagement with its great epics and physical exercise. Jaffrelot quotes Shraddhananda's vision of a network of Hindu Rasthra Mandirs as follows:

> The first step I propose is to build one Hindu Rashtra Mandir in every city and important

[105] *Ibid.*
[106] *Ibid.*, 123. See also: Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: the Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 116.
[107] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 34.
[108] The Arya Samaj was a Hindu reform movement founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. The organization pioneered the process of establishing temples and guesthouses across India as "training grounds," using them to promote new religious and social programs across the country. Often cited for introducing proselytization to Hinduism, the Arya Samaj led to a series of Hindu reform movements, but also had a significant impact on Buddhist revivals in India. Many of the first modern Buddhists from India began as members of the Arya Samaj—notably Rahul Sankrityayan and Anand Kausalyayan—leaving the Arya Samaj later in life to become monks working for the Mahabodhi Society.

> town, with a compound which could contain an audience of 25,000 and a hall in which *Katha* [prose selections] from the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the great epics of Ramayana and the Mahabharata could be daily recited. The Rashtra Mandir will be in charge of the local Hindu Sabha which will manage to have *Akharas* [places for physical exercise] for wrestling and *gathka*, etc. in the same compound. While the sectarian Hindu temples are dominated by their own individual deities, the Catholic Hindu Mandir would be devoted to the workshop of the three mother-spirits the Gau-mata [the cow-mother], the Saraswati [goddess of knowledge]-mata and the Bhumi-mata [motherland].[109]

Planned as part of a new type of Hindu Rasthra Mandir, the *akhara* was a place to develop the ideal Hindu public; one that was both spiritually and physically strong.[110] As such, they participated in an effort to create a more "masculine" image of the Indian subject, challenging colonial discourses that parodied Indians as effeminate and weak.[111] The Lakshminarayan Mandir was designed to include many of the spaces mentioned by Shraddhananda, actualizing his vision of a temple to the nation.

Tracing the growth of a Hindu nationalism from its early formations as part of Hindu reform movements like the Arya Samaj to a more militant Hindutva [Hindu-ness] promoted by organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Jaffrelot writes about "*an ideological akhara*" as a space for physical, mental, and "even a spiritual," training.[112] While the *akhara* had a place in Birla funded projects from the first part of the twentieth century, it was not always the focus of the large urban temples and gardens they sponsored. Instead, the projects they constructed suggest a more expansive vision of India as a religious playground, which included spaces for *akhara*s as mental and physical training grounds, as well as places of leisure and enjoyment in which the history and grandeur of India could be experienced as a particular "love" or "devotion" to the nation born out of a sense of play.[113] Buddhist monuments and references were often located in these expanded spaces of the temple, situating Buddhism physically and ideologically within the playground of the Arya Dharma.

Studying Buddhism's inclusion in a Hindu nationalist vision of India as a religious playground is important for three reasons: First, it emphasizes the role of buildings like the

[109] Shraddhananda Sanyasi, *Hindu Sangathan – Saviour of the Dying Race* (Delhi: Arjun Press, 1926), 140-1. As quoted in Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 22.
[110] The idea of play was an important part of anti-colonial narratives. See: Van der Veer, Peter. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. University of California Press, 1994; 71-72.
[111] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press, 2010).
[112] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* 35.
[113] The concept I am referring to is *bhakti*, which refers to religious devotion and the Bhakti Movement. See: Jayant Lele, ed., *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements* (Brill Archive, 1981).

Lakshminarayan Mandir in constructing a vision of India as the land of the Arya Dharma. Second, Buddhism's close affiliation with the colonial survey helped bring together empirical and affective readings of India as a historical and religious territory, shedding light on how colonial readings of Buddhism informed efforts to define India as a Hindu *bhumi*. Finally, the international community imagined around Buddhist sites in India—promoted by organizations like the Mahabodhi Society—helped expand the influence of the Arya Dharma to include not just all of India, but other parts of Asia as well.

During the twentieth century Buddhist sites underwent a period of intense transformation and discovery. Identified as significant places through historic and archaeological studies, they were later reanimated as sacred sites through the construction of new spaces that could facilitate religious observances at the site. Sraman Muckerjee has written about this as a process of resacralizing the material remains of Buddhism in India.[114] Projects funded by the Birla family in places like Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushnigar heightened a religious reading of Buddhist sites, transforming archaeological zones into religious pilgrimage centers. In the process, they also brought Buddhist sites into a larger effort to reimagine the Indian landscape as the religious and political grounds of the Arya Dharma; India as a Hindu nation. As I will discuss more below, I emphasize a reading of these spaces as playgrounds both because of their role as spaces in which India can be experienced as a religious and political arena, as well as their position in relationship to the Hindu centers the Birla family constructed at the same time. Much in the way that the Buddha Vihara in New Delhi was constructed adjacent to the Lakshminarayan Mandir, Buddhist projects funded by the Birla family were often part of projects designed around major Hindu centers, serving as grounds beyond the city or around a clearly defined Hindu center. The idea of Buddhism in the playground of the Arya Dharma is intended to reference Buddhism's role as both a secondary space related to a core Hindu center, while also emphasizing its centrality to the creation of new nationalist readings of India in the first half of the twentieth century (fig. 1.14).

The convergence of Buddhist and Hindu reform movements during this period resulted in a series of Buddhist viharas designed to look like Hindu temples—or temples of the Arya Dharma—similar to the Buddha vihara built next to the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi. The most notable feature of these new designs was a pyramidal form, similar to the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. As Sris Chandra Chatterjee explains in one of his only extant texts *Magadha: Architecture and Culture*, the pyramidal form developed as a way to symbolize "the ideal of the Vedic Brahmans and those of Buddhists meet[ing] spiritually on a common

[114] Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples."

Figure 1.14: Dhammapada pillar in the gardens of the Arya Dharma Dharmshala, Sarnath

religious platform."[115] The platforms Chatterjee is referring to are both conceptual and physical, a point he makes clear in his use of the term *bhumi*—as in *rang-bhumi.* As he continues, "The Mahabodhi [Temple] stood as a monument of the delightful compromise between the two rival sects of a common stock."[116] The Mahabodhi Temple's modern history further made it an ideal reference for a vision of Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma. Control over the site had been a matter of intense debate ever since the Sri Lankan (then Ceylon) Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala attempted to install a Japanese statue in the inner sanctum of the temple in 1894. Dharmapala's failed attempt to install the statue in the Mahabodhi temple resulted in the "Budh-Gaya Case," which claimed that the local Shaivite *mahant*—or landholding priest—who controlled the Mahabodhi Temple had violated Dharmapala's rights under British law to "lawful worship."[117] The *Budh-Gaya Case* was a landmark case because of its lasting ramifications for the maintenance of religious sites in India. It sparked over fifty years of debates over the control and status of Bodh Gaya. As Thapati Guha-Thakurta writes in her discussion of the modern appraisals of Buddhist sites, debates over the status and condition of Bodh Gaya centered around questions of "authenticity" and "truth."[118] Who controlled India's past? And what gave any one power the authority to assert what claims were true and which were not? As she continues, the formalization of the manner and processes for handling the material legacy of Buddhism in India led to the establishment of new institutions and forms of institutional knowledge. In constructing new Buddhist sites across India designed to look like the Mahabodhi Temple, the Birla family was making a clear statement about the position of Buddhism and Buddhist spaces in India, and, more specifically, who controlled their legacy. Placing them in the playgrounds of the Arya Dharma, they articulated a vision of Buddhism as part of India's Hindu cultural and religious heritage, drawing on Buddhist references in projects across India. In the following section, I consider the Birla family's efforts to develop Varanasi as a modern Hindu city before considering their impact on Sarnath, the site of the Buddha's first sermon. Because of Sarnath's proximity

[115] "It is assumed that the transcendental symbolisms of the crowning parts of the earliest hemispherical stupas were developed and elaborated to several stories gradually increased from five to thirteen 'Bhumis.' Domes, thereby, gradually ceased to become the dominating features of the stupas. They became narrow in course of time. And large Harmikas and tall spires over them came to be prominent. Their outlook fundamentally changed from the ideal of an accomplished Buddha to what had been visioned as Mount Meru's supramundane realms, thus making the ideals of the Vedic Brahmans and those of the Buddhists meet spiritually on a common religious platform. The development consummated in pyramidal and conical forms of Brahman-Buddhist temples as evinced in the towering temple of Bodh-Gaya, in the replicas of Bharhut of the third century B.C. and in the plaque of about the same period unearthed at Kumrahar (Pataliputra)." Sris Chandra Chatterjee, *Magadha: Architecture and Culture* (University of Calcutta, 1942), 32-33.

[116] *Ibid*.

[117] *Budh-Gaya Temple Case: H. Dharmapala Versus Jaipal Gir and Others. (Prosecution Under Sections 295, 296, 297, 143 & 506 of the Indian Penal Code)*. W. Newman & Company, 1895.

[118] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*.

to Varanasi, curating the perception of the famous pilgrimage town adjacent to Varanasi helped solidify an understanding of Buddhism as part of the playground of the Arya Dharma.

Temple Urbanism

By the start of the twentieth century, Varanasi, the famous Hindu pilgrimage city along the banks of the Ganges river, had become a major hub of Hindu nationalism (fig. 1.15).[119] Organizations like the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (1893) and the Hindu College (1898) were established with the goal of bringing together "the best of the East and the West."[120] Architecturally this took the form of new buildings built in a Hindu revivalist style across the city. Once again the Birla family took a prominent role in their construction, sponsoring several notable structures in the Hindu revivalist style developed by Sris Chandra Chatterjee. The buildings they funded included hospitals, colleges, universities, guesthouses, temples, *akharas*, and even a maternity ward. Each, in their own way, was imagined as a modern iteration of ancient Hindu typologies. As a mark of their modernity, many of these structures featured clock towers as a symbol of progress, advancement, and order. The clock tower was an important marker of progress under the British Raj and a key component of Indo-Saracenic architecture. Its inclusion in Hindu revivalist structures across Varanasi informed a design regime intended to suggest a proto-modernity to India's Vedic past.

Varanasi had already begun to be developed as a modern city through the construction of Indo-Saracenic buildings by the British. Indo-Saracenic architecture was developed as a response to the formalization of India as part of the British Raj 1858.[121] This change in governance led to a reclassification of Indian citizens as "subjects of the crown," prompting the construction of buildings with "modern functions" such as railways, libraries, post offices, lecture halls, museums, and schools; "buildings meant for Indians, but where the content and meaning of the structure were defined by the colonial ruler and embodied British definitions of appropriate behavior."[122] In Varanasi, this resulted in a series infrastructural projects such as railway stations, post offices, cantonments, water treatment facilities, and administrative blocks.

[119] Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*.
[120] Leah Renold, "A Hindu Temple of Learning: The Hybridization of Religion and Architecture," in *Banaras: Urban Forms and Cultural Histories* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), 170-191.
[121] The nature of this new relationship brokered by the Government of India Act was vocalized in a formal proclamation from November 1, 1858, when Queen Victory affirmed that, "We hold Ourselves bound to the Natives of Our Indian Territories by the same Obligations of Duty which bind Us to all Our other Subjects; and those Obligations, by the Blessing of ALMIGHT GOD, We shall faithfully and consciously fulfill." "Proclamation by the Queen in Council, To the Princes, Chiefs, and People of India," Allahabad, Monday, November 1, 1858.
[122] Thomas R. Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860-1910," *Representations* 6 (1984): 50.

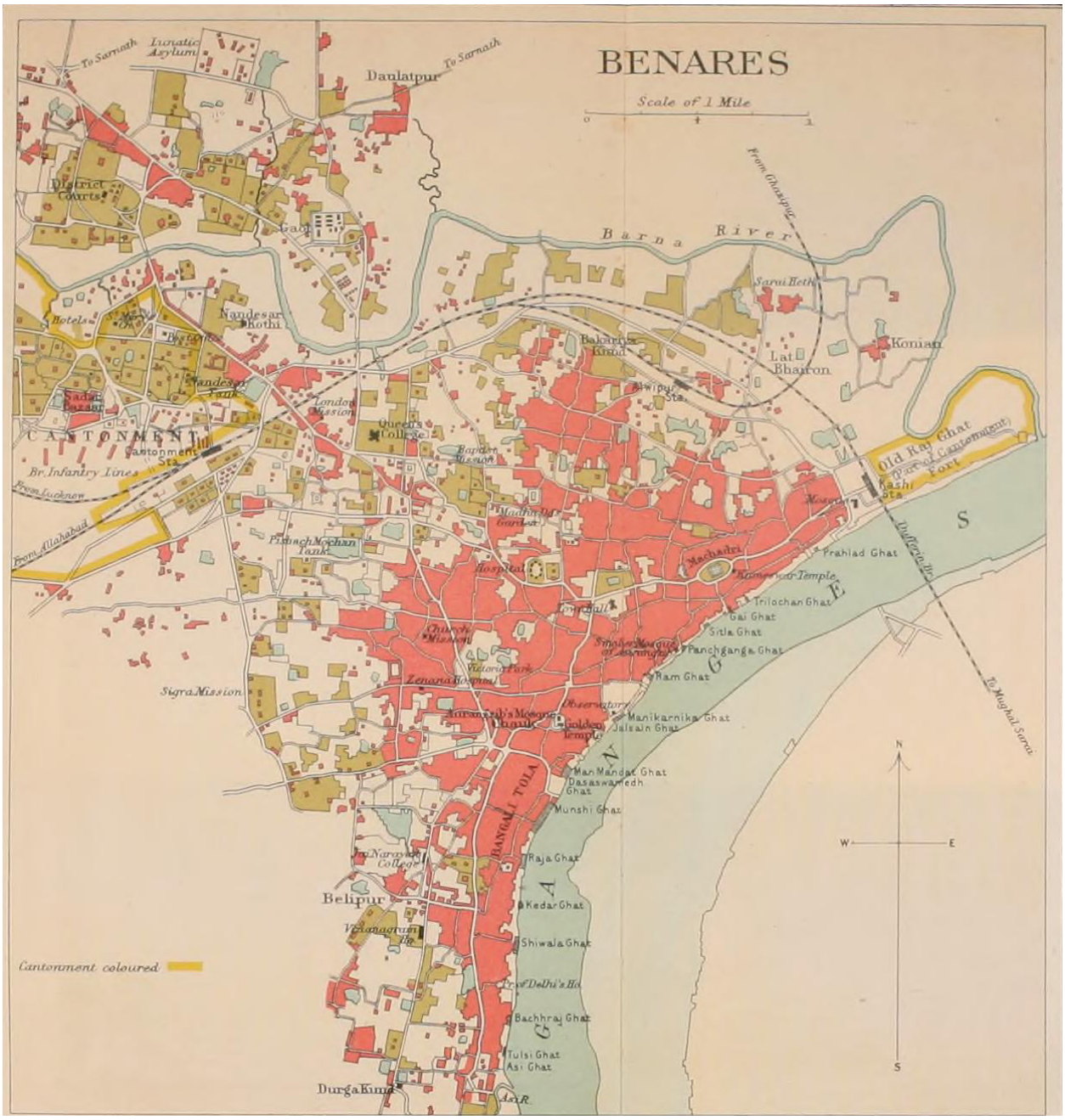


Figure 1.15: Map of Varanasi
Source: *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma, and Ceylon*, 1911

Based on new encyclopedic studies of South Asia that sought to classify architectural elements according to ethnic and religious classification, Indo-Saracenic architecture brought together a diversity of styles and forms to suggest a certain cultural unity under British rule.[123] Distinguished by an exuberance of ornamentation, including bulbous domes, horseshoe arches, and kiosks, Indo-Saracenic architecture incorporates motifs from across South Asia.[124] In his work on the Indo-Saracenic, Thomas Metcalf explores how the ability to mix and match styles into a unified composition was one way architects asserted Europe's dominance over India. The ability to classify elements as Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain, for example, allowed designers to presume a certain cultural authority that carried into the "civilizing" mission behind the buildings being constructed at the time.

The choice of the Indo-Saracenic for civic and institutional buildings under the British Raj was not always clear. Metcalf points to the debates over the design of Mayo College, established in Ajmer in 1875, as an important turning point in the history of the Indo-Saracenic. As he explains, the designers went through several iterations before settling on one that became a hallmark of the style. Their debates over style reflected a larger discussion over the appropriate aesthetics for India. Early designs explored the use of Grecian elements, but these were rejected on the grounds that Grecian architecture was not appropriate for a boarding school for Indian princes.[125] Other designs attempted a "Hindu-Saracenic," and even a "pure Hindu" architecture.[126] "Hindu" architecture, though, was felt to be too "horizontal," and so, after consulting with archeologists like Alexander Cunningham, the designers of Mayo College decided that more vertical elements were needed, leading to the merger of "Hindu" and "Saracenic" architectural elements to create the "Indo-Saracenic."[127]

The perception by European designers and archaeologists that Hindu architecture lacked certain qualities, such as verticality, drove Indian designers like Sris Chandra Chatterjee to emphasize those same aspects in designs for a modern Hindu architecture.[128] For example, the

[123] Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*; James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (Murray, 1874).
[124] While associated with colonialism, princely states in India also constructed buildings in the Indo-Saracenic style. A famous example is Albert Hall in Jaipur, designed by Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob and Tujumool Hoosein.
[125] Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire," 50.
[126] *Ibid.,* 46.
[127] *Ibid., 42*. The term "Indo-Saracenic" reflects the close association that was imagined between style and different ethnic and religious communities. The term "Hindu" originally developed as a way to refer to the geographical location of the people from the northern Gangetic plane—the Indus Valley. Over time, it came to reflect both a regionally specific and religiously bounded cultural identity. "Saracenic," developed as a term to refer to Muslim and Arab communities, and over time became associated with Islamic architectural practices that spread with Persian culture across the Arabian Peninsula and into South Asia. Together, the Indo-Saracenic formalized an Orientalist vision of Asia as "the other," blurring geographic, religious, and cultural identity in buildings that celebrated diverse cultural influences as a single style. See: Mariam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Saracen, accessed July 15, 2018.
[128] Chatterjee's discussions of his building continually reinforce their verticality.

Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi was designed to look tall, its verticality accentuated by the height of its towers and celebrated in pamphlets and publications.[129] Clock towers provided another vertical element in many of the buildings built by the Birla family in Varanasi, making a clear statement about their modernity and the potential for "Hindu" forms to be modernized and elevated. The inclusion of clock towers in Hindu revivalist architecture was a clear effort to co-opt the discourses and symbols of modernization as expressed in Indo-Saracenic architecture. The clock tower was more than an incidental element. It unified the "Indo" and "Saracenic" into a single style. As Metcalf explains in his discussion of Mayo College, clock towers did not accentuate the modernity of the Indo-Saracenic, but rather its picturesque qualities. In other words, clock towers reinforced a sense of Britain and Europe as the drivers of modernity and culture, while implying a timelessness to Indian architecture.[130] In addition to bringing a bit of the picturesque into the building, the clock tower reinforced ideologies that posited a link between colonization, education, and progress. The inclusion of clock towers in Birla funded projects across Varanasi worked similarly, creating a counterpoint to the other elements of the building. However, rather than adding to the "picturesque" quality of those structures, the clock towers incorporated into projects funded by the Birla family announced each project's modernity. They were not celebrations of the past, but drivers for future growth and progress.[131] Furthermore, if the clock tower in projects funded by the British government signified that India—its land and its people—were brought under order, much as the coming and goings of trains was reined in by the chiming of the clock towers, then the inclusion of the clock tower in Birla family projects suggested that India was under Hindu control.

Like the architectural interventions of the British Raj, the inclusion of clock towers in projects across Varanasi signaled a new codification of civic and religious life. Even the sacred rituals of burning corpses by the Ganges could be given modern form and new quotidian measures (figs. 1.16, 1.17, 1.18, 1.19). Marrying modern time with religious and mythic measures, a network of sites was created that could be both modern and traditional. While each of the Birla funded projects is deserving of further study in its own right, what is particularly striking about them as a collection of structures is how closely they match a set of typologies Sris Chandra Chatterjee wrote about in his study *Magadha*. The short text presents Chatterjee's

[129] "World Famous Birla Mandir," n.d.

[130] Major Mant, the builder behind Mayo College, insisted on including the clock-tower in his designs, and placing it, not at the center of the building, but off to one side in order to enhance the picturesque nature of the design. As Metcalf writes, "Mant insisted that to omit the tower 'would make the design somewhat tame and commonplace in its grouping, and wanting in spirit and picturesqueness of character." Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire," 55.

[131] Raja Baldeo Das Birla, the primary patron of many of these projects, felt that placing clocktowers in buildings would inspire his fellow countrymen's natural industriousness: "Raja Baldev Das Biṛla Sriddhanjali Vishesank: 2013-14." Pamphlet from the Raja Baldev Das Biṛla Aspatal, Macchodri Park, Varanasi.

Figures 1.16, 1.17, 1.18, 1.19
left: Clock tower of the Birla Aryuvedic Hospital, Varanasi

below: Birla Aryuvedic Hospital, Resthouse at Manikarnika Ghat, and the Sanskrit College attached to the Birla family home in Varanasi.

Figures 1.20: Birla Structure at Manikarnika Ghat

approach to modern design through a historical account of the architectural and social practices of Maghada, the great Indian empire in what is present day Bihar. Architecture, tradition, and aesthetics work together in Chatterjee's text, creatively imagining the region's ancient architecture in service of everyday life. Describing the ancient city of Rajgir, Chatterjee writes:

> Along the main streets 'Chaityas,' 'Aryuveda' Hospitals, Nurses' quarters, Alms Houses, Rest Houses, Guest Houses, Gandharva Vidyalayas (Schools of Music) and other structures including veterinary establishments rested among thick groves and spacious gardens. 'Havelis,' i.e., pavilioned wells built of large size burnt bricks and covered by gabled roofs, as well as large tanks, existed there.[132]

Chatterjee's revivalist mode sought to regenerate the values and practices he associated with the ancient capital cities of India, while updating them to accommodate modern life. At the core of his theories is an argument that Hindu culture—understood expansively as Indic culture or the culture of the Arya Dharma—has a latent modernity that could be brought out through intelligent design strategies.

The Aryuvedic hospital, sponsored by Raja Baldev Das Birla in the 1940s is the focal point of a particularly complete vision of what a modernist revival of Hindu architecture might be like. Situated next to a public well and garden, it is the center of an urban renewal project that joins modern conveniences with ancient traditions. While designed to look like a Hindu temple with a large rounded spire, it incorporates several key features that marked it as "modern." These included a clock tower, tile and glass for sanitation, areas for parking, and surgery wards.[133] The other buildings built by the Birla family in Varanasi similarly participated in reforming "traditional" typologies to suit modern needs. The Birla funded rest house at Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi is an interesting example. Designed as a staging area for families and priests during the final rights related to the ritual burning of corpses along the river, it features a small clock tower, an unusual reference to modern, global timetables (fig. 1.20). The only other clock tower along the *ghats* in Varanasi is on the façade of the Sanskrit school adjoining the Birla families private home near Gai Ghat.[134] Their presence along the banks of the river marks a concerted effort to inject modern references into the religious spaces of Varanasi.

There are only few extant writings available by Chatterjee. The most well-known is his work *Madadha*. Published in 1942, it focuses on the ancient kingdom of Magadha, as an

[132] Chatterjee, *Magadha,* 6.
[133] The building continues to be used as a hospital today and undergoes periodic renovations to keep it up to date and usable as a hospital. For example, a visitor today will find a recently installed ramp for rolling beds and wheelchairs, as well as room for x-rays.
[134] Sraman Mukherjee, "New Province, Old Capital: Making Patna Pataliputra," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 46, no. 2 (2009): 241-279.

exemplary moment of civilization and development in the region. Important in Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu narratives of India, Magadha was the center of a series of empires between the 6th-century BCE and the 8th-century CE.[135] Many of the major Buddhist sites associated with Buddhism, including Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Rajgir, were all part of Magadha, overlapping a region of India that is often referred to as the cradle of Buddhism in India.[136] The great artistic and architectural developments achieved in Magadha, along with its historical significance for three religious traditions from India, made Magadha a logical choice for Chatterjee as the basis of his revivalist aesthetic.

Magadha is divided into six sections: The first is "The History of Magadha" and includes sections on the "Splendour of Rajagriha," "Need for Extensive Archaeological Excavations in Magadha," "Asoka's Creative Genius," and "Glory of Nalanda." While clearly valorizing a Buddhist past in India, these sections are remarkable for the ways in which they link society and architecture in vivid descriptions of an imagined past.[137] The second section of *Magadha* further capitalizes on what Chatterjee felt were the strengths of the ancient empire. In "The Message of Magadha," he discusses the "Influences of Nature," the "Dawn of Buddhahood," and "Art and Peace." These subheadings are followed by a chapter on "The City of Siva" and the "Strength of Hinduism." Following the same logic that precipitated a reading of Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma, Chatterjee's text develops a clear teleology: The cultural consolidation first achieved by Buddhism was amplified and refined by Hinduism. The two are presented as intertwined, typified by a natural harmony between religion, geography, and culture. Section III of *Magadha* marks a dramatic shift. Reflecting on the deteriorated condition of Magadha and Magadha's architecture, first under "Moslem Rule," and its "Collapse in British India," Chatterjee charts Magadha's decline and its effects on Indian culture. Rather than elevating India's architectural traditions, foreign influences are presented as the causes of its decline. This is quickly followed by a chapter on "Modern Architecture in Magadha," in Section V, ending with "Agency for Resuscitating the Architecture of Magadha." Charting well-trod discourses on the decline of Indian culture, Chatterjee's work presents a vision of how a modern nationalist architecture might spark a cultural revival based on a return to Hindu culture. The book concludes with a series of portfolios depicting ancient remnants; Chatterjee's own designs, both built and proposed; and some modern interventions, including a set of Buddhist murals done by the Japanese artist Kosetsu Nosu in Sarnath, discussed in more detail below.

[135] https://www.britannica.com/place/Magadha, accessed September 28, 2018.
[136] Busswell, ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, xxxviii. See fig. 0.1.
[137] Gupta, Samita. "Sris Chandra Chatterjee: The Quest for a National Architecture." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 28, no. 2 (1991): 187-201.

Chatterjee's *Magadha* reads like a manifesto. As such, it is less concerned with presenting a comprehensive history of the region than with providing the necessary historical precedents for Chatterjee's revivalist architecture. We need look no further than Chatterjee's own declaration of his argument to see how quickly he is overwhelmed by the totality of examples he is trying to incorporate into his work:

> My argument is this: if the principles of planning the pre-historic cities of Mohen-jo-Daro, Harappa and Chanhu-Daro with their excellent arrangements for communication, water-supply, drainage and sanitation claim in certain respects similarity with those of modern Indian towns, if the brick-joints facing the steps attached to the great Bath of Mohen-jo-Daro clearly indicate the principles of brick-laying in modern building construction with 'English Bond' in all its ingenuity, if the hidden stairway leading to the upper storey of the fortified residence of the feudal Rajpur chieftain overlooking the shining-blue water of the Jayasamudra lake of Mewar recall the double-storied structure in Mohen-jo-Daro with identical arrangement for staircase leading to the top floor, if the technique and icons of the Indus Valley seals and terracotta objects of art are, though *in developed forms*, traceable in the ensembles of the Buddhistic and Gupta arts and crafts, if the 'saraswati-har' (necklace) and bracelets of modern India look like some of the ornaments recently unearthed in the Indus Valley,…if the religious ceremonies and social affairs of the Hindus of 1,500 years ago in regard to foundation-laying, new-house-entering, and general planning of their houses, temples and 'dharamsalas,' etc., concur fundamentally with our current rituals and social transactions to a considerable extent, if…

This list of conditional statements continues for pages. His descriptions though are lively, interjecting terms and concepts that would be familiar to readers as marks of modern cities. For example, he refers to "arrangements for…water-supply, drainage and sanitation" and even ancient "manhole covers." These are joined by descriptions of "parking lots" for "bullock carts and caravans." Chatterjee even develops a set of "indigenous typologies" given in Sanskrit that he translates into English as pre-modern precedents for modern architectural forms: *"akasha-kaksha" (Sky-parlour)* and *"samudra-grha" (Summer Villa)*. What is even more remarkable is how these "modern" elements align with the modifications Chatterjee made to traditional typologies in built projects across India. Contesting critiques of Hindu architecture as too "horizontal," Chatterjee further emphasizes the verticality of ancient Indian cities: Towers soar "into the air" (4), wells delve into the earth (6), and *shikara*s scrape the sky (83).[138] The extreme verticality of these descriptions brings to mind modern metropolises like Chicago, New York, Paris, and London, localizing and idealizing them as part of a vision of India's past. They also underscore Chatterjee's designs for soaring temples built by the Birla family.

[138] Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire," 42.

Having presented Magadha as a proto-modern city, Chatterjee finally arrives at his point: *If* Magadha is indeed a cultural melting pot into which centuries of tradition and practices of India came together in glorified ways, *then* it is a suitable basis for a modern, national architecture. In other words, foreign influences can only be read as corrupting and regressive, rather than advancing and modernizing. This is especially true of Mughal or Persian architectural influences, which Chatterjee's designs tend to elide, with limited success, much in the way understandings of India as the land of the Arya Dharma excluded Muslim influences from a vision of India as a Hindu nation.[139] Framing his argument as the logical conclusion to a series of "*if*…" propositions, Chatterjee concludes that Magadha is an appropriate source of inspiration for modern India because of the diversity of styles and traditions it brought together in its development: *If* Magadha was already a modern city that synthesized a host of diverse and modern influences from across Asia, *then* there is a long history of unity and development in the region. As he writes,

> …*then* prevalent manners and customs of the kings and people of Magadha were certainly adopted more or less in the time of Kautilya in respect of town-planning and social and ceremonial adjustments, and were subsequently followed by those in Buddhistic and Gupta ages. The ideals and aspirations of the 'nagarakas' of Rajagriha must have influenced the groups of citizens inhabiting different provinces of Magadha and neighbouring kingdoms, consistently with what were recorded in Sanskrit dramas and Pali literature. They were more so because the life-current of ancient India followed its course through long and comparatively straight cannels, *unsullied by extraneous influences*, in sad contrast to what it has been subject to at the present period of Indian life and outlook.[140]

Chatterjee's architecture makes claims about the continuity of traditions in the subcontinent, and Magadha in particular as a site where multiple traditions were consolidated. Further, it suggests a reading of the past where foreign influences are the cause of social and cultural decline in the region. To further validate his point, Chatterjee focuses on "developed forms," architectural details and precedents that are complete and can be made relevant to modern day life. Throughout his text, he simply suggests modifying these forms in order to update their utility and ensure they do not cause any "inconvenience." In other words, tradition should not impede progress, rather it should be a part of it.

In Chatterjee's work, traditional forms are updated and made modern through clever modifications. For example, in *Magadha* he explains how he updated the traditional "sun window" or "chaitya arch," by adding glass to it. As he writes of one of his own designs, the "[i]

[139] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India.*
[140] Chatterjee, *Magadha,* xix-xx, emphases added.

nsertion of coloured mica sheets or glass panes has rendered a modernized version of a 'chaitya' window, not inconveniencing the 'modern' Indian."[141] Another example of his approach to modernizing traditional forms and typologies is a design he proposed called the "Gateway to Magadha" (fig. 1.21) The design reimagines the ancient practice of having a group of musicians stationed at city and palace gates to welcome visitors, but modified to accommodate cars as a modern form of transportation. As he writes in his overview of the design: "Agreeing with conditions of economy and utility, rooted on traditions of Magadha architecture, the structure has been so designed as to accommodate one 'Nahbhatkhana' i.e., Hall of Music, on two lines of double columns over plinths built of stone."[142] Further modifying the form, the top half of the structure is "open," allowing it to be raised above the earth as a delicate pavilion or chamber in the sky. Chatterjee's choice of "Nahbhatkhana" to describe his pavilion is interesting because it draws from Persian and Mughal histories. "Naubat Khana" or "Naqqar Khana," are common features in Mughal architecture. The Naubat Khana at the Red Fort in Delhi was a particularly well known example. Despite his efforts to define an exclusively "Hindu" architectural style, Chatterjee's writings and designs reveal the challenge and discrepancy in such a proposition, as he often included Mughal architectural references in his designs and writings.[143] Ultimately, Chatterjee's work draws inspiration from ancient monuments and ruins across India as the basis for a new revivalist aesthetic. While predominantly focused on Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist architecture as representative of the Arya Dharma, his works also belies an interest in architectural forms and styles from South Asia more generally, including Mughal architectural examples.

Chatterjee's work made the most of recent archaeological finds in India. Imagining a dynamic feedback loop between archaeology, historical research, and modern architecture and planning. Mohen-jo-Daro, Harappa, and Chanhu-Daor were only "discovered" and made the subject of intense archeological study in 1921. Using the records of those finds, Chatterjee developed a taxonomy of potent precedents, working them into his designs for homes, government buildings, guesthouses, temples, and schools.[144] His work is, as he writes, "a re-orientation of ancient ideals to new conditions."[145] As India's past was excavated, Chatterjee drew them into his practice, modifying and updating them so that they could suit the demands of modern life without losing their core meaning or function. In some cases, references to archaeological finds, such as the columns and railings of Ashoka, are included in their entirety. In

[141] *Ibid., 85*.
[142] *Ibid.,* 87.
[143] In 2017 there were several ongoing public debates about whether or not the Taj Mahal constituted "Indian" architecture. https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/18/asia/taj-mahal-india-cultural-wars/index.html, accessed October 17, 2018.
[144] Kavita Singh, "The Museum is National," *India International Centre Quarterly* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 176-196.
[145] Saravapalli Radhakrishnan's introduction to *Magadha*, xv.

Figure 1.21: "Gate of Magadha"
Source: *Magadha*, 1942

other cases, they are modified to fulfill modern functions such as a surgery ward or a boulevard for cars.

In addition to modernizing traditional forms, Chatterjee's work celebrates Buddhism for its ability to bring the diverse elements of India's past together. It is the basis of the "developed forms" he writes about in *Magadha* and, in many ways, what makes his modernization of them meaningful and relevant. Highlighting the legacy of the Buddhist emperor Ashoka, Chatterjee writes,

> The whole of India was for the first and only time united under the banner of 'Ahimsa.' The Vedic barrier of untouchablility was removed. The removal resulted in the upheaval of Indian Architecture and allied arts for which the 'impure Vratyas' were responsible. One

cosmopolitan, international architecture pervaded all over the country.[146]

For Chatterjee, a return to the designs and precedents of Magadha was a call to reform India's culture and society. Like the idea of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, which Gandhi employed towards powerful ends as part of the nationalist movement, design could present a powerful challenge to colonial rule of India. Bringing Buddhist spaces into designs for India as the playground of the Arya Dharma bolstered claims that Hinduism could be progressive and, like the architectural fragments Chatterjee incorporated into his buildings, fully developed.

In his study of modern Buddhist revival efforts in India, Douglas Ober suggests that Chatterjee's designs for temples and guesthouses in key Buddhist sites funded by the Birla family were intended to curb a trend among Dalit communities of converting to Buddhism to escape the caste system, by incorporating it into the Arya Dharma.[147] While this was undoubtedly part of what prompted the construction of such structures, I argue that Buddhist sites were also important because of the ways in which they expanded a reading of India as a playground of the Arya Dharma. To see how Buddhist sites were situated within such a Hindu vision of India, I turn now to the planning of Banaras Hindu University before considering the development of Sarnath.

Banaras Hindu University

Founded in 1916 by Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya, the Banaras Hindu University (henceforth BHU) was an experiment in creating a national institution for the education of Hindus. In form and mission, the university brought together two prominent reformations of Hindu ideology in India: the one coming from the Theosophical Society and the other from the nationalist movement represented by the Hindu Mahasabha, Mahatma Gandhi, and the Indian Congress. Expanding the mission of the Hindu College established in Varanasi by Annie Besant in 1898, BHU was designed to instill in its students a sense of duty towards India as a nation.[148]

While scholars have assessed how each building at BHU is modeled as a "temple of learning,"[149] less attention has been given to how the various structures of the campus work together to form what Leah Renold describes as a temple town. A projection of the entire

[146] Chatterjee, *Magadha,* 30.
[147] Ober, *Reinventing Buddhism*, 214.
[148] For a longer discussion on the Hindu pedagogy underlying BHU, see: Leah Renold, *A Hindu Education: Early Years of the Banaras Hindu University* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
[149] Renold, "A Hindu Temple of Learning."

campus as a temple town begins at the entrance, which is marked by a large "temple gate" (fig. 1.22).[150] The gate proclaims the university's role as both an institute of higher education and as a religiously significant cultural center, bringing to mind Chatterjee's "Gate to Magadha," which fuses traditional forms with modern programing. The original plans for BHU were drawn up by Patrick Geddess who, along with Frank Lishman, developed a "city-beautiful" plan based on organicist principle.[151] Supposedly inspired by design principles drawn from traditional Sanskrit texts known as *shilpshastras* (architectural treatises), it was planned to bring the complex system of streets and alleys of Varanasi into some kind of order within the campus.[152] The entire campus is designed as a semicircle or crescent aligned to match the curves of the Ganges River (fig. 1.23). The different zones of the campus are divided into four main bands, each dedicated to a singular aspect of the school. Each band is further subdivided by a network of roads and pathways that connect the various blocks and institutions. Administrative blocks give way to academic faculties and libraries, which open onto playing fields and finally residences and hostels. At the physical center of BHU—in what is often likened to the eye of a peacock feather—there is a monumental temple. Scraping the sky, it marks the campus' symbolic center, anchoring a vision of the university as the playground of the Arya Dharma.[153]

The landscaping of the BHU campus deserves special consideration: Vast and lush, it creates a sense of a rural setting filled with the various departments and structures of the school; timeless temples and monuments in the divine playground of India. The "organic" and "picturesque" feel of the campus works against the even grid of the university, bringing together modern organizational strategies with idealized references drawn from historical temples and texts. The planning of the campus as a temple town continues from there, as visitors and residents are guided through distinct zones defined by the concentric bands of the campus plan. At the center of the campus, there is a large Hindu temple. The temple at the center of the BHU is known as the Vishwanath Mandir.[154] Construction on the temple began in 1931 and was only completed in 1966. Measuring 250 feet tall, it is visible from much of the campus (fig. 1.24). Its height is remarkable, emphasizing the temple's role as the spiritual and ideological focus of the university.[155] Surrounded by bookstores and tea stalls, it is crowded with students and

[150] S.L. Dar and S. Somaskandan, *A History of Benares Hindu University* (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Press, 2007), 884.
[151] *Ibid.,* 886-887.
[152] I am deeply indebted to Navneet Raman for his insights into the planning and history of the BHU campus.
[153] This is a reference to a phrase Sris Chandra Chatterjee uses in his text *Magadha*, but is also the very first impression I had upon seeing the temple.
[154] For a longer history of the construction of the Vishwanath Mandir on the BHU campus, see: S. Somskanan, *Mahamana Malviyaji aur Unki Wmr Krti* (Varanasi: Payasvati Prakashan, 2010), 68-86.
[155] A socially active site, it comes alive in the mornings and evenings when students and residents come together to meet, have tea, and visit the temple. If you visit the temple at dusk, it is often crowded with students, some chatting

Figure 1.22: Entrance gate to Banares Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi

Figure 1.23: BHU Campus Plan
Source: http://www.bhu.ac.in/aboutus/map.php

Figure 1.24: Kashi Vishwanath Mandir, BHU, Varanasi

Figure 1.25: Interior — Kashi Vishwanath Mandir, BHU, Varanasi

visitors throughout the day. Remarkably, on campus maps, the grounds around the Vishwanath Mandir are mostly designated as "playgrounds." Ostensibly referring to sports fields and areas for physical education, their designation accentuates the role of the university as a physical and mental training ground. Furthermore, it promotes a vision of the university as an idealized microcosm of the nation; a playground of gods and men.

Organizationally, the main faculties of the university sit closest to the library and central

in the grounds around the temple, other's visiting the book and food stalls around its gates, some studying in the recesses of the temple or taking part in rituals inside.

temple. They are also designed to look the most like Hindu temples, creating a core set of structures at the center of BHU. But, like other Hindu nationalist projects discussed so far, architectural and ideological references to other religious traditions are present across the campus. Fittingly, the playgrounds of BHU mark the transition from a core Hindu center to a more expansive vision of India as the landscape of the Arya Dharma. References to Buddhist architecture appear in the iconographic programs of several hostels along the outer edge of the campus. They join a host of themed hostels, each built in a different style and manner, reflecting the diversity of Indian artistic and architectural traditions. As in other Birla funded projects, the location of Buddhist elements in the design of BHU conceptually and physically map the historical trajectory of Indian philosophical traditions from an early "Vedic" origin to a modern Hinduism that purports to incorporate India's diverse religious traditions, including Buddhism, into a single reformed ideology (fig. 1.25).

The same relationship that was imagined between Buddhism and Hinduism inside the BHU campus—a strong Hindu core with Buddhism developed as ancillary or satellite to it—was developed outside of BHU as well. To see how Birla funded projects extended the ideal vision of India as religious playground beyond Varanasi and the BHU campus, we need only follow the line of guesthouses the Birla family sponsored for Buddhist pilgrims, leading from Varanasi to Sarnath and beyond. The set of guesthouses and temples built by the Birla family during the 1930s and 40s maps a course that extends from BHU to Sarnath, connecting them to a broader Buddhist network of sites, facilitating the travel of pilgrims and tourists from across India and Asia.

Sarnath and the Mulagandhakuti Vihara

In 1935, the Birla family funded a guesthouse in Sarnath, the famed site of the Buddha's first sermon (fig. 1.26). This was followed by the construction of a Chinese Buddhist monastery down the street in 1939 and a second guesthouse for Buddhist pilgrims in Varanasi along a road filled with pilgrimage guesthouses in 1943 (fig. 1.27).[156] Around the same time, the Birla family, especially Raja Baldev Das Birla, the son of J. K. Birla, sponsored several other temples, guesthouses, and schools at important Buddhist pilgrimage sites. These included a guesthouse and temple in Kushinagar in 1939, and a guesthouse in Bodh Gaya in 1944.[157] All built in the

[156] The Chinese Buddhist Temple in Sarnath was founded by Te-Yu and the Eastern Asian Buddhist Association. It was erected by Mr. Lee Choon Seng, of Fukien, China, in 1939. The gate and compound wall of the temple were built in 1952 with funds from the Oversea Chinese Buddhist of India. Dates based on a plaque at the temple.
[157] According to the current caretaker of the guesthouse in Bodh Gaya, a shrine room was originally planned for the site, but it was never completed. Instead, the structure built for the temple is now used as an extra room for large groups of pilgrims visiting Bodh Gaya. Personal interview, Bodh Gaya, March 14, 2017.

Figures 1.26: Arya Dharma Dharmshala (Birla Guesthouse), Sarnath

same style, these guesthouses, temples, and schools are all easily recognizable as Birla funded projects (fig. 1.28). The uniformity of design establishes them as a network. It also encourages a more comprehensive understanding of India as a unified landscape, linked by a common history and shared religious community.

In addition to numerous institutions at Buddhist and Hindu sites across India, the Birla family also sponsored the erection of monuments, columns, and pillars designed to emphasize the religious importance of each site rather than their historical or archaeological history. These built interventions were the focal point of gardens around the various temples and guesthouses the family sponsored. Carved with the text of religious works like the *Gita* or *Dhammapada,* the columns were especially potent symbols, encouraging visitors to reflect on the religious significance of sites as part of the Arya Dharma (figs. 1.29, 1.30, 1.31, 1.32). Such interventions marked India as a religious and political territory, and helped promote Buddhist places as points of pilgrimage and education. Such interventions developed out of a unique partnership between Hindu nationalists and Buddhist revivalists, especially members of the Mahabodhi Society.


Figures 1.27, 1.28: Birla funded Buddhist dharmshala, Varanasi; Telltale detail, Birla Dharmshala, Kushinagar

In 1931 the Mahabodhi Society completed the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sarnath (fig. 1.33). Drawing support from Buddhists around the world—especially the United States and Sri Lanka—the Mulagandhakuti Vihara was built by the Mahabodhi Society to house a set of relics excavated at Taxila.[158] The Mulgandhakuti Vihara was the second of three such temples built by the Mahabodhi Society. The first was the Dharmarajihka Vihara in Calcutta (present day Kolkata), inaugurated in 1920. The second was the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sanchi, discussed below. And the final temple built by the Mahabodhi Society to house a set of Buddhist relics in India was the Chetiyagiri Vihara in Sanchi, where the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana were enshrined in1952.

The Mulgandhakuti Vihara embodies the complex negotiation of several competing interests in the management of Buddhist sites and their related histories in India: the British, Hindu nationalists, and Buddhists. The plans and estimates for the Mulagandhakuti Vihara were drawn up by Rai Saheb Hari Chand.[159] The contractor for the project was Munnalal Govila. Chand drew up plans for several buildings constructed by the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath. Stylistically, though, the project is greatly indebted to Chatterjee's revivalist aesthetic. It follows the same pyramidal form that Chatterjee used for other Mahabodhi Society *viharas* sponsored by the Birla family across India. In the Mulgandhakut Vihara, however, the main spire of the temple is more bowed, emphasizing a reading of the Buddhist *vihara* as a kind of Hindu

[158] For more on the history of relics incorporated into viharas constructed by the Mahabodhi Society in India, see Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples."
[159] "Mahabodhi and the United Buddhist World," *The Maha-Bodhi*, Vol. 31 (1931). Online at: https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.70778/2015.70778.Maha-Bodhi-And-The-United-Buddhist-World-Vol39_djvu.txt, accessed July 21, 2018.




Figures 1.29, 1.30, 1.31, 1.32: Birla columns and architectural interventions in Sarnath

Figure 1.33: Mulgandhakuti Vihar, Sarnath

temple. The exterior cladding of the building further distinguishes it from Chatterjee's designs. Rather than the distinctive plastered detailing that is typical of Chatterjee's work at the time, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara is entirely clad in sandstone. This harkens to the earlier *vihara* built by the Mahabodhi Society in Kolkata, inaugurated in 1923 and known as the Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara. Similarly clad in sandstone, the designs for the Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara drew heavily from the colonial survey of Ajanta. They were the result of a unique partnership between the Mahabodhi Society and members of the Archaeological Survey in India. As Sraman Mukherjee points out in his study of the Mahabodhi Viharas in Kolkata and Sarnath, while Marshal and J. A. Page both offered designs for the Dharmarajika Vihara in Kolkata, Anagarika Dharmapala modified them.[160] This turn away from the aesthetics of colonialism is important as it marks a new agency by nationalist figures who used architectural designs to challenge the colonial curation of religious sites in India. As Muckerjee explains, the

> …tortuous negotiations over the designs and plans of the Maha Bodhi society's Calcutta Vihara…revealed that the specialist knowledge of the archaeologists over the ancient Buddhist monuments of the colony could now be used and modified freely by neo-Buddhist revival associations in building new practicing temples over which the specialists would have no official control.[161]

[160] Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples."
[161] *Ibid.,* 22.

Much in the way that Indo-Saracenic architecture was based on an ability to "mix and match" architectural styles drawn from catalogues of "Indian design," modern Buddhist art and architecture in India emerged from a sense that Buddhist architectural elements and designs could be mixed and matched to reflect contemporary notions of what Buddhism is or should be. The alliance between Buddhist missionaries working for the Mahabodhi Society and Hindu nationalists like the Birla family, however, was not always an easy one, and the aesthetic choices made by each reflect different underlying ideologies. The major difference was where each group imagined the center of their own religious commons to be. For the Mahabodhi Society, Buddhist sites defined a distinct religious terrain centered on Bodh Gaya. For Hindu Nationalist, Buddhism was framed as part of the Arya Dharma and Buddhist sites were developed as satellites of major Hindu centers. The Mulgandhakuti Vihara embodies a compromise between these two visions.

The use of sandstone for the Mulgandhakuti Vihara aligns the with archaeological surveys of Buddhist sites in India, a fact which is accentuated by the inclusion of large sandstone pillars in the main hall carved to resemble those at Ajanta. It also emphasizes a novel understanding of the archaeological sites at Sarnath as a part of a Hindu reading of India, positioning Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma. The most striking detail on the facade of the Mulagandhakuti Vihar is a large motif of hanging chains and bells on the main spire. This motif is a common one to all of Chatterjee's designs, but here it was applied at a new scale. In addition to emphasizing the religious aspect of the building, it also added a sense of verticality and dimension to the façade. The spire on top of the vihara's main tower is perhaps the clearest reference to other Buddhist sites, recalling the spire that caps the central tower of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya. Other, more direct, references to Buddhist art and architectural traditions are mostly found inside the building. In the main hall, one finds a golden reproduction of the famed "Sarnath Buddha" and the large colorful murals painted by the Japanese artists Kosetsu Nosu.

The Mulagandhakut Vihara draws inspiration from the archaeological remains of Sarnath, combining it with a new approach to Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma. Particularly important was a sense of Sarnath as the zenith of cultural and artistic production. Sarnath is known as the site of the Buddha's first sermon. Over time it was developed into an important Buddhist center with several monastic complexes and major stupas or monuments. The ruins of those sites exist today and compose a large archaeological campus.[162] A major attraction at the site is the Ashokan pillar erected there in the 3rd century. One of several such pillars erected by the Buddhist monarch, they were inscribed with edicts outlining Ashoka's turn to

[162] For more on the history of Sarnath, see: Brian Orland and Vincent J. Bellafiore, "Development Directions for a Sacred Site in India," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 19, no. 2 (1990): 181-196; and, Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and their Contribution to Indian Culture* (Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 1988).

Buddhism after a particularly bloody battle at Kalinga and proscribing moral guidelines for those who lived under his rule. Erected at important Buddhist sites across the subcontinent, Ashokan pillars became a powerful symbol during the nationalist movement. The other major monument at Sarnath is the Dhamek Stupa. Originally one of a set of stupas, the Dhamek Stupa is the most intact. The Dharmarajika Stupa used to stand near to the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath. It was famously dismantled though by Jagat Singh between 1793-94. [163] During the excavation of the Dharmarajika Stupa, some relics were found, but they are said to have been discarded into the Ganges.[164] The other famous remaining stupa is the Chandkhandi Stupa. It is said to mark the spot where the Buddha encountered his first five disciples. Built during the Gupta period, the monument is now crowned by an octagonal structure recorded as having been erected in 1588 A.D. by Govardhan to commemorate Humayun's visit to the site.[165] The modern Mulagandhakuti Vihara completed by the Mahabodhi Society in the 1930s draws its names from an ancient *vihara* in Sarnath said to mark the spot where the Buddha spent his first rainy season.

The modern condition of Sarnath is largely defined by the archaeological survey of the site during the nineteenth century. The famous archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham began his surveys of Sarnath as early as 1835. In 1856, the British government acquired parts of the site in order to conduct more formal excavations. Over the next fifty years, some of Britain's most well-known archaeologist would play a role in the survey of Sarnath, including Sir Alexander Cunningham, Major Kittoe, and Sir John Marshal, establishing it as a major Buddhist site.[166] Construction on a museum designed by James Ramson adjacent to the archaeological site was completed in 1910 and used to house many of the artifacts unearthed at Sarnath. These include the capital of the Ashokan pillar found at Sarnath and a famous statue of the Buddha in the gesture of teaching or *dharmachakra mudra*. It was around this time that Buddhist communities from other parts of Asia started purchasing tracts of land in Sarnath and began constructing schools and guesthouses in the small town.[167] The designs of these buildings caught the attention of British officers who objected to them on aesthetic grounds. As Sir John Marshal noted in a letter to the Secretary of the Indian Government concerning a Burmese *dharmashala* built in 1914:

Although not in the Park itself, [the Burmese guesthouse] was so obtrusive and ugly that it

[163] Guha-Thakurta*, Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 88-90.
[164] Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples," 3.
[165] Plaque at the site of the site of the Chaukhandi Stupa.
[166] J. H. Marshall, "XXXIII. Archaeological Exploration in India, 1906–7," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 39, no. 4 (1907): 993-1011; http://www.asisarnathcircle.org/, Accessed December 2, 2017.
[167] "Letter: From Sir John Marshal to The Secretary to the Government of India. Dept. of Education, Health and Lands, Delhi. Campt Taxila, the 26th November 1925." National Archives, New Delhi. Education, March 1926, Pros. Nos. 271-277.

> induced Sir Harcourt Butler, the then Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, to take up the question of protecting the site against such undesirable buildings being erected in future and at the same time to acquire further land for exploration.[168]

Aestheticizing India as a landscape of ruins was one way of legitimizing Britain's control of India.[169] Mapped and surveyed, the manicuring of archaeological sites presented a biased and controlled understanding of India's past. The construction of new structures by Buddhist and Hindu communities disrupted that vision, suggesting alternative approaches to a history of India and alternative modes of appreciating religious sites as living religious centers. Advocating for a return to traditional typologies that saw India as a religious territory rather than as an archaeological zone, these designs challenged the British authority over Sarnath. Projects like the Mulagandhukit Vihara and Birla Dharmshala in Sarnath served as markers of the site's religious and nationalist importance, co-opting the material and visual strategies of the archaeological survey to emphasize their modern importance and role as places of devotion and leisure.

The foundation stone of the Mulagadhakuit Vihara was laid in 1904 near the ruins of the Dhamek Stupa.[170] Following an agreement with the government, the temple was supposed to be constructed on a small plot of land known as "the Mango Grove." However, claiming that the Mango Grove was too low lying for such a structure, the Mahabodhi Society began construction on a small crescent shaped piece of land much closer to the archaeological site. Fearing that the new temple would encroach upon the aesthetic—and arguably picturesque—pristineness of the archaeological site, the government challenged the right of the Mahabodhi Society to build there.[171] The Mahabodhi Society had, however, already started building the Mulagandhakuti Vihara. As their funds were largely drawn from public donations, the government feared that if they ordered the temple be dismantled, there would be a public backlash from Buddhists around the world. The government was keenly aware of the enduring disappointment of Buddhists over the decision not to hand over the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya to Buddhist control and they were eager not to excite greater disagreement.[172] In response to these concerns, Sir John Marshal—head of the Archaeological Survey at the time—suggested that the government grant the Mahabodhi Society 10,000 rupees to relocate the temple and provide a larger plot of land as part of a scheme to landscape the area.[173] Not only would the extra funds and land assuage the

[168] *Ibid.*
[169] For more on the various visual and material mappings of India under colonialism, see: Pelizzari, *Traces of India.*
[170] Janice Leoshko, *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in South Asia* (Routledge, 2017).
[171] "Letter: From Sir John Marshal to The Secretary to the Government of India. Dept. of Education, Health and Lands, Delhi. Campt Taxila, the 26th November 1925." National Archives, Delhi. Education, March 1926, Pros. Nos. 271-277.
[172] *Ibid.*
[173] *Ibid.*

Figure 1.34: Ruins by the Dhamekha Stupa with the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in the distance, Sarnath

concerns of the Mahabodhi Society, placing the new temple in a park would "restore the site some semblance of its original character, and it would be far more seemly that the new Vihara should stand a little apart in the dignified seclusion of this Park than cheek by jowl with the older and time-worn monuments."[174] Today the Mulagandhakuti Vihara sits in a large park, complete with deer and a zoo, recreating a vision of the site as "deer park."

From the grounds of the archaeological site in Sarnath, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara built by the Mahabodhi Society looks like part of a Buddhist landscape that extends from the time of Ashoka to the present (fig. 1.34). If viewed from a spot behind the Ashokan pillar—now broken, its two halves protected by a sandstone pavilion and guarded from prying hands by Plexiglas dividers—the Mulagandhakuti Vihara's spire thrusts through a canopy of trees, dynamically playing against the ruined silhouette of the Dhameka Stupa. Monks from the Mahabodhi Society organize daily services in the Mulagandhakut Vihara and at least one monk is present in the main hall during the day to facilitate donations and offerings. The relics housed at the temple are

[174] *Ibid.*

occasionally brought out and presented for the public as part of large scale programs that involve Buddhist monks and lay practitioners from around the world. Next to the temple, there is a small plot of land reserved for gifts from Buddhist constituents. They are largely the gifts of royal families, government officials, and religious leaders. Over time, the area around the temple has been developed into a major headquarters of the Mahabodhi Society, including their head office, a library, archives, schools, and a residence for monks.

The development of Sarnath reflects a trend in India to facilitate active worship by creating designated zones for religious activities near archaeological sites. Separating history from devotion, a multitude of institutions sprang up at the turn of the twentieth century catering to different functions at sites like Sarnath. While each function is given its own spot and structure, in the movement of people and programs, their purposes blur. The temple becomes a tourist destination. The archaeological zone a religious center. It is not uncommon to find monks praying next to the Dhamek Stupa inside the archaeological zone while tourists flock to the Mulagandhakuti Vihara taking photographs and selfies. In addition to its unique placement near the archaeological site of Sarnath, the Mulgandhakuti Vihara's design represents an important shift away from the colonial curation of Buddhist sites to religious and devotional approaches to them. Much in the way temples like the Lakshminarayan Mandir sought to create religious zones where India could be experienced as a religious territory, the construction of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara was part of an effort to revive Sarnath and other Buddhist sites as religious places, not just archaeological zones.

Historically connected to Bodh Gaya through the life story of the Buddha, and located close to Varanasi, Sarnath was uniquely able to accommodate competing visions of Buddhism for India. The ability of the temple's design to navigate different religious and political affiliations is reflected in a 1944 cover of *The Maha-Bodhi* (fig. 1.35). At the center of the cover there is a large circle through which we get a glimpse of the world. The orientation of the map is curious as it does not seem to be centered on any one country. Rather, it is a view form above the North Pole. At the top of the map is a circular symbol, a *dharmachakra* or dharma wheel, a symbol of the Buddha's teaching as well as the sovereignty of an idealized ruler known as a *charkravartin*. Placing the *chakra* on the site of the North Pole suggests a reorientation of the world, not on any one country, but towards a moral compass grounded in the Arya Dharma or Noble Law. It further suggests a reframing of India's ancient religious and political systems within new geo-political relationships at the time. Published in the midst of World War II, the cover was a powerful statement of where and how peace and freedom might be found. Returning to the notion of the playground or battlefield, the cover can be read as a political and social indictment suggesting a return to earlier models of sovereignty and religious duty; Hindu nationalism as a return to

Figure 1.35: 1944 cover of *The Maha-Bodhi*

the Arya Dharma.[175] Traditionally, the interior of a *dharmachakra* is depicted as a series of spokes. In this illustration, the lines inside the wheel look more like rays of light, reminiscent of Chatterjee's designs for the Lakshminarayan Mandir, and evoking the imperative to proselytize the Arya Dharma.[176] The rays of light are carried out, spreading from the wheel across the map of the world, suggesting both the historical spread of Buddhism across Asia and its modern dissemination as the Arya Dharma around the world.

The inclusion of two temples on the 1944 cover of *The Maha-Bodhi* also emphasizes an expansion of the Mahabodhi's efforts to restore Bodh Gaya as a major Buddhist pilgrimage center. The two temples depicted on the cover are the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya on the right, and the Mulgandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath on the left. For a long time, a photo of the Mahabodhi Temple was the standard cover image of *The Maha-Bodhi.* It symbolized the Mahabodhi Society's founding mission to return Bodh Gaya to Buddhist control and revive it as a modern Buddhist center. Following the construction of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in 1931, the society began featuring images of the new v*ihara* on its cover as well, suggesting a shift in the society's mission beyond restoring Bodh Gaya to Buddhist control to developing a network of Buddhist sites in India and towards promoting India as the land of the Buddha. The detailed silhouette of the Mulgandhakuti Vihara on the 1944 cover of *The Maha-Bodhi* makes the formal similarities between it and the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya clear. Both have recognizable pyramidal forms capped by a bell-shaped stupa or spire. Seeing the two temples side by side, their differences also become apparent. There is a large nave added to the front of the Mulaghandhakuti Vihara, which is not present in the Mahabodhi Temple. The nave accommodates the central hall of the vihara. The mirroring of the two structures suggests a close link between them, implying the production of a network of Buddhist sites and the revival of India's Buddhist past.

Given the long-standing debates between Buddhist and Hindu communities over the control of Bodh Gaya, the Mulgandhakuti Vihara's design is curious. Rather than diminish any associations between Buddhism and Hinduism in India, the building actually emphasizes such comparisons, encouraging a more ambiguous reading of the structure as a building of the Arya Dharma. Douglas Ober, Gitanjali Surendra, and Sraman Mukherjee have written compellingly about the modern associations between Buddhist revivalists in India and Hindu nationalists at the time, but the visual and material associations expressed in the design of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara and the cover design of *The Maha-Bodhi* underscore the territorial ambitions of such

[175] There is an interesting argument to be made here referring back to Gandhi and the Gita. See: M. K. Gandhi, *The Gospel of Selfless Action* (Navajivan Publishing House, 1946).
[176] This is an idea that is presented in a variety of texts and arenas, but is also clearly stated on the plaques around the Lakshminarayan Mandir in New Delhi. It is also present in publication of the Mahabodhi Journal.

associations. The design of the the Mulgandhakuti Vihara, and related representations of it, further suggest a unique moment when Buddhist revival efforts and Hindu reform movements aligned, producing a religiously inflected vision of the subcontinent that could challenge colonial control of India.

India and Asia

While the exterior of the Mulgandhakuti Vihara suggests one set of negotiations related to the placement of Buddhism in India, the interior presents another. The walls of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara are decorated with large murals painted by the Japanese artists Kosetsu Nosu. Executed over a period of four years (1932-1936), Nosu's murals were inspired by the murals of Ajanta. However, they do not seem to draw from any one artistic tradition. Rather, they draw from multiple traditions.[177] The murals are dynamic and changing, suggestive of a process of painting that seeks to embody evolving depictions of the Buddha's life as they unfold in the world (fig. 1.36). Some of the areas of the mural are left uncolored, only finished with black and white lines on a tan background. Nosu brings these elements together with a Japanese aesthetic, incorporating stylized forms and compositions drawn from traditional Japanese representations. The result is a mural that appears pan-Asian, but deeply rooted in India's Buddhist past. In an approach that harks back to early Buddhist revival by the Mahabodhi Society in Kolkata—when the Bengali elite known as *bhadralok* partnered with Japanese monks and artists to create innovative works of art and approaches to Buddhism—Nosu's murals reflect an enduring project to acknowledge India as the world's Buddhist commons.

Kolkata seems to have bookended Nosu's visits to India. He visited the Government School of Bengal in 1932, where he met with Mukul Dey and other prominent figures at the time.[178] In 1932 and 1936 respectively, Nosu's work was featured in *Our Magazine* and in a solo exhibition. As *Our Magazine* recounts of a reception to welcome Nosu to India at the Nippon Club:

> Rabindranath Tagore in welcoming the artist spoke of the great qualities of the Japanese people and of his genuine love for them, and he made it clear by some touching personal reminiscences how the masses of the Japanese people, simple men and women, felt drawn to India as the land of Buddha whose message brought such spiritual uplift for man. This old sense of kinship through a great spiritual experience may not be as strong

[177] Nosu's work should be consider within a history of the Bengal Renaissance in India and the work of artists like Nandalal Bose and Abanindranath Tagore. For more on that period, se: Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India.*

[178] http://www.chitralekha.org/articles/kosetsu-nosu/kosetsu-nosu-japanese-artist-who-painted-sarnath, accessed November 7, 2017.

Figure 1.36: Kosetsu Nosu's mural of defeat of Mara, Mulagandhakuti Vihar, Sarnath

> now as it was before, but the new age through science has brought India and Japan closer, and he welcomed the advent of the Japanese artists to decorate the most important Buddhist shrine of modern India as being fraught with great significance.[179]

While Nosu's murals in Sarnath reflect a certain pan-Asianism, in comments like the one above, we begin to see how earlier universalist readings of Buddhism for India came to be aligned with later nationalist ones. Buddhist revival projects in India fostered this relationship, welcoming Japanese monks and artists to participate in the production of a new Buddhist spaces. They also prefigured efforts by the Birla family to host Japanese monks in India and to build new Buddhist centers for them, leading to new discourses around Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma.

Birla funded Buddhist projects across India were also used to house several Japanese monks, some of whom were deported from India on the grounds of promoting anti-colonial propaganda.[180] One such monk was Bhikshu Ananda Gyolyo, who would return to India after independence. Taking up residency in the Birla funded Buddhist temple in Mumbai, he would

[179] *Our Magazine*, vol. 1, No. 4 (December 1932). Reproduced by: http://www.chitralekha.org/articles/kosetsu-nosu/kosetsu-nosu-japanese-artist-who-painted-sarnath; Accessed November 7, 2017.
[180] "Request by one Japanese Bhikshu Ananda Gyolyo, Living in the Japan Mandir, Bombay, for sacred relics of Lord Buddha for cause of Peace establishment in Japan." National Archives, New Delhi. External Affairs, Progs., Nos. 14 (7441)-CJK, 1954.

try and coax Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, to give a set of relics to Japan as a sign of the enduring solidarity between the two nations. Gyolo's role in the development of modern Buddhist art and architecture in India is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Developments in India-Japan relations in the first half of the twentieth century had a huge impact on the aesthetic and intellectual contours of Indian nationalist projects.[181] While many Indians were critical of Japan, others looked to Japan as a model for spiritual, political, and cultural independence.[182] The choice of Nosu for the interiors of the Mulgandhakuti Vihara continued a tradition of seeing India as part of a transnational collection of sites revived through the reanimation of Buddhist centers, while the exterior of the building was designed to reflect emerging notions of India as a nation with its own aesthetic traditions.

Explorations of India's unique artistic and architectural traditions led to new scholarship that saw India as the center of an expansive cultural terrain known as Greater India.[183] Inspired by the scholarship of Sylvain Levi who wrote about *l'Inde transgangetique*, the idea of Greater India was picked up by a series of notable historians from Bengal, including P.C. Bagchi and Kalidas Nag. Promoting a history that was "diffusionist rather than evolutionist,"[184] histories of "Greater India" trace the impact of Indian culture across Asia. Identifying a particular "Spirit of India" that could be recognized both at home and abroad, historians of Greater India fostered an approach to Indian identity as somehow inherent and timeless; the basis for a nationalist identity that had at one point spread across Asia and which could now be re-discovered by divining those influences at home and abroad.

It is possible to perceive a dynamic relationship between Greater India and revivalist styles like Chatterjee's Hindu revival architecture. The ability to identify key details and architectural features as "Hindu" or "Indian" was related to an ability to discern those same details in other parts of the world. As colonial surveyors discovered monuments in Indonesia, Cambodia, Burma, and beyond, they began identifying common motifs, reinforcing theories of Greater India. As the Indian nationalist movement gained momentum, the idea of Greater India was picked up as a powerful argument for India's historical and global significance. Chatterjee was greatly

[181] In *From the Ruins of Empire*, Pakaj Mishra identifies the battle of Tsushima Stain in 1905 as a turning point in how Asian nations saw themselves in relationship to European countries. As he writes, "For the first time since the Middle Ages, a non-European country had vanquished a European power in a major war; and the news careened around a world that Western imperialists—and the invention of the telegraph—had closely knit together," 1.
[182] Alan Roland, *In Search of Self in India and Japan: Toward a Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Princeton University Press, 1988); Peter Van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann, eds. *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton University Press, 1999); David E. Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005); Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
[183] Bayly, "Imagining 'greater India'," 703–44.
[184] Ibid., 711.

influenced by the idea of Greater India. Not only does his study of Magadha emerge from his "travels in most parts of India and portions of Greater India…" the entire book is dedicated to the memory of an active member of the Greater India Society, Asutosh Mookerjee. Mookerjee even wrote the foreword of Chatterjee's *Magadha*, framing the work as part of an effort to discover India's core identity by retracing the "currents and cross-currents" that defined the major empires of Magadha.[185]

Histories of Greater India map onto and align with a history of Buddhism in Asia. This led to a surprising overlap between Buddhist revival missions and Hindu nationalist movements, both of which saw India as the center of an expansive cultural field. In Kolkata, members of the Bengal Buddhist Association and the Mahabodhi Society were often also members of the Greater India Society. For example, another prominent member of the Greater India Society, Kalidas Nag, whose definitive work *Greater India* was published in 1926, was also the editor of *The Maha-Bodhi,* the main journal of the Mahabodhi Society. Through figures like Mookerjee, Nag, and Chatterjee, Buddhism became enmeshed in images of Greater India, and in turn with a Hindu nationalist vision of India as the grounds of the Arya Dharma. Defining an expansive cultural field that extended beyond the limits of the Indian subcontinent was an important means of challenging colonial rule in India. As discussed in the next chapter, after India's independence in 1947, the idea of Greater India was picked up by political leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru who looked to India's Buddhist past as a guide for national and international policies.

Conclusion

By the start of the twentieth century, Buddhism had become more than the specialized interest of Buddhists and archeologists. It had become a way of rethinking culture, society, and religion. In India, it was a powerful lens through which a bounded pre-modern political space could be imagined and enlivened as a modern nation-state. Linked to the life of the Buddha—his peregrinations across the Gangetic planes and the later outward flow of his disciples—the spread of Buddhism provided an important image of how India could impress itself on the world. As the nationalist movement began to gain greater momentum, Buddhism became one way of countering the cultural and intellectual clout of the West. Accordingly, new artistic and architectural practices developed to express a more inclusive and encompassing idea of India as a Hindu nation with a proud and long history. Through a series of architectural interventions, the Birla family in particular sought to revive important sites for cultural resurgence, developing

[185] "Currents and cross currents of spiritual thought and material prosperity flowed simultaneously to stimulate the creative energy of Magadha and lay the correct foundations of Indian nationalism." Asutosh Mookerjee's foreward to Chatterjee's *Magadha*, xii.

them as the training grounds for a burgeoning nation.

Between the 1920s and 1940s, the Mahabodhi Society—self-proclaimed ambassadors for an international Buddhist community centered on India—also pivoted away from colonial support towards nationalist backing. This shift in their social and political base was reflected in the designs of their new temple at Sarnath, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara. Mixing nationalist trends to see Buddhism as part of the Arya Dharma with a continued effort to build an international Buddhist community, through the development of Sarnath, the Mahabodhi Society participated in a trend to see Buddhism as part of India's religious and cultural commons.

In 1947, India became an independent nation, ready to claim a spot on the global stage. Buddhism was once again picked up as a way to forge international relationships, and to project an image of India as a unified cultural, political, and religious territory. This time, however, it was less about resisting colonial rule than about imagining India's global role. Accordingly, Buddhist designs changed. They moved away from a revivalist architecture towards a more global modernism as the basis for new cultural and political alignments. Such shifts reflected a pivot away from Britain as the center of empire, towards the United States and Russia as two new global superpowers. In some ways, the change in design strategies reflected a shift away from Gandhism to Nehruvian plans for India. Following Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948, the influence of his ideals waned and Jawaharlal stepped in as a leading figure. However, as we will see in the next chapter, the tendency to see Buddhism as an index of ancient glory and cultural affinities continued, resulting in new designs at both the national at state level.

Chapter 2

Under Nehru

Chapter Two—Under Nehru

A New Buddhist International

In an impassioned letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, the Japanese monk Ananda Gyolo Maruyama requested the personal delivery of some of the Buddha's relics to Japan for entombment in a set of pagodas at the sites of atomic war.[186] The memorials were part of an initiative lead by Nichidatsu Fujii—better known in India as Fujii Guruji.[187] Planned as new symbols for world peace, Maruyama felt that if a set of relics were presented by the Prime Minister of India, it would further the mission behind them by strengthening relations between India and Japan. Conscious of his role as the representative of a newly formed government, Nehru's response to Maruyama's letter was not one of immediate acceptance. He did not step into the moment, taking up the call to deliver the relics himself. Rather, in an internal memo, Nehru sought to distance himself from the request in favor of a more dispassionate governmental response:

> We can hardly deal with an individual Buddhist Bhikshu in such a matter. Apart from this, the Government of India does not give away any Buddhist relics without consulting the Mahabodhi Society or like organizations.
>
> I do not understand why the Bhiskhu should want to give me some relics so that I

[186] "Request by one Japanese Bhikshu Ananda Gyolo, Living in the Japan Mandir, Bombay…" External Affairs. Progs., Nos. 14 (7441)-CJK, 1954. National Archives, New Delhi.

[187] For more on Fujii Guruji and his connection to both Gandhian and Buddhist thought in India, see: "Gandhi and Buddhism: An Interview with Sanskrit Scholar Naresh Mantri." *Dharma World*, Vol. 2, No. 1-A (2008). Available online: http://indianfolklore.org/journals/index.php/Ish/article/view/553/657, accessed July 28, 2018.

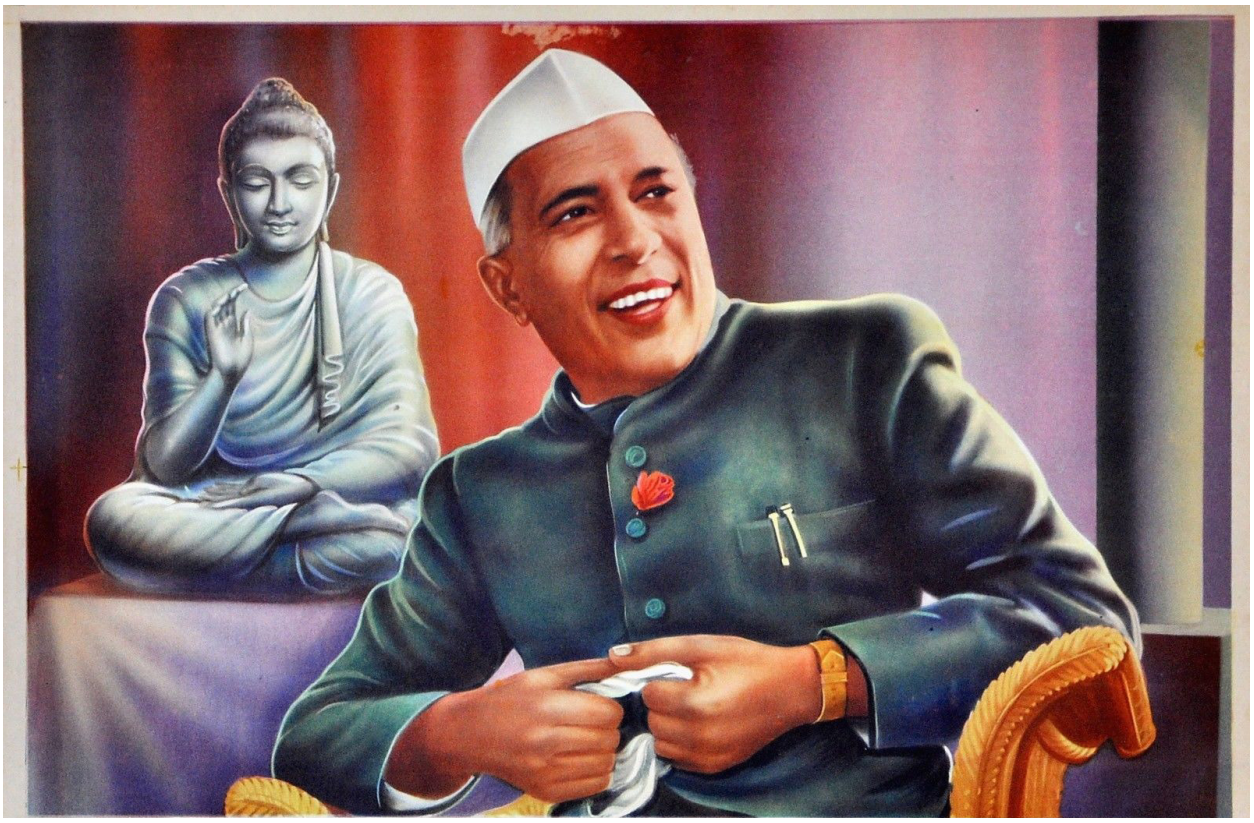


Figure 2.1: Nehru and the Buddha in a calendar.
Source: Ajanta Art Calendar Mfg. Co, Madras

can then give them over to him. He can take them to Japan himself.[188]

Nehru's reaction to Maruyama's request is surprising given Nehru's history of engaging with Buddhism.[189] It was not that Nehru was opposed to entertaining Buddhist monks or supporting Buddhists in India and abroad. Nehru had even met with Maruyama a few months earlier.[190] In his personal life and written works, Nehru expressed a great fondness for Buddhism (fig. 2.1). His home and office were full of Buddha statues and he always made a point of visiting the "Samadhi Buddha" whenever he was in Sri Lanka.[191] Even in his official duties, Nehru participated in a broad spectrum of projects and endeavors around the preservation and promotion of Buddhism in India, even distributing relics on multiple occasions.[192] However,

[188] Letter signed J. Nehru, 5-4-1953. "Request by one Japanese Bhikshu Ananda Gyolo, Living in the Japan Madnir, Bombay…" External Affairs. Progs., Nos. 14 (7441)-CJK, 1954. National Archives, New Delhi.
[189] See: https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/jawaharlal-nehrus-statements-on-the-buddha-and-buddhism, accessed October 17, 2018.
[190] "Request by one Japanese Bhikshu Ananda Gyolo, Living in the Japan Madnir, Bombay…" External Affairs. Progs., Nos. 14 (7441)-CJK, 1954. National Archives, New Delhi.
[191] http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/dec/21nehru.htm, accessed May 30, 2018.
[192] Torkel Brekke, "Bones of Contention: Buddhist Relics, Nationalism and the Politics of Archaeology," *Numen* 54, no. 3 (2007): 270-303; Ray, *The Return of the Buddha;* David Geary and Sraman Mukherjee, "Buddhism in Con-

conscious of the power of relics to serve as diplomatic tools, and his responsibilities as Prime Minster, when Maruyama's request came, Nehru sought to distance himself from the process, choosing instead to find more institutionally sanctioned approaches to the distribution of Buddhist relics.

Maruyama's request was not innocuous. It was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to foster modern political alliances between Japan and India as a counterbalance to China's growing influence. As Maruyama explains in a subsequent letter to the first President of India, Rajendra Prasad, through the gifting of relics, he hoped to "keep China within the bonds of Eastern culture."[193] The relics of the Buddha were more than religious objects. They represented a long history of engagement between Asian polities across Asia. Their modern redistribution presented the chance to strengthen modern political alliances and challenge others. A set of Buddhist relics were eventually taken from India to Japan, but not by Nehru. Instead, they were delivered by two representatives of the Mahabodhi Society who went to Japan in order to participate in the World Pacifist Conference of 1954.[194]

Maruyama's request and the response of the Indian government marks a precarious moment in global affairs when governments and citizens alike were forging new geopolitical relationships. During this period, Buddhism became an important reference for rethinking Indian identity and politics, suggesting pre-modern regional and cultural affinities that could be leveraged as the basis for modern international alliances. Following India's independence in 1947, the Indian government oversaw a series of cultural projects designed to emphasize its role as the land of the Buddha. Public programs, development schemes, and foreign policies were put into action with the intention of stoking international interest in India's Buddhist legacy.

The Indian government's approach to Buddhism followed, to a certain degree, Nehru's approach to it as a cultural philosophy embedded in the landscapes and history of India. He famously wrote about his impressions of Buddhism in *The Discovery of India,* published in 1946. The text frames Buddhism as integral to the "spirit" of India and embedded in the soil and the hearts of its people.[195] As he writes,

> The Buddha story attracted me even in early boyhood, and I was drawn to the young Siddhartha who, after many inner struggles and pain and torment, was to develop into

temporary India," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism* (2016): 36.

[193] Translation of a letter dated 10-3-53 addressed to the President by Shri Anand Gyolo, Japani Bhikshu. External Affairs. Progs., Nos. 14 (7441)-CJK, 1954. National Archives, New Delhi.

[194] "It is understood that Rev. Anand Gyoryo returned to Japan, from India, in October, 1953, and that the relics of Lord Buddha, reported to have been entrusted to his care by the Prime Minister was brought to Japan by Dr. Kalidas Nag, M.P. and Mr. Devapriyavalsingh of the Mahbodhi Society of Calcutta, when they came to Japan to attend the World Pacifist Conference held in Japan from the 1st to the 22nd April 1954." *Ibid.*

[195] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Penguin, 2008). First published in 1946.

> the Buddha. Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* became one of my favorite books. In later years, when I travelled about a great deal in my province, I liked to visit the many places connected with the Buddha legend, sometimes making a detour for the purpose. Most of these places lie in my province or not far from it. Here (on the Nepal frontier) Buddha was born, here he wandered, here (at Gaya in Bihar) he sat under the Bodhi tree and gained enlightenment, here he preached his first sermon, here he died.[196]

Mapping the events of the Buddha's life against the geographic contours of India, Nehru's description suggests that the Buddha's legacy in India was not distant. Instead it was vital and present. As such, Buddhism represented an enduring Indian ethos or "spirit" that could be reinvigorated to inform India's modern growth and development. Buddhist art and architecture were also important, providing a record of that shared cultural expression or Indian spirit in built forms. As Nehru continues,

> The conception of the Buddha, to which innumerable loving hands have given shape in carven stone and marble and bronze, seems to symbolize the whole spirit of Indian thought, or at least one vital aspect of it.[197]

If India's Buddhist past presented a fundamental aspect of Indian culture that could be used as the basis for modern development, the legacy of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka became a model of how that past could be developed into a united political space or territory. According to legend, after a particularly bloody battle at Kalinga (in modern day Odisha), Ashoka turned away from warfare and towards Buddhism. In an effort to establish his kingdom as a Buddhist realm, he broke open the original stupas that contained the relics of the Buddha and purportedly divided them amongst 84,000 stupas across Asia.[198] Along with these stupas, he funded the construction of monastic centers and erected numerous pillars carved with state edicts on moral citizenship.[199] These structures helped establish the physical and moral contours of the Mauryan empire, which Nehru approached as a proto-nationalist space. More important than the actual history of Ashoka, was the impression of his legacy as attested to by the extensive ruins of his empire.[200] As Nehru writes in *The Discovery of India*,

[196] *Ibid.,* 132.
[197] *Ibid.,* 133.
[198] J.S. Strong. *The Legend of King Ashoka (Ashokavadana)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2002).
[199] There are numerous studies of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. One of the most prolific authors on both his history and modern significance is Romila Thapar. Just a few of her relevant works include: *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford University Press, 2012); "Asoka and Buddhism," in *Past and Present* (1960): 43-51; "The State as Empire." *The Study of the State* 35 (1981): 409. For more on how specific ideas of citizenship and statesmanship see Maria Mishra's work on the Arthashatra, "The Indian Machiavelli: Pragmatism Versus Morality, and the Reception of the *Arthasastra* in India, 1905–2014." *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (2016): 310-344.
[200] Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

Figures 2.2, 2.3: Ashokan lion capital in the insignia of the Government of India; Indian flag with *chakra*
Source: Wikicommons

> At Sarnath, near Benares [present Varanasi], I would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon, and some of his recorded words would come like a distant echo to me through two thousand five hundred years. Ashoka's pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who, though an emperor, was greater than any King or emperor.[201]

In Nehru's description, Ashoka's legacy has an even greater immediacy than the Buddha's. The Buddha's message comes from afar. It is an "echo" from the past. Ashoka's legacy, however, speaks directly to Nehru, coming through inscriptions in stone and through the other built remnants of the Mauryan empire as a "magnificent language." Through architecture, Nehru sought to convey a similar message, using built infrastructure and buildings to project an image of India as a unified nation and an important global force.

After India's independence in 1947, the Government of India adopted the symbols from the reign of the emperor Ashoka (c. 268-232 BCE) as their new emblems, formalizing a notion of India as the modern inheritors of Ashoka's imperial and religious legacy. The famed Ashokan Lion Capital—unearthed in Sarnath—was chosen as the emblem of India, emblazoned on its flag and stamped on its currency. The *dharmachakra*, or dharma wheel, was placed at the center of the national flag (figs. 2.2, 2.3).[202] With the emblems of Ashoka firmly in place, Nehru took

[201] Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 43.
[202] H. P. Ray offers an in-depth discussion of how Buddhist symbols became the early symbols of the Indian government in her work *The Return of the Buddha*.

on the role of a modern Ashoka, leading the country towards political and cultural unity.[203] This seems to have been an opinion popular amongst some Buddhists in other parts of Asia as well. Maruyama even began his letter to Nehru by referring to him as such:

> To Japan you are the living Ashoka of India. Ever since the conference of World Fellowship of Buddhists came to an end I am moving from place to place in Japan delivering a course of lectures on world peace. Wherever I go I have to speak to the people about you, because they desire to hear of you.[204]

The redistribution of relics provided another opportunity for Nehru to fashion himself as a modern Ashoka. A key moment in Nehru's tenure was the return of the relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana—the two foremost disciples of the Buddha—to India from England. Removed from the Great Stupa at Sanchi by Frederick Charles Maisey and Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1851, the relics were taken to England where they were kept at the Victoria & Albert Museum.[205] Following India's independence, they were repatriated to India.[206] The return of the relics occasioned a tour of them across Asia between 1947 and 1952, further emphasizing an image of Nehru as a modern Ashoka and India as the land of the Buddha.[207] The tour concluded with the enshrinement of the relics in a new *vihar* or temple in Sanchi known as the Chetiyagiri Vihara or Buddhist temple (fig. 2.4).[208]

The Chetiyagiri Vihara in Sanchi is a single-story structure built of exposed masonry. It is the simplest of the temples built by the Mahabodhi Society to house a set of unearthed Buddhist relics. As discussed in earlier chapters, the first such temple was the Dharmarajika Vihara built in Kolkata and inaugurated in 1920. The second was the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sarnath, which was completed in 1931. Both of those structures were clad in sandstone, expressing a kind of Indian classicism based on Buddhist forms. Both structures sought not only to reference the past, but to actually recreate ancient Buddhist archetypes in new and modern structures. While the Dharmarajika Vihara attempted to imagine the caves of Ajanta as a modern urban temple, the Mulagandhakuti Vihara was constructed as part of an effort to remake India as a modern Hindu nation. The Chetiyagiri Vihara draws more directly from its local context and

[203] Nehru, Jawaharlal. "The Unity of India." *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 2 (1938): 231-243.
[204] "Letter from Rev. M. Dharmeshwar, Nipponzan Myohoji, Hanaokayam Kumamot, Japan. 27.2.1953." National Archives, New Delhi.
[205] The relic containers found at Sanchi are still in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O24890/relic-casket-reliquary-unknown/, accessed June 1, 2018. For more on the study and excavation of Sanchi by Frederick Charles Maisey and Alexander Cunningham, see: http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000000546u00007000.html, accessed June 1, 2018.
[206] The request of the Mahabodhi Society to return them was granted in 1939, but not enacted until after 1947.
[207] Douglas Ober, *Reinventing Buddhism*.
[208] "Relics Re-enshrined at Sanchi," *The Times of India*, December 1, 1952: 1.

Figure 2.4: Chetiyagiri Buddhist Temple, Sanchi

the existing condition of the structures around it. The exposed masonry references the exposed stone work of the nearby stupas of Sanchi. Even its siting conveys a sense that the temple is another monument within the archaeological grounds of Sanchi. The plan and ornamentation of the temple is quite simple. The plan consists of a long nave and an apse. The apse is crowned by a small stupa modeled after the nearby stupas at Sanchi. It has a small dome with a *harmika*, finial, and railing around the base. The columns at the entrance to the temple are crowned with white elephant capitals that reference the elephant capitals on the north *torana* of the Great Stupa at Sanchi. Other historical references, such as sandstone *chaitya* arches and ornamental screens, are incorporated into the design as well. In the context of India's post-colonial development, new viharas no longer had to challenge the colonial control of India's archaeological sites. Instead, they could celebrate India's extensive cultural heritage and its management as a historical site managed by the Indian government and as a religious site by organizations like the Mahabodhi Society.

Under Nehru, Buddhism's return was celebrated as a cultural renewal, linked to the self-realization of the nation as an independent country. With the return of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana's relics to India, the revitalization of Buddhism in the region became part of national narratives related to the idea that India's postcolonial emancipation was the natural

consequence of the nation's self-discovery of core ideals and cultural sources. In Nehru's words, India's independence was a "tryst with destiny,"[209] imagined as the rekindling of an ancient legacy in the subcontinent. Buddhism was an important aspect of Nehru's nationalist narratives, serving to validate India's historic legitimacy in the region. In March of 1947, just a few months before India's independence, a provisional government headed by Nehru hosted a conference in New Delhi, inviting representatives from across Asia to explore postcolonial policies, pan-Asian affinities and plans for establishing more prominent roles for themselves in global affairs. Nehru began his speech for the conference by commenting on the historical nature of the event, articulating a teleology he would famously present on the eve of independence:

> We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history. Standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavor, we can look back on our long past and look forward to the future that is taking shape before our eyes. Asia, after a long period of quiescence, has suddenly become important again in world affairs.[210]

Nehru excelled at articulating India's independence as both a rediscovery of the nation's past and its potential for the future.[211] Independence was not just a political liberation, it was also a social, historical, and intellectual one as well. Much in the way that Ashoka's legacy was imagined as a model for modern governance and development, Buddhism was imagined as a cultural and philosophical impulse towards intellectual, social, and political freedom or liberation.

Building on the importance of Buddhism for understanding India's history as well as its role in the modern world, Nehru approached foreign policy through Buddhist principles. The two policies Nehru is perhaps most remembered for are the Panchsheel Treaty of 1954 and the "Non-aligned Movement." Both were based on Buddhist principles and inspired several notable transnational partnerships between Asia, Africa, and South America. The Panchsheel Treaty was an accord between China and India based on five Buddhist principles for peaceful cooperation: Mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and cooperation, and peaceful co-existence.[212] The treaty was an attempt to circumvent the increasingly tense relationship between

[209] For the entire speech see: https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jawaharlalnehrutrystwithdestiny.htm, accessed May 30, 2018.
[210] Nehru's speech at the Asian Relations Conference, 1947, as quoted in "Tibet Sun", http://tibetsun.com/archive/1947/03/24/pt-jawaharlal-nehrus-speech/, accessed Jan 21, 2018.
[211] Nehru presents his ideas around the importance of India in global history and Buddhism's role in defining India in *Glimpses of World History (*1934) and *Discovery of India* (1946).
[212] There is actually quite a lot of debate about whether or not the Pancsheel Treaty is based on Buddhist principles. However, it remains a popular way of talking about the treaty. See: Swaran Singh, "India–China Relations: Perception, Problems, Potential," *South Asian Survey* 15, no. 1 (2008): 83-98; Egreteau, Renaud, "'Are We (Really) Brothers?': Contemporary India as Observed by Chinese Diplomats," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47, no. 6 (2012): 695-709; Jonathan Holslag, "Progress, perceptions and peace in the Sino-Indian relationship," *East Asia* 26,

China and India, proposing a policy of non-interference and non-alignment based on assumed cultural and historical affinities.

India-China relations provided an important geo-political axis at the time, one perpendicular to the Cold War politics between the United States and USSR. As the two rising giants of Asia, how and on what terms they would resolve their disputes had important implications for the region. Famously promoted by Nehru as "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai,*" India and China are brothers, negotiations between the two nations broke down in 1962 with the Sino-Indian War (October 20, 1962 – November 21, 1962). In the 1950s, however, India maintained an optimistic agenda, assuming that cultural and historical affinities between the two nations would help them find common ground.

Taking Buddhism as a common link, non-interference became a model for international cooperation. Nehru developed this as a theory of "non-alignment" over the course of several conferences, including the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, which took place in New Delhi, and the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955, held in Bandung, Indonesia.[213] The underlying principle of "non-alignment" is that if there are two or more competing factions, conflict is inevitable. Having a group of "non-aligned" parties or countries was imagined as a way to diffuse tensions between competing interests. In the context of the Cold War, it felt necessary to have a group of countries that could remain removed from the debates between the USSR and the United States, asserting their own political clout and greater collective agency by staying out of the fray. As Itty Abraham explains,

> If every country in the world belonged to one or another bloc, the two opposing blocs would be in a constant state of tension and such a world would have too many points of possible friction. In order to prevent the Cold War from breaking out into a global military conflict, it was crucial that some countries remained outside the fray, unaligned with either side, precisely in order to provide that buffer zone within which inter-bloc friction could be dissipated.[214]

The theory of "non-alignment" Nehru helped develop in 1947 eventually grew into the Non-Aligned Movement, a multi-lateral accord between countries in Asia, Africa, and South America. Following the Bandung Conference of 1955, the base of the movement shifted from India to Indonesia, where it experienced a boon under the direction of the first President of Indonesia,

no. 1 (2009): 41-56.

[213] For more on this trajectory see: Sinderpal Singh, "From Delhi to Bandung: Nehru, 'Indian-ness' and 'Pan-Asian-ness'," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 51-64.

[214] Itty Abraham, "From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian foreign policy, 1947–65," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008): 209.

Sukarno.[215] Following this trend, India developed many famous modernist sites, such as the Secretariat building in Chandigarh, designed by Le Corbusier and built in 1953, and the Bakra Nangal Dams opened in 1963, which Nehru referred to as the "modern temples of India."[216] Such projects further reinforced an image of Nehru as a modern Ashoka, a statesman redefining the contours of the subcontinent through building projects and diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries.

In *The Architecture of Independence,* Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai discuss the architecture that developed under Nehru as a "search" for an appropriate national aesthetic. As they write, "The years between 1945 and 1980 began with the euphoria of Independence—building a new India based on a concern for all people."[217] Buddhism provided an significant historical basis for imagining a unified India, suggesting a set of architectural references that, as Chistophe Jaffrelot writes, could overcome the tense divides between Hindu and Muslim communities that erupted following India's independence. Unlike other religious traditions, India's Buddhist past suggested a cohesive moral and political territory in the region that predated both Mughal and Colonial rule of India.[218] As the Indian government began experimenting with forms that could be modern and expressive of an Indian spirit or quality, several different architectural trends developed.[219] The first was a more clearly modernist trend, related to the practice and influence of architects like Le Corbusier. Jon Lang writes about this period as a "first generation" of modernist architects following India's independence in 1947.[220] According to Lang, this was followed by a "second generation," when architects moved away from a rationalist modernism towards a more empiricist model, drawing inspiration from architects like Richard Neutra and Frank Lloyd Wright.[221] Projects by architects like Mansinh M. Rana and Joseph Stein were part of this "second generation," designing buildings that appeared "locally embedded" through material choices, such as exposed brick work *jaalis* or screens, and a greater attention to issues of environmental control, while still being grounded in modern aesthetic practices from around the world.

Other structures from the period drew more explicitly from architectural references from

[215] Kusno Abidin, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2014); James P. Muldoon Jr, *The Architecture of Global Governance: An Introduction to the Study of International Organizations* (Routledge, 2018).
[216] C. V. J. Sharma, "Modern Temples of India: Selected Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru at Irrigation and Power Projects," *Central Board of Irrigation and Power* (1989): 40-49; http://nehruportal.nic.in/temples-modern-india-0, accessed May 30, 2018; W. Curtis and Balkrishna Doshi, *An architecture for India* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988); Jon T. Lang, *A Concise history of modern architecture in India* (Orient Blackswan, 2002).
[217] Lang et al., *Architecture and Independence,* 195.
[218] Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*.
[219] Lang et al., *Architecture of Independence,* 188.
[220] *Ibid.*
[221] *Ibid.,* 227.

Figure 2.5: Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi
Source: Sumita Roy Dutta, 2017

India's past. These include the Ashoka Hotel, designed by J.K. Choudhury and Gulzar Singh, and the Vigyan Bhavan, designed by R.I. Geholote for the Central Public Works Department in New Delhi, both of which were completed in 1955.[222] As Rebecca Brown discusses, these buildings "folded" historically significant architectural references into their designs, placing architectural fragments on otherwise clean modernist structures. As Brown further relates, Buddhist architectural references played a unique role in both structures, serving as "national symbols that [were] simultaneously Indian and yet neither Hindu nor Muslim."[223] This is especially apparent at Vigyan Bhavan, the façade of which is dominated by a large abstracted chaitya arch (fig. 2.5). As Brown writes,

> The Vigyan Bhavan refers…to an Indian past valorized by Nehru and others as an exemplary moment for the subcontinent in terms of international relations, tolerance, and political power. Its references to a Buddhist past are tempered slightly by the secondary reading of the vertical elements on the façade (as minarets) and the generic *chajja* eaves running around the top edge. Like the upanishadic phrase below the Ashokan capital, these elements only help to *generalize* the gesture to the past and to religion that the façade introduces.[224]

[222] *Ibid.,* 206.
[223] Brown, "Reviving the Past," 298.
[224] *Ibid.,* 305.

Projects like the Vigyan Bhavan were designed and constructed by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). Located in New Delhi, they were imagined as national symbols and built as part of an effort to transform the capital city into a hub of international cooperation and development. They reflect a desire to celebrate India's unique historical and cultural legacy, while also attempting to present India as a modern nation. In such projects, Buddhism appears as a "generalized" element in a broader framing of Indian culture.

At the state level, however, there was an effort to develop projects that could speak more directly to specific local histories of Buddhism in the region, resulting in a set of revivalist structures designed to evoke the ancient architecture and cultural practices of specific states and regions within India. Steeped in Buddhist history, Bihar, in northeast India, began developing its important Buddhist sites in the 1950s and 60s. Upendra Maharathi, discussed in more detail below, was a driving force in those efforts, developing a style that celebrated the unique cultural traditions of the region by focusing on Buddhist references and craft traditions. Much in the way that Nehru spoke of Buddhism as part of the "spirit of India," Maharathi approached craft and Buddhism as two fundamental aspects of a more localized spirit in Bihar. Even though the projects I discuss in Bihar reference local histories and practices, they continued to express an idea that the history of Buddhism in India was inherently global and, as such, could have some bearing on India's role as an international religious and political center. In other words, the same internationalizing aims that guided India's foreign policies and modern development also informed the design of structures in places like Bihar. However, rather than favoring more overtly modernist aesthetics, projects at the state level continued to employ a revivalist aesthetic, believing it reflected an embedded cosmopolitan history of Buddhism in the region. Amidst growing international tensions, the chance to develop India as a bastion of peace—or at least a site where different nations could come together under the banner of Buddhism—seemed pertinent. It provided an important opportunity for India to explore the possibility of reconciling regional disputes, while also celebrating its own unique history. As a focal point for Buddhists around the world, Bodh Gaya, once again, became an important and contested site.

Buddhism Returns, Again

Ever since Anagarika Dharmapala sat beneath the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya in 1891, the Mahabodhi Temple has been a site of contestation.[225] Early efforts to recuperate the site as "Buddhist" helped foster international interest in India as the land of the Buddha.[226] During

[225] For an insightful and detailed discussion of Bodh Gaya as a contested site, see: Geary et al., *Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site.*

[226] Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya*; Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*; Huber, *The Holy*

the 1920s and 30s, Buddhism was incorporated into a Hindu nationalist vision of India and the rediscovery of "Greater India." Bringing nationalist, Hindu, and Buddhist concerns together, in 1935 the Bodh Gaya Temple Committee and Hindu Mahasabha collaborated to propose a joint resolution on the best way to handle the management of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya. Rajendra Prasad was tasked with developing the proposal. He proposed a resolution to create a joint management committee composed of an equal number of Buddhists and Hindus, as well as the local *mahant* or landholding priest.[227] The committee decided to table the resolution, however, in order to focus attention on programs centered on India's independence from colonial rule.[228]

Soon after India's independence, the question of Bodh Gaya was taken up again. The newly formed government adopted the plan developed by Prasad in the 1930s. The Bodh Gaya Temple Act was passed on June 19, 1949, and the management of the Mahabodhi Temple was officially turned over to the control of a new management committee on May 28, 1953.[229] Tracing some of the developments related to the management of Bodh Gaya both pre- and post-Independence, it is possible to see how Buddhism became a key part of state and national development plans following India's independence. In her study of Bodh Gaya, Tara Doyle suggests three reasons why the management of Bodh Gaya was so important to Indian nationalists and Nehru in particular. She cites the importance of the Buddha as a historic figure, the potential of Buddhism's historical spread across Asia as the basis for new international relations, and Nehru's interest in land reform as the major drivers of efforts to wrestle the control of the Mahabodhi Temple from the control of the local *mahant.*.[230] The expediency with which the government returned to the question of Bodh Gaya is indicative of Buddhism's importance in India after its independence, and its role in framing debates over the status of religious sites in a newly formed secular democracy. Plans for the management and development of sites like Bodh Gaya emphasized an effort to secularize important sites while still maintaining their religious function. To Doyle's points regarding the Indian government's keen interest in the management of Bodh Gaya, C. Robert Pryor adds that Nehru had a personal interest in Buddhism, leading him to seek greater Buddhist control over Bodh Gaya.[231] All of these concerns coalesced around

Land Reborn.

[227] *Proceedings of the All India Hindu Mahasabha Buddha Gaya Temple Committee which met at Gaya on the 8th, & 9th, July, 1935* (pp 20-22). Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

[228] Shivani Sharma, "Quit India Movement," dissertation (Aligarh Muslim University, 1990); Hutchins, Francis G. *India's revolution; Gandhi and the Quit India movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

[229] Geary, *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya.*

[230] Doyle, "Bodh Gaya."

[231] C. Robert Pryor, "Bodh Gaya in the 1950s: Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahant Giri, and Anagarika Munindra," in *Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site*, edited by David Geary, Matthew R. Sayers, and Abhishek Singh Amar (Routledge, 2012), 124-132.

the idea that Buddhism could be the basis of cultural and political unity in India. Because of its unique history in the region, Buddhism was understood as a potential balm for political and cultural fissures in the region. Underlying these efforts was a vision crafted by Nehru and other government officials of the nation as a center for international cooperation and understanding; a cultural and religious commons.

The handover of the Mahabodhi Temple to a new management committee facilitated the transformation of the Buddhist circuit into an international Buddhist destination. Placed in the hands of a more ecumenical trust, Bodh Gaya began to serve as an international center for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Over time, it developed as an eclectic patchwork of temples and guesthouses sponsored by various Buddhist communities. Today the city even boasts numerous hotels, an international airport, and stores eager to capitalize on the growing number of visitors.[232] While the development of Bodh Gaya may not reflect the more cohesive vision of the small pilgrimage town imagined by Nehru and the Indian Government, the diversity of buildings and styles in Bodh Gaya today does reflect its role as a cosmopolitan or international center. As David Geary explains in his study of the development of Bodh Gaya, Nehru had originally hoped to construct a single hall at Bodh Gaya that could be used by Buddhists from around the world, regardless of tradition or country.[233] This idea, however, was never realized. Instead, individual communities and polities began constructing their own centers and temples, usually referencing traditional designs from their respective countries.

The first modern Buddhist temple built in Bodh Gaya by a "foreign head of state" was the Royal Wat Thai.[234] Built by the Thai Government in 1956, it continues to serve as an important center for pilgrims, functioning as a consulate office, guesthouse, cafe, monastery, and temple (figs. 2.6, 2.7). The number of such Thai temples or *wat* in India has greatly expanded since the first one was built in Bodh Gaya. There is at least one Thai temple, and often more than one, at every major Buddhist pilgrimage site in India. Groups of monks and pilgrims from Thailand travel together, often by bus, from one Thai temple to the next. Such trips usually begin in Bodh Gaya, after which they proceed to Lumbini, Kushinagar, Vaishali, Rajgir, Nalanda, and Sarnath. Each Thai temple is constructed to look like a traditional Thai temple, distinguished by their high

[232] David Geary sites the Union Tourism Ministry's claims that 420,000 people visited Bodh Gaya in 2009. *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya* (2017), 1.

[233] "Although Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru opined that a large accommodation hall should be built at Bodh Gaya where foreign scholars and Buddhists could stay irrespective of their country, he was also keenly aware of the symbolic and diplomatic connections that Buddhism provided. For these reasons, Nehru accepted a proposal by the king of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016), shortly after the Buddha Jayanti, and a large, 3.92-acre plot of land was leased to the royal monarchy by the government of Bihar at a limited annual rate for ninety-two years." Geary, David. *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya,* Kindle Locations 1015-1019.

[234] "Under the name the Royal Wat Thai, this became the first Buddhist monastery and temple in the postindependence era to be built under the jurisdiction of a foreign head of state." *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1019-1020.


Figures 2.6, 2.7: Thai Wat in Bodh Gaya; interior and exterior.

slopping roofs and detailed filigree. Inside the temples, there is usually an elaborate altar with statues from Thailand and walls decorated with colorful and detailed murals painted by Thai artists. The impact of the Thai missions in India has been profound. Over the years they have expanded to include public development projects, education programs, and religious programs, bringing thousands of Thai pilgrims and tourists to India each year.[235]

The model of constructing temples and guesthouses for pilgrims and tourists from specific countries has continued since the 1950s. Today it is common to see Burmese, Tibetan, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Korean temples at most of the sites associated with the life of the Buddha. During specific times of year, the streets of these towns are crowded with buses as pilgrims from various countries make their way across the Buddhist landscape of India. In many ways, the planning decisions made by the Indian government after India's independence paved the way for the exuberant cross-cultural development that took place at sites like Bodh Gaya. Celebrating India as the land of the Buddha, they welcomed and encouraged foreign Buddhists to come, visit, and build at the major pilgrimage sites, celebrating Bodh Gaya as an important historic, religious, and tourist center (figs. 2.8, 2.9, 2.20, 2.11).

Buddhist Celebrations

In considering the Indian Government's engagement with Buddhism, the events of 1956 are of particular interest. They mark a concerted effort by the Government of India to celebrate

[235] http://www.thaiembassy.org/mumbai/en/news/443/65519-Donation-of-10-Buddha-Statues-to-Temples-in-India.html, accessed May 30, 2018.

Figures 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11: Various temples and guesthouses in Bodh Gaya

Buddhism as a way of establishing international connections across Asia. The year 1956 was signaled for national celebrations because it marked the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha Jayanti, or Vesakh Day, a celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and *parinirvana*—they all fall on the same day according to the Buddhist lunar calendar.[236] Delegates were invited from across Asia to participate in the celebrations and the government earmarked funds at both the state and national levels for the events—some accounts estimate the funds were as high as 10 million rupees.[237] Funds were used to host dignitaries, erect temporary structures, build commemorative halls, parks, and improve roads, as well as to print commemorative volumes and texts in different languages.

[236] Chris Clark, "The Sixth Buddhist Council: Its Purpose, Presentation, and Product," *Journal of Burma Studies* 19, no. 1 (2015): 79-112; Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Buddha in Sri Lanka: Histories and Stories* (Taylor & Francis, 2017); Judith Snodgrass, "Performing Buddhist Modernity: The Lumbini Festival, Tokyo 1925," *Journal of Religious History* 33, no. 2 (2009): 133-148.
[237] "Govt.Plans Country-Wide Celebrations: 2,500th Birth Anniversary of Lord Buddha," *The Times of India*: Aug. 29, 1955.

While celebrations were carried out across India, Bodh Gaya was a focal point.[238] As news reports from that period make clear, processions through Bodh Gaya were "colorful" and "interfaith." As one reporter described it, "The procession, headed by a huge flag carrying the message of the Buddha inscribed in the Tibetan script, was joined by people from India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Tibet, Nepal and France."[239] The participation of monks from Pakistan (East Pakistan or modern day Bangladesh) was especially noteworthy and received a lot of attention, because of its potential for bridging the political divide between India and Pakistan following Partition in 1947. Books printed for the occasion were similarly produced in different languages, including Hindi, English, Tibetan, and Nepali, suggesting an interest in accommodating Buddhists from around the world.[240] Such details point to a trend at the time to approach Buddhism as a tradition that could overcome intense religious, cultural, and political divides in India.[241]

At Bodh Gaya, large temporary structures were erected and updates made to the grounds around the Mahabodhi Temple. The changes to the Mahabodhi Temple were largely designed by Upendra Maharathi, an artist, craftsman, and architect serving as a special designer in the Department of Industry, Bihar. In addition to several temporary structures built to house special events, Maharathi also drew up designs for the railing around the Bodhi Tree, as well as designs for a large stone frieze for the north wall of the Mahabodhi Temple grounds. These architectural works have continued to be a focal point of devotees. Each day thousands of people come to the Mahabodhi Temple, applying fabric, gold, and other offerings to the gates around the Bodhi Tree and touching their heads to the large structure Maharathi designed to offer visitors a glimpse of the tree and to serve as a support for their devotion (figs. 2.12, 2.13, 2.14).

There have been several recent comprehensive studies of India's Buddha Jayanti celebrations and the development of Bodh Gaya.[242] While these are important, they do not account for the ways in which subsidiary sites were development as part of more extensive

[238] Accounts put the number of monks who participated at 5,000. Events were primarily held in sites associated with the life of the Buddha—Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, Sarnath, Vaishali, Rajgir, and Sakashya, to name but a few. However, large scale events took place in other cities as well, including Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahemdabad, and Nagpur. Buddhism was no longer confined to a few remote sites associated with a history of Buddhism in India. It had become a national affair, suggestive of the way Buddhism had seeped into public culture. Programs ranged from chanting and processions, public speeches, and the installation of statues and the planting of Bodhi Trees, to more extravagant gestures like the release of fresh flowers over Madras (present day Chennai) from an airplane chartered for the occasion. "Prayers Offered Under Mahabodhi Tree: Thousands Gather For Jayanti Celebrations," *The Times of India*: May 25, 1956.

[239] "Procession in Bodh Gaya: People of Many Faiths Gather," *The Times of India*, May 25, 1956.

[240] *The Times of India*, May 24, 1956.

[241] Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*.

[242] Geary, *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya*; Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism"; Surendran, "'The Indian Discovery of Buddhism'," Geary et al., *Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site*.

Figures 2.12, 2.13: Railings around the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya; a large frieze of the Buddha's life on the north wall of the coumpound designed by Upendra Maharathi

Figure 2.14: Detail of the railing around the Bodhi tree, Bodh Gaya

development plans for India. They also do not present an overview of the artistic and architectural strategies that accompanied that development. A study of the development of Buddhist sites in Bihar is important because it reveals how development at the state level compared to development at the national level. Perhaps the greatest distinction to be made between national and state level Buddhist development is aesthetic: while projects funded by the central government tended to incorporate more modernist elements into their design, approaching Buddhism as a general cultural history, state sponsored projects tended towards a revivalist architecture that celebrated a unique history of Buddhism in the area. For example, in the designs for Vigyan Bhavan built in 1955 in New Delhi, Buddhist architectural motifs float on an otherwise flat modernist facade, whereas in state funded projects from around the same time, buildings were constructed as complete recreations of ancient Mauryan temples. As I will discuss below, Maharathi's projects in Nalanda, such as the Nav Nalanda Bihar, were especially comprehensive recreations of what the designer imagined the ancient monasteries of that site looked like centuries before, but with modern programs and functions. New structures sponsored by foreign interests added yet another dimension to Buddhist development in India. Often constructed to reflect the traditional architecture of the countries or communities they were associated with, they create an important dialogue with state sponsored projects in India that were built to embody the traditional architecture of Buddhism in India, resulting in an eclectic and diverse urban fabric. The fact that these different structures and styles sit side by side at Buddhist sites in India suggests an ongoing struggle to define modern Buddhism in the region, while also heightening a sense of Buddhist traditions from around the world coming together and finding common ground in India.

A Chinese Memorial in India

In 1957 the Chinese government presented the Indian government with a relic of Xuanzang, the famous Chinese scholar who traveled to the subcontinent in the 7th-century. As part of a modern history of Buddhism in India, Xuanzang's accounts of his travel in "the Western Region" were a resource in aiding colonial surveyors as they mapped the historical Buddhist landscape in the subcontinent. The archaeologists Alexander Cunningham, in particular, relied on Xuanzang's accounts—together with those of Faxian, a 5th-century traveler from China—in his efforts to map the subcontinent during the 19th-century. In her seminal work *Monuments, Objects, Histories* Tapati Guha-Thakurta writes of Cunningham as follows,

> In 1848 Cunningham established his clear-cut agenda of elucidating the historical geography of India on the basis of the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims…tak[ing] on

Figure 2.15: Nehru and Dalai Lama on the stage at Nalanda
Source: Nav Nalanda Mahavihar Archive, Xuanzang Memoria, 1957

> the role of a reincarnated Chinese pilgrim, arduously retracing the footsteps of Fa Hien [Faxian] and Hieun Tsan [Xuanzang]…[243]

There is a wonderful parallel between Cunningham's work and that of Xuanzang's. They often give accounts of the same scenes, separated by centuries, conveying a sense of how sites changed and developed over time. Comparing Xuanzang's accounts against Sanskrit records and what he encountered on the ground, Cunningham managed to map out an extensive archaeological landscape. The overlay of multiple visions— of modern and ancient ones, of British surveyors and Chinese pilgrims—continues to define the Buddhist landscape of India today.

The development of Nalanda after India's independence offers a snapshot into how local Buddhist sites were developed according to regional histories and interests, as well as to address ongoing international dialogues at the time. After independence, Nalanda, a small town north of Bodh Gaya, became a particularly important site for rethinking India's Buddhist past and its fame around the world.[244] Nalanda was the site of a large Buddhist monastery or "university" between

[243] Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* 34-35.
[244] Two new "Nalanda" universities were founded in the last ten years as attempts to recuperate a history of the an-

the 5th and 12th centuries.[245] At its height, people came from across Asia to study there. Xuanzang was one such seeker. His time at Nalanda was key to his fame as someone who collected, studied, and brought Buddhist texts back from India before translating them upon his return to China. It is this history of attracting people from around the world that excited the Indian government about Nalanda and spurred its development after independence. When the time came to build a memorial for Xuanzang's relics, Nalanda seemed the logical choice.

Xuanzang's relics were discovered in 1942 inside an ancient sarcophagus that was unearthed in the Jiangsu Province of China during the construction of an Inari Shinto Shrine. After their discovery, the relics were broken up and distributed.[246] One shard was presented to India on the suggestion of Jagdish Kasyapa, the Buddhist revivalist and founder of Nav Nalanda Mahavihar, or New Nalanda University. In 1957, the relic was presented to Jawaharlal Nehru by the 14th Dalai Lama (fig. 2.15). Taking place only three years after the Panchsheel Treaty between China and India was signed, the politics of this exchange are complex. The gifting of Xuanzang's relics and their presentation by the Dalai Lama was planned as a staged enactment of the political concessions imagined between both countries and as a symbol of their long historical alliances. Two years later, the Dalai Lama would flee Tibet to take up exile in India. Along with the relics of Xuanzang, the Chinese government presented the Indian government with a check for *5,74,713/-* rupees, (roughly the equivalent of 310,000 US dollars today) for the construction of a memorial hall to house them.[247] This began a process of designing and constructing a memorial hall that would take more than 40 years to complete.

The Xuanzang Memorial was planned as a positive symbol of Chinese-Indian relations. As expressed in an internal memo, the memorial was a celebration of the "spiritual" bonds between China and India:

> …The Government feels that it will be a graceful act and effectively demonstrate our

cient university as a model for an internationally recognized institution of higher education. The first Nalanda University was founded in India in 2010, opening its doors in 2014. The other opened in China in 2017. The opening of the second Nalanda University in China sparked debates about the politics in such projects and Buddhism's enduring role in "soft-diplomacy." For more see, http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/jun/05/soft-power-china-gets-its-own-nalanda-university-shames-india-1612915.html, accessed May 30, 2018.

[245] Frederick M. Asher, *Nalanda: Situating the Great Monastery* (Radhika Sabavala, 2015); Asher, Frederick. "India, Magadha, Nalanda," in *Records, Recoveries, Remnants and Inter-Asian Interconnections: Decoding Cultural Heritage*. Edited by Anjana Sharma (Yusof IShak Institute, 2018), 51-69.

[246] https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/-gLy1Bey76EHJA, accessed March 22, 2018.

[247] "This file deals with the proposal for erection of a Memorial Hall at Nalanda to house the relics of Huen Tsang. The Government of China have presented to the Prime Minister a cheque for Rs. 5,74,713/- to finance the construction of the Memorial Hall. The amount is at present lying in deposit with the Central Public Works Department and an Advisory Committee has been set up to advise the Government in the matter." "Erection of a Memorial Hall at Nalanda for Housing the Relics of Hen Tsang." Housing & Supply works, 1958, WII-1-5-1-58 0. National Archives, New Delhi. (Dy.NO. 11 (IS)-WII/58) National Archives, New Delhi.

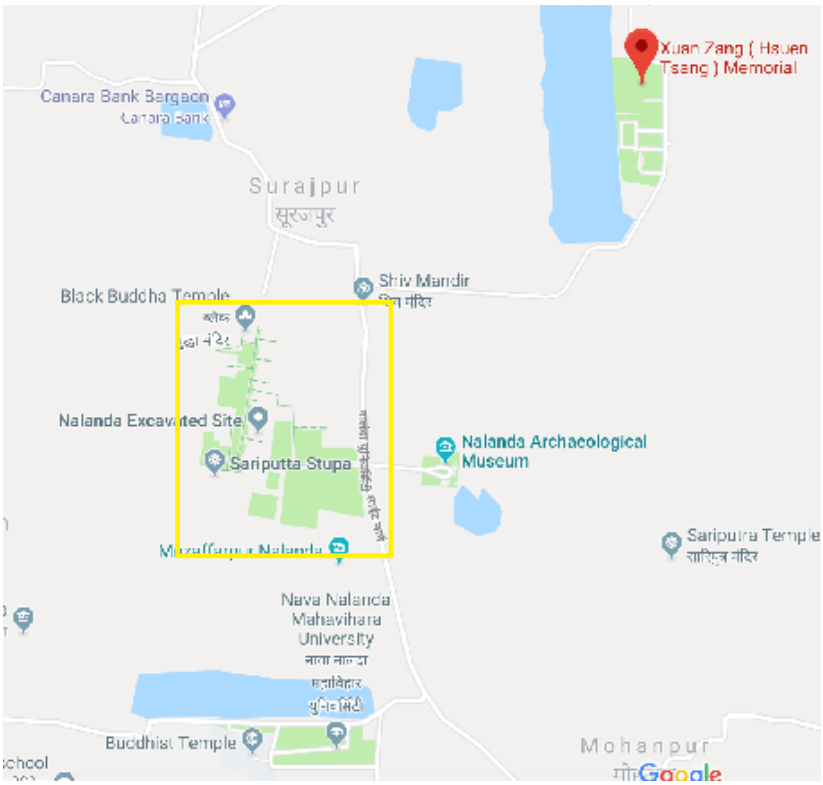


Figure 2.16: Aerial map of Nalanda Archaeological Site and the site of the Xuanzang Memorial
Source: Google maps

characteristic way of looking at things spiritual if, in the present state of our relations with China, the completion of this project were expedited.[248]

Given the rising tensions between India and China at the time, there was a great urgency to the construction of the memorial. It was as if completing it could help assuage growing tensions between the two countries. And yet, despite its political urgency, the project experienced numerous delays, ultimately stalling before being put on hold in 1962 with the start of the Sino-India war. Once the relic and funds for the Xuanzang Memorial had been received, an advisory committee was quickly formed in India to handle and oversee the project. It was composed of members of the Archaeological Survey of India, the Central Public Works Department, and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. Eventually members of the Ministry of External Affairs were also involved, as was Nehru, who seems to have been regularly briefed and consulted on the project. Once a plot of land was purchased near the main archaeological site of Nalanda,[249] the chief architect of the Central Public Works Department (hereafter CPWD), Mansigh M. Rana, was given the task of designing and planning the memorial and the grounds around it (fig. 2.16).

[248] August 12, 1960, AV Pai, ICS, to T Sivasankar. National Archives, New Delhi.
[249] "Erection of a Memorial Hall at Nalanda for Housing the Relics of Hen Tsang." Housing & Supply works, 1958, WII-1-5-1-58 0. National Archives, New Delhi.

Born in 1922, Rana was educated at the J. J. School of Arts in Bombay, after which he traveled to the United States to join the office of Frank Lloyd Wright. He worked in Wright's atelier from 1947 until 1951, after which time he returned to India to become the chief architect of the CPWD. As the chief architect of the CPWD, Rana had an influential role in defining the national architecture of India. His legacy is visible across New Delhi in a series of modernist structures. Clean and decorous, they furthered Nehru's vision of a modern India. In addition to the buildings he designed in India, Rana also designed several national pavilions, including the Indian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1964 and the 1967 International Expo at Montreal. In 1989, he founded the Sushant School of Art and Architecture.

Before designing the Xuanzang Memorial in Nalanda, Rana had been asked by Nehru to design Buddha Jayanti Park in New Delhi,[250] a large sprawling park on the north ridge of the city. The idea for the park emerged from an international conference on Buddhist art in India in 1953-54. The park was intended to mark the 2,500-year celebration of Buddha Jayanti in India, serving as a capstone to the large national events of 1956 discussed above. A public call for designs had gone out, and several submissions had been garnered. Nehru, however was not satisfied with any of them. Instead, he gave the project to Rana.[251] Rana's plans for the park employ his usual mix of landscaping and organic forms that reference design trends around the world, especially the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Inspired by Japanese gardens, the park is filled with meandering paths and pavilions that pay homage to Wright's aesthetics and the pavilions of Taliesin West (figs. 2.17, 2.18, 2.19). The exposed stone and cement walls of the park's pavilions evoke the ruins of ancient monuments that are an integral part of New Delhi's landscape, cleverly referencing India's long history while also furthering a modern and international approach to development. Rana employed a similar tactic for the Nehru Planetarium in 1977, the form and layout of which resembles the ruins of a 14th-century hunting lodge adjacent to it (figs. 2.20, 2.21). While Buddhist references do not come through as a strong design element within the park itself, it is implied as an underlying aspect of India's past and as part of its future development. The combined impact of ruins revived as Wrightian pavilions and Japanese inspired landscaping suggests a notion of Buddhism as a latent theme within the other fragments of India's past. It is, in fact, hard to find any explicit reference to Buddhism while visiting Buddha Jayanti Park. The one exception is a large Buddha statue that was installed in the middle of a small lake. Gifted by the Dalai Lama in the 1990s, the statue is an expression of the Tibetan Government in Exile's gratitude for India and a record of the complex political changes that took place in the region. The development of Buddha Jayanti Park serves almost as a microcosm for the broader

[250] Rahul Khanna and Manav Parhawk, *The Modern Architecture of New Delhi 1928-2007* (Delhi: Random House, 2008).

[251] I have not, as of yet, been able to find any records of the original design submissions.

Figures 2.17, 2.18, 2.19
above: Pavilion designed by MM Rana, Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi
below: Peace memorial at the center of Buddha Jayanti Park; Buddha statue presented by the Tibetan Government in Exile, Buddha Jayanti Park

Figures 2.20, 2.21
above: Nehru Planetarium designed by MM Rana, New Delhi
below: Adjacent ruins of a 14th century hunting lodge

development of Buddhist sites under Nehru. The park is important for the ways it chooses not to highlight Buddhism in its plan. Instead, it elides historical allusions to impart a more generalized sense of Buddhism as part of India's cultural and political history. Even within such spaces, groups often find ways of injecting their specific historical connections to Buddhism, becoming a part of the national history of Buddhism in India.

Studying Rana's designs for Buddha Jayanti Park, it becomes clearer why, when faced with the challenge of building a "Chinese Pavilion" for the Xuanzang Memorial, Rana and his team struggled. In records related to the erection of the memorial, there is a sense of uncertainty about how to proceed and of waiting for the Chinese government to supply complete drawings for the site.[252] There were repeated requests for documents or books that could have provided aid the architects with the design. At one point, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stepped in, coordinating with representatives of the Chinese Government to orchestrate a meeting with Rana and a group of state engineers from China who had come to New Delhi in order to oversee the construction of a pavilion on the grounds of the Chinese embassy. A meeting between them was eventually organized, but the Chinese engineers were unable help or offer much assistance finalizing the designs. The engineers from China did, however, help Rana's team come to the conclusion that the pavilion should be developed as a reconstruction of a Qing period structure.[253] Eventually some reference materials were also found and Rana produced a preliminary design of a basic memorial hall in a simple landscaped garden (fig. 2.22).

Once the preliminary designs were finished, debates ensued over the construction costs. The main feature of the memorial hall was a sweeping tile roof. However, no such tiles were available in India. The government put out tenders and requests for the tiles, but none were taken. A bid was even taken from a Japanese manufacturer, but the expense of shipping the delicate tiles to India was considered too high. As the roofline and tiles were being debated, the Indian government was getting increasingly anxious about the project. Tensions between India and China were rising and in files related to the project there is a consistent refrain from government officials that this project "is of the highest importance."[254] It soon became clear that sourcing ceramic roof tiles from East Asia was not going to be possible. The architect suggested sourcing tiles from Southeast Asia, but this too was considered to be prohibitively expensive. Going to China for further assistance was also not an option. The political climate between India and China had changed enough by the 1960s that India could no longer look to China for help

[252] Details related to the erection of the Xuanzang Memorial are mostly drawn from "Erection of a Memorial Hall at Nalanda for Housing the Relics of Hen Tsang." Housing & Supply works, 1958, WII-1-5-1-58 0. National Archives, New Delhi.
[253] It is unclear why the Qing period was chosen, but it is the style that was mentioned in archival references.
[254] "Erection of a Memorial Hall at Nalanda for Housing the Relics of Hen Tsang." Housing & Supply works, 1958, WII-1-5-1-58 0. National Archives, New Delhi.

Figures 2.22: Xuanzang Memorial, n.d.
Source: *Nalanda Past and Present*, 1977

planning or realizing the project. As J. S. Mehta writes in an internal memo, "In the present state of our relationship, we should not remind or ask the Chinese Government for further help."[255] In the face of growing conflict between India and China the completion of the project presented the opportunity to at least symbolically gesture towards shared cultural affinities between the two, even if dialogues between them were breaking down. The failure to realize the memorial project seemed only to accentuate the rising discord between the China and India. Concerned government officials began offering alternatives, and the architectural team was instructed to look elsewhere. In particular, they were advised to look at architectural examples in the northeast of India—in Sikkim and Darjeeling—where the architecture was believed to be more "Buddhist" in style. One government official even suggested using wooden tiles, painting and shaping them to appear like ceramic tiles:

> …The Senior Architect in charge of the work has apparently been postponing the preparation of the designs on the ground that he does not know the type of tiles that will be used for this purpose of roofing and he has suggested that we should attempt to get the tiles from one of the neighboring Buddhist countries.
>
> The Government of India now feels that it is not necessary to be so meticulous about following the Chinese style of architecture. There are various specimens of

[255] *Ibid.* 21-5-60, J. S. Mehta.

> Buddhist architecture in India, particularly in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong area which the Architect can adapt in the Memorial and utilize only local material such as wood shingle with appropriate paint for the roofing. It appears that the Architect has also had discussions with the Chinese Engineers and Architects who had come to Delhi in connection with the Chinese Embassy building. From the knowledge gathered by him from them, the available literature on the subject and the existing designs of Monasteries and Buddhist Shrines in India and Sikkim, it should be possible to finalize the design and to commence construction.[256]

Moving forward in fits and starts, the project continued to stall. If it was not the tiles or design, then tenders failed to gain adequate bids. All the while, the urgency of the project as a sign of good will between China and India continued to escalate until, finally, the project came to a halt. With the start of the Sino-India war in 1962, the Xuanzang Memorial was put on hold. The period of "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai,*" India and China are brothers, gave way to open conflict. It was several decades before the Xuanzang pavilion was completed. In the meantime, Xuanzang's relics were taken to the Patna Museum. Eventually the Xuanzang pavilion was handed over to the care of the Nav Nalanda Mahavihar and in the early 2000s it underwent a lavish makeover sponsored, in part, by the Chinese government in an effort to renew modern cultural alliances between the two countries (figs. 2.23, 2.24).[257]

The troubles around the design and realization of the Xuanzang Memorial speak to the challenges of basing modern political alliances on presumed historical affinities. It was never that the designs for the Xuanzang Memorial could overcome the conflict between China and India, or that the challenges in designing a Chinese Pavilion aggravated the political situation. Rather, the issues faced in realizing the designs of the memorial are symptomatic of the evolving relationship between China and India. In his study of post-war transnational relations, Akhil Gupta warns about too easily equating historically specific "cultural zones"—premodern areas defined by cultural and political affiliations—with nation-states. The Republic of India and the People's Republic of China, he argues, are modern entities and should be treated as such. And yet, during the 1950s, India-China relations were, to a large extent, premised on assumed cultural and historical affinities premised on Buddhism's spread across Asia.[258] As part of diplomatic efforts between China and India, Nalanda became a potent site and Xuanzang's relics potent objects: the material expressions of soft power negotiations. In the ensuing debates over style that circulated around the plans for the Xuanzang Memorial Hall, we begin to see the power, and

[256] *Ibid.,* 20th May 1960, A. D. Pandit. Joint Secretary.
[257] https://www.nnm.ac.in/xuanzang_memorial_hall.html, accessed June 1, 2018.
[258] Drawing on the work of R. Williams, Akhil Gupta discusses these assumed affinities as "structures of feeling" in his essay, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. (Feb., 1992); 63-79.

Figures 2.23, 2.24
above: Xuanzang Memorial Hall, Nalanda
below: Monks inside the main hall of the Xuanzang Memorial Hall

Figure 2.25: Chinese Buddhist Temple, Sarnath

also the limits, of assuming that premodern cultural ties could be used to guide modern political alliances.

The interrupted history of the Xuanzang Memorial's construction points to the ongoing power of architecture to speak to political alliances. The Xuanzang Memorial in Nalanda was not the first "Chinese pavilion" to be built in India. Nor was it the first nationally inflected one within a larger scheme to develop Buddhist sites. In 1939, a Chinese temple was constructed in Sarnath as part of a scheme to develop the area around the archaeological site. It was later expanded in 1952 with funds from "The Overseas Chinese in India" (fig. 2.25). The Overseas Chinese in India erected another temple in Nalanda four years later (fig. 2.26). Despite these earlier examples, the model of a pavilion sponsored and designed by the Government of India was different, as it was not just the effort of Buddhist communities in India. Rather it had to navigate the complexities of international and local politics as governments, local stake holders, and designers vied to determine the style, scale, and scope of a project.

Rana's struggle to design a Chinese Pavilion was partially a matter of exposure, but it was also a matter of vision. The kind of modernity he and his team generally practiced did not easily accommodate a Chinese Pavilion. The pavilion did, however, have a role to play in constructing a vision of Nalanda and India as a bastion for Buddhists from across Asia. The modern Buddhist landscape of India is an eclectic one, and the Xuanzang Memorial Hall sits comfortably alongside a growing number of temples and guesthouses built by Thai, Japanese, Korean, Burmese, Lao, and Cambodian communities. While the various Buddhist structures built since the 1950s suggest clear religious and national divisions, the spaces between structures are in fact quite fluid. They are moved through by pilgrims and tourists along their tours of the region, as well as by those living in the area. Even their management is cross-cultural: A Thai monk living in Rajgir manages the Chinese Buddhist temple of Sarnath; Tibetan communities sponsor huge chanting ceremonies for Theravadan monks from across Southeast Asia. This same

Figure 2.26: Chinese Buddhist Temple, Nalanda

fluidity is evident inside the Xuanzang Memorial as well: Monks and pilgrims from various traditions come to pay homage to the historic traveler for his efforts in spreading the teachings of the Buddha. Divisions of tradition and region, which might have previously kept a monk from Burma or Thailand from venerating a monk from China, have broken down, indexing a more universal and modern Buddhist tradition. While the movement between different Buddhist spaces does not erase sectarian and nationalist divides, it does convey a more open invitation to explore different traditions, much in the way visitors are encouraged to visit the different temples and memorials they encounter. The architecture around Buddhist sites may not necessarily reflect the kind of syncretism that can be experienced at the ground level. It is, however, the result of policies and development schemes that Nehru and the Indian government put in place after India's independence. In light of a failure to develop a singular style that could reflect the various interest of national and international governments and Buddhist communities, Buddhist sites developed to reflect multiple visions, accommodating distinct styles and forms from around the world related to specific national identities and religious communities. The result is a diverse and eclectic patchwork of structures, styles, centers, and institutions; an approach to India as the land of the Buddha and a global religious commons.

Master Craftsman

Parallel to the international approach to Buddhist development being fostered at the national level, there was an effort to design Buddhist spaces that reflected a more localized aesthetic and history in states like Bihar. Not far from the site that was chosen for the Xuanzang Memorial in Nalanda are the grounds of the Nav Nalanda Mahavihar—the eventual caretakers of the Xuanzang Memorial. Founded by the Buddhist revivalist Jagdish Kashyapa in 1951, Nav

Figures 2.26; 2.27: Aerial photographs of Nalanda ruins and Nav Nalanda Mahavihar

Nalanda Mahavihar was imagined as an important center for the study of Buddhism and the languages necessary to read ancient texts.[259] Since its inception, Nav Nalanda Mahavihar was imagined as a revival of the great university that flourished there until the 12th-century. Situated just across a small pond from the main archaeological site, it was designed as if the campus buildings were the next set of structures in a series of monasteries that constituted the ancient monastic complex of Nalanda (figs 2.26, 2.27). The notion of constructing a modern Buddhist temple or *vihara* was carried into the design of the buildings at Nav Nalanda Mahavihar as well. Planned as monk's quarters arranged around a courtyard and central temple or library, each building functions as an isolated unit, strung together like the collection of monasteries that

[259] P. N. Ojha, *Homage to Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap: Commemorative Volume* (Siri Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, 1986).

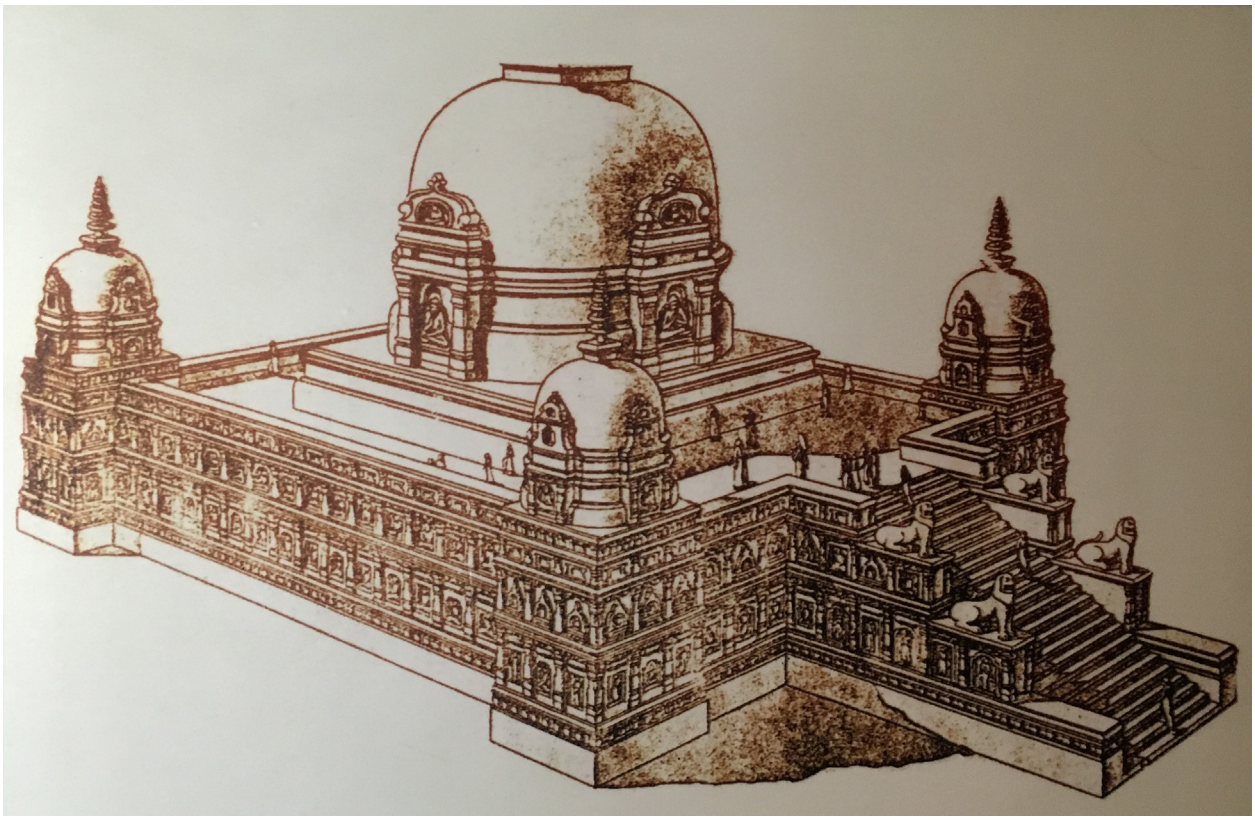


Figure 2.28, 2.29, 2.30: Nav Nalanda Mahavihar, designed by Upendra Maharathi; Column detail at Nav Nalanda Mahavihar; Percy Brown's "Conjectural Restoration of Nalanda Monastery City (Fifth Stupa)"

constituted the ancient campus of Nalanda (figs. 2.28, 2.29, 2.30).

Nav Nalada Mahavihar was designed by the artist-architect Upendra Maharathi. Born in 1908, Upendra Maharathi was trained at the Calcutta School of Art—famous as the Bengal School—studying with Percy Brown and Mukul Dey. Brown's studies of ancient Indian architecture deeply influenced Maharathi. These influences appeared in his later designs for the Nav Nalanda Mahavihar and other projects across Bihar. Eventually settling in Patna, Maharathi had a profound impact on the art and architecture of Bihar and the formalization of a Buddhist aesthetic in India. His body of work is eclectic and includes paintings, illustrations, architectural designs, and furniture. In addition to his own artistic output, Maharathi is best known for his efforts to revitalize craft and folk arts in Bihar, especially works in bamboo.[260] In 1956, he founded "The Institute of Industrial Research," which was renamed the Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan following Maharathi's death in 1981.

Maharathi developed a unique approach Buddhism, appreciating it as a local tradition and practice. He further associated it with craft as a regionally embedded practice that could be maintained as a spiritual and practical endeavor. In his practice, Maharathi emphasized craft and Buddhism as two important pillars of Bihari culture, exploring their potential for growth and modernization across the state. Rather than art, *kala* in Hindi, Maharathi practiced *shilp*.[261] *Shilp,* implies art and architecture equally as part of an expanded notion of craft. Much in the way artists and architects in Europe returned to craft as a way to create complete spaces linked to social and economic reform—an antidote to rampant modernization[262]—Maharathi approached craft as a spiritual endeavor that could aid development in India.[263] Both pre- and post-independence, *shilp* was a highly debated aspect of India's struggle to find an appropriate modern aesthetic for the nation.[264] Buddhism was central to those debates, infusing the earliest explorations of modern art and architecture for the nation in places like Shantiniketan and in the works of artists like Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. While earlier projects by figures like Tagore and Bose incorporated Buddhism into elements of art designed according to

[260] Upendra Maharathi, *Veṇu-Shilp* (Bihar-Rastrbhasa-Prisad, 1961).
[261] *Shilp* (*nm*) craft; architecture; *-kalā* technology; craft. *A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary,* online. For one of the few comprehensive studies of Maharathi's work, especially his engagement with craft, see: J.C. Mathur, "Upendra Maharathi: A Shilpi in the Old Tradition and New," *Roopa-Lekha.* Vol. 37, No. 1 and 2 (New Delhi: All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, 1967).
[262] Catherine E. Rigby and Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (University of Virginia Press, 2004); Warren Breckman, *European Romanticism: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martins, 2008); Alan Crawford, "Ideas and Objects: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain," *Design Issues* 13, no. 1 (1997): 15-26.
[263] For more on the projection of sacred landscapes as part of Romanticism, see: Rigby and Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred.*
[264] Atreyee Gupta, "The Promise of the Modern: State, Culture, and Avant-gardism in India (ca. 1930-1960)," (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2011).

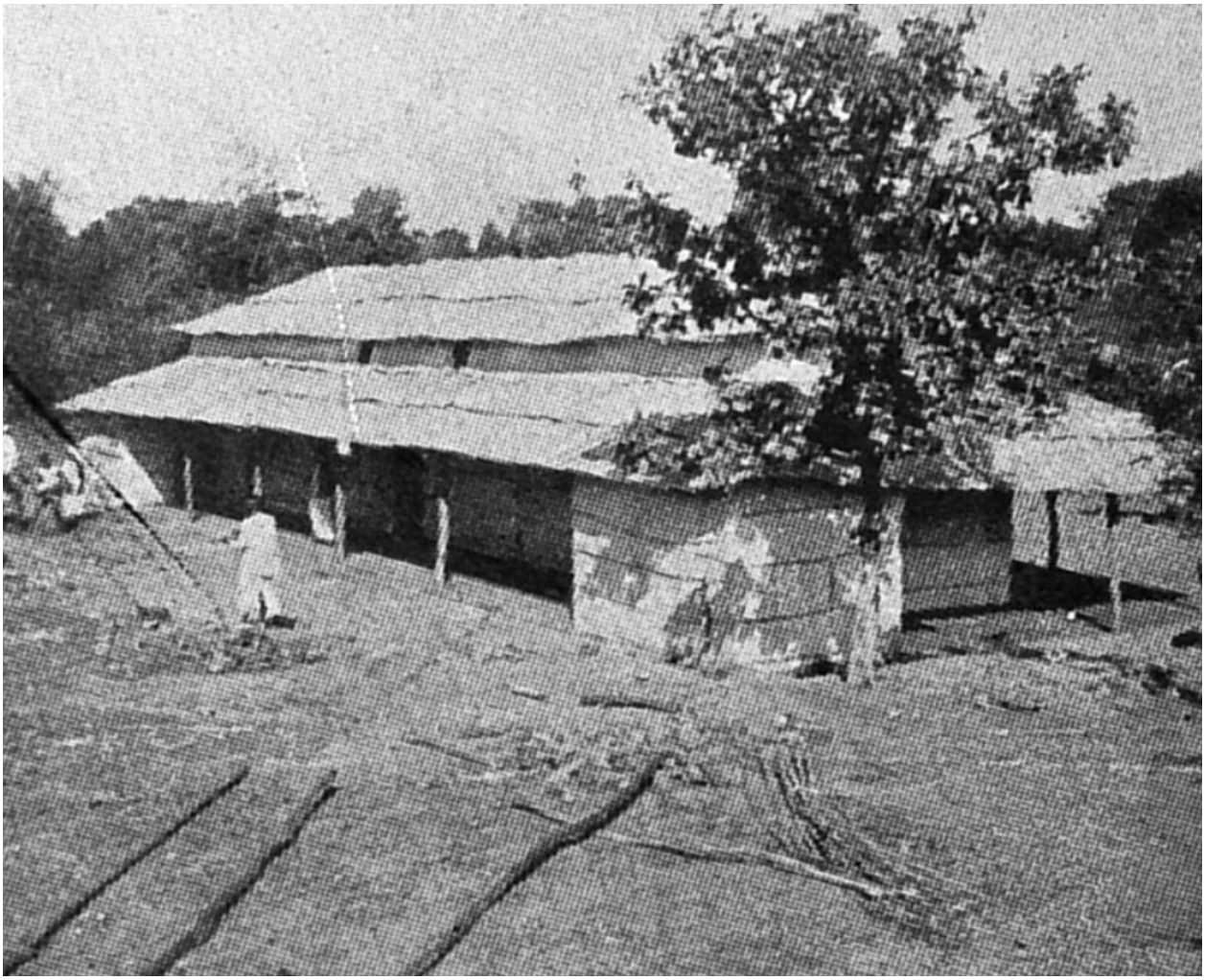


Figure 2.31: 1940 pavilion for the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Ramgarh
Source: Atreyee Gupta, "The Promise of the Modern State," p. 240, reproduced from 53rd Annual Meeting of the Indian National Congress, Ramgarh 1940 (Calcutta: Commercial Syndicate, 1940), unnumbered plate

pan-Asian Indian aesthetic, Maharathi's work benefited from the unique way he saw himself as both a Buddhist and a craftsperson. In her study of modern art in India, Atreyee Gupta points to Maharathi's designs for the 1940 National Congress Pavilions as an early exploration in how local practices and materials could establish novel approaches to a modernity for the nation.[265] Working with Mahabir Prasad Verma, G.S. Kapadia, and Kartik Chandra Pal, Maharathi planned a set of "thatched mud pavilions resembl[ing] the domestic architecture of rural Ramgarh," for the site of the congress session (fig. 2.31). As Gupta continues,

> The mud structures were then lined with *madur*, a specific variety of woven grass mat produced in the region. While the mats provided protection from heat, traditional motifs

[265] *Ibid.,* 67.

> woven into the *madur* with strands of dyed grass created a decorative surface. This novel use of everyday object[s] brought the artist public attention, and, in 1942 Maharathi was appointed a special Designer in the Department of Industry, Bihar.[266]

Maharathi's fame was based on his ability to integrate local, everyday objects and techniques into designs that were both modern and traditional. Underlying his practice was a romantic vision of India inspired by a reading of craft and Buddhism as "technologies of the spirit," a romantic idea that brought together prominent nationalist ideals around an "Indian spirit" and an interest in craft traditions as an antidote to industrialization.[267] As David McMahan remarks in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* modern Buddhism has always been caught up in a spiritual revival similar to "Romantic expressivism," reflecting "a nostalgia for the premodern" as an alternative to rampant industrialization and modernization.[268] The famous Hindi and Marathi poet Baba Nagarjun captured a similar sentiment in a short essay he published in 1936 titled, "The Economic Condition of the Buddhist Age."[269] Linking craft to the social and religious impact of Buddhism in the region, his essay highlights craft as the foundation of the period's economic and social success. According to Nagarjun, craft was education and education was craft, valued by everyone from princes to merchants, potters, landlords, and farmers. The organization of craftsmen into guilds further ensured a more egalitarian rather than a feudal society. Throughout his career, Maharathi similarly sought to use craft as a way to reinvigorate marginalized communities in India, and as a means to develop Bihar. Merging Buddhism and craft in his approach to designs celebrating Bihar's past, Maharathi helped promote the "craftsman" as a modern cultural hero, a counterpoint to Nehru's "engineer" as the driver of social and cultural progress.[270]

Buddhism was as important to Maharathi's practice as craft. And while his artistic legacy has received some attention,[271] his unique relationship to Buddhism and its impact on important structures across Bihar deserves further consideration.[272] In a small volume dedicated to Fujii Guruji, Maharathi writes about his first encounter with the Japanese Buddhist Sangha in India.

[266] *Ibid.,* 72.
[267] As David McMahan writes, following on the work of Charles Taylor, "Modernity…carries with it a nostalgia for the premodern and a hope that ancient traditions can help in reenchanting the world, through, ironically, their own kind of 'sciences' and 'technologies'—those of the spirit." McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 13.
[268] *Ibid.*
[269] Baba Nagarjun, "Buddh yug ki arthik avstha," in *Nagarjun Rachnavali, Vol. 6*, edited by Shobhakant (New Delhi, Patna: Rajakamal Prakashan*,* 2003), 82-88.
[270] For a broader discussion on the role of the "engineer" and the "architect" in design and construction, see: Andrew Saint, *Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry* (Yale University Press, 2007).
[271] Mathur, "Upendra Maharathi;" Gupta, "The Promise of the Modern."
[272] I am greatly indebted to Mahashweta Maharathi for her insights into her father's practice and especially with reference to his dedication to Buddhism and craft traditions. Personal interview, September 3, 2017, Patna.

It took place while he was standing on a train platform in Ramgarh in 1940. Maharathi was waiting for Abdul Kalam Azad, the president of the 53rd session of the Indian National Congress. The train was late and the platform crowded. As Maharathi recounts, "In the middle of this sea of people, Maruyama and one other monk were waiting for the train while beating the drum of peace and chanting 'nam myoho renge kyo.'"[273] The monk Maharathi saw was Maruyama, the same monk who wrote to Nehru in 1953 requesting that some relics of the Buddha be gifted to Japan. When Abdul Kalam Azad arrived, the monks continued on their way, "creating a path through the crowd." People stared and Maharathi was struck by the ability of the monks to draw so much attention simply through their dedication and focus.[274] After the congress session in Ramgarh, Maharathi visited the Japanese monks he saw on the train platform, staying with them for some time at their center in Rajgir. This was the beginning of a lifelong connection to Fujii Guruji and the Nipponzan-Myohoji order of Buddhism. In 1955, Maharathi traveled to Japan to participate in a UNESCO conference as the representative of India, affording him the chance to see and learn about master craftsmen in the country and to see how they continued to practice their craft even as Japan continued to modernize. Maharathi brought back to India much of what he learned during that trip to Japan, setting up his own house as a kind of craftsman studio. As his daughter recounts, their family home was usually filled with Japanese Buddhist monks and Maharathi was always engaged in some kind of artistic production.[275] Through his involvement with Japan, Maharathi refined his approach to craft and Buddhism as two fundamental features of his vision of craft or *shilp* for the nation.

Paintings, legends and history were the other important pillars of Maharathi's practice. In paintings, such as *Aryabhatta* (1940), *Lord Buddha in Vaishali* (n.d.), and *Amrapali* (n.d.), Maharathi experimented with what the ancient capitals and landscapes of Bihar might have looked like in the past. Just as importantly, they also allowed him to imagine what the mood or atmosphere of those landscapes might have been, creating evocative works that highlighted the spiritual aspects of the Indian landscape. Focusing on the intimate relationship between bodies and the terrains they move through, in several of Maharathi's works, rocks and mountains are anthropomorphized, while figures appear to melt into the atmosphere. His works on Gandhi and the Buddha carry this idea further, celebrating the two as martyrs whose remains dissolved into the land and sky. In another series, titled *Glimpses of Tribal Life in Chhota Nagpur, Part 1 and 2* (n.d.), Maharthi focused on Adavasi communities, depicting them in grand and evocative landscapes that they animate and appear to be part of, much in the way the mountains or clouds

[273] Upendra Maharathi, *Shantidut: Mahamana Phujii Guruji.* Rajgir (Nalanda: Tathagat Prakasn, 1973), i.
[274] I believe part of what Maharathi admired about craft traditions and craftspeople, was the focus and dedication they required.
[275] Personal interview with Mahashweta Maharathi, September 3, 2017, Patna.

are part of the landscape of other paintings (figs. 2.32, 2.33, 2.34).

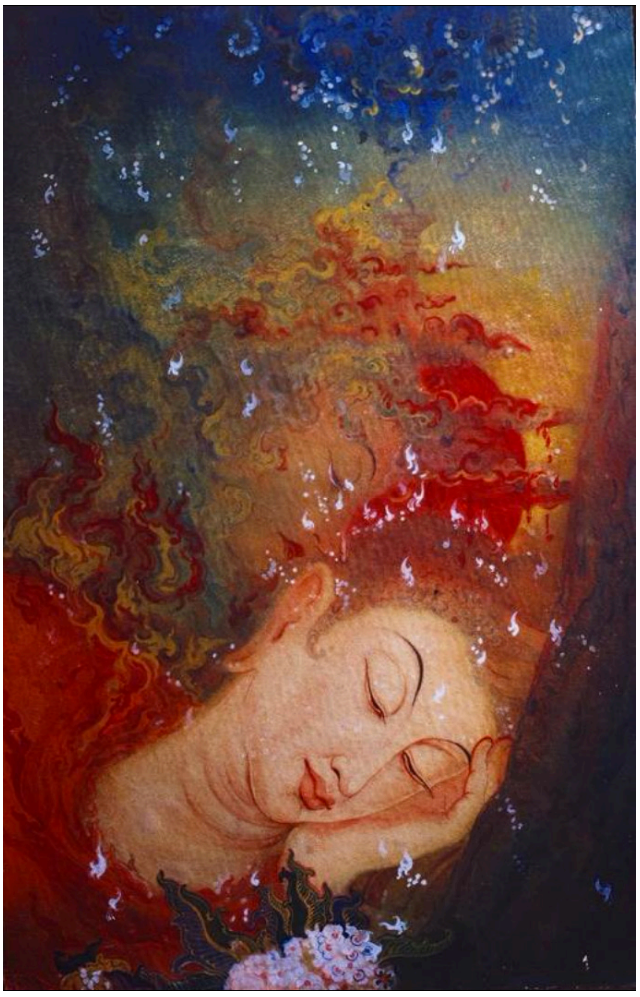
Maharathi's architectural designs from the 1950s and 60s similarly celebrated and idealized a legendary and religious history of Bihar. Working from the popular adage that "bihar" is derived from the word "vihar," or temple, Maharathi set about making Bihar a landscape of temples.[276] He designed bus stands, guesthouses, water towers, city gates, circuit houses, and government offices to look like Buddhist temples. In many cases, they were made to appear as if they were emerging from out of the ruins of famous archaeological sites; the modern revival of ancient forms and cities (figs. 2.35, 2.36, 2.37, 2.38, 2.39, 2.40). Designing each building to fit a state-wide development plan, Maharathi clustered projects according to function, style, and color, creating a network that helped guide and facilitate study, travel, and practice in the region. Highly stylized and painted in bold and bright colors, Maharathi's architectural works often feel like three-dimension versions of his paintings, enhancing a sense of them as legendary or idealized spaces in the landscape.

Maharathi's designs for the New Venuvan Vihar Monastery in Rajgir are exemplary of his romantic vision and how he realized it in architecture. Painted white with light yellow trim, the building seems almost to disappear into the atmosphere. Especially in the mornings or evenings when the valley around the temple is filled with a soft fog, the temple's upper story seems to vanish. Colonnades at the base, however, are detailed in a soft yellow, as are other details of the building, playing against the greenery of the gardens around the temple (fig. 2.41). The coloring and design of the New Venuvan Vihar Monastery are similar to a painting Maharathi did of the Buddha in the same bamboo grove (fig. 2.42). Bringing the imagery of the painting into real life, the gate he depicted behind the Buddha in the painting seems to have been based on or inspired by a similar gate on the edge of the grounds of the New Venuvan Vihar Monastery, leading to a small bridge and a bamboo grove on the other side of small stream. The synergy between painting and building is immediately visible. The same colors, forms, and atmosphere pervade both, encouraging an appreciation of the site as sacred and vibrant (fig. 2.43).

The interior of the New Venuvan Vihar Monastery is large and open. It is defined by several vaulted ceilings created by rotating, repeating, and extruding the *chandrashala* design Maharathi used to ornament the exterior. Statues and paintings from Japan fill a larger altar at the end of the hall. On most days, one will find a monk inside, rhythmically hitting a large drum and chanting 'nam myoho renge kyo,' the famous prayer of the Nichiren sect. On the walls are images of various Vishwa Shanti Stupas, or World Peace Pagodas, from around the world and several large postings of texts and images showcasing the tragedy of atomic warfare.

The temple itself sits next to Venuvan, the famous bamboo grove gifted to the Buddha by

[276] *Ibid*.



Figures 2.32, 2.33, 2.34—clockwise, from upper left "Images in Rocks, Indra and Airavat," Oil on canvas, 61 x 51cm, n.d.; "Earth questions the Mountains," Oil on Canvas, 51.3 x 44cm, n.d.; Detail: "Glimpses of Tribal Life of Chhota Nagpur, Part II," Tempera on paper, 277 x 30.4cm, n.d.; "Nature Despairs teh Maha-parinirva-na of Loard Buddha," Wash on paper, 51 x 33cm, n.d. Paintings by Upendra Maharathi
Source: http://www.geocities.jp/upendra_maharathi/Gallery.html

Figures 2.35, 2.36, 2.37, 2.38: Bus stands, benches, water towers in Nalanda and Rajgir

Figures 2.39, 2.40
above: View of Rajgir with a water tower shaped like a stupa at the center
below: Water tower at Nalanda as seen through the ruins of Nalanda

Figure 2.41: New Venuvan Vihar Monastery, designed by Upendra Maharathi, Rajgir

Figure 2.42: Upendra Maharathi's *Buddha in Venuvan*; Watercolor, 74” x 54”, 1970

Figure 2.43 : Gate to Venuvan, Rajgir

the king Bimbisara and is said to have been a favorite spot of the Buddha. The Bihar government developed the gardens with a small pond, bamboo groves, and platforms and pathways for visitors and events. In recent years, it has become the final destination of an annual pilgrimage through the Jethian Valley by Buddhists from across Asia.[277] Not far from the Japanese Buddhist Temple and Venuvan, are several other structures designed by Maharathi. They include a government circuit house painted a pale yellow and a guesthouse turned dormitory, painted a deep green. The most prominent design feature of the circuit house is a large *chandrashala* that forms the support for a carport. The building itself is ornamented with small stupas lining the roof and the railings on the upper story balconies. Set within a park, the top of the Japanese Buddhist Temple is visible from the roof of the circuit house, appearing like an ancient stupa amidst a forest of bamboo.

In a drawing of the hills and valley of Vulture Peak—the small hillock not far from the New Venuvan Vihar Monastery famous as the site where Buddha is supposed to have taught the Prajnaparamita Sutra—we get a glimpse of Maharathi's vision of the state and how it brings together the different influences that guided his approach to the development of Bihar (fig. 2.44). Drawn as a Japanese or Chinese ink drawing, probably in the late 1960s, it presents Bihar's development as a modern Buddhist landscape. It depicts several temples and gateways, including a large stupa on top of a hill with a rope-way or gondola running up to it. The stupa in the drawing is based on the Vishwa Shanti Stupa desige by Maharathi and built by Fujii Guruji and the Japanese Buddhist Sangha in 1969 (figs. 2.45, 2.46). It was the first of its kind in India, but built as one of a constellation of such stupas around the world. Funded by the same religious organization that approached Nehru to gift a set of relics to Japan—discussed at the start of this chapter—the Vishwa Shanti Stupa was conceived of as a symbol of world peace and a reminder of the horrors of atomic warfare.[278] Even though it imagines a modern Buddhist landscape of India, the drawing by Maharathi of the Vishwa Shanti Stupa and its surrounding area suggests an effort to ground that vision in an idealized vision of Bihar's religious landscape, drawing as much from local histories as pan-Asian affinities linked to Buddhism's spread across Asia.

[277] http://lbdfi.org/portfolio-items/jethian-valley-2014/, accessed July 28, 2018.

[278] Since the construction of the Vishwa Shanti Stupa, similar monuments have been constructed across India and around the world. Some are at sites associated with the life of the Buddha—like Vaishali and Lumbini—while others are located in places like New Delhi, Bengaluru, London, and San Francisco. There are over a hundred such stupas around the world, all unique, but those in India are united by a similar aesthetic: white with golden spires. Maharathi's designs for the Vishwa Shanti Stupa in Ragjri established a clear precedent, drawing from the architectural legacy of Ashoka and the Great Stupa at Sanchi, which is known for its large dome and the detailed railing along its base and upper walkway. See: Jacqueline I. Stone, "Nichiren's Activist Heirs," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (2003): 63-94; M. Deenadayal and V. Sudarshan, "India-Japan Relations through Buddhist culture for Promoting Economic Development and World Peace," *seaps*: 97; Robert Kisala, *Prophets of Peace: Pacifism and Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

Figure 2.44:
Illustration of Vulture Peak by Upendra Mahrathi, n.d.
Private archive

Figures 2.45, 2.46: Vishwa Shanti Stupa at Rajgir and plaque

Maharathi's vision of Rajgir and the Jethian Valley in Bihar is surprisingly close to the present condition of Bihar's Buddhist circuit. It is a vision of the region as a landscape that brings together influences from around the world to create a Buddhist territory. It is a landscape of temples and monuments, connected by roads and gondolas, inhabited by hermits, artists, and tourists, and feels equally Indian and foreign. It is the kind of environment where a Chinese pavilion can sit comfortably alongside a Thai one, a modern university next to a museum or a guesthouse. What connects them all is a sense of the region's history and the importance of Buddhism and craft for economic and social progress.

The romantic vision of India's Buddhist landscape that Maharathi sought to recreate through his designs for Bihar suggests certain historical continuities between his designs from the 1950s and 60s and projects designed by architects like Sris Chandra Chatterjee in the 1920s and 30s. And indeed, there are notable stylistic overlaps between the work of Maharathi and the designs of Sris Chandra Chatterjee discussed in the last chapter. Both attempted to revive the ancient glory of Magadha and the architectural excellence of the various empires in that region. The political and cultural context of Maharathi's work was, however, surprisingly different from Chatterjee's. While Chatterjee developed a Buddhist revivalist aesthetic as part of a Hindu nationalist movement geared towards challenging the British rule of India, Maharathi's designs were based on a more concerted effort to reflect the localized history of Buddhism in India and to use that as a celebration of India's independence and great historical depth. Furthermore, Maharathi's work was directly linked to the idea of culture and tradition as a practice; craft as an artful expression of living. Craft was the link in Maharathi's work between the region's past and its future, connecting what otherwise might have been a more generalized Buddhist revivalist aesthetic to local histories, legends, and a sense of place.

In many ways, Maharathi's life spans the entire history of a Buddhist modern in India. Reflecting on it offers a way to think about some of the historical continuities, and ruptures, of modern Buddhist art and architectural practices in India. His earlier works were incredible watercolors, reminiscent of his contemporaries in the Bengal School, that blend miniature styles, religious symbolism, and historical allegory to create novel works that celebrated pan-Asian aesthetics, while still aspiring to generate national ones. Maharathi's later works grew to express India's national development programs at the state level, leading to a robust and identifiable network of structures that curate Bihar's Buddhist past while facilitating modern uses and experiences. This was accompanied by a shift in medium from watercolors to tempera paint, leading to bolder brighter paintings that reflected his design sensibilities. Later projects celebrated more personal engagements with Buddhism and an enduring sense of the value of Bihar's Buddhist past for the world. Much in the way different approaches to Buddhism have

come to sit side by side in India, Maharathi's work merged multiple national and international influences to create a style that was all his own, while still embodying the unique history of Buddhism in the region.

From Nehru To Ambedkar

While previous chapters began with an entrance into new Buddhist spaces, this chapter began with a remove. The most active gesture of Nehru's Buddhist diplomacy, at first glance, seems to have been a step back, a withdrawal from personal and religiously inflected Buddhist modernism.[279] On further reflection, however, this remove can be read as a sign of Nehru's abiding commitment to Buddhist ideals as well as the enduring power of Buddhism for national and international development plans and policies. Much like Nehru's Buddhist inflected theories of "non-alignment," the initial distancing of Nehru and the Indian government from Buddhist affairs was soon followed by a host of programs and activities designed to encourage Buddhist development across India, from instituting a new management committee at Bodh Gaya, to large scale Buddha Jayanti Celebrations in 1956, and even the design and creation of a commemorative park north of the capital complex in New Delhi. Simultaneously, more regional development around historic Buddhist centers was encouraged, both by foreign polities looking to establish networks of religious pilgrimage centers and as part of state-sponsored development schemes that celebrated local histories of Buddhism in India.

The development of Buddhist sites at both the state and national level indexes alternative approaches to postcolonial development in India. In his study of the politics of decolonization, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about the pedagogical and dialogic as two models of postcolonial development. The pedagogical is premised on the idea that decolonized nations need to "catch up" to the West. It celebrates the statesman as "teacher" and fetishizes the "engineer" as a particular cultural icon.[280] Nehru is exemplary of the pedagogical model, valorizing the engineer as part of his technocratic vision of India. In contrast, the dialogic model is defined by a "richness of contradictions" and an attempt to find commonality in differences; to celebrate diversity.[281] If the engineer is the ideal of a pedagogical model of development, then perhaps the craftsman is the ideal of a dialogic model because it suggests a process of culling designs and strategies from the traditions and practices of local communities. Upendra Maharathi offers a powerful case study in a life lived in pursuit of the ideal of the craftsman, bringing together

[279] Heinz Bechert is famous for coining the term "Buddhist modernism" to describe a general modernization and reform of Buddhist reform around the world.

[280] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2005): 4812. (4812-4818).

[281] As Chakrabarty explains, "…unlike the pedagogical side, there was no one model to follow. Different thinkers took different positions, and it is this richness of their contradictions that speaks directly to the fundamental concerns

a study of India's Buddhist past with influences from different parts of the world in order to present a complete vision of India as a Buddhist landscape. The emphasis of his work was not on universalizing traditions or models for "catching up." Rather, he sought to translate local traditions and practices in such a way that they could be appreciated globally and used to bolster modern development.

It would be too easy to say that one vision of Buddhist development dominated in India after its independence in 1947. Instead, it seems more apt to suggest that Buddhist art and architecture were caught in a dialectical relationship between the ideal of the engineer and the ideal of the craftsman. The difference between them seems to have played out at different levels of development, the first on the national, the other as part of state development plans. Development projects at the state level favored a more revivalist mode of art and architecture, while at the national level, there was an effort to frame Buddhism within international modern trends. Common to both approaches, however, was a new understanding of India as an international commons, a site for nations and communities to come together.

The notion of an international commons is generally used in discussions of the management of natural resources around the world. It refers to "domains traditionally acknowledged to be beyond the exclusive legal jurisdiction of sovereign states."[282] I use the phrase here in reference to the management of cultural heritage. Since the end of the 19th-century, Buddhism was promoted as one of India's great contributions to the world. After independence, Buddhism's history of fostering international connections, artistic and social progress, as well as ideals of world peace, were used to rethink India as a space where the world could meet on common ground. In other words, by focusing on its Buddhist past, India framed itself as the caretaker of a history and tradition that was important for the entire world.[283] This was further validated in 2002, when Bodh Gaya became a UNESCO World Heritage site.[284]

If Buddhist revivalist projects prior to 1947 used Buddhism to define India as a sacro-political landscape—a *bhumi*—then Buddhist projects after India's independence reframed the nation as an international commons, engaging with Buddhism as a pre-modern precursor to India's postcolonial emancipation. In building a narrative around India's independence with Buddhism as a marker of progress—the inevitable march to freedom and liberation—the government of India set the stage for Buddhism to inspire new social reform movements that approached Buddhism as an escape from enduring casteism and other forms of oppression. Dr.

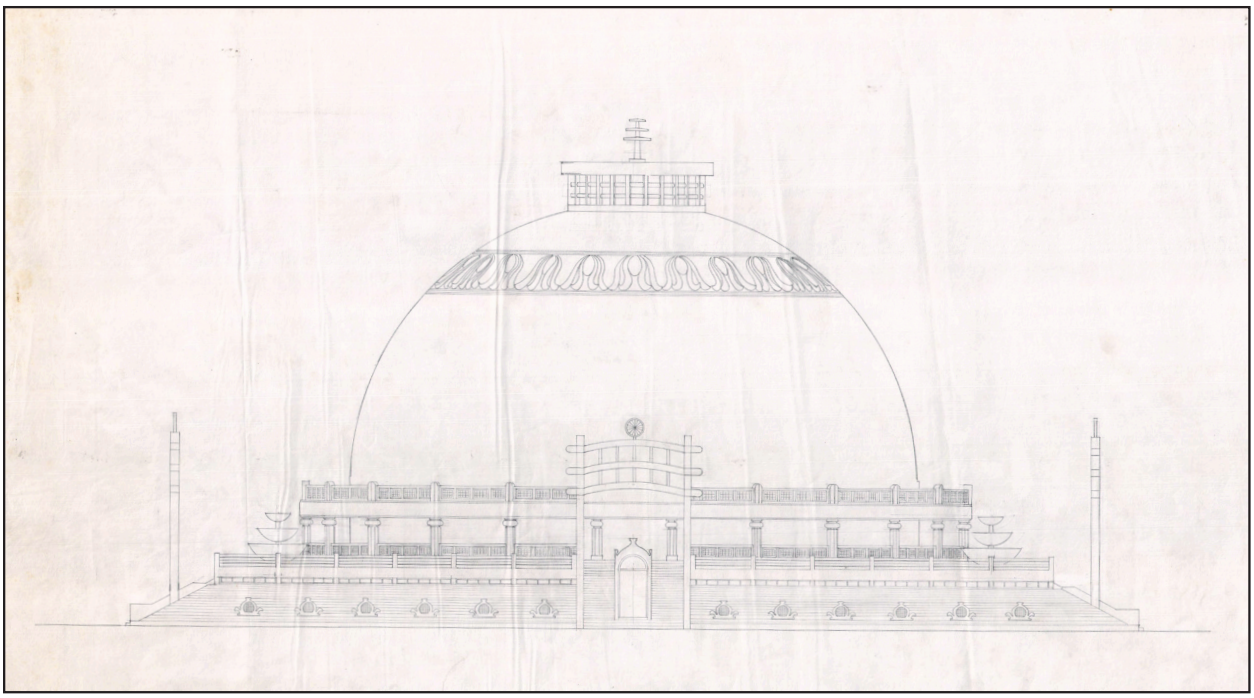
of both postcolonial criticism and globalization theory." *Ibid.*

[282] Marvin S. Soroos, "The International Commons: A Historical Perspective," *Environmental Review: ER* 12, no. 1 (1988): 1.

[283] "The Way of the Buddha." Speech in New Delhi, 24 May 1956. AIR tapes, NMML. Original in Hindi. *The Oxford India: Nehru,* edited by Uma Iyengar (Oxford University Press), 650-655.

[284] https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1056, accessed July 28, 2018.

B.R. Ambedkar—the great anti-caste activist and hand of the Indian constitution—picked up on this. Anticipating a global trend to see nations as new sites of global imperialism, Ambedkar approached Buddhism as a means for social and political liberation linked to the de-terrorization of the state. At the end of 1956, the same year the Indian government sponsored large scale Buddha Jayanti celebrations across the country, Ambedkar led a mass conversion of several hundred thousand Dalits—formerly the Untouchables of India—to Buddhism in Nagpur, India. The conversion inspired a new Buddhist tradition and the development of a modern network of Buddhist sites. Following their conversion, the Dalit Buddhist movement began coopting Buddhist symbols—especially those associated with the Indian government—and the sacro-political space of Buddhism itself in an effort to define new social and political spaces for Dalit's in India. These developments would not have been possible without earlier efforts by Nehru and the Indian government to frame Buddhism as a symbol of social and political liberation.



Chapter 3

After Ambedkar

Chapter Three—After Ambedkar

Dalit Buddhist Art and Architecture

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the great social activist, politician, and hand of the Indian constitution arrived in the morning, exiting his car and walking determinedly towards a stage set in the midst of an ocean of people. He had come to lead a mass conversion to Buddhism, inaugurating a new Buddhist tradition that would come to be known variously as Dalit Buddhism, Navayana Buddhism, or neo-Buddhism (fig. 3.1).[285] A few weeks earlier the site had laid empty, an open plot in the middle of Nagpur, the winter capital of Maharashtra. But on April 14, 1956, the grounds were crowded with hundreds of thousands of people, mostly members of the Dalit community—formerly the Scheduled Castes and Tribes of India or Untouchables—all dressed in white.[286] Like those assembled, Ambedkar also wore white, donning a silk *dhoti*, an

[285] "Diksha" translates more literally as "initiation." Conversion, however, is the language Ambedkar used around his turn to Buddhism, so I use it here as I believe it represents the kind of break from a previous tradition and the adoption of a new one that is not as present in the idea of an "initiation." For more on conversion as a form of social and political emancipation, see: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Conversion as Emancipation* (Critical Quest, 2004); Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, eds., *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

[286] While a solemn occasion, it was also a moment of celebration. According to people who attended the conversion ceremony in 1956, every shop in and around Nagpur was sold out of white fabric, and people had begun to set up decorations in homes and public spaces. Hundreds of thousands of people poured into Nagpur from all parts of India, filling the streets and assembling in the open spot of land in Nagpur that would come to be known as "Diksha Bhumi" or "conversion ground." Long bamboo railings were set up to help keep the crowd organized and the local chapter of the Samata Sainik Dal, the Soldiers for Social Equality founded by Ambedkar in 1927, was engaged in managing the event. The local chapter of the Samata Sainik Dal had originally been charged with acting as Ambedkar's bodyguards during the conversion ceremony, however on the actual day, Ambedkar arrived with the members from the Bombay chapter (present day Mumbai). I am greately indepted to N.G. Kable and C.S. Patel for sharing

FIgure 3.1: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, 1935
Source: Wikimedia Commons

unusual choice for a man known for wearing a blue suit and red tie.[287] Ambedkar's wife, Savita Ambedkar, walked beside him dressed in a white *sari*. As they climbed the stairs up to the stage, they were greeted by monks from the Mahabodhi Society. The monks formed the *sangha* or community from which Ambedkar would take his conversion, their saffron robes creating a locus of color in the midst of the gathered crowd. A small table had been placed on the stage and set with bronze lions and a statue of the Buddha garlanded with flowers.[288] The platform itself was designed as a sort of makeshift stupa or monument. Clearly identifiable by its large dome, detailed railings, and *toranas* or gateways, the stupa crowning the platform was modeled after the Great Stupa of Sanchi, the iconic Buddhist memorial established by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in the 3rd-century BCE (fig. 3.2).[289]

Designed and constructed by Ram Tirpude, the model of Sanchi at the conversion event was a beacon for the new Buddhist movement. It suggested parallels between Ambedkar's conversion and Ashoka's own turn to Buddhism many centuries prior. The model further prefigured the extensive building campaign of the Dalit Buddhist movement, simulating Ashoka's architectural legacy and its role in defining a moral and political geography across much of northern India.[290] In its early stages, the Dalit Buddhist movement did not have the benefit of a monarchy or government for support in constructing its new centers. Instead, it was community driven, making use of whatever funds and materials were available. Drawing from "materials at hand to fashion a miniature of the Sanchi stupa as a canopy over the heads of Ambedkar and his associates,"[291] Tirpude's design foreshadowed the aesthetic and symbolic trajectory of Dalit Buddhist architecture after 1956. Evoking a sense of a Buddhist past in South Asia and its modern use as part of Indian nationalist movements, Dalit Buddhist art and architecture developed as a way to memorialize Amebedkar and the new Buddhist community he

their accounts of the conversion ceremony with me during a set of interviews I conducted with them in Nagpur on March 17, 2014. N.G. Kamble also provided me with several documents from his personal archive, including an announcemnt that was sent out in preparation for the ceremony by the Buddhist Society of India, on September 21, 1956. The announcement reads: "Revered Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Founder and President of the Buddhist Society of India—The Bharatiya Bouddha Jana Samiti—shall embrace Buddhism at the ceremony to be held at Nagpur at 8 am on the Vijayaya Dashami Day—Sunday the 14th October, 1956. Venerable Bhikkhu Chandramani Maha Thera of Burma, now in India, shall perform the ceremony. / People desirous of getting themsevles converted shall be able to do so at the very ceremony, and shall be required to wear clean white garments." For more on the Samata Sainik Dal see http://ssdindia.org/about/, accessed February 15, 2017. For more on caste in India, see: Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (University of California Press, 2009).

[287] For more on the customs of dress in India, see: Emma Tarlo*, Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[288] "Ambeḍkar Baudhd Diksha Vishesank," *Prabudhd Bharat*, August 26, 1956.

[289] For more on Sanchi see: Dehejia, *Unseen Presence*; Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument," 77-109.

[290] Allen, *Ashoka.*

[291] Gary Michael Tartakov, ed., *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.

Figure 3.2: Conversion Pavilion, Nagpur, April 14, 1956. Colors digitally imposed
Source: Buddhism & Ambedkarism Blog

established.

A leading member of the Dalit community, Ambedkar had struggled against caste his entire life. Despite restrictions on education for lower castes and Untouchables, he achieved an incredible education, becoming one of the most learned men in India at the time. He received doctoral degrees in economics from Columbia University and the London School of Economics and studied for the Bar at Gray's Inn, London. Returning to India in 1917, he worked for the Baroda State Government before becoming a professor at Sydenham College in Bombay. Angered by the discrimination he continued to experience in those roles, Ambedkar soon gave up teaching to take up politics.[292] In 1924, he founded the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha political party

[292] There are several biographies available on Ambedkar. Some of the most well-known are: Narendra Jadhav, *Ambedkar: Awakening India's Social Conscience* (Konark Publishers, 2014); Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System* (Columbia University Press, 2005); Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Popular Prakashan, 1995); Gail Omvedt, *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. (Penguin, 2017); Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism* (Windhorse Publications, 1986).

and began organizing political agitations or *satyagraha*. Many of these protests centered on the right of Dalits to enter public and religious spaces, specifically public wells and temples. In 1927, Ambedkar marched with a large group to the public well in Mahad, affirming the legal rights of Dalits to draw water from it.[293] In 1930, he led another protest, this time entering the Kalaram Temple, challenging the continued restrictions on Dalits from entering temple grounds. In both cases, the protesters were met with resistance. In Mahad, the local community revolted, calling for the immediate purification of the well, dumping cow-dung into it and performing other rituals to sanctify it.[294] In Kalaram, the protesters were met with violence.[295]

By its very nature, "untouchability" was premised on the exclusion of certain communities from social and physical arenas.[296] As the name suggests, their "touch" was felt to be polluting and, by extension, their presence was also stigmatized. Accordingly, the right to enter public spaces was a recurrent theme and a pervasive issue related to caste in India, one that would come to have a major impact on the art and architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement. As I discuss below, the art and architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement developed to create new spaces for Dalits, celebrating and encouraging them to come together and congregate in religious and public spaces. Through new visual and material expressions of Dalit culture, the art and architecture of the movement evolved to express a new collective identity and assert their presence in Indian society and politics.

Buddhism's past in India provided a rich and celebrated history on which to ground modern Dalit identity. The choice of Buddhism as the new religious and historical basis of the Dalit community, however, was not always evident. In 1935, after a series of very public and heated debates with Mahatma Gandhi over reservations for Dalits, Ambedkar vowed not to die a Hindu.[297] It was around this time that Ambedkar began searching for alternative religions for his community.[298] He did not settle upon Buddhism right away. Instead, he studied different

[293] Swapna H. Samel, "Mahad Chawadar Tank Satyagraha of 127: Beginning of Dalit Liberation under BR Ambedkar," in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 60 (India History Congress, 1999): 722-728.
[294] Gail Omvedt, "Dalit and Democratic Revolution," *New Delhi* 1, no. 994 (1994): 1-50.
[295] For a good collection of some of his writings and details about Ambedkar's life, see: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/index.html, accessed September 4, 2018.
[296] Robert Deliege, "Replication and Consensus: Untouchability, Caste and Ideology in India," *Man* (1992): 155-173. For a particularly moving description of the experience of untouchability, see, Mulk RajAnand, *Untouchable* (Penguin, 2014). First published in 1935.
[297] Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* 253. For a taste of the kinds of debates that existed between Ambedkar and Gandhi, see Ambedkar's essay "Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables," available online at: http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/42.%20Mr.%20Gandhi%20and%20The%20Emancipation%20of%20The%20Untouchables.htm, accessed August 6, 2018.
[298] Ravinder Kumar, "Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact, 1932," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 8.1-2 (1985): 87-101; Tejani, Shabnum. "Reflections on the Category of Secularism in India: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Ethics of Communal Representation, c. 1931." (2007): 45-65; Asha Krishan, *Ambedkar and Gandhi: Emancipators of Untouchables in Modern India* (Himalaya Publishing House, 1997).

religions from around the world, including Christianity, Sikhism, and Islam.[299] Members of various faiths courted Ambedkar, offering to finance the construction of schools and community centers.[300] Such inquiries were often associated with discussions of architecture and the appropriate symbols for the movement. Ultimately, Ambedkar chose Buddhism because it was a religion from India and thus carried with it cultural and ethnic implications that he felt would benefit Dalits over time.[301] Furthermore, it had a robust artistic and architectural legacy in the region that could be used as the inspiration for the movement's visual and material expressions. Drawing from precedents such as the Great Stupa at Sanchi, the caves of Ajanta, and other well-known examples of Buddhist art and architecture in India, Dalit Buddhists began constructing a narrative around themselves as the inheritors of Buddhism in the region, coopting its artistic and architectural heritage to create new spaces designed to elevate the position of Dalits in India.

Having made the personal decision to convert, Ambedkar invited other members of the Dalit community to join him. In 1936, Ambedkar organized a series of public discussions with members of the Mahar community, his particular caste-community. During these meetings, Ambedkar explained his motivation for turning to Buddhism and why he thought they should as well. As he expressed it:

> For myself I have taken my decision. My conversion is sure. My conversion is not for any material gain. There is nothing which I cannot achieve by remaining as an Untouchable… However, for you, for spiritual as well as material gains conversion is a must.[302]

The decision was eventually taken to carry out a mass conversion to Buddhism. Following this resolution, Dalit communities began studying Buddhism and exploring its legacy in India, organizing study groups and publication divisions.[303] They also began experimenting with forms of representation, incorporating Buddhist elements into both private and public projects. Ambedkar had a role to play in many of these early formal explorations. For example, in 1948, Ambedkar republished P. Lakshmi Narasu's *The Essence of Buddhism,* using it as an opportunity to furnish those who read it with a large collection of Buddhist images. As Gary Tartakov writes about Ambedkar's role in the reprint of Narasu's work, in addition to writing a biographical note

[299] Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar.*
[300] Johannes Beltz and Surendra Jondhale, *Reconstructing the World: Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
[301] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?: How They Came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society* (Bombay: Thackers, 1970); Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (SUNY Press, 1996); Arvind Sharma, "Dr. BR Ambedkar on the Aryan Invasion and the Emergence of the Caste System in India," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2005): 843-870.
[302] Ambekdar, *Conversion as Emancipation*, 37.
[303] *Ibid.*

about Narasu, Ambedkar also:

> …chose to reprint…Narasu's second edition, which included 105 photographs of Buddhist imagery, which were lacking in the first edition. In doing this, he was expressing not only his acceptance of Narasu's vision of the dhamma but his vision of the dhamma's appropriate visual imagery.[304]

These earlier explorations in print media influenced Ambekdar's later publications on Buddhism, most notably *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* published posthumously in 1957. It also provided a rich index of Buddhist forms on which to develop new Dalit Buddhist imagery.[305]

After India's independence in 1947, Ambedkar was invited by Jawaharlal Nehru to be India' first Minister of Law. He was later appointed Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the constitution.[306] Ambedkar is largely credited with incorporating many of the more secularist and egalitarian elements of the constitution, as well as adding special provisions for Dalits and other marginalized communities.[307] He is also recognized for his role in encouraging the government to look to Buddhism as a model for modern governance and for the use of Buddhist symbols as the paraphernalia of the Indian government.[308] Many of the Buddhist symbols adopted by the Indian government—such as the Ashokan Lion Capital and *dharmachakra* discussed in Chapter 2—were later picked up by the Dalit community.[309] The use of this same set of symbols by Dalit Buddhists presents a double cooption: First, of the Buddhist legacy of Ashoka in India, and second, of the Government of India's use of those same symbols. In other words, in addition to turning towards a new religion as an escape from the caste system, Ambedkar's conversion was designed as a claim to the political and cultural significance of Buddhism in modern India. This involved the appropriation of Buddhist imagery and the construction of new monuments and

[304] Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*, 130-131.
[305] *Ibid.*
[306] http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/1940s.html, accessed, August 5, 2018.
[307] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *States and Minorities: What are their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India* (Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Society, 1970); Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Vasant Moon, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1994); Sukhadeo Thorat, *BR Ambedkar: Perspectives on Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policies* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
[308] The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru also had a role to play in the adoption of Buddhist symbols by the Government of India. As discussed in the last chapter, he also approached Buddhism as a model for modern governance. More work needs to be done on how the two leaders' approaches to Buddhism differed or worked together to help shape modern India. For more on the debates between Ambedkar and members of the Congress Party, see: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *What Congress & Gandhi Have done to the Untouchables* (Gautam Book Center, 1946); Roy, *The Doctor and the Saint*; Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*; Reba Som, "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance?" *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 165-194; Surinder S. Jodhka, "Nation and village: Images of rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2002): 3343-3353.
[309] For more on these symbols and their adoption by the Government of India, see Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*.

memorials designed to represent the physical and historical presence of Dalit communities across the country.

The process of reimagining the religious and political spaces of Buddhism in India began with Ambedkar's conversion in Nagpur, India. A city with a large Dalit population, Nagpur is also at the very center of India, a point I will discuss in more detail below. Ambedkar's choice of Nagpur indicated a desire to remap or reterritorialize India, linking his conversion to both pre- and postcolonial efforts to define the social and political contours of India. From Nagpur, the network of Dalit Buddhist sites expanded to other cities, first through the events around Ambedkar's death and later through more localized efforts to erect new *viharas,* memorials, statues, and monuments across India dedicated to remembering Ambedkar as a political hero and religious saint.[310] Over time, grander monuments were planned that celebrated Ambkedar and the new Dalit Buddhist movement he founded, but also a longer legacy of Buddhism in India as the basis for new social and political movements. Before discussing the art and architecture that developed after Ambedkar's conversion, it is worth considering the religious and philosophical basis of the Dalit Buddhist movement. For that, I return to the moment of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956, in order to highlight some of the distinct aspects of the Dalit Buddhist movement and its relationship to Buddhist modernism and post-colonial readings of the nation as a site of imperialism and continued forms of oppression. I spend some time discussing the ideological basis of the movement as it is essential to appreciating the art and architecture that developed to express it.

The Contours of a New Buddhist Tradition

During the conversion ceremony of 1956, Ambedkar took his vows from the assembled monks, signifying his initiation into the tradition they represented.[311] Bhadant Chandramani Mahathero was among them.[312] Chandramani's role in Ambedkar's conversion signaled that it was part of a modern approach to Buddhism. One of the first four monks to come to India from Burma

[310] Timothy Fitzgerald, "Ambedkar, Buddhism and the Concept of Religion," in *Untouchable: Dalits in Modern India*, edited by S.M. Michael (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999): 57-71. For an account of how Ambedkar is remembered each year on his anniversary, see V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (Pan Macmillan, 2012).
[311] Dan Smyer Yu, "Buddhist conversion in the contemporary world," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, edited by Lewsi R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Robert J. Miller, "'They will not Die Hindus': The Buddhist Conversion of Mahar Ex-Untouchables," *Asian Survey* (1967): 637-644.
[312] Seven monks attended the ceremony. They included Bhadant Chandramani Mahathero, Bhante Pragya Tiss, M. Sangh Ratan Mahathera, Bhiskhi Dhamm Rakshit, H. Saddha Riss and H. Thamma Nand Mahather. There seems to be some debate over who actually initiated Ambekdar. Some reports suggest it was Chandramani, other report it was Bhante Galgedar Pragyanand. See: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/monk-who-initiated-ambedkar-to-buddhism-dies-at-90-/articleshow/61861421.cms, accessed July 21, 2018.

(present day Myanmar) at the end of the nineteenth century as part of Anagarika Dharmapala's efforts to create a larger Buddhist presence in Bodh Gaya, Chandramani had a major impact on the spread of modern Buddhism in South Asia.[313] He stayed in India long after his fellow monks had returned to Burma, establishing himself in Kushinagar, the site of the Buddha's *parinirvana*.[314] Chandramani helped define the small town as a modern pilgrimage place and converted many others to Buddhism, including Karmasheel and Mahapragya from Nepal in 1930 and the British monk Sangharakshita.[315]

Chandramani played an important role in defining modern Buddhism in South Asia, defining what Heinz Bechert has written about as "Buddhist modernism" in the region.[316] Largely spurred by colonial influences and new global connections made possible through modern transportation, as well as social and cultural reformations afoot in the region, Buddhist modernism refers to reform and revivalist efforts and organizations that developed around readings of Buddhist teachings as a modern intellectual and socially engaged philosophy.[317] As Bechert writes,

> [Buddhist modernism] is characterized by the emphasis laid on rationalist elements in Buddhist teachings, by the belief that the teachings of Buddhism and those of modern science are not only in conformity but identical, by the tacit elimination of the traditional cosmology, and by a reinterpretation of the objective of the Buddhist religion in terms of social reform and the building of a better world.[318]

To Bechert's definition we might add that Buddhist modernism is typified by a new emphasis on laity and lay practitioners, as well as an increased emphasis on understanding individual Buddhist communities as embedded in global networks.

Ambedkar did more than just continue a modern approach to Buddhism, he transformed

[313] Sarah LeVine, *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravada Movement in Twentieth-Century Nepal* (Harvard University Press, 2009).
[314] Geary Mukherjee, "Buddhism in Contemporary India"; Rana P.B. Singh, *Where the Buddha Walked: A Companion to the Buddhist Places of India* (Indica Books, 2003).
[315] As D.C. Ahir writes in *The Pioneers of Indian Buddhism*, Chandramani was born in a small village in Burma (present day Myanmar) in 1876. Having become a novice at the age of ten, he went to India when Anagarika Dhamapala asked "Ven. U Chandima to send some suitable Dhammadutas for missionary work in India." Chandramani was thus one of the four Burmese monks to come to Bodh Gaya at Dharmapala's bequest, staying at the Burmese Guest house as a kind of protest or demonstration of religious observances at Bodh Gaya. Chandramani began living in Kushnagar only after 1903 and soon petitioned to make the "Nirvana Temple" a living site of worship and devotion. Official permission for Chandramani's request was given in 1904." D.C. Ahir, *The Pionners of Buddhist Revival in India* (Delhi: Sri Saguru Publications, 1989), 46-47.
[316] Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society, Nation."
[317] In her dissertation on the modern history of Buddhism Gitanjali Surendra suggests Buddhist Modernism in India is an effort to rethink Buddhism as a liberation-theology. Surendran, "'The Indian Discovery of Buddhism'."
[318] Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society, Nation," 91.

it to address the specific social and political needs of Dalits in India. Gitanjali Surendran writes about Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism as a "liberation theology," a turn to religion as a way to amend social and political ills that he was unable to tackle in politics and law alone. As Surendran writes,

> Ambedkar's conversion may be seen as one of the first important post-independence expressions of dissatisfaction with the so-called modern, secularist state's potential for social egalitarianism. In this context Ambedkar attempted a kind of revolution or at any rate, a radical break, deploying religion where he felt that the state and the law that he had so tirelessly tried to influence, would not succeed in liberating the lower castes.[319]

Approaching Dalit Buddhism as a liberation theology emphasizes the movement's connection to global liberation ideologies around race and oppression.[320] It also highlights Dalit Buddhism's connection to other forms of "engaged Buddhism" in places like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.[321]

The combination of international connections and local histories is a defining aspect of the ideological and aesthetic legacy of the Dalit Buddhist movement. The art and architecture of the movement followed suit. Rather than employing a revivalist style, the movement developed a more fragmentary aesthetic, one that involved the incorporation of ancient Buddhist architectural references into otherwise modernist structures. The art historian Rebecca Brown has talked about this as a process of "folding" in architectural references, creating a unified Indian aesthetic through the inclusion of incomplete references drawn from multiple periods and regions.[322] Bringing together Buddhist architectural references and modernist designs, the art and architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement established a new Buddhist aesthetic that reflects the movement's evolving social, political, and religious agendas.

Ambedkar's break from other Buddhist traditions was incorporated into the conversion ceremony he led in 1956. While Ambedkar took his initiation from Chandramani and the other monks in attendance, everyone else took their conversion from Ambedkar, signaling that his was to be a new Buddhist tradition, distinct from the one he had been initiated into by

[319] Surendran, "The Indian Discovery of Buddhism," 197.
[320] Vijay Prashad has written extensively about the Dalit movement as part of a global movement against various forms of oppression. Some of his books, include: *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of Dalit Community* (Oxford University Press, 2000); *The Karma of Brown Folk* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000); *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (The New Press, 2008); *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Beacon Press, 2002).
[321] Thich Nhat Hanh is largely credited with coining the term "engaged Buddhism" in his work *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. Hill and Wang, 1967. For a survey of how approaches to engaged Buddhism have developed in South and Southeast Asia, see: Queen and King, *Engaged Buddhism*.
[322] Brown, "Reviving the Past"; Brown, Rebecca. *Gandhi's Spinning Wheel and the Making of India*. Routledge, 2010.

Chandramani. Having taken the three refuges and five precepts typical of Buddhist initiations, Ambedkar turned towards the crowd, taking twenty-two vows he had written especially for the occasion before leading the entire assembly in the same twenty-two vows.[323] While some of the vows were predictable—"I shall not steal, I shall not tell lies"—others explained and clarified Buddhist practices—"I shall follow the Eightfold path as told by the Buddha." Other vows were notable because of how anti-Hindu they were. At least half explicitly rejected Hindu gods and worship—"I shall not consider Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as Gods nor shall I worship them; I shall not consider Ram and Krishna as Gods nor shall I worship them; I shall not believe in Gauri-Ganesh and other gods and goddesses of Hindu Religion nor shall I worship them." Still others denied any sort of theism. Such vows were followed by a specific rebuttal of Buddhism as part of Hinduism—"I believe that, Buddha is an incarnation of Vishnu, is a false and malicious propaganda." Having publicly led the mass conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar left the stage with his wife, returning the next day to offer a longer discussion of what he felt the core tenants of his new Buddhist movement meant for Dalits in India.[324]

The novel approach to Buddhism Ambedkar established in 1956 was also a rebuke of earlier attempts to couch Buddhism in Hindu nationalist and state sponsored development schemes. Prior to Ambedkar's conversion, other religious and political leaders had attempted to elevate the status of lower castes in India through religious and political reforms and the construction of new temples, guesthouses, and schools. Mahatma Gandhi is one notable figure, discussed in Chapter 1, whose ideals were incorporated into a set of temples funded by the Birla family in the 1930s and 40s. After 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru framed India's post-colonial emancipation in terms of the Buddha's personal liberation centuries earlier, articulating a vision of the nation as a more egalitarian and universalist space. Both of these trends saw Buddhism as a powerful counter narrative to colonialism in Asia and other forms of oppression, using it as a way to assert India's independence and political agency. Ambedkar continued the trend of seeing Buddhism as an important counterforce to different forms of domination and oppression. However, rather than understanding the colonizer as a foreign power, he articulated a notion of a Hindu imperialism inside India itself, aligning the Dalit Buddhist movement with global struggles around the world related to race, identity and oppression.[325]

Even the choice to lead a mass conversion in 1956—while partially motivated by Ambedkar's declining health—was a challenge to the Government of India's claims to the

[323] LeVine, *Rebuilding Buddhism*; Alan Sponberg, "TBMSG: A Dhamma Revolution in Contemporary India," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, edited by Christopher Queen and Sallie B. King (SUNY, 1996), 73-120.
[324] The text of the speech Ambedkar gave after his conversion to Buddhism can be found at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_conversion.html, accessed September 4, 2018.
[325] Anil Seal, "Imperialism and Nationalism in India," *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1973): 321-347.

nation's Buddhist past. As discussed in the previous chapter, the government of India had organized large public programs throughout the year, inviting delegates from across Asia to participate in celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *parinirvana* known as Buddha Jayanti. Ambedkar's conversion took place that same year and can be read as a challenge to a Hindu majority's efforts to orchestrate large Buddhist celebrations in India. Tellingly, while government sponsored events focused on engaging with foreign delegations, inviting Buddhists from around the world, Ambedkar's conversion marked an effort to create a new Buddhist community in India itself, defining the new tradition as an anti-Hindu political and social movement.

Like Ambedkar's reading of Buddhism, the visual and material cultures of the Dalit Buddhist movement emphasized Buddhism as a unique religious tradition in India and Ambedkar and his followers as the modern inheritors of that tradition. Following the mass conversion to Buddhism, Dalit families began emptying their homes of any Hindu idols, texts, or images, throwing them onto large bonfires lit across India.[326] Those unable to attend the conversion ceremony in Nagpur participated from afar, taking their conversion as the event was broadcast over the radio. Once community places and homes had been emptied of Hindu images, the production of new Buddhist art and architecture began. While it would be some time before grand monuments could be built, smaller gestures began to appear across India: A small Buddha statue where before there was a Hindu idol; an image of Ambedkar and the Buddha in a living room, their faces sometimes superimposed to suggest the one blurring with the other; a new architectural detail on a home, such as a dome on a home's edifice or *chaitya* arches around the windows (fig. 3.3). Over time, people began to modify their homes in more radical ways, modeling architectural details on famous Buddhist structures like the Great Stupa of Sanchi. Eventually communities began pulling their resources to install larger statues, gates, and community centers. Each project and intervention increasingly blurred the line between the political and the religious. Community centers came to serve as temples or viharas, statues as memorials as well as icons, and gateways and other architectural features as points for religious observance as well as urban markers. In the process, Ambedkar became more than a political or social hero. He became a religious icon, a *bodhisattava*, or the next Buddha according to some Dalit Buddhists (figs. 3.4, 3.5).[327] In some cases, traditional markers such as lotuses or halos were

[326] This account is drawn from various accounts of the conversion ceremony, including interviews with N.G. Kable and C.S. Patel on March 17, 2014. Ambedkar had actually set a precedent for burning Hindu texts when he organized a collective burning of the *Manusmriti* in 1927. See: Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, "Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: Rebel against Hindu Tradition," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1976): 13-23.

[327] One of the most immediate and visible signs of the Dalit community's turn to Buddhism was the production of statues of Ambedkar in public places across India. Such statues typically portray Ambedkar standing and wearing a blue suit and tie, often with one hand pointing into the distance, while under the other hand he holds a book or a

Figure 3.3: Private Residence, Nagpur

used to emphasize Ambedkar's elevated status as a religious and political figure. Architectural features such as domes and umbrellas drawn from Ashokan references were similarly used to frame Ambekdar statues as religious icons. Such design interventions also highlight his legacy as a political leader, blurring the distinction between an understanding of him as a religious and social leader.

The construction of Dalit Buddhist sites provided the opportunity to experiment with new forms and styles as part of the production of a modern network of Dalit Buddhist sites across India. Over time, certain architectural features became hallmarks of the movement and a way to relate disparate sites. Built before Ambedkar's conversion, Milind College in Aurangabad was one of the earliest Buddhist inflected structures associated with the movement, incorporating

copy of the Indian Constitution. Gary Tartakov's essay "Art and Identity: The Rise of New Buddhist Imagery" was the first to highlight how such statues worked to bring Dalit identity to the national stage, much in the way that new Dalit literature was a way to give Dalits a national and international voice. What Tartokov brilliantly outlines is how Dalit art and architecture developed to express a collective desire for greater social and political agency in India through collective symbols that spatially marked Dalit spaces in cities and rural areas. In other words, the art and architecture of the movement helped establish a physical presence of Dalit communities in India, linking them to a proud history of Buddhism in the region and transforming them into sites of political and social emancipation. Gary Michael Tartakov, "Art and Identity: the Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 409-416. See also: Nicolas Jaoul, "Learning the use of Symbolic Means: Dalits, Ambedkar Statues and the State in Uttar Pradesh," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 175-207.


Figures 3.4, 3.5: Public monuments, Nagpur

Buddhist architectural elements into its design. The college also houses a set of Buddha statues Ambedkar helped design. Chaitya Bhumi in Mumbai, was constructed soon after Ambedkar' death in 1956. It was the first structures built specifically to commemorate Ambedkar as a religious figure. In addition to establishing new artistic and architectural traditions, Chaitya Bhumi inaugurated a practice of constructing religious monuments associated with Ambedkar and his legacy. It was several decades before a memorial was constructed at Dhiksha Bhumi, the site of Ambedkar's conversion. Before a large memorial hall was built there, the monk Anand Kausalyayan constructed a small monk's residence known as Bhiksu Niwas at the site. This was followed by the development of the Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Complex. In many ways, the memorial complex at Diksha Bhumi incorporated the key elements of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture and its expansion into a set of formal and stylistic approaches to building new Dalit Buddhist spaces in India. After the 1980s, several large memorial parks were constructed under the direction of prominent Dalit leaders. These include Buddha Bhumi and Nagaloka outside of Nagpur, and the Ambedkar Memorial Park in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow. Each represents a different approach to memorializing Ambedkar's legacy, incorporating key features of earlier designs, but also modifying those designs to reflect the changing needs and interests of Dalit communities in India. The Ambedkar Memorial Park in Lucknow, in particular, highlights how Dalit Buddhist art and architecture has develop after the Bhajuan Samaj Party's rise to political power, evolving from small community driven interventions into large-scale civic projects.

Early Explorations

Even before the large conversion ceremony of 1956, Ambedkar and his associates began experimenting with Buddhist forms of representation. These early explorations helped set the


Figures 3.6, 3.7: Milind College, Aurangabad

stage for the later art and architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement. One of the first projects to incorporate Buddhist elements into its design and mission was Milind College. It was founded in Aurangabad in 1950 under the auspices of the People's Education Society, a society established by Ambedkar in 1945. The main building was designed by the architect Mr. Narvekar. Much in the way that earlier institutions like Shantiniketan and Benares Hindu University sought to merge traditional Indian ideals with Western approaches to education and the sciences, the mission of Milind College was to provide a modern education based on Buddhist principles. However, unlike earlier nationalist institutions that approached Eastern spiritualism as an antidote to Western materialism, Milind College saw Buddhism as aligned with modern forms of Western education. The architecture of the campus was designed to reflect that aspect of its mission. The Buddhist architectural references of the main building at Milind College draw from both ancient and modern architectural precedents, stressing their ongoing significance as religious and political symbols. Unlike the other nationalist education institutions discussed so far in this dissertation—which tended to be painted red or yellow—Milind College is painted white with blue trim. The use of white emphasizes the building's likeness to colonial structures across India, while the blue identifies it as a building connected with the Dalit movement. A two-story, u-shaped structure with open colonnades, the most iconic elements of the main building at Milind College are two large domes on each corner modeled after stupas (figs 3.6, 3.7). They are instantly recognizable as stupas by their domes, *harmikas*, and spires. Those living in Aurangabad might recognize them as modern replicas of stupas like those inside the *chaitya* halls of Ajanta or the famous dome of the Great Stupa at Sanchi. Upon closer inspection, the domes at Milind College further reference the main dome of the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in New Delhi, designed by Edwin Lutyens and completed in 1929 (figs. 3.8, 3.9, 3.10).

Figures 3.8, 3.9, 3.10: Dome at Milind College; a chaitya hall at Ajanta; main dome of the Rashtrapathi Bhavan, New Delhi. Images by author, except the image of the dome at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan, taken from: https://rashtrapatisachivalaya.gov.in/rbtour/circuit-1/central-dome

Figures 3.11, 3.12
above: Planting of a Bodhi tree at Milind College
below: Dr. Ambedkar at Milind College, Aurangabad, with (from left to right) Architect Mr. Narvekar, Principle Mr. M.B. Chitnis, Mrs. Ambedkar, Mr. Bole, Mr. Kamalakant Chitre, and Mr. B. H. Varale

Even before construction began on Milind College, its role as a modern Buddhist institution was highlighted by the planting of a bodhi tree—or *ficus religiosa*—on the property.[328] Bodhi trees are an important symbol of Buddhism in the world (figs. 3.11, 3.12). According to the *Mahavamsa*, or *"Great Chronicle,"* a poem written in the 5th-century, a cutting of the Bodhi Tree, the one the Buddha sat beneath at the moment of his enlightenment, was sent by Ashoka to Sri Lanka as a way of establishing Buddhism there.[329] The first cutting gave rise to several saplings, each of which bore fruit. Each fruit symbolized a new Buddhist tradition and center of Buddhism on the island. Through such accounts, bodhi trees became important markers of the spread of Buddhism across Asia. They also became a part of ceremonial rituals around the preparation of a site for Buddhist practice and study. The planting of a bodhi tree at Milind College set a precedent for later Dalit Buddhist institutions, many of which would incorporate bodhi trees into their plans and designs as a reflection of the movement's role in continuing Buddhist traditions in India.[330]

Statues of the Buddha provided another way for Ambedkar and his associates to begin defining the contours of a modern Buddhist tradition in India. Around the same time that plans for Milind College were being developed, Ambedkar was in consultation with the artist R. B. Madilgekar who was developing new representations of the Buddha. Some of Madilgekar's Buddhas are still housed at Milind College. The largest example is outside of the Dean's Office of the college. Roughly four feet tall and painted gold, Madilgekar made the statue for Ambedkar in 1950.[331] The Buddha sits on a flattened lotus that appears almost like a stylized seat of grass placed on the ground. The Buddha is seated with his legs folded and with one hand raised at roughly chest level with an open palm facing out. It is a hand gesture known as the *abhaya mudra* (figs. 3.13, 3.14). In his study of Dalit Buddhist visual imagery, Gary Tartakov suggests that the *abhaya mudra* is a sign of teaching.[332] The traditional teaching mudra, however, is the *vitarka mudra*, which is formed by bringing the index finger and thumb together. In contrast, in the *abhaya mudra,* the hand is kept open and is held pointing away from the body (figs. 3.15, 3.16). The *abhaya mudra* is traditionally not a sign of teaching, but of "fearlessness" or "no-

[328] Petra Kieffer-Pulz, "Rules for the Sima Regulation in the Vinaya and its Commentaries and their Application in Thailand," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20.2 (1997): 141-153; A.G.S. Kariyawasam, *Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka* (Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., 1996).
[329] For an early translation of *The Mahavamsa* see Geiger, Wilhelm, ed. *The Mahavamsa*. Pali Text Society, 1908. To understand its role in modern Buddhist historiographies, see: Heinz Bechert, "Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahavamsa and Political Thinking," *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (1978): 1-12.
[330] Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: the Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton University Press, 2004).
[331] Gary Tartakov identifies the statues at Milind college as a set of early Buddha statues developed by the artist Madilgekar in consultation with Ambedkar. Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery,* 136-146.
[332] Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery,* 139.


Figures 3.13, 3.14: Large Buddha statue and small Buddha statue, Milind College

fear." The gesture carries with it notions of protection and benediction, conveying a sense of power and dignity. The hand gesture is also closely associated with an episode in the life of the Buddha in which his cousin, Devadatta, tries to kill him by releasing an angry elephant.[333] As the enraged elephant raced towards the Buddha, he is said to have raised his hand in the *abhaya mudra,* quieting the animal. All of these aspects of the *abhaya mudra* take on greater significance in the context of the Dalit Buddhist movement. The story of the Buddha quelling the anger of a raging elephant, for example, can easily be read as an allegory for the response of Dalits to different forms of oppression they have faced as a result of enduring casteism in India. The Buddha's open hand in new Buddhist statues is as an invitation to quell or overcome social and political fears through a turn to Buddhism, a visual cue to the Dalit Buddhist movement's goal of achieving personal and social emancipation through a turn towards Buddhism.

The other set of statues at Milind college are kept inside one of the domes on the upper story of the college's main building. They are smaller and ceramic. Some are white, others are painted. For those that are painted, the Buddha's robes are orange and his skin a peachy-almond

[333] For a longer discussion of the *abhaya mudra* see: Ernest Dale Saunders, *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 55-65.

Figure 3.15, 3.16: Vitarka Mudra and Abhaya Mudra
Images from: Yogapedia.com

color. Instead of a lotus, the Buddha sits on a blue cushion. A similarly blue lotus forms a halo behind the Buddha's head. The Buddha's hair is stylized in a manner similar to statues from east Asia, with tight curls and a clear *ushnisha* or protrusion from the top of the head. The robes and torso of the statue are also reminiscent of statues one might find in China, Japan, or Korea, with the Buddha's robe draped over both shoulders and his chest exposed. The faces of the smaller statues at Milind colleges are also distinctive: They have soft rounded eyes that are open, looking forward. Gary Tartakov writes about the more "Indian" expression of these early statues of the Dalit Buddhist movement, and it is easy to see the likeness to other modern representations of the Buddha in India, especially those of Raja Ravi Varma.[334] The expression of the Buddha statues designed by Madilgekar is further distinguished by the Buddha's open eyes, which face outwards, rather than being lowered, as is more common in representations of the Buddha from other parts of Asia. Like the large statue outside of the Dean's office, each small statue of the Buddha is shown with his right hand raised in *abhaya* mudra.

As Tartakov further remarks in his study of the statues at Milind College, Ambekdar approached the creation of a new Buddha image much in the way he approached Buddhist texts, drawing from multiple sources, both Indian and international to create a new form for the Dalit Buddhist movement. The result, according to Tartakov, was a more "naturalistic" Buddha, which uniquely expressed Ambekdar's understanding of the Buddha as a historical figure and Buddhism

[334] Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*.

as a rationalist philosophy.[335] In imagining a new form of the Buddha, Ambedkar drew from Indian examples available at the time in publications and reproductions, as well as international Buddhist forms, especially the Japanese Buddha image from the Totuku-ji temple on display in the Sri Dharmarajika Vihar of the Mahabodhi Society in Kolkata.[336] The result was a Buddha form that clearly drew from global sources, but which was nonetheless, identifiable as Indian.

One other aspect of the Buddha statues developed by Madilgekar and Ambedkar deserves further consideration: As Tartakov discusses in his essay, the statues are not empowered with relics or other religious objects.[337] Across Asia, the ritual emplacement of relics inside statues is an important step in establishing them as worthy objects of devotion. Much like the planting of a bodhi tree marks a site as Buddhist ground, placing relics and other religious inside a statues and monuments transforms them into objects of devotion. No such process was undertaken in the creation of the statues discussed so far. Instead, their significance comes from the fact that Ambedkar had a hand in their production and their power to visually represent a new Buddhist movement. Later architectural projects of the movement similarly forwent ritual empowerments, celebrating Dalit Buddhist identity through more open forms and visual markers designed to reflect the entrance of Dalits into the spaces of Buddhism in India.

While many of the elements and forms discussed so far will show up in projects I address below, their development in earlier projects signals how certain artistic and architectural elements were fundamental to crafting a new Buddhist vision for Dalits in India. What I hope to make clear below is how the formal and aesthetic consistency of the movement allowed for multiple associations and transformations of a few key forms, notably the dome, the *torana*, the pillar, and the arch. Each new iteration was a chance for invention and new associations to be made depending on when and where they were built or installed. Siting—the placement and framing of new artistic and architectural projects—is an important aspect of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture. It helps bring new meaning to formal and stylistic elements that are constantly repeated and repurposed. While reflecting the idiosyncrasies of each site and the period when they were built, the formal consistency achieved through the repetition of certain artistic and architectural elements in Dalit Buddhist projects across India emphasizes the connections between sites and communities, conveying a sense of the history of the movement and its ongoing development.

[335] As Tartakov writes, "…the use of visual imagery offers *concrete* alternatives or corollaries to the use of verbal logic in patterns of cultural production. In this case, Ambedkar is doing with visual imagery what he often did textually. He is creating some of his new form by selective variation on existing forms according to the needs of a new interest." Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery,* 133.
[336] *Ibid.,* 148-149.
[337] *Ibid.*, 138.

New Buddhist Spaces

Ambedkar passed away only a few months after his conversion to Buddhism. He died on December 6, 1956, in his home at 26 Alipur Road, New Delhi, in a large house that had been given to him by a member of the royal family of Jaipur.[338] His body was quickly flown to Mumbai to be cremated. Hundreds of thousands gathered to mourn the passing of their political and religious leader. During the cremation ceremony, the Buddhist revivalist Anand Kausalyayan led a second large-scale conversion to Buddhism, helping to establish it as a site of remembrance and transformation. Later, a portion of Ambekdar's ashes were installed in a small monument or *chaitya* at the site, leading to its rechristening as "Chaitya Bhumi" or Memorial Ground.

"Chaitya" refers to a memorial or object of worship.[339] "Bhumi," as discussed in Chapter 1, means "ground" or "plane" and is laden with religious readings of space as both a conceptually and physically bounded territory. Calling the site of Ambedkar's cremation "Chaitya Bhumi" emphasizes its role as a religious memorial and object of devotion intended to house sacred relics.[340] It would eventually become one of three major sites associated with Ambedkar's life and legacy, which include: Janma Bhumi, the site of Ambedkar' birth; Chaitya Bhumi, the spot of his cremation and first memorial; and Diksha Bhumi, the site of the mass conversion he led in 1956. At each of these sites a memorial modeled after the Great Stupa at Sanchi was erected and celebrated as a new religious center.

Housing Ambedkar's relics in a memorial was an important divergence from earlier works associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement. As discussed above, the internment of relics or other sacred objects was typically not part of the creation of new works of Dalit Buddhist art or architecture. Instead, earlier works expressed a rationalist approach to Buddhism, functioning more as symbols of the movement than objects of devotion. Relics have a long and important history in defining modern Buddhist sites in India, and the transformation of Ambedkar's ashes into religious relics marks a further transition in how modern forms of Buddhism were understood and practiced in India. As Sraman Mukherjee has pointed out in his study of the housing of relics in new Buddhist centers in India, at the beginning of the twentieth century a shift occurred from housing relics in museums to encasing them in new structures designed to function like memorials and temples.[341] The monuments of the Dalit Buddhist movement mark

[338] http://www.thedelhiwalla.com/2015/06/20/city-landmark-ambedkars-house-26-alipur-road/, access August 2, 2017. For a discussion of the development of the site into a new memorial that was inaugurated by Prime Miniser Modi in 2018, see: https://thewire.in/the-arts/ambedkar-memorial-delhi, accessed September 4, 2018.

[339] Niels Gutschow and David N. Gellner. *The Nepalese Caitya: 1500 Years of Buddhist Votive Architecture in the Kathmandu Valley* (Edition Axel Menges, 1997).

[340] In previous chapters, I drewing from the work of Sraman Mukherjee to discuss how Buddhist centers were constructed to reflect changing understanding of the importance of Buddhist relics and other material vestiges in India. At Chaitya Bhumi, a modern politician was interred and treated as a saint or *bodhisattva.*

[341] Mukherjee, "From Sites and Museums to Temples."

Figure 3.17: Chaitya Bhumi - exterior

another shift, resulting in buildings that function as museums, temples, and memorials. The result was an entirely new approach to the stupa or *chaitya*. As Gary Tartakov writes, "What is strikingly new is the Navayana use of the stupa, which is hollowed out to form a meeting place. The container and shape are maintained but the contents, and so the symbolism and meaning, are transformed. Rather than a solid mass surrounding a relic for individual circumambulation, the Navayana 'stupa' becomes a hall for meetings and social activities."[342] Chaitya Bhumi represents an early exploration of this new stupa type.

The main structure of Chaitya Bhumi is a small domed building with four small *toranas* or gateways. It is formally reminiscent of the small model of Sanchi constructed by Tirpude for the pavilion at Ambedkar's conversion discussed at the beginning of this chapter (fig. 3.17). As in that earlier model, the spire, railings, and *toranas* of Chaitya Bhumi are simplified. The building is further distinguished by the fact that, rather than being clad in stone, it is constructed in reinforced cement and painted white. The spire on top of the dome and the *toranas* are

[342] Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*, 84.


Figures 3.18, 3.19: Chaitya Bhumi - interior

accented in yellow, blue, red, and yellow, referencing the international Buddhist flag.[343] Inside the main monument at Chaitya Bhumi, there is a single room divided into two concentric circles by a low wall with openings between a set of columns. The interior circle marks the inner sanctum of the memorial, where groups are allowed to enter and make offerings to a bust of Ambedkar (fig. 3.18). The bust sits in front of a single column that runs through the center of the lower level. The column is the main focus of devotion and is detailed with a small alcove formed by a set of columns with rounded corbels supporting a *chaitya* arch. Inside the alcove there is a statue of the Buddha. Very often there is a monk or volunteer inside the inner sanctum of the memorial, offering teachings or guidance to groups as well as facilitating donations and offerings.

Inside the memorial at Chaitya Bhumi there is also a large wooden model of a stupa (fig. 3.19). On first inspection, it appears like a model of Sanchi, but on closer examination it reveals itself to be a model of the memorial that would eventually be built at Diksha Bhumi. Its presence inside the memorial at Chaitya Bhumi references a pattern of reproducing multiple monuments by creating small models and placing them at other Dalit Buddhist sites. Similar models are often housed in people's homes and in community centers. The miniaturization and reproduction of modern and ancient Buddhist monuments that were then placed at new Dalit sites as models heightens a sense of each place's religious significance and their connection to a much broader network of sites and memorials. It also references the structure itself, alerting visitors to the design of the structure they are visiting and its relationship to other structures across India.

The connections between different Buddhist sites and the memorials of the Dalit Buddhist movement are further reinforced through repeated architectural features, especially the dome, railing, and *toranas* of the Great Stupa at Sanchi. Other important symbols are bodhi

[343] Oliver Freiberger, "The Meeting of Traditions: Inter-Buddhist and Inter-Religious Relations in the West," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2 (2001): 59-71.

Figures 3.20, 3.21: Torana on the road near Milind College, Aurangabad; Torana of the Great Stupa of Sanchi

trees, elephants, Buddha statues, *chaitya* arches, and statues of Ambekdar, all of which work together to convey a historical and modern sense of Dalit Buddhist sites as religious places. By using repeated symbols, architectural forms, and colors, Dalit communities become more visible, drawing attention to the number of Dalit settlements across the country. Driving through towns and cities today it is easy to identify a Dalit community. In most cases, there will be some architectural reference to Sanchi—a dome or a *torana*—Buddhist flags, and either a statue or painting of Ambedkar (fig. 3.20).[344] The use of *toranas*, in particular, has become a symbol of the Dalit Buddhist movement.

The gateways of Sanchi have a long and complicated history (fig. 3.21). As Tapati Guha-Thakurta writes in her essay "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument: The Many Lives of the Sanchi *Stupa*," the gateways became some of the most photographed and copied objects of Indian art during the colonial rule of India.[345] As such, they played an important role in defining both the study of Indian art and architecture and a larger project to define "India" and its subjects through new forms of knowledge. As Guha-Thakurta relates, they were documented, excavated, and studied by officers such as Sir Alexander Cunningham and Lieutenant Frederick

[344] Tartakov was the first to draw attention to the incredible proliferation of Dalit statues across India in his essay… I take the idea of "collating" from Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*, 136.
[345] Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument," 82.


Figures 3.22, 3.23: Gateways around Chaitya Bhumi

Charles Maisey. These studies were then picked up by James Fergusson who presented Sanchi in books like *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture of Hindostan* (1848) and *Tree and Serpent Worship* (1868), as well as in exhibitions such as the Paris International Exhibition of 1867. Following the 1867 "Convention for promoting universal reproductions of works of art for the benefit of museums of all countries,"[346] a plaster copy of the northern gateway of Sanchi was created and then installed in 1870 in the Architectural Court of the South Kensington Museum, where it still stands today as one of the most iconic pieces of the Victoria & Albert Museum's South Asia Gallery.[347] The longer history of the gates as outlined by Guha-Thakurta tracks their transformation from an architectural element into an object that was reproducible. With the ability to copy and reinstall the gateways in ever changing contexts came the ability to reframe their cultural and religious significance. With the dislocation of the *toranas* as grounded objects—*in situ* architectural elements—the gateways took on a new role as signifiers of Buddhism in India, embodying a complex set of readings that Guha-Thakurta writes about as a "vortex of secular and sacred, archaeological and devotional consecrations."[348] While picked up by various Buddhist groups in India, the Dalit Buddhist movement in particular has coopted

[346] "Convention for promoting universal reproductions of works of art for the benefit of museums of all countries." *Inventory of the Electrotype Reproductions of Objects of Art*. (Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education. South Kensington Museum. 1869), v-vi. The opening lines of the convention read as follows: "Throughout the world every country possess fine historical monuments of art of its own, which can easily be reproduced by casts, electrotypes, photographs, and other processes, without the slightest damage to the originals."
[347] Beatriz Enid Cifuentes, "Bodh Gaya: A Study of the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment and the Related Collections in the Victoria and Albert and British Museum," dissertation (Durham University, 2013); Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument."
[348] Guha-Thakurta, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument," 77.

Figure 3.24: Lion capital pillar at Chaitya Bhumi

Figure 3.25: Posters at Chaitya Bhumi

the gateways of Sanchi as one of their primary architectural symbols, transforming them into signifiers of the movement's social, political, and religious mission.

A set of *toranas* modeled after the north *torana* of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, are repeated several times at Chaitya Bhumi. In addition to the small *toranas* that are a part of the original memorial at the site, there is a larger *torana* that is part of a bounding wall around the memorial grounds (figs. 3.22, 3.23). An even larger and more ornate *torana* marks the entrance to the road leading to the memorial. This last *torana* is roughly three-stories tall and is the newest of the *toranas* at the site. It is also the most ornate, incorporating all of the frieze work and details of the original gateway at Sanchi. Behind the gateway is a large reproduction of an Ashokan Column with a lion capital (fig. 3.24). Painted a shiny golden color, the gate and column identify the site as Buddhist, distinguishing it from some of the nearby properties and public parks.

Posters and other print media available for sale at Chaitya Bhumi, further emphasize the role of architectural markers like *toranas* in establishing Dalit Buddhist sties as part of a vast Buddhist network. Inside the bounding wall around the main memorial at Chaitya Bhumi, for example, there is another set of posters lining the pathways to the memorial. Beginning with a stylized depiction of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, the posters depict pillars and lion capitals across India and around the world. Some are of the ancient pillars erected by Ashoka in the 3rd-century BCE. Others are modern reproductions of Ashokan pillars erected in places like China and Australia (fig. 3.25). Along that same passageway, there are a series of posters displaying quotes by Ambedkar. Others explain the rules and history of the site, as well as how to make one's way through the structure. One large poster presents the twenty-two vows Ambedkar

Figure 3.26: Gateway to Worli, Mumbai

wrote as the foundation of the Dalit Buddhist movement. That same poster displays the Buddha standing above Ambekdar, his right hand raised in the *abhaya mudra*. As I hope is clear by now, the same symbols and images are continually repeated at sites associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement. They include the architectural elements of Sanchi as well as images and posters explaining Ambedkar's unique approach to Buddhism. These repeated elements appear at Dalit Buddhist centers across India and even in the private homes of Dalit Buddhists. The constant repetition of forms and visual material helps reify a Dalit Buddhist network. It also mirrors the dissemination of Ashoka's edict, but in entirely new and modern media.

The use of repeated architectural elements, like the *torana,* also distinguishes Dalit Buddhists centers from other Buddhist centers in India. In Mumbai, for example, Chaitya Bhumi functions as just one of a number of Dalit Buddhist centers and markers in the city, mapping out a collection of sites that is distinct from other Buddhist centers in and around Mumbai. The city itself has a longer history of Buddhist reform and revival in India from at least the 1920s. As Douglas Ober writes in his dissertation, *Reinventing Buddhism,* the Bombay Buddha Society was founded there in 1922, leading to the creation of one of the city's first Buddhist temples, Anand Vihar.[349] In 1940, a Buddhist temple funded by the Birla family first opened next to Worli, one of the city's largest Dalit settlements.[350] Dalit Buddhist interventions now stand in conversation with these earlier structures, distinguishing themselves through the use of a set of established architectural references, colors, and images. The entrance to Worli, for example, is now marked by a small model of a *torana* based on the one at Sanchi, instantly identifying it as a neighborhood with a large Dalit Buddhist population (fig. 3.26). To consider the growth of a discernable Dalit Buddhist network, I return now to Diksha Bhumi, the site of Ambekdar's conversion, and efforts to develop that site as the center of an expanded Buddhist network across India.

Hallowed Spaces

Despite Diksha Bhumi's importance for the Dalit Buddhist movement, it was several decades after the mass conversion there before a large memorial was constructed at the site. During those intervening years, smaller interventions at Diksha Bhumi helped establish it as a new Buddhist center. These included the planting of a bodhi tree, the erection of a bust of Ambedkar, a statue of

[349] Ober makes this point while discussing a temple and guesthouse built by the Birla family in Kushinagar, but I think the same logic can be applied to sites built by the Birla's in other cities. Ober, *Reinventing Buddhism*, 225-226.
[350] Worli was the site of several major riots in the 1970s led by the Dalit Panthers. Jayashree B. Gokhale-Turner, "The Dalit Panthers and the Radicalisation of the Untouchables," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 17, no. 1 (1979): 77-93; Anupama Rao, "The Word and the World: Dalit Aesthetics as a Critique of Everyday Life," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 1-2 (2017): 147-161.

the Buddha, and the construction of a small monk's residence.[351] The driving force behind several of these initiatives was Anand Kausalyayan, the monk who led the second mass conversion of Dalit's to Buddhism in Mumbai. Kausalyayan played a significant role in the development of the Dalit Buddhist movement.[352] A prolific Hindi author, he published several books introducing Buddhism to Hindi speaking audiences, including a translation of Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.[353] Kausalyayan was trained as a monk by the Mahabodhi Society. As a result, the projects he initiated represented a unique subset the of Dalit Buddhist movement. Compared to other monuments associated with Dalit Buddhism, those built under Kausalyayan's direction emphasized the religious aspects of the movement, rather than its political ones.

In 1967, Kauslayayan oversaw the construction of a small monk's residence at Diksha Bhumi known as Bikshu Niwas (figs. 3.27, 3.28, 3.29). Bikshu Niwas is distinguishable from other Dalit Buddhist structures by its form and coloring. Unlike other Dalit Buddhist projects, which are typically painted white and blue, Bhikshu Niwas is painted yellow with red trim. Such coloring emphasizes the building's role as a monastic space. Another distinctive feature of the building is its large pitched roof. Painted red, the roofline seems to have been modeled after the sweeping roofs of monk's quarters in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, or Thailand. The building's other notable design feature is the repeated use of *chaitya* arches. A recurring element in Dalit Buddhist architecture, the *chaitya* arches incorporated into the design of Bhikshu Niwas serve as windows and doorframes. A pair of arches further define the shrine room. One is drawn onto the wall, the other is made by a string of lights framing a small bronze statue of the Buddha (fig. 3.30).

Dalit Buddhist projects always mediate between the social, political, and religious. In some cases, it is hard to define whether or not a project is a Dalit project or a Dalit Buddhist project; a social and political statement or religious one. While some projects like Bhikshu Niwas emphasize the religious aspects of the Dalit Buddhist movements, others, such as the installation of Ambedkar statues, blurs the lines between the religious and political aspects of the movement. Around the same time that Bikshu Niwas was being designed and constructed, for example, a set of bronze statues were installed in front of several major government buildings across India. They include a set of well-known statues created by Brahmesh V. Wagh. One stands

[351] I am greatly indebted to Dr. Y.S. Alone in the School of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for sharing his memories of Diksha Bhumi and other information about the development of new Dalit Buddhist sites in India.
[352] For more on the biography of Anand Kausalyayan, see: Ahir, *Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India*; Christopher S. Queen, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation," in *Engaged Buddhism*, edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (SUNY Press, 1996).
[353] One of his most well-known books in English is: *An Intelligent Man's Guide to Buddhism* (Buddha Bhoomi Prakashan, second edition, 1992).

Figures 3.27, 3.28, 3.29: Bhikshu Niwas, Nagpur

Figure 3.30: Shine room inside Bhikshu Niwas, Nagpur

in front of the Institute of Science in Mumbai. It was erected in 1962. Another was installed in front of the Lok Sabha or Parliament Building in New Delhi in 1966.[354] Each year, people gather around these statues, hanging garlands of flowers on them as a sign of respect. Politicians are expected to pay their respect to these statues as well, especially on April 14, the anniversary of Ambedkar's birth. The importance of garlanding the statues of Ambedkar has reached such a point that large structures have been constructed around many of them. These structures serve as scaffolding around the statues and often include a set of steps for visitors to climb up to the statue in order to garland it. They are also often designed with a dome shaped canopy over the statue.[355] The use of Buddhist architectural references to frame statues of Ambedkar heightens a reading of them as religious icons and political memorials. Further heightening their religious associations, Ambekdar statues are often placed alongside statues of the Buddha. The bust of Ambedkar on the grounds of Diksha Bhumi, for example, sits on a platform next to a stupa, a graphic of which is painted onto the stand, and a statue of the Buddha on a separate pedestal, also decorated with a graphic of the memorial hall. Such visual and material references place representations of Ambedkar within a matrix of visual and material references to the Dalit Buddhist movement, emphasizing his role as a modern Buddhist hero (figs. 3.31, 3.32).

[354] For more on these statues see: Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery,* 82; and, Nicolas Jaoul's "Learning the Use of Symbolic Means," 98-126.

[355] In their essay "Mayawati and Memorial Parks in Lucknow, India: Landscapes of Empowerment," Amita Sinha and Rajat Kant draw from the work of Thomas Metacalf to highlight how structures built around Ambedkar statues sometimes resemble those built around the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. The ability to draw multiple references is a defining aspect of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture; buildings built as part of the movement incorporate a diversity of forms related to memorialization in order to generate a new Dalit Buddhist architecture. Underlying all of them is an effort to use architecture as a means to elevate the status of Dalits in India.


Figures 3.31, 3.32: Bust of Ambedkar and Buddha Statue, Diksha Bhumi

The blurring of the religious and the political is an important aspect of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture. The two function together as part of an effort to emancipate Dalits in India. Much in the way that statues of Ambedkar are given more religious weight depending on their use and context, buildings associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement take on greater political and religious valences depending on their design and location. The memorial that was eventually constructed at Diksha Bhumi—officially known as the Babahsaheb Ambedkar Memorial Complex, but popularly known as Diksha Bhumi—was designed as a religious center associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement. Its design, however, emphasizes a history of Buddhism in India as the basis for forging new political and social spaces for Dalits. Work began on the Diksha Bhumi memorial complex in 1978. It was not completed until 2001, when it was inaugurated by then president K. R. Narayanan (fig. 3.33). The memorial complex and adjoining campus were designed by Sheo Dan Mal, an engineer and self-trained architect who was based in Nagpur. His other notable projects include the Panchasheel Cinema Hall, the Guru Nanak Bhawan at the University of Nagpur, the APMC market yard, and several other institutional structures.[356] The choice of Sheo Dan Mal as the chief architect for the project is notable given that he was not a member of the Dalit community. It suggests a shift in the ambitions of the Dalit Buddhist movement from a community focused endeavor to one that sought to assert a more impactful national presence through large scale architectural projects. Mal brought

[356] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/Road-named-after-Sheo-Dan-Mal/articleshow/17576291.cms, accessed August 13, 2018.

Figure 3.33: Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Complex (Diksha Bhumi), Nagpur

a unique emphasis on pure geometries and engineering to his designs for Diksha Bhumi, creating a memorial that visually referenced ancient Buddhist architectural forms in India while modernizing them through formal and spatial transformations.

As if the replica of the Sanchi Stupa that had been constructed over the platform of Ambekdar's mass conversion in 1956 expanded over time, Diksha Bhumi is a large concrete facsimile of the ancient stupa of Sanchi. While the form and details of Diksha Bhumi evoke the legacy of Ashoka's vast Buddhist empire, and the Great Stupa of Sanchi in particular, a section cut through the memorial reveals its most innovative feature: the stupa is hollow (fig. 3.34).[357] The walls of the dome delicately tapper towards the top, but only slightly, creating a thin shell structure with a strong visual impact. The interior of the dome is large and open, devoid of any altar or shrine. The base of the dome is composed of two bands of windows and glass doors, filling the room with light and emphasizing its scale and vacuity. At the top of the dome there is a cupola that lets in light throughout the day, casting a circular beam that moves across the dome (figs. 3.35, 3.36).

[357] Gary Tartokov makes a similar point in his study of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture. What I offer here is a longer discussion of the evolution of the hollow dome as part of a longer history of the Dalit Buddhist movement.

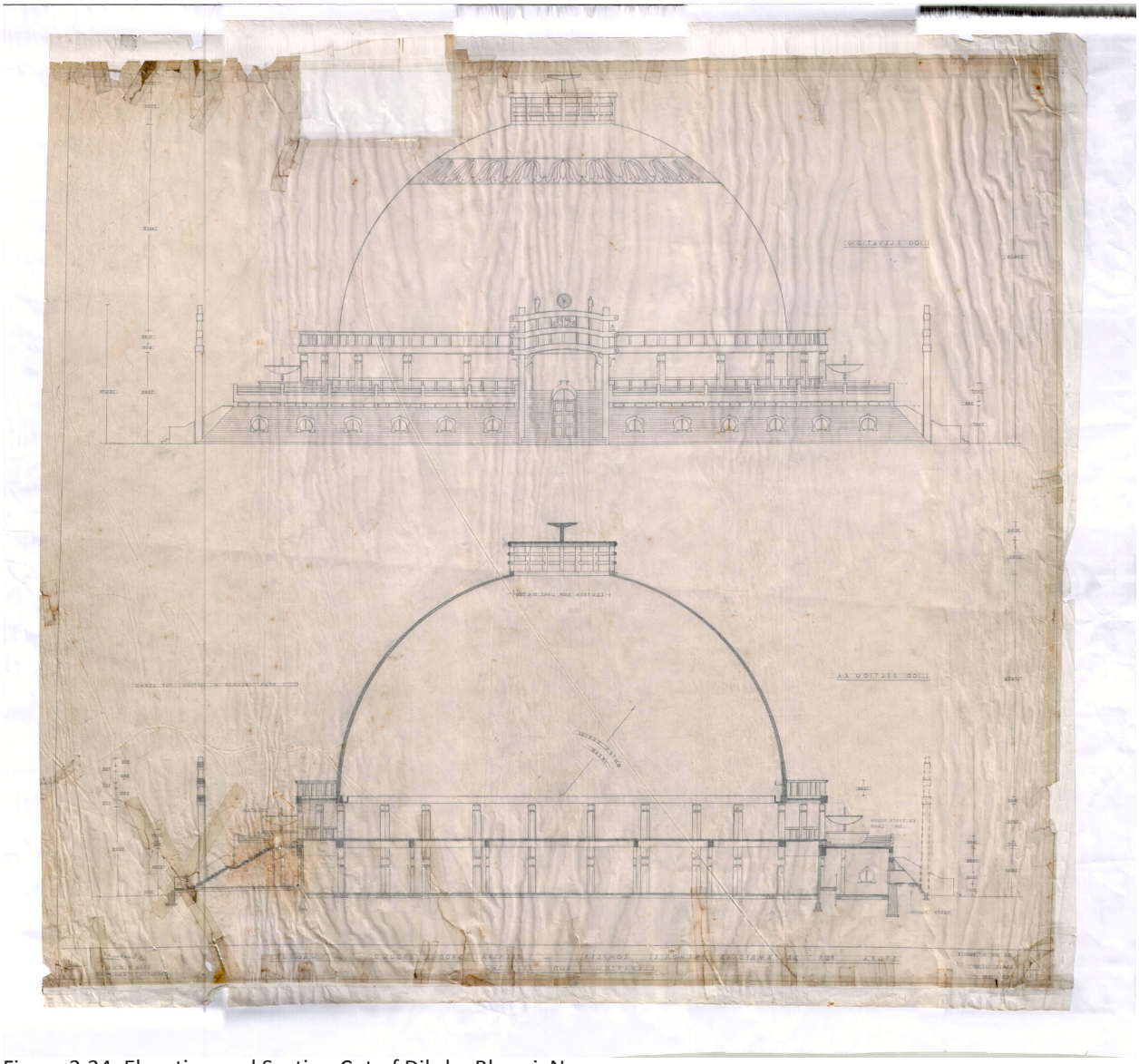


Figure 3.34: Elevation and Section Cut of Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

Figures 3.35, 3.36: Main Hall and Cupola, Diksha Bhumi

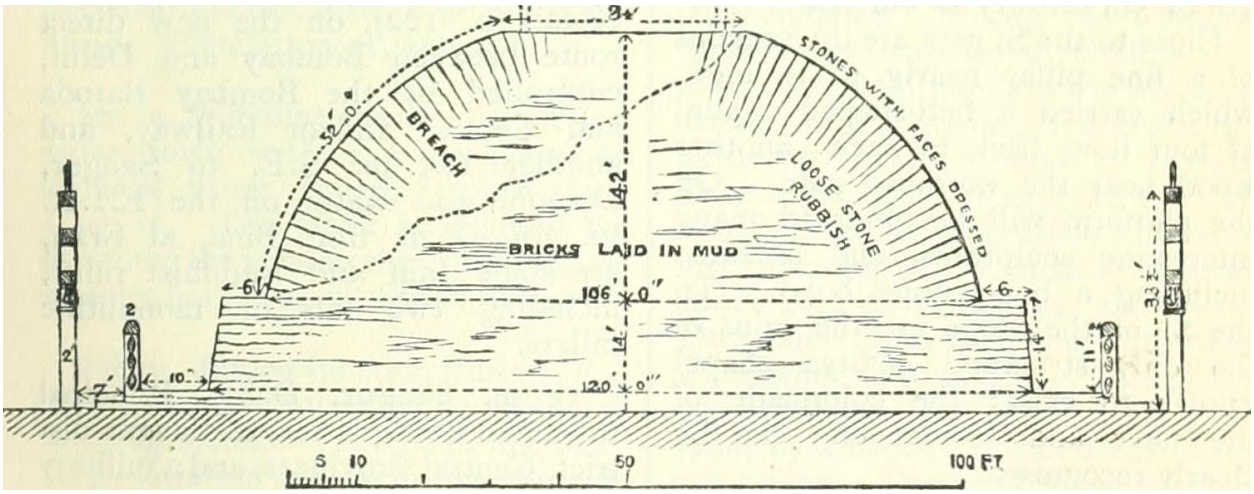


Figure 3.37: Section of a stupa, the stupa at Sanchi
From: *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma, and Ceylon* (1911), p. 243

Stupas are traditionally domed shaped structures built to commemorate great and noble men.[358] They are typically solid and often have a long pole or piece of wood running down their center known as a *yasti* (fig. 3.37).[359] The relic and the *yasti* are often considered to be the basis for a stupa's religious significance. It is not essential, however, for a stupa to contain any relics. In those cases when a relic is absent, stupas serve as more symbolic references.[360] The plasticity of Diksha Bhumi's dome—its large and expansive quality—allows for a structure that is open, but which is still clearly identifiable as a stupa . It is a space that is made sacred, not through religious objects or relics, but through the entrance of Dalits into it. In the absence of relics, or a *yasti,* Diksha Bhumi invites readings of it as a symbolic space; a model of a new Buddhist worldview or cosmology. It also functions as a physical space for Dalits to congregate and celebrate. This is further emphasized by the numerous entrances into the site. While stupas are traditionally worshipped from the outside, circumambulating them and sometimes leaving offerings at small shrines or altars built at their bases, Diksha Bhumi invites people to enter it, either by proceeding up a set of steps into the large hall created by the dome on the upper lever, or by entering a set of elaborate entrances designed as extruded *chaitya* arches that are cut into the steps, leading into an large hall on the ground level. As discussed below, these entrances are further ornamented by a set of *toranas* that reference the Great Stupa of Sanchi. Through new openings and the hollowness of the dome, Diksha Bhumi transforms the traditional aspects of a

[358] Sushila Pant, *The Origin and Development of Stupa Architecture in India* (Bharata Manisha, 1976); Anna Libera Dallapiccola, *The Stupa: Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 1980).
[359] Peter Harvey, "The Symbolism of the Early Stupa," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, no. 2 (1984): 67-94.
[360] Gérard Fussman, "Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 37-53.

stupa into a modern structure, inviting visitors to enter the site and use it as a memorial, temple, museum, congregation hall, and space for meditation.

Bringing together the symbolic and the religious functions of a stupa, the memorial at Diksha Bhumi creates an iconic form that represents the site's connection to India's Buddhist past and the modern entrance of Dalits into that tradition. Following on the complex history of modern Buddhism in India, which brings together a perception of Buddhist spaces as both abstract religious planes and the measured geography of the nation, it is possible to read Diksha Bhumi as the representation of the conceptual cosmology of Buddhist thought and the measured territory of India itself; a globe perhaps, or the dome of the cosmos.[361] We might understand this as a modern cosmology or the formal production of an imagined community with Diksha Bhumi at the center and Dalits as the inheritors of a long and illustrious history in the region.[362] What I hope to highlight here is how the dome of Diksha Bhumi embodies an ideal of India itself as sovereign Buddhist space and the Dalit community's entrance into that space. By sovereign I mean a space that is both religiously and politically defined. The construction of new memorials like the one at Diksha Bhumi signifies the production of this new sovereign space, reorienting the social and political landscape of India.

When asked what he thought the dome of Diksha Bhumi might represent, Ashok Mokha, the son of Sheo Dan Mal, the architect who designed Diksha Bhumi, said it represented the cosmos and perfection.[363] His father, he continued, demanded perfection in his designs. He also had an abiding interest in pure geometries. As an example of the kind of precision Mal demanded, Mokha recounted his efforts to create a model of Diksha Bhumi. The dome needed to be a "perfect sphere," or as close as possible to one, the base a "perfect square." As the support for the model he went to the market and bought a cart full of clay jugs. Mokha then went home and set about cutting them in half so that he could use their round bases as the mold for a dome. Because they were made out of clay, most of the jugs broke. Finally, one survived. The clay base was still too rough for the design, however, so Ashok coated it with plaster. The result was a bulbous form that was almost a perfect half circle in section. That model still exists today and sits alongside several other models of the building inside the base of the memorial.

The use of pure geometries and historical precedents imbues Diksha Bhumi with greater symbolic significance, inviting readings of it as a historical and ideological index of a new Dalit worldview. The hollowness of the memorial celebrates the Dalit community's entrance into the spaces of Buddhism, generating new grounds for Dalits that celebrate their entrance into

[361] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959); Snodgrass, Adrian. *The Symbolism of the Stupa*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishe, 1992.
[362] I take the phrase "imagined communities" from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.
[363] Personal interview with Ashok Mokha July 28, 2017.

Figure 3.38: Zero Mile Marker, Nagpur

the religious and historical spaces with Buddhism in the region. It also serves as the center of a remapping of India through the production of memorials like Diksah Bhumi in sites associated with Ambedkar and the Dalit community.

Diksha Bhumi's role as the center of a new Buddhist world is emphasized by its placement in Nagpur. Not far from Diskha Bhumi, there is a small monument known as Zero Mile Marker. It marks the very center of India and the spot from which the entire British Empire was mapped (fig. 3.38).[364] The marker itself is rather unassuming. It is a small cut piece of stone set in the ground with a small red circle carved into it. Next to that, there is a single sandstone pillar with a group of stone horses erupting from the shrubs around it. The horses seem to be a reference to the Pandava Brothers from the Mahabharata, perhaps gesturing towards a fusion of mythic and geographic understandings of the subcontinent.[365] Zero Mile Marker is not noteworthy because of its design, however. Rather, it is significant because it marks the center of a modern conception of India and before that the British Empire. In an exciting and surprising

[364] Edney, *Mapping an Empire.*
[365] *Times of India.* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/Why-is-Nagpur-called-the-zero-mile-centre/articleshow/6801564.cms, accessed August 2, 2017.

passage of *Mapping and Empire,* Matthew Edney relates how the formation of modern India was born out of the mapping of the subcontinent, which literally reoriented the center lines of the colonial map to line up with India's north-south axis.[366] My argument here is that, like the reorienting of India to fit a colonial world view, the construction of Diksha Bhumi can be read as an effort to reorient India according to a new understanding of its Buddhist past and Dalits as its modern inheritors. This is reinforced by the proximity of the site to the Zero Mile Marker, suggesting parallels between earlier efforts to map the subcontinent and the Dalit movement's efforts to reimagine the political and religious spaces of India. While it may seem like something of a stretch, the proximity of the Zero Mile Marker and Diksha Bhumi corroborates a reading of Diksha Bhumi as the imagined center of a larger effort to remap the nation as a new Dalit Buddhist territory,

Ambedakar also chose Nagpur as the site of his conversion because he claimed it was the locality of the first Buddhists in India. In a speech he gave on October 15, 1956, the day after his conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar explained his motivation for choosing Nagpur as the site of the conversion, stating:

> Those who read Buddhist history will come to know that in India, if anyone spread Buddhism, it was the Nag people. The Nag people were fearful enemies of the Aryans. A [f]ierce and fighting war went on between the Aryans and non-Aryans. Examples of the harassment of the Nags by the Aryan people are found in the **Puranas.** Agasti Muni helped only one Nag man to escape from that. We spring from that man. Those Nag people who endured so much suffering wanted some great man to raise them up. They met that great man in Gautam Buddha. The Nag people spread the teaching of Buagwan Buddha all over India. Thus we are like Nag people. It seems that the Nag people lived chiefly in Nagpur and the surrounding country. So they call this city Nagpur, meaning city of Nags…Nagpur was chosen because of this.[367]

Ambedkar's understanding of Nagpur forms an origin narrative around Nagpur and the Nag people as the early ancestors of the Dalits. It also proffers an explanation for their marginalization within Hindu society by suggesting that lower castes and Untouchables were

[366] *Ibid.,* 9-10.

[367] "Why Was Nagpur Chosen?" Speech given by Ambedkar on October 15, 1956. Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_conversion.html, accessed August 2, 2017. Emphasis in the original. I am skirting a large discussion of the racial aspects of Ambekdar's approach to Buddhism, but as the quote makes clear, Ambedkar held strong beliefs regarding the ethnic and religious background of Dalits, all of which further emphasized them as the heirs of Buddhism in India. The conversion was imagined not so much a turn to a new religion, but as a return to an old one. See also: Shailaja Paik, "Mahar–Dalit–Buddhist: The History and Politics of Naming in Maharashtra," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 45.2 (2011): 217-241; Jayashree B. Gokhale, "The Sociopolitical Effects of Ideological Change: The Buddhist Conversion of Maharashtrian Untouchables," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45.2 (1986): 269-292.

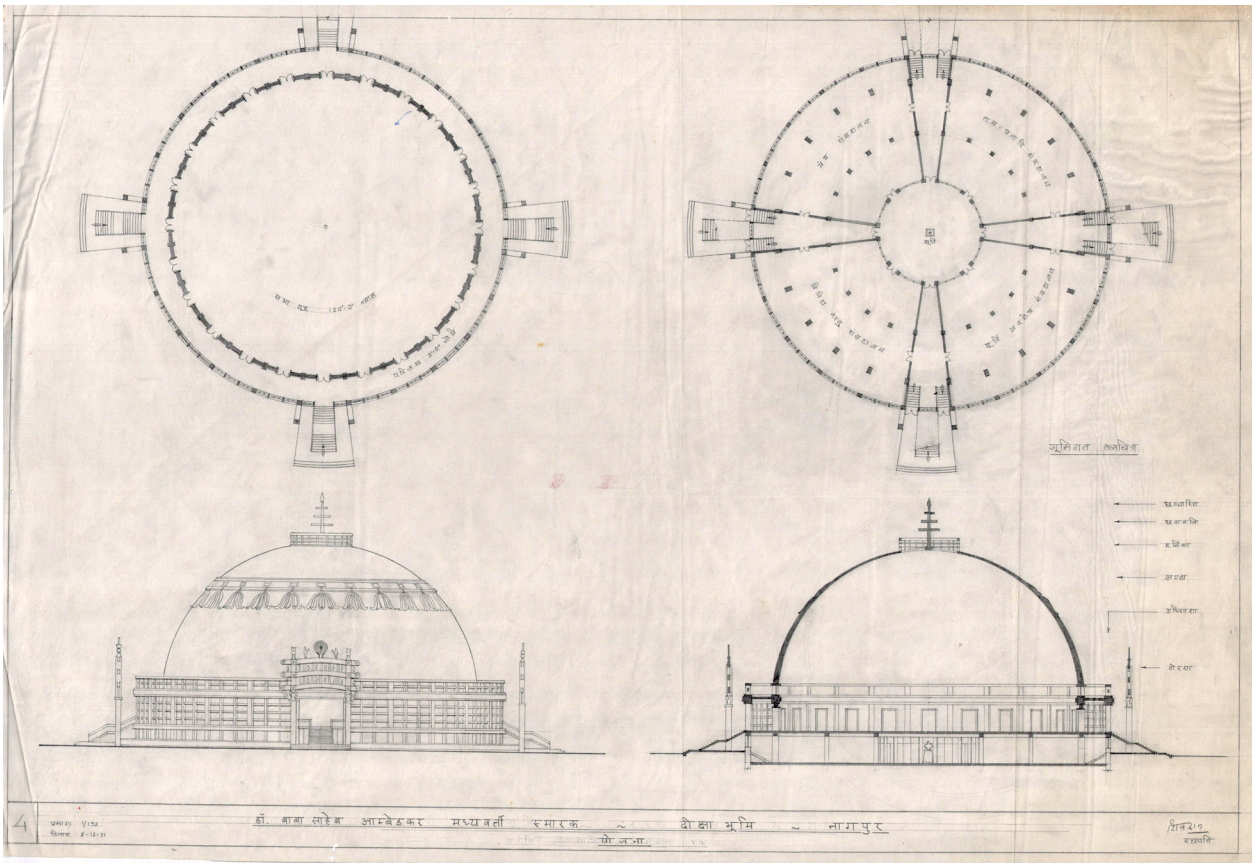


Figure 3.39: Plans, elevation, and section, Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

ostracized because of their dedication to Buddhism. In staging his conversion in Nagpur, Ambedkar emphasized the historical validity of Dalits as the modern-day heirs of Buddhism in India. Diksha Bhumi memorializes Ambedkar's discovery of the lost Buddhist legacy of Dalits at that site.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the remains of stupas in the subcontinent—whether containing relics or otherwise—were approached as both religiously and historically significant sites, worshiped and appreciated for both qualities. In India, the most famous examples of such sites are those from the Mauryan Empire, though other monuments from the Gupta and Pala period also continue to be venerated as historically and religiously significant. The historical and religious significance of famous Buddhist monuments in India were incorporated into Dalit Buddhist projects through modern adaptations of traditional forms such as the expansion of the stupa dome into a hollow, thin concrete shell (fig. 3.39). The combination of pure geometries and symbolic forms at Diksha Bhumi symbolizes an effort to remap and reimagine the religious and political spaces of India, bringing together the legacy of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, the colonial survey of India, and Buddhism as the basis for defining a new Buddhist ground

for Dalits in India. Folding formal references to the Great Stupa at Sanchi into a modernist approach to the stupa, Mal and his team designed a memorial that could celebrate the symbolic and physical ambitions of the Dalit Buddhist movement, creating new spaces for the Dalit community at the very heart of India.

The designs of Diksha Bhumi further reflect a desire to imagine the memorial within a global history of Buddhism. Early plans, for example, explore the memorial as part of a taxonomy of stupa forms from around the world. One drawing, presents four stupas or pagodas from different parts of China, identifying them as the Kaiyuan Temple Pagoda, the Songyue Temple, the Lesser Wild Goose Pagoda, and the Bao'en Temple Pagoda (fig. 3.40). A more developed site plan dedicates a large area in front of the main memorial to models of 12 different stupa types with space for six more (fig. 3.41). While such plans for the site were never realized, their development suggests two important aspects of how Mal and his office were approaching the project: First, as part of an effort to envision Diksha Bhumi as an archetypal stupa form—a circle inside of a square. And second, as an effort to explore stupa types as basic geometries. By returning to more formal geometries, the designers were able to study historically bounded stupa types as geometric relationships—circles, squares, hexagons, and the like—that could be modified in key ways. They could be expanded, hollowed out, or even flattened, while maintaining their historical and symbolic significance.

Details similarly became more graphic elements in Diksha Bhumi's design, either as flattened graphics, like the detailed tile work on the surface of the dome, or as architectural fragments that could serve as visual cues of the site's connection to ancient Buddhist sites. The *toranas* erected on each side of the memorial hall are the clearest example of how such fragments serve as signs of the site's connection to a longer Buddhist legacy in India (fig. 3.42). As a drawing from Mal's office makes clear, the *toranas* were imagined as highly detailed elements framing the more abstracted or streamlined elements of the building. Further distinguishing them from the rest of the building, the *toranas* were clad in sandstone, contrasting with the white paint and tiles of the rest of the building (fig. 3.43). Called out through material choices and detailing, the gateways serve as signs indicating the site's role as a Buddhist monument and its connection to other Buddhist sites, both Dalit and non-Dalit, ancient and modern.

Elevation studies for the main memorial hall at Diksha Bhumi also explore how best to represent historical connections to other Buddhist places while still embodying a modern aesthetic (figs. 3.44, 3.45). In one study, the dome is supported by a repeated motif of large chaitya arches. In another, the dome is encircled by an abstraction of the railings around the Great Stupa of Sanchi. A stylized pattern on the dome similarly went through several iterations, first as a series of interlocking boxes and then as a simplified motif of ornamental leaves.

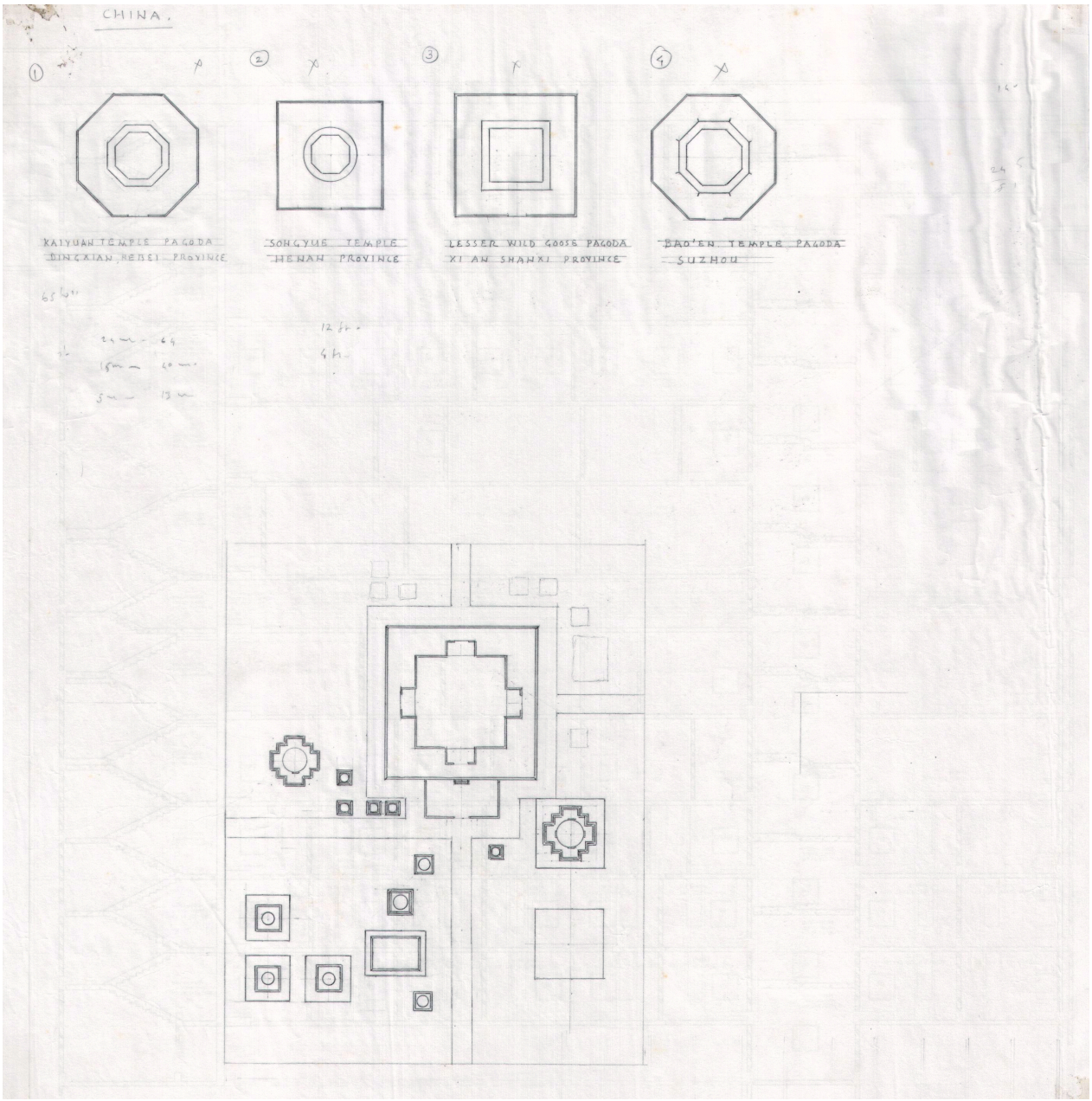


Figure 3.40: Diksha Bhumi, Study—Pagoda Types
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

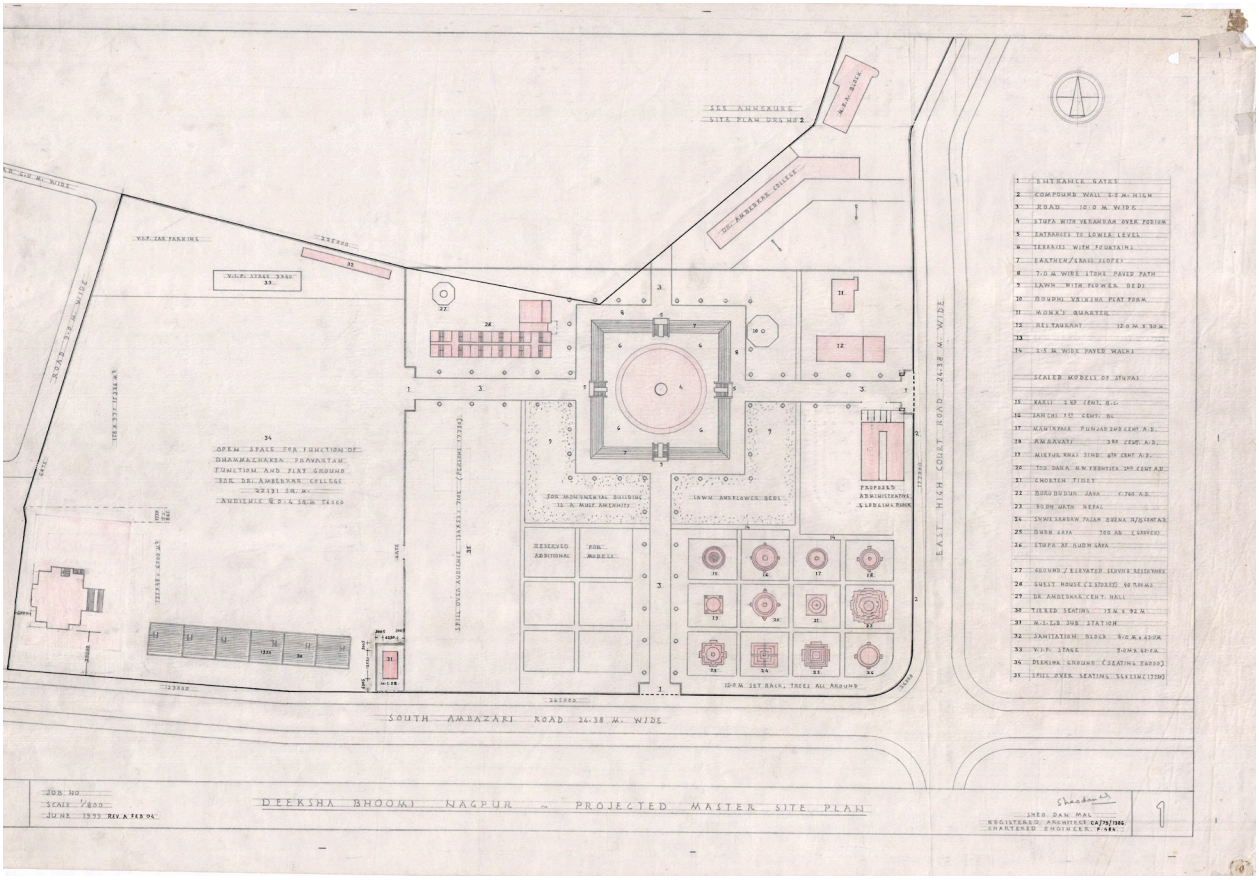


Figure 3.41: Site Plan with a Field of Stupa Types
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

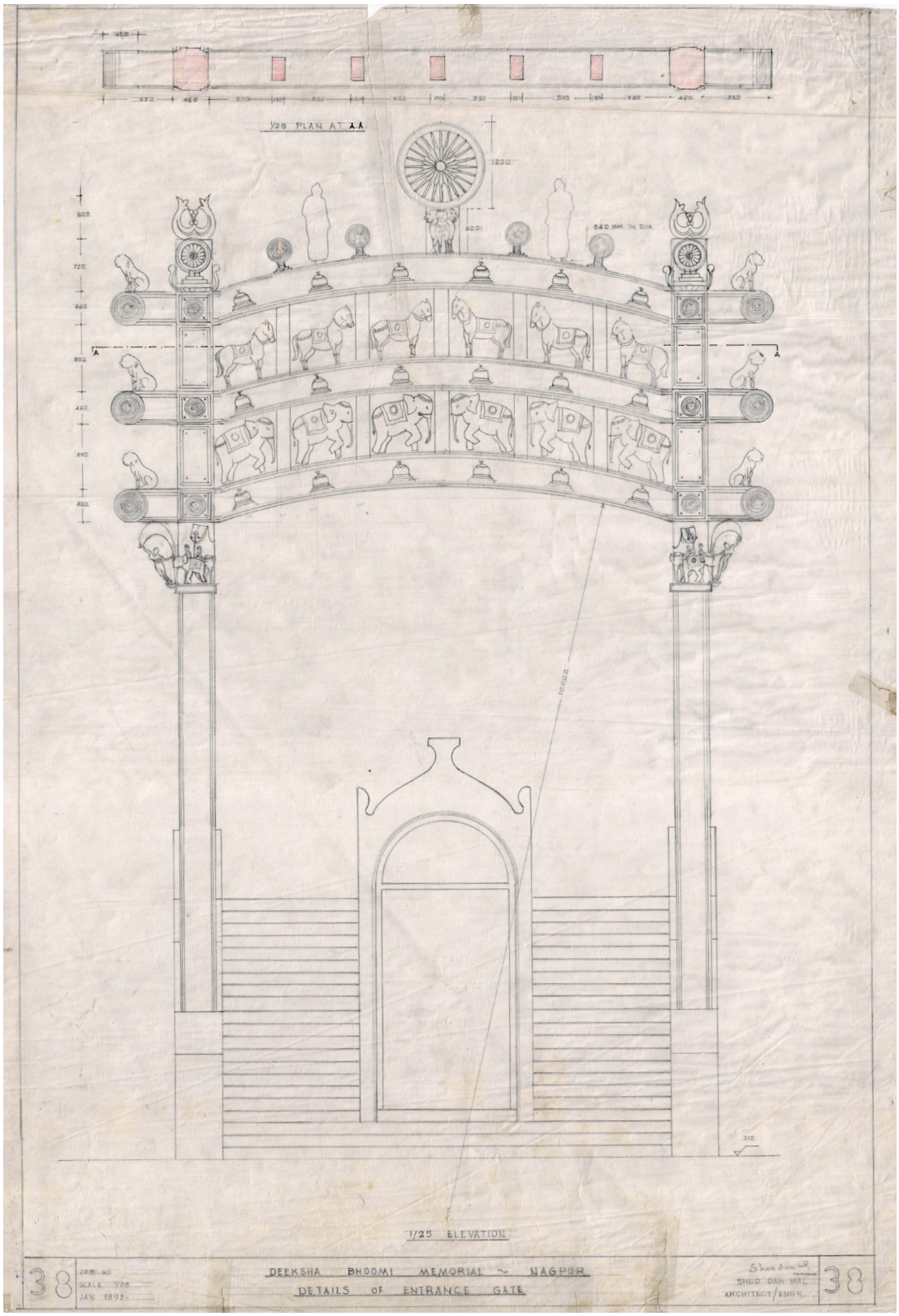
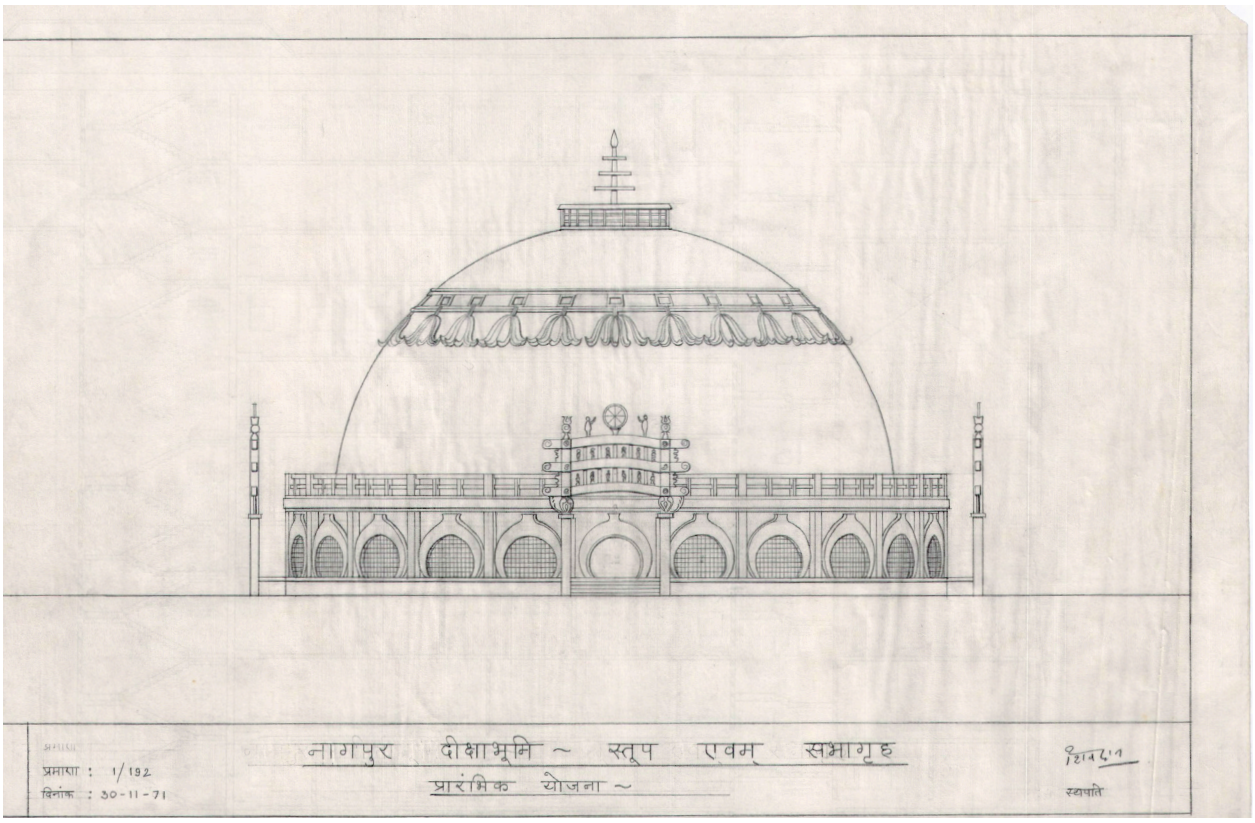
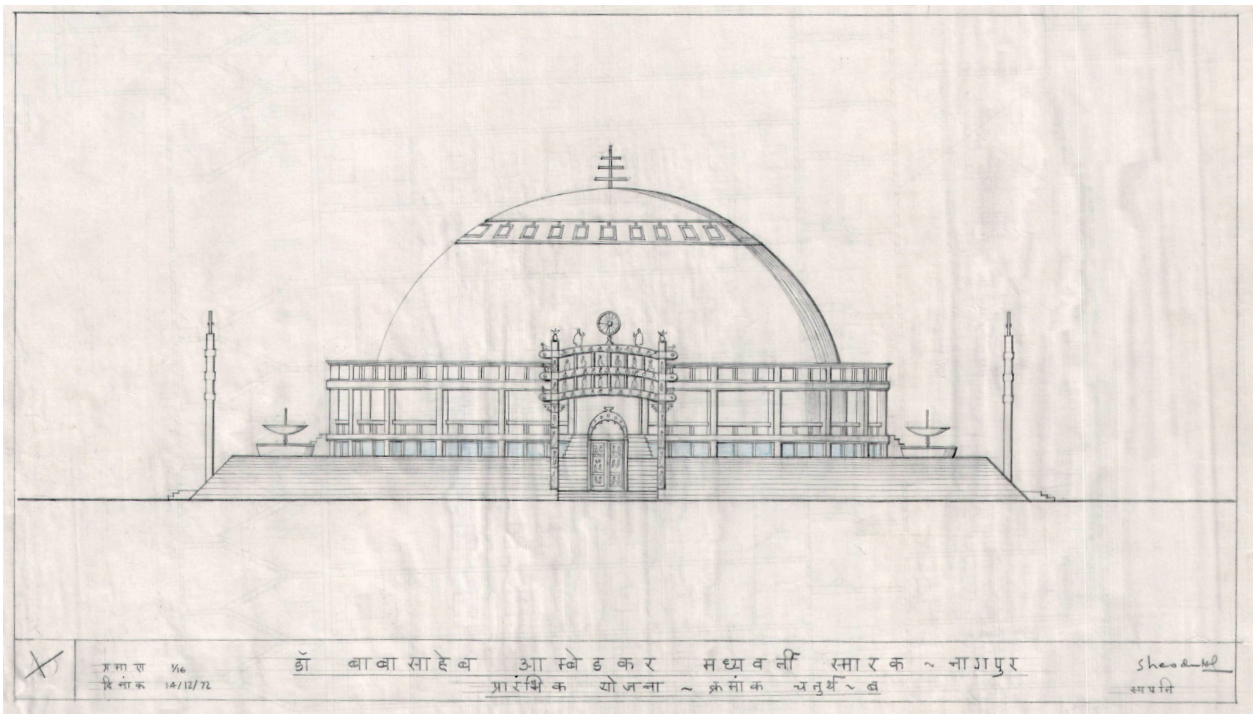


Figure 3.42: Drawing of the toranas at Diksha Bhumi
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

Figure 3.43: Gateway in front of Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur





Figures 3.44, 3.45: Elevation Studies, Diksha Bhumi
Source: Office archives of Ashok Mokha

The final design for the main dome and surrounding walkway of the memorial hall found a compromise between more abstracted modernist elements and historically inspired architectural motifs. The colonnade was reduced to a single story with a gridded overhang supported by a set of columns with rounded capitals. The diminished colonnade emphasizes the dome's size and its lack of ornamentation, while the tilework on the dome highlights the smoothness of the dome and its plasticity, reinforcing an understanding of it as an abstract representation of a new worldview or perhaps a globe.

The decision to place the dome on top of a square base is also important. It references earlier memorials developed as part of the Dalit Buddhist movement, recreating the relationship between a square base and rounded top that was part of Tripude's designs for the conversion platform and the memorial at Diksha Bhumi. It also references the relationship between the Great Stupa of Sanchi and the ground it sits upon. While the stupa at Sanchi sits almost flat upon the earth, it is located on top of a small hillock. The square base of Diksha Bhumi can be read as a model of that raised hillock, or more fittingly, the measured territory of India, further emphasizing a reading of Diksha Bhumi as the center of an idealized Dalit Buddhist landscape.

Diksha Bhumi was imagined as the center of a larger re-mapping of the cultural and religious contours of India; a representation of the new spaces for Dalits in the nation. The designs for Diskha Bhumi further reinforce that idea, creating an open space inside a stupa where there was traditionally no space before. This is carried into the ground floor of Diksha Bhumi as well, which, like other Dalit Buddhist structures, serves as the main space for daily visitors. The flooring, stainless steel railings, and lighting of the ground floor draw the attention of visitors to the center of the room (figs. 3.46, 3.47, 3.48, 3.49). In the center of an open circle created by a set of columns is a model of the Sanchi Stupa that contains a portion of Ambedkar's relics. The model is encased in a clear plastic replica of Diksha Bhumi's dome. Behind these models are a set of statues, flags, and plaques. They include a Buddha statue in the Tibetan style and a walking Buddha statue based on a Buddha type from Thailand.[368] Also on the ground level, there are several photographs of Ambedkar, as well as a model of the site made by Mal's son Ashok Mokha.

As mentioned before, repetition is an important aspect of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture. At Chaitya Bhumi, *toranas* were repeated in various ways throughout the site. At Diksha Bhumi, the dome, and especially its hollowness, is referenced repeatedly in symbols, models, and other representations including the ironwork of the fences around the compound. This repetition of forms—especially in miniature versions that afford visitors the chance to see the building as a model containing other models—reinforces an understanding of the site as a

[368] Robert L. Brown, "God on Earth: the Walking Buddha in the Art of South and Southeast Asia." *Artibus Asiae* 50,

Figures 3.46, 3.47, 3.48, 3.49: Ground floor - interior, Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur

symbol of the movement's ability to create new spaces for the Dalit community. The various models of the same structure, each encasing the other, further represents the conceptual and literal expansion of Ambekdar's legacy and the Dalit Buddhist movement. Like each model, the Dalit Buddhist movement began with Ambedkar's turn to Buddhism. This was followed by the conversion of several hundred thousand Dalits to Buddhism. Even after his passing, Dalits continued to convert to Buddhism, leading to a growing Buddhist community across India.[369] The expansion of the Dalit Buddhist community led to the creation of new and grander monuments across the country, and even around the world. I turn now to a series of projects that embody the evolution of the Dalit Buddhist movement and modes of memorializing it. The first project emphasizes the religious aspects of Ambekdar's Dalit Buddhist movement, using the hollow domed stupa as a model for Dalit Buddhist memorials. The second project focuses on Ambedkar's social message, connecting Dalit Buddhist communities to international Buddhist communities. The third, and final example, emphasizes Ambedkar's political legacy, formalizing it in a series of grand memorial parks constructed under the supervision of Mayawati Das.

Monumental Legacies

Not far from Diksha Bhumi, there is a small Buddhist center known as Buddha Bhumi. It was established by Anand Kausalyayan in the 1980s. Even from the highway, the center is instantly recognizable as a Dalit Buddhist site: The entrance is marked by a large white and blue *torana* capped with a dharma wheel (fig. 3.50). On the property, there are also several other structures and statues, including a three-story white and blue temple capped with a large white stupa dome. There is also a golden Samadhi Buddha, a lifelike marble statue of Kausalyayan, and a bronze statue of Ambekdar, his right hand extended out, pointing towards Diksha Bhumi. Between the statues of Kausalyayan and Ambedkar, there is a small concrete memorial. It is unfinished, but its design is clear: It is a hollow dome that hovers above a raised plinth (figs. 3.51, 3.52, 3.53). Unfinished, the memorial looks like a *chattris* or a dome shaped pavilion popular in Mughal architecture. The plinth is broken by the dome of a small structure that juts out from below it. The top of the small structure protruding from the floor mirrors the dome above it. The memorial recreates the same relationship between miniature models and full-scale monuments at sites like

no. 1/2 (1990): 73-107.

[369] Gyanendra Pandey, "Can There be a Subaltern Middle Class? Notes on African American and Dalit history." *Public Culture* 21, no. 2 (2009): 321-342; Minna Säävälä, "Low Caste but Middle-Class: Some Religious Strategies for Middle-Class Identification in Hyderabad," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 35, no. 3 (2001): 293-318; Amy Bhatt, Madhavi Murty, and Priti Ramamurthy, "Hegemonic Developments: The New Indian Middle Class, Gendered Subalterns, and Diasporic Returnees in the Event of Neoliberalism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 1 (2010): 127-152.

Figure 3.50: Entrance to Buddha Bhumi

Figures 3.51, 3.52, 3.53: Hollow Dome Stupa at Buddha Bhumi

Disksha Bhumi and Chaitya Bhumi, as well as the relationship between Ambedkar statues and the dome of the structures built around them. At Chaitya Bhumi and Diksha Bhumi, the ashes of Ambedkar were housed in a set of small models placed beneath their domed structures. The models were fundamental to the creation of those sites as religious monuments, but they were incidental to their structure; the models could, in theory, be removed at any time. At Buddha Bhumi, the encasement of ashes is formalized into the design of the monument itself, merging the hollow dome stupa type with a somewhat more traditional approach to encasing relics.

Buddha Bhumi is one of a number of smaller sites that have developed around Nagpur. Another center known as Nagaloka is just down the road. Established by the Triratna Baudha Mahasangha (TBMSG), the Indian branch of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, established by the British monk Sangharaksita in 1967, Nagaloka embodies the kinds of international and national connections that define the art and architecture of the Dalit Buddhist movement. It also embodies an alternative legacy of Ambekdar's conversion to Buddhism, tracing it from Chandramani through the British monk Sangharakshita.[370] Like Ambedkar, Sangharakshita was initiated into Buddhism by the Burmese monk Chandramani.[371] He was also present at Ambedkar's mass conversion. The conversion ceremony had a huge impact on Sangharakshita, inspiring several books and also leading him to return to India numerous times in order to offer instruction to the newly formed Dalit Buddhist community. Over the course of his life, Sangharakshita also led other mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism. He eventually went on to establish several centers and organizations dedicated to educating Indian Buddhists and offering programs on both religious and social leadership, one of which is the Nagaloka.[372]

Nagaloka was established as a space for Dalits from across India to learn about Buddhism and develop skills as community leaders. The idea for the center was first proposed in 1992 and the first buildings were completed in 1997. The initial funding for the project came from Taiwan, primarily from Dr. Yo and Ven. Kuang Shin, with later funding coming from the United Kingdom, Korea, and the United States.[373] The architecture of the center represents the different national and international communities that banded together to create Nagaloka. Designed by Christopher Charles Benninger Architects, the buildings at Nagaloka are composed of connected barrel vaults in exposed brick and concrete. While the architects claim that the design was

[370] Dharmachari Subhuti, *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* (Windhorse Publications, 1994).
[371] Bhikshu Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga: An English Buddhist in the Eastern Himalayas* (Windhorse Publications, 1991).
[372] For a longer overview of Sangharakshita's life and connection to Ambedkar, see: Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*.
[373] "During a visit to India in 1992, Sangharakshita proposed a large teaching centre just outside Nagpur that would be a centre for the whole of India. Two supporters from Taiwan, Dr. Yo and Ven. Kuang Shin, responded enthusiastically to this and a plan for the Nagaloka Centre and the Nagarjuna Institute was developed." http://www.nagaloka.org/nagaloka/about-nagaloka/history-of-nagaloka/, accessed August 29, 2018.

inspired by the ancient Buddhist architecture of India, they are stylistically very reminiscent of projects by the architect Louis Khan, especially the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth Texas, and the Villa Sarabhai designed by Le Corbusier in Ahmedabad (figs. 3.54, 3.55, 3.56).[374]

Like earlier Dalit Buddhist projects, Nagaloka is celebrated for its openness. As Christopher Charles Benninger Architects writes about the main meditation hall on the campus,

> The Dhamma Hall is the main public meeting hall where the Buddhist triad Buddha, dhamma and sangha are brought together. The hall is used for discourses, meditation and public gatherings. Hollow exposed brick bearing walls enclose three sides of the hall. Glass folding doors open onto the large entrance pavilion, which is also sheltered by a 20 meter long shell.[375]

Even though Nagaloka caters to Dalit communities in India, it is arguably grounded in a more international Buddhist network. The planning and development of the campus reflects that. Plaques on the buildings commemorate the financial support of patrons and communities in Taiwan and Korea, and visitors from around the world come to volunteer at the site and participate in its programs.[376] The project remains deeply embedded in the Dalit Buddhist movement, however. This is expressed in signs and posters around the campus, as well as two statues that stress the center's enduring connection to the Dalit Buddhist movement. The first, is a bronze life-size statue of Ambekdar. He is dressed in a *dhoti* and carries a walking stick, as if he is walking towards his conversion. The other statue is a 36-foot-tall representation of the walking Buddha that serves as the main focus of the campus (fig. 3.57). The walking Buddha was created by the Taiwanese sculptor Wen Khwey and installed at the site in 2009.[377] One of Ambedkar's favorite representations of the Buddha, the image of the walking Buddha has become a hallmark of the Dalit Buddhist movement, an expression of a socially engaged form of Buddhism in the world.[378]

The construction of centers like Nagaloka and Buddha Bhumi reflect the ongoing effort to maintain the religious and social aspects of the Dalit Buddhist movement. Beginning in the 1990s, planning began on a series of memorial parks that emphasize the Dalit Buddhist movement as part of a political movement. Built under the direction of Das Mayawati during her

[374] "The architecture of the buildings is based on the design of the Buddhist meeting halls that were found in India two thousand years ago." http://www.nagaloka.org/nagaloka/, accessed August 29, 2018.
[375] https://worldarchitecture.org/architecture-projects/fvgm/nagaloka_nagpur-project-pages.html, accessed August 29, 2018. See also: Christopher Charles Benninger, "An Architecture for Learning," *Ekistics* (1998): 207-238.
[376] Eleanor Zelliot, "Connected Peoples: Pilgrimage in the Structure of the Ambedkar Movement." *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 4, no. 1 (2011): 1-6; Cláudio Carvalhaes, "Wandering and Wondering: Unimaginable Interreligious Border Crossings." *Liturgy* 32, no. 3 (2017): 14-22.
[377] http://www.nagaloka.org/nagaloka/about-nagaloka/walking-buddha/, accessed August 28, 2018. For more on the depictions of walking Buddhas in South and Southeast Asia, see: Brown, "God on Earth."
[378] Queen and King, *Engaged Buddhism*.

Figures 3.54, 3.55, 3.56: Nagaloka Center

Figure 3.57: Walking Buddha, Nagaloka

Figure 3.58: Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the projects celebrate Ambedakar as a religious and political hero, and Mayawati as his heir. While the memorials are inherently less religious, they continue to express a strong teleology grounded in a reading of the Dalit movement as a modern extension of Buddhism in India. The projects built under Mayawati's supervision are state-funded civic monuments that celebrate Dalit Buddhism as part of India's national history. Building on Gary Tartokov's study of the formation of Dalit Buddhist art and architecture, Melia Belli Bose writes about these monuments as part of a "second phase" of new Buddhist art and architecture, marking a significant transition from earlier community driven interventions to the creation of large scale urban parks.[379] The two most famous memorials constructed during Mayawati's tenure are the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Prattek Sthal Park (or the Ambekdar Memorial Park) and the Rashtriya Dalit Prerna Sthal. I will focus on the Ambedkar Memorial Park in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, discussing how it compares to earlier Dalit Buddhist projects (fig. 3.58).

The Ambedkar Memorial Park in Lucknow was built between 1995 and 2008. Jay Kaktikar was the chief architect, while Ram V. Sutar and Anil Star were the head sculptors.[380]

[379] Melia Belli Bose, "A Modern Chakravartin: Mayawati's New Buddhist Visual Culture," in *Urban Utopias* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 139-167; Melia Belli Bose, "Monumental Pride: Mayawati's Memorials in Lucknow," *Ars Orientalis* (2014): 85-109.
[380] *Ibid.*

Figure 3.59: Pratibimb Sthal, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

An expansive landscape of marble and sandstone, the site is composed of a series of monuments connected by large plazas and sculpture lined approaches. One of the main entrances to the site—not the entrance used by daily visitors—is lined with sixty-two almost life size statues of elephants leading to a large monument known as Pratibimb Sthal or Reflection Point (figs. 3.59, 3.60). The Pratibimb Sthal is an enormous model of the memorial park itself, presenting visitors with an axonometric plan of the site flanked by a statue of Mayawati on one side and her metnor Kanshi Ram on the other side. Like earlier Dalit Buddhist projects, repetition and models are used as a way to emphasize the vision of the site's creators. It is also a way to convey a larger vision for the project, a worldview perhaps, embodied in the plan of the site itself. Within the Ambedkar Memorial Park, similar depictions of the site appear several times, always flanked by a statue of Mayawati, emphasizing her role in imagining and creating the large urban memorial. The scale of the memorial park, even in reproductions, is striking, marking a clear departure from earlier Dalit Projects. However, even with changes in scale and funding, these later projects continue to draw from the same architectural references as earlier projects associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement.

At the center of the Ambedkar Memorial site is a monument known as the Ambedkar Stupa. It reads more like a fort than a stupa, however. It is composed of four grand stairways shaped like the stylized petals of a lotus protruding out from the center. The entrances to the

Figure 3.60: Posing by the Pratibimb Sthal


Figures 3.61, 3.62: Entrance to the Ambedkar Stupa, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

monument are between the stairways. Like the memorial at Diksha Bhumi, a set of *chaitya* arches mark the entrance to the ground level of the monument. They sit in facades that are several stories tall and highly ornamented to reference the famous caves at Ajanta. The ornamentation of the facades is not deep, however. Instead it is flat and graphic. The flat undulating facades instead recall the architecture of Mughal forts, like those built by the Mughal emperor Akbar in Agra in the 16th century (figs. 3.61, 3.62). Bringing together fort architecture and temple architecture, the Ambedkar Stupa reads as a new civic monument. This is further emphasized by the modification of stupa forms at the site. Five red domes crown the monument. On top of each dome, there is a small protrusion known as a *harmika*. Noticeably absent from each one of these "stupas," however, is a spire.[381] The removal of the spire from the domes reflects a shift in their use and meaning, transforming them from religious monuments into more overtly civic markers.

Like other Dalit Buddhist monuments, the center of the Ambedkar Stupa is open. It encloses a large open foyer below a silver dome decorated with a golden sun and four golden images of the Buddha. The open foyer is connected to a series of chambers around it. The chamber facing the main entrance is occupied by a large bronze statue of Ambedkar modeled after the famous statue of Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. Ambedkar's posture and his ornamented seat are all based on that statue of Lincoln. Even Ambedkar's hands seem based on the famous depiction of the 16th president of the United States (fig. 3.63). Below the statue is a quote in Hindi, which translates as, "My life's struggle is its own message." The quote is a play on Gandhi's famous quote, "My life is my message." Such appropriations and transformations are indicative of the design for Ambedkar Memorial Park, which brings together various references, especially those related to well-known social and

[381] Dallapiccola, *The Stupa*; Harvey, "The Symbolism of the Early Stupa."

Figure 3.63: Ambedkar Statue inside the Amberkdar Stupa

Figure 3.64: Interior of the Samajik Parivartan Sangrahalay, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

Figure 3.65: Exterior of the Samajik Parivartan Sangrahalay, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

political movements, in order to memorialize the role of Dalits in India and new political parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).[382]

The other monuments at Ambedkar Memorial Park similarly fold diverse historical and political references into a plan presented as a modern take on traditional Buddhist forms. Across from the Ambedkar Stupa, for example, is the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Sangrahalay or the Museum of Social Change. It is composed of two large domes connected by a central walkway. Inside each dome, there is a large stele depicting Mayawati on all four sides, her distinctive handbag held in her right hand (fig. 3.64). Around those sculptures, there are a series of 18-foot-tall marble statues that present a lineage of the Dalit Buddhist movement. It begins with the historical Buddha Shakyamuni and ends with Mayawati. Small signs placed next to each statue highlight the family lineages of each figure, presenting the details of their birth and death, as well as the names of their parents and spouses. The addition of such a sign for the Buddha is remarkable as it re-contextualizes the Buddha in a way that blurs the distinction between the Prince Siddhartha and the enlightened being who would come to be known as the Buddha. Historically, those two are approached differently, almost as separate entities.[383]

The exterior of the Parivartan Sangrahalay similarly modifies the stupa to suggest new historical equivalences between the Dalit community in India and other empires and republics around the world (fig. 3.65). While the Ambedkar Memorial incorporated elements of Mughal

[382] Scale seems to have been a particular preoccupation with the designers of the park. As Gary Tartakov writes about the statue inside the Ambedkar Stupa, "The criterion for the size of the Ambedkar statue was that it should be higher than the dome of the five-star hotel under construction [across the street]." Tartakov, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*, 117-118.

[383] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Origin of the Buddha Image," *The Art Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1927): 287-328; Benjamin Rowland, *The Evolution of the Buddha Image* (Ayer Co Pub, 1963); Yuvraj Krishan and Kalpana K. Tadikonda, *The Buddha Image: Its Origin and Development* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996); Vidya Dehejia, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 45-66.

Figure 3.66: Column at the Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

architecture into its exterior, the Parivartan Sangrahalay seems to have been inspired by the Pantheon in Rome, a fact that is heightened by the interiors of the two domes, both of which recreate the distinctive ceiling and alcoves of the Pantheon. The exteriors of the buildings are also made to look "Buddhist" through the same *chaitya* motif that was used on the facades of the Ambedkar stupa, along with an extensive railing design based on the famous railings of Sanchi.

Other monuments and memorials at the site similarly draw from ancient Buddhist architectural references, bringing them together with well-known architectural forms and monuments from around the world. In her essay, "A Modern *Chakravartin: Mayawati's New Buddhist Visual Culture,*" Melia Belli Bose explores how the site's design and materiality emphasize a reading of Mayawati as a modern *chakravartin,* especially in its allusions to Ashoka. As Bose writes, the park stresses a reading of Mayawati as a modern religious and political figure through symbolic references to Ashoka's reign—especially through the use of columns, stupa forms, and elephants—as well as references to civic structures like the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in New Delhi, "thereby visually linking *dalits* with government, independent rule, upward mobility, and social justice, rights they have historically been denied" (fig. 3.66).[384] The use of sandstone at the site especially works to heighten the associations between the Ambedakar Memorial Park and other historical sites across India. As Bose further relates in her article, Mayawati insisted on using the same red sandstone that Ashoka used when erecting his famous pillars across the subcontinent. As Bose continues, "Mayawati's sandstone was quarried in Chunar,

[384] Bose, "A Modern Chakravartin: Mayawati's New Buddhist Visual Culture," 149.

U.P., which over two millennia ago supplied the material for the free-standing pillars Emperor Ashoka erected throughout his vast empire."[385] The associations do not end there. According to an interview with Kaktikar, Bose notes that Mayawati not only wanted to reference Ashoka in the designs, but to actually surpass his architectural legacy: "Kaktikar noted that Mayawati ordered her columns to be slightly taller than Ashoka's, suggesting that as a *chakravartin*, she eclipses even the great Mauryan emperor."[386] As Bose's discussion makes clear, the Ambedkar Memorial Park goes beyond simple allusions to Ashokan architectural references, it incorporates them into an expansive park that draws inspiration from a variety of sources in order to exceed earlier architectural examples. It also works to situate Ambedkar's legacy within a global history of political and social reform. Stated differently, the new memorials built under the direction of Mayawati fuse Buddhist ideals and imagery with new global references to social emancipation and political representation. Chief among these is the dome, which is used repeatedly to refer both to early stupa designs and later institutions related to the foundation of political republics in India, Europe, and the United States.

There is certainly more that can be said about the Ambedkar Memorial Park, however I want to conclude my discussion of it by looking at a set of bronze friezes at the site and how they represent Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism (fig. 3.67). The first is located on a raised, unfinished platform located across the road from the main grounds of the Ambekdar Memorial Park. In the frieze, Amabedkar is depicted taking his conversion from the monk Chandramani. The inscription below it reads: "On 14 October, 1956, Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkare took *diksha* (initiation) in the Buddha-Dharma (Buddhism)." Chandramani is not called out by name, but is clearly identifiable. A few things about the frieze are noteworthy: First, the complete absence of other people. The conversion is typically celebrated for its scale—over 500,000 people converted to Buddhism that day—none of whom are shown in this sculptural depiction. The other feature that is unusual is the statue of the Buddha between the two men and its placement in a small shrine with a bodhi tree sprouting out from the top. Leading up to the Buddha statue is a set of stairs. The composition of Buddha statue, architectural frame, and bodhi tree seems to be a clear reference to Bodh Gaya as the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, and the wellspring of Buddhism. The implication is that the entire history of Buddhism from that first moment when the Buddha achieved enlightenment, through its successive generations is somehow brought to bear on the present through Ambekdar's own conversion.

The scene of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism is reproduced in another large bronze frieze inside the Ambedkar Stupa. In that iteration, Ambedkar and Chandramani are

[385] *Ibid*., 150.
[386] *Ibid*., 152.

Figure 3.67: Bronze Frieze across the street from the Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

shown standing closer together (fig. 3.68). Chandramani's hand gestures mimic those of the Buddha statue behind him, suggesting a direct transmission from the Buddha to Chandramani, and, finally, to Ambedkar. Like in the first frieze, the Buddha statue sits inside a small temple. However, rather than a bodhi tree sprouting from within the shrine, the small temple is crowned by a dome with a large *chaitya* or *chandrashala* arch. Like the dome of the Ambedkar stupa, it is topped with a small *harmika,* but no spire. It is a clear reference to the dome of the Ambedkar memorial itself, and other Dalit Buddhist memorials across India. If Chandramani's hand gestures are able to suggest a direct link to the Buddha, the addition of a dome above the small shrine seems to suggest a direct link between Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism as a religious act and the production of new sites like the Ambekdar Memorial Park, which were made possible through his conversion. The scale and breadth of the effect of Ambedkar's conversion on India is expressed in the landscape of the frieze. The bodhi tree that was confined to the small temple in the first frieze discussed above is no longer contained to a shrine. Instead, it is a tall slender tree that rises well above the small shrine and figures in front of it. Another set of trees are depicted in the distance. While not clearly bodhi trees, they bear some resemblance to the bodhi tree in the foreground, recalling the epic narration of how Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka in the *Mahavamsa*, in which the planting and growth of bodhi trees led to the establishment of new Buddhist centers there. Behind the second row of trees, there is a series of valleys and mountains.

Figure 3.68: Bronze frieze inside the Ambedkar Stupa, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow

Most of the friezes at the site do not include any background or landscape, so the addition of one here is noteworthy. It is not an identifiable landscape. Rather, it simply conveys a sense of space and distance, grounding Ambedkar's conversion in a much larger territory. It is a totalizing vision, one that imagines all of India as a new Buddhist frontier, conquerable or definable by new Dalit spaces like the Ambedkar Memorial Park.

Conclusion

Conclusion

On March 20, 2015, I was in Nagpur, researching the construction of the memorial at Diksha Bhumi, the site of Dr. B.R. Ambekdar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956. I had spent the morning documenting the main memorial complex there and had finally been able to enter the dome on the building's upper level. A group of women were cleaning the floors inside and they allowed me in to take some pictures. There was a sense of routine familiarity about the group of women as they mopped the large marble floor that was in stark contrast with the grandness of the space. It was a sunny day and the light streamed in through the windows and copula, filling the large open hall (fig. 4.1).

In all my visits, I had never seen the dome open, let alone occupied. I wondered what the dome looked like when it was full of people. Would crowds sit in rows and meditate? Or would they listen to sermons? Perhaps they would mull around admiring the openness of the space. After photographing the memorial hall, I returned to a small kiosk to collect my shoes, which I had needed to remove before entering. I remembered the first time I visited Diksha Bhumi. I had tried to walk into the memorial grounds with my shoes on because it was raining.[387] "It is a religious place," the guard told me. He was sitting in a small plastic chair next to a metal detector and camera that were installed at the entrance of the ground floor (fig. 4.2). He then gestured towards a small concrete building where I could leave my shoes. It was nice to return to that same kiosk so many years later, handing the person behind the window a few rupees before walking towards the site's main gate.

[387] There is a long history of protests and conflicts around shoes at religious sites in Asia. For a great study of the issue at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar, see: Penny Edwards, "Grounds for Protest: Placing Shwedagon Pagoda in Colonial and Postcolonial History," *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 2 (2006): 197-211.

Figure 4.1: Interior of the main dome at Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur

Figure 4.2: Entrance and guard at Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur

Figure 4.3: Group outside the gates of Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur

As I exited the grounds of the memorial complex, I came upon a large group of people gathering in the street. Most were dressed in white, suggesting that they were lay Buddhists, likely the lay community of the Dalit Buddhist movement. There were also a few police officers in khaki uniforms at the edges of the group and a number of monks and nuns scattered throughout, their heads shaved, wearing bright orange and burgundy robes (fig. 4.3). At first, it was not clear why everyone was there. It was not one of the well-known anniversaries associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement, when thousands gathered at such sites to honor the legacy of Ambedkar. The two most famous anniversaries associated with Ambekdar are October 14th, the day Ambedkar led the first mass conversion to Buddhism, and April 14th, the anniversary of his birth in 1891, and it was neither of those days. Was there, perhaps, some kind of political protest planned? Or an election? On the boundary walls on both sides of the street, there were several large blue and white murals painted with political slogans and elephants—the symbol of the Bhajuan Samaj Party (BSP)— attesting to the ongoing politics around Buddhism in India and Diksha Bhumi as a site of remembrance and social action. The crowd, however, was not chanting slogans or carrying signs. Instead of party flags, they carried Buddhist flags, the international

Figure 4.4: Group with Buddhist flag at Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur

Buddhist community represented as stripes of blue, yellow, red, white, and orange (fig. 4.4).[388]

I began asking people what was happening and was told that they were gathering to set off on a pilgrimage. They were leaving that afternoon to walk from Nagpur to Bodh Gaya, a distance of roughly 550 miles. The people I talked with said it would take around 45 days to reach Bodh Gaya. While the practice of pilgrimage is not new in India, the thought of a group making such a journey in this day and age, when they could easily go by bus or train, seemed astonishing. Even more surprising, I learned that this was not the first time a group had made such a pilgrimage.[389] Groups traveled every year from Nagpur to Bodh Gaya, reinforcing a sense of the two sites as linked and part of a shared Buddhist circuit.

[388] Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya*; Freiberger, "The Meeting of Traditions"; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Buddhism and Asian Politics," *Asian Survey* (1962): 1-11.
[389] Tara N. Doyle, "'Liberate the Mahabodhi Temple!' Socially Engaged Buddhism, Dalit-Style," *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, edited by Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish (Oxford University Pres, 2003), 249-280.

There is a long history of tracing the contours of the subcontinent through religious peregrinations to various holy sites. As Diana Eck discusses in *India: A Sacred Geography*, the process of touring the country on pilgrimage is an ancient practice in India, reifying pre-modern ideas of India as religious and sovereign space. In modern times, there has been a resurgence of pilgrimage as a way of emphasizing specific religious readings of India. Modern Hindu pilgrimages are perhaps the most well-known and documented, but as the above example makes clear, Buddhist groups have similarly come to define new pilgrimage routes related to changes in social, political, and religious approaches to Buddhism.[390]

The group I encountered in Nagpur was defining a new religious terrain through their journey.[391] It was not the traditional Buddhist network of sites associated with the life and legacy of the Buddha. It was also not confined to the new Buddhist sites connected to the Dalit Buddhist movement and discussed in the last chapter. Instead, their pilgrimage suggested an effort to bring the different Buddhist networks of India together, creating a modern Buddhist landscape that included both modern and ancient Buddhist sites. Through the physical act of walking, the group was mapping out a constellation of Buddhist places linking the center of the Dalit Buddhist movement in Nagpur with the anchor of the international Buddhist community in Bodh Gaya.

With an elderly and barefoot monk at the lead, the group began to make their way through the city. While I could not join for the entire 45-day journey, I asked if I could walk with them through Nagpur and was cordially invited to join. Nagpur has a population of roughly 2.5 million people. A small city by Indian standards, it is still bustling with cars, buses, motorcycles, bicycles, carts and people. It was somewhat jarring to walk through the busy streets, but police were posted throughout the city, stopping traffic for us as we made our way through the city. Some people stopped and watched us as we walked slowly down the main avenues. Others

[390] In her study of the violence around the destruction of Ayodya, Thaptai Guha-Thakruta noticed the similarities between the modern appraisals of Ayodhya and debates over Bodh Gaya. At Aydodya, the presence of a Muslim mosque was contested by some Hindu nationalist organizations, resulting in its demolition in 1992. In Bodh Gaya, the local Hindu mahant's control of the site has similarly been a matter of contention. Guha-Thakurta's argument is that the battle over both sites was linked by a common issue in India regarding what sources established the "true" or "authentic" account of a religious place. Could epics like *The Mahabharata* or *The Ramayana* be read as historical texts? And to what extent should archaeological remains be used to decide modern debates over land rights and religious control of a site. In other words, what qualified as an "authentic" source for establishing rights and control over religious places. I would like to add that in addition to textual sources and archaeological evidence, the movement of people to and from different sites is also important. As Toni Huber disccuses in his study of Tibetan engagements with sites, the Buddhist landscape of the subcontinent changed over time depending on shifts in doctrine and political situations, but also according to trade routes. As Tibetan traders began traveling to new parts of the subcontinent, new religious sites often appeared in those areas. New historical studies and archaeological evidence have helped establish certain key sites as historical places associated with remembering the life of the Buddha. But even in light of such evidence, it is possible to see how communities continue to define and redefine the contours of India's landscape.

[391] Doyle, "'Liberate the Mahabodhi Temple!'"

Figure 4.5: Group from the pilgrimage

simply ignored us. As we moved along, some people even joined in, walking with the group for a bit before peeling off to return to their regular lives.

During my time on the pilgrimage, I walked with a group made up of a few monks, an elderly nun, an army officer, and a young boy who was making the journey with his mother (fig. 4.5). They explained to me that the group was primarily composed of new Buddhists from rural areas around Nagpur, the so called Scheduled Castes and Tribes or Dalits, who had followed the model of Ambedkar and converted to Buddhism as a way to escape the caste system.[392] The pilgrimage was a way for them to learn about their new religion and to practice it by visiting the sites of the Buddha. As we reached the train station, the army officer let us know that he would be leaving us to catch his train, heading north to his post there. It felt like a good place for me to take my leave as well. As we passed under the train tracks of the Nagpur station, the dense city gave way to open fields and smaller settlements along the highway. I said my goodbyes and

[392] I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 4, but for a discussion of Ambedkar's approach to conversion see, Ambedkar, *Conversion as Emancipation*.

headed back to the guesthouse where I was staying.

A few days later, I would make a similar trip, traveling from Diksha Bhumi beyond the city limits of Nagpur to Buddha Bhumi, the small Buddhist center established by Anand Kausalyayan in 1982. I did not walk by foot this time, nor did I participate in another pilgrimage. Instead I traveled by car, racing down the highway until I was let off in front of the main gate of the center. While visiting Buddha Bhumi, I met Ven. Bhadant Pragyajyoti Thero. He had been there since its founding, spending ten years with Kausalyayan before becoming the center's head abbot. He lived in a small one room house at the end of the compound. In addition to training young monks, he ran several businesses as a way to support the activities of the center. An increasingly important one was planning religious tours, what he referred to as *dhamma yatra* or pilgrimages. Every year, his center would lead several twenty-day tours by bus to places like Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Vaishali, Rajgir, Nalanda, Kushinagar, and Lumbini—the traditional Buddhist circuit. They also organized trips to Sri Lanka. When I spoke to Pragyajyoti, he said they had over 50 people scheduled to go to Sri Lanka that year, mostly from the nearby city of Warda. He also organized pilgrimages for people from Sri Lanka. They would fly from Colombo to Chennai, traveling by bus to Nagpur and spending the night at Buddha Bhumi before heading to Bodh Gaya and the other Buddhist sites around it. There are certainly more direct ways to get to Bodh Gaya, but Pragyajyoti insisted on bringing groups to Buddha Bhumi and exposing them to Buddhist organizations associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement. Much in the way that the pilgrimage described above helped connect Dalit Buddhist sites to the traditional network of Buddhist places, Pragyajyoti's organization, and other organizations like it, used travel and pilgrimage as a way to build affinities between different Buddhist sites and communities.[393]

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed various networks of modern Buddhist sites in India. I began with the construction of several notable Buddhist temples, guesthouses, and centers in conjunction with the development of new Hindu temples in places like New Delhi, Varanasi, and Kolkata. Largely funded by the Birla family, such structures sought to establish India as a Hindu nation, incorporating Buddhist sites and history into a vision of the subcontinent as a religious and political territory; the grounds of the Arya Dharma. The revivalist style of Sris Chandra Chatterjee defined the architecture of this period, merging Hindu and Buddhist architectural forms together to create grand and modern temples that served as religious hubs across India and training grounds for a rising Hindu nationalist movement.

In Chapter 2, I examined the development of Buddhist sites as part of India's national and international development policies after India's independence in 1947. India's Buddhist past was one way to remember historical cultural affinities between Asian countries and the

[393] Personal interview with Ven Bhadant Pragyajyoti Thero at Buddha Bhumi, March 25, 2015.

new architecture of that period reflected that. Memorials at Bodh Gaya and Nalanda, as well as in major cities like New Delhi, helped reify presumed bonds between Asian nations, moving between more modernist architectural projects to buildings designed to imitate a Qing-period pavilion from China. At the state level, Bihar began building a set of structures designed to facilitate travel in the area and to showcase the state's rich cultural heritage. What united the various projects from this period was an emphasis on welcoming Buddhist communities from around the world and the potential of Buddhism to facilitate international cooperation and understanding.

In 1956, there was a break from earlier nationalist efforts to define modern Buddhist spaces in India. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism that year marked a turn away from understandings of Buddhism as part of Hindu culture in India, resulting in the formation of an entirely new branch of Buddhism known as Navayana Buddhism or Dalit Buddhism.[394] As discussed in Chapter 3, the sites associated with the Dalit Buddhist movement define a network of sites that is distinct from the traditional Buddhist circuit. Instead, they are located in cities and towns with Dalit settlements or at sites associated with the life and legacy of Ambedkar, like Diksha Bhumi in Nagpur or Chaitya Bhumi in Mumbai.

For a long time, Dalit Buddhist sites were believed to define an entirely distinct constellation of Buddhist sites. In broad strokes, the traditional sites were understood to be clustered in eastern India and the new Dalit Buddhist sites were in western and central India. The historical sites such as Sanchi and Elora, pointed to a longer history of Buddhist places in India, but they were always satellites of the major Buddhist sties in India associated with the life of the Buddha and the legacy of the emperor Ashoka. Architecture was one early way that Dalit Buddhist monuments asserted their connection to the established network of Buddhist places. The buildings associated with the movement drew from the same core architectural elements as earlier Buddhist sites built in India since the 1900s. The incorporation of such elements as the dome, railings, and *toranas* at Sanchi, or the *chaitya* arch drawn from the facade of the caves at Ajanta, symbolically worked to associate the social and political agenda of the Dalit Buddhist movement with a longer history of Buddhism in the region. Travel and pilgrimage became another way to affirm the links between different Buddhist sites, linking Dalit Buddhist places to other religious centers across India.

Travel is a common theme in modern Buddhist development since the nineteenth century. It underscores the various social, political, and religious narratives around modern Buddhist art and architecture in India discussed throughout this dissertation. Not only does travel between

[394] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Virginia Hancock, "New Buddhism for New Aspirations: Navayana Buddhism of Ambedkar and His Followers," *Manushi* 145 (2004): 17-25.

Buddhist sites point to the modernization and development that took place during the colonial and post-colonial periods of Indian history—when advances in train, ship, and later automobile and air travel made it easier for more people than ever before to visit Buddhist sites in India—travel itself underscores some of the most salient features of Buddhism's modern history in India. It was fundamental to the ways in which colonial officers first began studying and engaging with India's ancient Buddhist heritage, leading to an increase in foreign interest in India's Buddhist sites. Travel was also an essential reason why Buddhism was so important to various nationalist movements in India. As mentioned at the start of this dissertation, Buddhism's spread across Asia was a fundamental part of what made it so important to modern nationalist narratives. The accounts of travels to and from the subcontinent by figures like Xuanzang who journeyed to Nalanda in the 7th-century were used to bolster global perceptions of India's cultural development and impact on the world.

The modern development of Buddhist sites helped memorialize Buddhism's spread across Asia. It also sought to embody a sense of Buddhism's return to India in forms that harkened to the various Buddhist faiths and communities. Guesthouses were common to all the phases of modern Buddhist development in India. They were also built as part of a series of projects, linking sites through a network of new buildings designed to ease travel between different Buddhist centers and to curate people's experience of those sites. The set of bus stands, guesthouses, and museums designed by Upendra Maharathi in the 1960s for the state of Bihar remain, for me, a hallmark of modern Buddhist art and architecture. The consistent use of style, color, and form alerts visitors to the fact that they are part of a set of sites, while also reflecting the region's Buddhist past. And yet, they would have gone completely unnoticed by me except for their formal similarities with earlier Buddhist revivalist projects such as the set of temples funded by the Birla family and designed by Sris Chandra Chatterjee in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, and Varanasi.

As I travelled across India in search of modern Buddhist art and architecture, I began to see the same architectural elements repeated in buildings across India, especially the *chaitya* arch drawn from Ajanta; the dome, railings, and *toranas* of Sanchi; and the Ashokan pillar. These became the trademarks of modern Buddhism in India, indexing a longer history of Buddhism in the region and its importance for defining modern cultural and political values. The repetition of certain architectural features also meant that, even when they were not built as part of the same enterprise, different clusters of projects could still be studied collectively as representations of more pervasive approaches to modern Buddhism in India.

It soon became clear that groups were also moving between Buddhist networks previously thought to be distinct. If formal repetition was one way to create links between

different Buddhist projects, pilgrimage and movement were others. Pilgrimages from Nagpur to Bodh Gaya are just one example of the kind of movements taking place in India and how they forge connections between distinct Buddhist networks. Some, like the countless groups that include a stop at the Taj Mahal in Agra as part of pilgrimages to the Buddhist holy sites in India, draw equivalences between Buddhist holy sites and other heritage zones in India. Others, such as the Dharmayatra walk through the Jethian Valley organized by the Light of Buddha Dharma Foundation (LBDFI) are grounded in international efforts to expand the scope of conservation efforts beyond specific Buddhist sites to encompass entire landscapes.[395] Such projects seek to address environmental and social issues by inviting people to imagine what the landscape they are walking through might have been like when the Buddha walked through them during his lifetime centuries ago. Because of the scale of such projects, they invariably touch on other efforts to define modern Buddhist spaces in India, subsuming multiple and sometimes competing visions of Buddhism into overarching ideas of conservation and heritage. Increasingly, new Buddhist projects in India have to account for other modern expressions of Buddhism, as well as historically significant Buddhist sites. It is the collection of various and distinct approaches to Buddhism that defines modern Buddhist art and architecture in India. Accordingly, when groups move through India's Buddhist landscapes today, they do not encounter a single vision of India's Buddhist past. Instead, they move through the many ways in which Buddhism has been imagined as part of India's future.

[395] In December 2017, I joined LBDFI for their one day pilgrimage through the Jethian Valley. Many of my observations here are drawn from that experience.

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