

## Certificate

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “*Bodh Gaya and Gaya: The Great Divines and Their Great Divides*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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## **Table of Contents**

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1. Overview .....	1
1.2 Historical Overview and Geographical Information.....	2
1.3 Research Statement .....	4
1.4 Aims and Objectives .....	5
1.5 Research Methodology .....	5
1.6. Limitations .....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	12
2.1 Bodh Gaya and Gaya .....	12
2.2 Buddhism and Hinduism.....	13
2.3 Temple Complexes .....	15
2.4 Tourism .....	17
2.5 Socioeconomic Aspects .....	19
Chapter 3: Findings and Analyses .....	23
3.1 Religious Spaces .....	23
3.1.1 Bodh Gaya .....	24
3.1.2 Gaya .....	36
3.2 Business and Tourism.....	49
3.2.1. Bodh Gaya .....	49
3.2.2. Gaya .....	57
Chapter 4: Comparison: Contrast, Confluence, and Conflict .....	66
4.1. Temples and Complexes .....	66
4.1.1. Space .....	66
4.1.2. Purpose.....	67
4.1.3. Rituals .....	68

4.1.4. Religions .....	69
4.2. Business and Tourism .....	71
4.2.1. Tour Guides and <i>Pinda Daan</i> Agents .....	71
4.2.2. Hoteliers, Monasteries, and Ashramas .....	73
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	75
References .....	78

## Acknowledgements

There have been innumerable contributions from various entities through the past 9 months, without which this project wouldn't have been a reality. Our group would like to extend its sincerest thanks and gratitude to them. Firstly, we would like to thank FLAME University and our vice-chancellor, Dr. Devi Singh for pioneering something as inspiring as the Discover India Program. It is humbling to know that we got the opportunity to study a part of this country's fascinating culture and contribute to it academically.

We would like to thank our DIP Chair- Dr. Shweta Rana for undertaking the herculean task of managing a passionate set of students and yet mentoring us patiently at every step. We would also like to thank the DIP Committee for the year 2016-17. Their constant evaluation, feedback, and discussion through the year made us outdo the quality of projects we would have otherwise managed to shell out.

We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude towards the helping staff and administration of FLAME University who seamlessly undertook the background tasks during the project and ensured that we didn't break a sweat over them.

We would also like to thank a few people who assisted us on-field and make ample progress in our research. Firstly, Mr. Anil Kumar who got us extensively acquainted with the cities of Bodh Gaya and Gaya which made our days on field much more efficient. Through his help we had the privilege to network with various other locals and academicians who pitched in with priceless contributions. Our gratitude also extends to Mr. Dhananjay Katariya who made us familiar with Gaya, the Vishnupad temple complex and its surroundings. His continuous directions helped us look in all the right places and navigate a complex city with minimal effort. We are also indebted to Mr. Mehool Parekh and Saurabh Singh who made our stay on-field as comfortable and welcoming as possible.

Lastly, our group profusely thanks our mentors Prof. Nidhi Kalra and Prof. KS Mochish who were with us every step of the way. They were as much a part of our group as any student member and that investment helped us build the strong foundation on which this project stands today. This agenda couldn't have been possibly close to what it is without their consistent feedback, calls, discussions, and emails. No amount of gratitude is ever enough for what they have provided to us and to this project.

## Abstract

Bodh Gaya and Gaya are two temple towns in the Gaya district of Bihar, India. Bodh Gaya is the city where it is believed that the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and thus becomes an important centre for pilgrimage for Buddhists all over the world. It also houses Buddhist monasteries and temples from 12 different countries- all of them coexisting in the Mahabodhi temple complex.

Meanwhile, Gaya is where it is believed that Sita first performed, on the banks of the Phalgu River, at the Vishnupad temple. *Pinda daan* – a Hindu ritual conducted for those seeking salvation for the deceased. It thus draws in Hindu pilgrims from all over India with the Vishnupad temple complex being a central attraction.

Bodh Gaya and Gaya represent two contrasting religions and ideologies that coexist in proximity to one another, which piqued our interest in them. The Niranjana River that flows in Bodh Gaya merges into the Phalgu River in Gaya. With both the cities being only 15 kilometres away from each other, these rivers act as geographical demarcations as well as links.

These cities are known to be in constant conflict which translates into strongly held opinions of the other. As a group, we aim to study these opinions along with drawing a parallel between the socio economic factors that branch out as a result of the two temple complexes. It was imperative for us to not only dwell on these differences but to analyse what or who perpetuates them.

### List of Figures

Sr. No.	Figure	Caption	Page No.
Chapter 1			
1	Fig. 1.1	Bihar on a map of India	3
2	Fig. 1.2.	Bodh Gaya and Gaya in Gaya District	3
Chapter 3			
3	Fig. 3.1.	A floor plan of the Mahabodhi temple complex	25
4	Fig. 3.2.	The Mahabodhi Temple	26
5	Fig. 3.3.	The Buddha statue inside the Mahabodhi temple	27
6	Fig. 3.4.	Statue at the Muchalinda Sarovar	29
7	Fig. 3.5.	Sculptings of the Buddha on the Mahabodhi temple pillars	29
8	Fig. 3.6.	<i>Kora</i> - Circumambulations around the Mahabodhi temple	30
9	Fig. 3.7.	Nuns from Ladakh at the Mahabodhi Temple	31
10	Fig. 3.8.	Cremation grounds in Gaya	36
11	Fig. 3.9.	A floor plan of the Vishnupad temple complex	37
12	Fig. 3.10.	A pinda daan being performed	41
13	Fig. 3.11.	Sign outside the Vishnupad temple	41
14	Fig. 3.12.	Beggars too are not an uncommon outside of the Vishnupad temple	45
15	Fig. 3.13.	Donation box in the Vishnupad temple	48
16	Fig. 3.14.	A stall table in a Bodh Gaya market selling religious ware	50
17	Fig. 3.15.	The inside of a Tibetan pop-up restaurant	51
18	Fig. 3.16.	A donation stall outside the Tibetan Karma Temple	52
19	Fig. 3.17.	Ms. Aarti, an e-rickshaw driver in Bodh Gaya	54
20	Fig. 3.18.	A <i>samagri</i> seller in Gaya	58
21	Fig. 3.19.	Jain Bhawan, Gaya	59
22	Fig. 3.20.	A <i>tilkut</i> shop in Gaya	61
23	Fig. 3.21.	A Market-place in Gaya	62
Chapter 4			
25	Fig. 4.1.	Genealogical records in the Vishnupad Temple	67
26	Fig. 4.2.	Buddha Puja in the Bhutanese monastery	71

<b>List of Boxes</b>			
<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Caption</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Box 3.1.	2013 Bombings	26
2	Box 3.2.	Bodh Gaya Temple Act	27
3	Box 3.3.	Dhananjay Katariya	28
4	Box 3.4.	Kalachakra Festival	50
5	Box 3.5.	Bodh Gaya Biennale	55
6	Box 3.6.	Japanese Wives	57
7	Box 3.7.	Pitrapaksha Festival	60
8	Box 3.8.	Pretshila	64

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Table</b>	<b>Caption</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Table 1.1.	Interviews Conducted in Bodh Gaya	8
2	Table 1.2.	Interviews Conducted in Gaya	9





## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview**

There is more to Gaya and Bodh Gaya than temple-towns separated by a prefix; the word changes, the world changes, and yet these worlds are not poles apart. Significant differences and similarities lie deep within the presence or absence of 'Bodh' in Gaya. The demon Gayasura breathed his last and the prince Gautama became the Buddha, all within a half-hour drive of the other, never mind the centuries and questions of mythology and history that separate them.

Gaya is among the holiest and most venerated Hindu religious sites in the world, and Bodh Gaya is the most important of all Buddhist pilgrimage sites associated with the life of Gautama Buddha. One marks the death of the mythical Gayasura and the other, the spiritual rebirth of Gautama into the Buddha.

Gaya is said to be associated with the offering of *pinda daan* of king Dashratha by Sita, and thus became a site of significance for ancestral rites and rituals commemorating the dead. This makes the Vishnupad temple in Gaya the most important place for performing the *shraddha* ceremony.

Similarly, accounts by many report that Bodh Gaya was the place where Prince Gautama reached enlightenment and became the Buddha. It was the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya under which Gautama found enlightenment by following the eight-fold path he developed. It is claimed that the Buddhist patron, king Ashoka originally commissioned the construction of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya. Today, the Mahabodhi is at the centre of a set of diverse Buddhist temples representing a varied reverence from countries around the world.

These two temples are at the centre of their respective towns that symbolise opposites. Death and birth, both with their own charm. The triumph of a God and that of a human being. A religion inherently 'Indian', and one that took root in present day India but has been more successful elsewhere. It is through these lenses that we hope to compare the two towns and highlight similarities and differences both in people and practices.

## 1.2 Historical Overview and Geographical Information

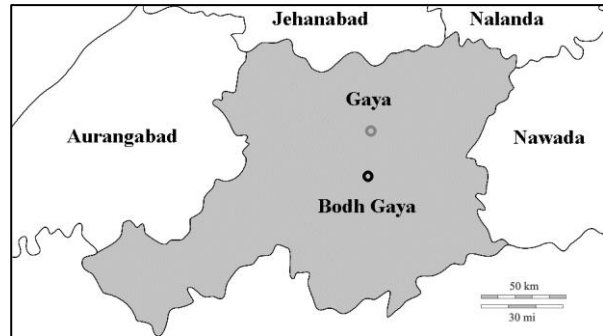
Per Hindu mythology, Gaya is the site that Rama visited with Sita and Lakshmana where Sita was offered *pinda daan* to their father Dasharath, millions of Hindus follow suit every year to give freedom to the souls of their deceased, so that they may continue their pursuit of *moksha* in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The namesake of Gaya, Gayasura, was a powerful demon - an *asura* - who performed harsh asceticism in penance towards Lord Brahma for his sins. His strength grew and so did his appeal to the Gods, who granted him his wish to be the purest being on earth. Thus, one would attain *moksha* merely by touching him. This in retrospect for the Gods, was a terrible mistake - but they could not rid themselves of this demon directly, owing to his pious nature. Lord Vishnu was called upon for help, who then proposed asking Gayasura to allow the sacrifice of his body for holy purposes, which the pious demon agreed to. After promising to Gayasura that the place covered by his body would be the holiest spot on earth, Vishnu drove the demon into the ground, pushing him below the surface of the Earth using his right foot - the footprint is said to be embedded in stone - this foot is at the centre of the famous Vishnupad Mandir, the most significant temple in Gaya.

The Buddhist scriptures in Pali script are said to be directed from the mouth of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama was born to a large clan, the Shakyas in modern day Nepal. It is said that he spent most of his life in a palace built by his father, secluded from the outside world. He was exposed to life beyond the palace in his late twenties, and was faced with the realities of human mortality. He subsequently left his kingdom to continue life as an ascetic seeking enlightenment. Soon he found that both the lifestyles he had experienced had been two opposite and extreme ends - the luxurious life of a prince and the meagre lifestyle of a harsh ascetic. This realisation drove him to the 'middle path' where neither extreme is touched, and the mind and body are at peace. Bodh Gaya was the place where Prince Gautama reached enlightenment and became the Buddha according to the Pali Buddhist narrative.

Cut across by the Ganga, the fertile land of Bihar is landlocked by Nepal in the north, West Bengal in the east, Uttar Pradesh on the west and Jharkhand on the south. With an area of 1,73,877 square kilometres, the state has a population of 64.89 million. The capital, Patna, is well connected to the rest of the state and to all major cities in India like Calcutta, Mumbai, New Delhi, and Ahmedabad.



**Fig. 1.1: Bihar on a map of India**  
(D-maps.com, India)



**Fig. 1.2: Bodh Gaya and Gaya in Gaya District**  
(D-maps.com, Bihar)

Meanwhile, Gaya (located at longitudes 84.40° to 85.50° E and latitudes 24.50° to 25.10° N) is a hundred kilometres south of Patna amidst a number of hills on three sides and the river Phalgu (also known as Niranjana) on the fourth. The structure of its geographical location results in seasonal temperature. It experiences extremely hot summers from the months of May to July and cold winters from October to March. Its peak tourist season falling during the winter months. Gaya receives an ample annual rainfall of 214 centimetres from July to October and its main river Phalgu, a tributary of the Ganga, suffers floods every year.

The district of Gaya is a total of 4,976 km<sup>2</sup> but the actual city of Gaya is only 50.17 km<sup>2</sup> and it has a population of 4,63,454 that is rapidly expanding (Banerjee). Gaya's population density is at 880 per square kilometre, with a sex ratio of 932 women for every 1000 men and a literacy rate of 66.35% (Banerjee).

The district houses the Gautama Buddha Wildlife Sanctuary which stretches over 260 km<sup>2</sup> since 1976, which has a diverse range of flora and fauna. The crops that grow in abundance are wheat, paddy, lentils and potato. Large quantities of sand are found in the Phalgu's river beds which are collected and transported to part of Gaya and significant construction sites.

The temple town of Bodh Gaya has a similar climate to that of Gaya given that the two places are located approximately only 10 kilometres away from each other- i.e. dry, hot summer months of May, June and July followed by a particularly chilly winter climate in between October and March. The town which is approximately 248,639 sq km in area is located on the western bank of the river Phalgu. In total Bodh Gaya accommodates 139 villages. Bodh Gaya

doesn't have a varied topographical spectrum with the land being mostly flat and is located on the junction of the Gangetic Plain and the Chota Nagpur Plateau.

According to the Bodh Gaya Population Census 2011, the population of Bodh Gaya is a meagre 38,439 residing locals otherwise most of the demographic influx is made up of pilgrims and tourists visiting the town. The census also reports the sex ratio of Gaya to be 931 females for every 1000 males.

It is imperative for this study to establish a historical and geographical foundation. In order to study, context is vital and so is a holistic understanding of the lands of Bodh Gaya and Gaya— how they came about to be, the nature of the terrains and what they actually consist of. By examining these aspects in themselves, the stark contrast between these two temple towns at the most basic level is brought forth which lays the ground to build the comparative study.

### **1.3 Research Statement**

This study was an endeavor “To study the Mahabodhi and Vishnupad temple complexes and their impact on socio-economic aspects of the two temple towns of Bodh Gaya and Gaya, and further draw a comparison between the two, to understand the relationship they share owing to their proximity.”

To define the terms mentioned in our statement is essential in order to gain a true understanding of their significance in our study:

Temple complex:

A temple, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is defined as a “space for religious practice.” A temple complex through that association is a physical space (generally extending to a few acres in area to a few hundred acres) made of various temples together and may also include other secondary spaces. The Mahabodhi and the Vishnupad temple complexes in specific have shops, water bodies, and monasteries/ ashrams within their temple complexes as secondary spaces. Other popular examples of temple complexes are the Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Prambanan temple complex in Indonesia.

Temple-towns:

Gaya, on grounds of population and area - has been classified as a city, while Bodh Gaya by the same metrics is a town. While recognising the classifications of these places, we have used ‘temple-towns’ as a term to refer to both Gaya the city, and Bodh Gaya the town.

Socio-economic:

Our project revolves around studying the social structures of caste, gender and religion in Bodh Gaya and Gaya, in conjunction with the economic effects the presence of the Vishnupad and Mahabodhi temples have on the cities in terms of tourism and local businesses.

Comparison:

The research project is a comparative study between Bodh Gaya and Gaya as we have specifically focused on topics in the two cities between which lines can be drawn. This study is not an analysis of them independently, rather it is one where they are chalked out together. It also explore the conflicts between the two which further enhances one's idea of the other and vice-versa.

Proximity:

The reason Bodh Gaya and Gaya were chosen as the two towns to be compared was not only because they are centres of great importance for their respective religions but also because they are only fifteen kilometers away from each other. The presence of this high contrast in ideology even though the cities are not geographically distant was interesting ground for us to build this study on.

#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives**

1. To study the coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism in Bodh Gaya and Gaya
2. To study Buddhism and Hinduism in the two cities with respect to history and practices, and rituals performed at the sites
3. To document the dynamics of daily functioning typical to Bodh Gaya and Gaya
  - a. Daily routine of the temples
  - b. Motivations of, and interactions between: pilgrims, expatriates, locals, monks/priests, and tourists
  - c. Livelihood of people within, and with relation to the temple complexes
4. To study tourism and its impact on the locals
5. To study funding provided to the temples for their maintenance and to understand the disparity in their current condition

#### **1.5 Research Methodology**

Sources of data collection:

For the purpose of this study, the researchers have referred to two kinds of sources: primary and secondary. For the sake of enabling the researchers to have a thorough knowledge on the historical context of the site of research, several secondary sources have been looked into. These sources vary in content from being various versions of the myths and legends which makes the site historically and religiously significant, to current affairs pertaining to census data, ongoing conflicts, government funded tourism books and academic texts analyzing and critiquing the various aspects of the two temple towns. These sources are in the form of **periodicals, books, journals, articles, audio-visuals, dissertations, and archives**, all accessed in the digital form and in print.

The more significant part of this ethnographic study was the on-field research which entailed most of the primary sources needed for the research. Other primary sources are various academic scholars who have considerably shed some light on lesser known aspects, and thus filling various gaps in the process of the research. This data was obtained through the means of interviews, observation on site using snowball sampling.

- Nature of the research:

The two temple towns which are the center of our research are multidimensional in their socio-cultural as well as socio-economic aspects. Moreover, the two dominant religions at play that govern the historicity and cultural phenomenon make the study complex in nature, given the fact that all the facets are interlinked at various levels. This calls for the need of a qualitative study.

### **Sampling:**

The nature of the cities is such that they serve as hubs for tourists and pilgrims. With a religiously assorted population and an added tourist influx, it is difficult to take the entirety of the demographic into consideration whilst conducting the research. Therefore, a sample group was selected using non-probability sampling.

1. **Non-probability sampling:** With a relatively unknown universe, this form of sampling gives representation to all stratas, groups and sub-groups of the population. There are 4 types, of which the researchers have used :
  - a. **Snowball sampling:** Due to the fact that most of the administrative staff in these temple towns are hard to locate digitally, this technique was

used to contact the same. The networking also enabled the researchers to reach the more niche groups of locals.

- Tools of data collection:

1. **Interview:** The researchers used the interview method in the verbal form along with recording it audio-visually. This served as an efficient tool. To ensure greater flexibility and adaptability to the subject's needs, two kinds of interview questionnaire was put to use:

- a. **Unstructured interview:** As this technique requires no predetermined questions, it allowed the researchers to conduct on the spot interviews in and around both the cities. It was also conducive to a situation where in an interview had to be conducted with a subject whom the researchers did not previously intend to interview.

- b. **Semi-structured interview:** The crux of qualitative research, this tool not only provided a framework to rely upon but also significantly enhanced the flexibility. Intended subjects could furnish detailed information and personal opinions going beyond what the researchers already had in mind. This aided in procuring previously unknown insights.

2. **Observation:** A ritual ridden study like this one depends on a tool such as observation. It served to fill in the gaps of information that had not been acquired through the interview process. Only one method of observation was used:

- a. **Non-participant observation:** Herein, the researchers merely observed the subject or event from the periphery, not getting involved in the activity. This form of passive observation came handy when exploring the rituals and practices of the Buddhist monks in Bodh Gaya and the Hindu pujaris in Gaya.

These choices pertaining to data collection were made in the hopes that we sufficiently document the viewpoints of the stakeholder involved.

**Table 1.1. Interviews conducted in Bodh Gaya**

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Themes Discussed</b>
1.	Tasya McKay	Cafe Owner, Bodh Gaya	Ashok Complex, Bodh Gaya
2.	Sonam Dorjee	Monk, Mahabodhi Temple	Mahabodhi Temple
3.	Swati Singh	Security Guard, Bodh Gaya	Mahabodhi Temple
4.	Nangzey Dorjee	Secretary at BTMC, Bodh Gaya	Mahabodhi Temple
5.	Thomas Johnson	Pilgrim, Bodh Gaya	Temple Complex
6.	Kiran Lama	Caretaker, Japanese Monastery, Bodh Gaya	Conflict between Monasteries and Hotels
7.	Kelsanj	Hawker, Bodh Gaya	Business within the temple
8.	Munnilal	E -Rickshaw Driver, Bodh Gaya	Business beyond the temple
9.	Sapna	E - Rickshaw Driver, Bodh Gaya	Business beyond the temple
10.	Preeti Singh	Head of Nagar Nigam, Bodh Gaya	Business beyond the temple
11.	Karma Tsering	Head of Donations, Kagyu Monlam, Bodh Gaya	Tourism and Funding
12.	Vinod Kumar	Travel Agent, Bodh Gaya	Tourism
13.	Sourabh	Tour Guide, Bodh Gaya	Local Residents
14.	Bhikku Chalinda	Chief Monk, Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya	Funding
15.	Stanzin Dolma	Nun, Bodh Gaya	Gender
16.	Kailash Prasad	Professor, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya	Caste, Buddhism and Hinduism



**Table 1.2. Interviews Conducted in Gaya**

<b>S.r. No.</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Themes Discussed</b>
1	Dhananjay Katariya	Panda, Gaya	Vishnupad Temple, Conflict between Hotels and Ashrams, Gaya
2	Mahesh Gupt	Panda, Gaya	Gender, Caste and, Hinduism and Buddhism
3	Ranjit Lal Pathak	Panda, Gaya	Gender
4	Virendra	Sweeper, Gaya	Caste
5	Manohar Lal Chaurasia	Pinda Daan Agent, Gaya	Religious Businesses
6	Manoj Pandey	Panda, Gaya	Religious Businesses
7	Pramod Bhadani	Businessman, Gaya	Business beyond the temple
8	Ranjit Ram Narayan	Pilgrim, Gaya	Tourism

### 1.6. Limitations

In our time on field, we were exposed to a different reality. Studying towns that were vastly different from the environment we were accustomed to, and having the opportunity to delve deep into an unfamiliar culture was a unique experience. The locals were warm and welcoming, accommodating our curiosity with furore. However, there were hurdles that we had to face.

Our first obstacle was the limited secondary data that had been recorded in regard to Gaya. While the temple town had been mentioned in innumerable papers due to its mythological significance, it was not studied in terms of its current affairs and socio-economic status. Our research aimed to understand the impact of the temple complexes on the towns along with the relationship Bodh Gaya and Gaya shared in the current scenario. The secondary data that we could accumulate could not assist us in building an appropriate framework in that regard.

Secondly, we had hoped to extend our research to include an analysis of the architecture and symbolism that each temple complex represented, but yet again, secondary data on it was limited. Moreover, on field we could not find reliable sources to interpret the symbolism or architecture. Our study on rituals was also stunted in terms of Bodh Gaya. Due to the ceremonies being a personal affair, a large audience was not appreciated. Rituals that individuals carried out personally were public affairs and therefore, possible for us to observe.

Thirdly, due to their attempts to safeguard the holy sites, access to the temples too was limited. While in the Mahabodhi temple one was not allowed to peruse the levels above the main hall, in the Vishnupad, areas were assigned based on region, caste and gender.

Fourthly, we were unable to gauge the locals in their respective familial spaces. The majority of our time on field was spent in the markets and the temple complexes, therefore we did not have sufficient time to observe cultural influences and or religious manifestations in the homes of the resident locals.

Fifthly, information that we could gather about caste and gender in Bodh Gaya was meticulously filtered in order to maintain the Buddhist ideology of an egalitarian community. According to the locals, the rigid caste system and gender biases are not prominent issues in the town. Contrarily, through our research it was divulged that the temple town has not completely overcome the social constructs either. Subtle indications of persisting caste

hierarchy along with an observable dearth of women in the public spaces were indicative of continuity of prejudice in the community.

Lastly, gender and caste worked differently in Gaya. Our sample size was stunted due to problems with credibility of information from sources that were not genuine and we had access to a single socio-economic group for collecting primary data. Since the visibility and availability of Brahmins in the temple was dominant, their perspective on the temple town and its many facets was the primary lens available to us.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Situated within the Gaya district, Bihar, are the two temple towns of Gaya and Bodh Gaya, both of which have interesting, and often intertwined histories. Both are religious sites of paramount importance and house their respective temple complexes that attract pilgrims from the furthest corners of the globe. It is imperative to note that there exist parallels between the two towns - and though they run besides each other, these lines of similarity may often be far apart or be found travelling in entirely different directions. This has caused the two towns to attract significant amount of academic attention.

For our research, we decided to split our review of literature thematically. The first would be a study of the two temple towns, Bodh Gaya and Gaya, looking into the physical spaces, mythologies and legends attached to both and the history revolving around them. Second, would be a deeper view into the relationship shared by the two religions represented in the temple towns. Buddhism and Hinduism have had a complex relationship. While interactions between the two are unavoidable, they are often fraught. The third theme we have used is the temple complexes, along with a myriad of rituals and practices that take place within the religious centres and shape their daily dynamics. We hope to do a comparative study by emphasising on the disparity in the maintenance and popularity of the Mahabodhi temple complex and the Vishnupad temple complex. While the former is a famous tourist attraction, the latter is in a dilapidated condition, with only devout pilgrims walking through its doors. Fourth, in our themes, is tourism. While tourism can be included in an overarching title of socio-economic aspects, the phenomenon is the lifeblood of the two towns. Without tourism, the economy of Bodh Gaya would plummet with no hope of recovery. The town owes the majority of their employment to tourism, in the form of street vendors, restaurants, hotels and temple volunteers. The final theme is the socio-economic aspects of the towns, particularly, the livelihood of people, commercialization of the spaces and funding and upkeep of the temple complexes.

Thus, one by one, we would elaborate on the literature we have perused under each theme, the ways in which we found each text useful, and those in which we found them lacking.

### **2.1 Bodh Gaya and Gaya**

Gaya was a place of Hindu importance long before the rise of Buddhism, primarily as a sacred space for the performance of funeral rites. There are multiple strands of

mythology attached to Gaya, the most significant of which, regarding the legend of Gayasura, is mentioned in the Gaya Mahatmya, a section of the Vayu Purana. The first chapter deals with the summary of the principal themes of the mahatmya and with the shraddha ceremony. The next chapter deals with the previously addressed mythology of Gaya with regards to the demon Gayasura and the subsequent establishment of Gaya as a site where brahmanas were allowed by Lord Brahma to live on the incomes of the tirtha performed by pilgrims of the faith. Later chapters enumerate the mountains and rivers, statues and the *padas* - all the manifest and unmanifest forms of Lord Vishnu across Gaya. The sixth chapter describes the performance of the *shraddha* ceremony in Gaya, and the final two chapters discuss pilgrimage - the *tirthas* in Gaya, and the order in which the pilgrim must visit and honour them (Tagare, 2014).

*Gaya and Buddha Gaya: Book 1, Pre-Buddhistic History of Gaya*, gives a descriptive account of the ancient monuments across Gaya district important to both Hinduism and Buddhism, connected by historical and mythological narratives like those found in the Gaya Mahatmya. This text continues to speak about Gaya as mentioned in the Skanda Purana, in texts describing rituals, and eventually transcends from Hindu texts to locating Gaya in Buddhist texts. While Buddhist scripture fails to acknowledge the importance of Gaya as a site for *pinda daan*, it criticises the brahmanical ideal of purificatory rituals, pointing out the case of Gaya's holy waters. In later chapters, the text speaks of the Bodhi Tree 'navel of the earth', and its importance in Buddhism as it is said to be the point where Siddhartha attained enlightenment and acquired the title of The Buddha, and is now the site of the Mahabodhi temple. (Barua, 1931).

*Mapping Multiplicity: The Complex Landscape of Bodh Gaya*, is a paper that speaks about Bodh Gaya as a religious centre across the ages and how it has manifested itself as a site where a multitude of distinct memories, narratives, perceptions and imaginations come together. It addresses the fact that the landscape of Bodh Gaya has always rejected any singular approach asserting a uniform or monopolistic understanding, owing to the claims and counterclaims made by parties over the issue of the management of the Mahabodhi Temple. It goes on to distinguish Bodh Gaya from other places of Buddhist importance in India, describing it as a vibrant socio-cultural space, how identities of temples, stupas, lingams, and *padas* have been in constant flux - testament to the fluid identity and liveliness of Bodh Gaya (Kumar, 2015).

## **2.2 Buddhism and Hinduism**

Through Bodh Gaya and Gaya, it is highlighted how often Buddhism and Hinduism intersect one another. The religions are intricately intertwined, in regards to their mythology, sacred spaces, symbols and people. A lot of the intermingling of symbols and spaces can be rooted to studying them out of context. In, *The Polyvalent Padas of Vishnu and Buddha*, it is explicitly stated that the second the context of a symbol or scripture is removed, it is open to embellished interpretations. All icons in museums have been stripped off the years of historical relevance. The icon then becomes an object to be claimed by the highest bidder. Owing to the debunking of contextual proof, images belonging to one religion have been interpreted into another.

Several examples are provided to the reader as proof of this ongoing phenomena. To begin with the most important artefact, the *pada* at Vishnupad temple is known, according to myths, as the footstep of Vishnu which landed on Gayasura's chest causing his demise. It is an important myth in Hinduism, since legend says that Gayasura's dying wish was to convert the land of his death into a sacred site for Hindus where they can liberate the souls of their ancestors. Gaya's function in its religion stems from this tale and therefore, the tale's objectification, the Vishnupad, is an integral artefact to Hinduism. Despite the myth, there are many who believe that it is not Vishnu's footstep in the temple, but Buddha's. While there are no real claims regarding why there would be such a belief, it is a point of conflict between the two temple towns (Kinnard).

Similarly, there is a debate over the jurisdiction of the Mahabodhi Temple complex. Chapter 10, "Liberate the Mahabodhi Temple" by Tara Doyle, which was part of a compilation of essays in the book, *Buddhism in the Modern World*, elaborated on the conflict. The clash began in 1891 with Anagarika Dharmapala, a Buddhist reformer who quaked with rage at seeing the Mahabodhi Temple in the hands of a Shaiva Mahant. He began a protest, attempting to return the Mahabodhi to Buddhists, however, the protest gained no ground and Dharmapala failed (Heine). The one victory that came years after Dharmapala's death was the Bodh Gaya Temple Act of 1949, where the new Indian government formed a Temple Committee consisting of five Hindus and four Buddhists to reside over the temple complex and thus, this win was not sufficient for the Buddhists.

In 1992, the unrest was revived under the leadership of Surai Sasai, a Nichiren monk who aided his *guru* with the construction of the Stupa in Rajgir. Sasai then went to Nagpur, where he familiarized himself with Ambedkar's followers and their beliefs and carried out his

own agendas regarding Buddhism. Upon his discovery of the uneven representation of Buddhists in the Temple Committee, Sasai started a movement to restore the Mahabodhi to those whose faith it truly belonged to. Eight hundred Buddhists from Maharashtra marched down to Bodh Gaya, where they vowed to liberate the temple from its Hindu shackles. They then stationed themselves outside the Panchapandava Temple, a Hindu shrine in the Mahabodhi temple complex. It is home to what are believed to be Buddhist idols and icons, but are worshipped as Hindu gods and goddesses. It was taken as another attempt of the Hindus to overshadow Buddhism in its very own birth place. Then, the protesters infiltrated the temple and vandalized it, including seizing the idols and ripping off the clothes that covered them. After this, Sasai began his siege to win over the Mahabodhi Temple Complex, following which, the chief minister of Bihar began circulating a draft bill, demanding the Hindus remain in control of the Buddhist shrine. While the protest started with fire, it fizzled out soon. The movement was something foreign Buddhist leaders, representatives and citizens avoided. Moreover, the protests did not lead to any fruition (Heine, 2003).

Eventually, in 2013, an amendment to the Bodh Gaya Temple Act was released, dictating that the temple complex must be under the jurisdiction of four Hindus and four Buddhists and the final seat be given to the District Magistrate, regardless of the faith they belong to.

All in all, the fight between the Buddhists and the Hindus always has reasons to continue. The papers mentioned were a fruitful addition to our project since they elaborated on the coexistence and occasional unrest simultaneously. They gave us an insight into the functioning of the temples complexes as well as the people existing within it. These texts also provided us with another insight to follow in terms of studying temple towns. In our aim to understand the relationship the two temple towns share, the paper allowed us a closer understanding of the idea each had of the other. The overlapping histories and legends led us into a fascinating study of Lord Vishnu and the Buddha's power over their people and the cities they believed to have inhabited.

### **2.3 Temple Complexes**

The crux of this research revolves around the temple complexes and their dynamics, which are an inherent part of the two temple towns, and yet stand as separate entities with life and light of their own. While Bodh Gaya is enshrined by the Mahabodhi

Temple Complex, the Vishnupad Temple Complex in Gaya holds the central significance for the pilgrim-oriented town.

On speculation of the Mahabodhi temple complex as a physical space, as is done by Alan Trevithick in *British Archaeologists, Hindu Abbots, and Burmese buddhists: The Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, 1811-1877*, a multilayered history comes into light, which is quite literally true as well since the excavation of the site has revealed several layers of structural remains which point to the evolution of the temple complex over the centuries. The temple complex at various points in time has held significance for various cultural groups, significantly, the British archeologists, the Hindu Abbots and the Burmese Buddhists. The British saw it as a ruined past which was to be recovered and restored, the Hindu occupation on the site for various years made it a symbol of their religious dominance over the Buddhists, and as for the Burmese Buddhists - it was the holy site where Buddhism emerged from and thus, they undertook the restoration process in 1874 (Trevithick).

Similarly, the site and its various structures have been built and refurbished a number of times over the years, starting as early as the Gupta period or earlier, then further undertaken by Ashoka and many Sinhalese patrons who have subsequently added and demolished structures over the site, thus making it multi-layered in terms of archaeological findings. Therefore, by the time the British arrived, the site had already served as a center for Buddhists cults and Hindu dominion (Trevithick).

Vishnupad, as is mentioned in the Skanda Purana for its significance in the Hindu realm, encompasses within its holy environs the Footprint of Lord Vishnu, the Vishnupadi Ganga (Phalgu River) that washes over the holy site, and the Gayasira hill, all of which are significant as sites for offering 'pindas' and performing ancestral rites and rituals commemorating the dead (Barua). Dr. Vidyarthi, in his notable work: *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya* has provided a detailed description of the activities in Gaya, especially the Vishnupada Temple Complex, which vary from offerings to sacrifices to religious incantations, meditation and to the extent of fun fairs. Amongst these, the significant one is the *Gaya Shradha*, which draws thousands of Hindu pilgrims every year to Gaya in order to provide peace and liberation to their dead relatives. *Pinda daan*, though sported throughout the year, is an important activity undertaken by the pilgrim on the second day of the *Gaya Shradha* and includes offerings of small balls of rice called *pinda*. These practices and rituals form the essential dynamics of this temple complex which in turn affects the city as a whole: culturally as well as economically (Vidyarthi).



Pertaining to the importance of this ritual, the *Gaya Shraddha*, many scholars have argued that it was due to the collective significance of Gaya: traditionally as a place for washing away one's sins, Buddha was believed to have visited Gaya and thus Uruvela, to gain enlightenment. However, Matthew R. Sayers in his essay *Gaya-Bodh Gaya: The Origins of a Pilgrimage Complex* argues that it was only after Buddha's visit to Uruvela to gain enlightenment, that Gaya was embedded in the brahmanical texts as a place of higher importance for ancestral rites and worship and that the concept of *Gaya Shraddha* was yet under construction (Sayers). Similar attempts by various scholars and authors of religious texts project a religious dilemma pertaining to the conflicts between the primary religions at play here: Hinduism and Buddhism. Alan Trevithick mentions this power-play as the need for assimilation of icons of both the religions into one another, as was done by the Sanghas, and thus the appropriation of these icons and practices by the followers of both the religions in order to attain a harmonious coexistence, which for many years have been in conflict and has been seen by the display of multicultural symbols at the Mahabodhi temple complex, like the *Bodhisattvas*, which are incidentally also known as the *Pancapandav* (Trevithick).

This abundance of secondary data is essentially a preview of the all-encompassing temple complexes with an array of identities in the contemporary times, thus facilitating the process of documentation and overall comprehension of the dynamics of the temple complexes.

#### **2.4 Tourism**

The nature of development in Bodh Gaya is essentially based on the scope for better tourism. 'NGOs, Corruption, and Reciprocity in the Land of Buddha's Enlightenment', written by Jason Rodrigues, is part of the book *Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site*, which is a collection of essays on Buddhism and Bodh Gaya by academics from a varied range of fields. It explores how various Buddhist practices informed the shape of development projects, especially since some of these practices intersected with local social networks. Apart from that, it also looks at the meaning of "development" itself in this context, why there was a need decided for it in Bodh Gaya, and how Buddhists' renunciation of desire intersects with the materialistic desires of the locals. It discusses the causes for the general perception of Bihar as a lawless, corrupt, economically destitute state and its influence on tourism in Bodh Gaya as well as the relationship that locals, pilgrims, tourists and foreign volunteers share (Geary) which helps develop an understanding of the research project.

Tourism suffered massively due to this perception of Bihar. The idea and existence of Bodh Gaya served an important purpose as this sacred place of Buddha's enlightenment and thus helped Bihar boost its tourism by projecting a positive image for itself. A "Master Plan" for development was made for Bodh Gaya which was a future-making vision of it as a model UNESCO World Heritage Site and a quiet pilgrimage destination. Hence it was to be developed by making it as it existed 2500 years ago; fusing history and the present, tourism being one of the main motivations. Naturally, this caused conflicts among foreign Buddhists and locals regarding what the face of development looked like. This development resulted in a lack of urbanization and restricted locals from achieving their desired standard of living to bring them up to par with other urban areas of India. Local sovereignty had been undermined as well in the promotion of tourism by the local and national state and their opinions were ignored, creating an atmosphere of resentment. Moreover, the development of a tourism infrastructure or an ideal pilgrimage site did not guarantee any financial benefits for an overwhelming majority of locals (Geary).

The essay ventures into the asymmetrical relationship between locals and foreigners in Bodh Gaya as a result of the hostility stemming from the development (or lack of) in this town. Bihar was largely rural and an economically destitute place with little opportunity for people to pursue the lives they aspired to, and thus most locals aspired to leave it. Ironically, Bodh Gaya, a place where Buddha realized that desire is the root of all suffering, was a place of a plethora of emergent desires of materialistic nature and of social and physical mobility; and these desires were left unfulfilled.

Another illustrious work is David Geary's dissertation *Destination Enlightenment: Buddhism and the Global Bazaar in Bodh Gaya, Bihar* which mainly examines the role of tourism and pilgrimage as a source of economic livelihood for local residents. The last few decades have seen a sharp increase in extra-national Buddhist groups acquiring land, new networks of international aid and assistance, improved transportation and both tourism and urban development initiatives, all of which have accelerated the profile of Bodh Gaya and India's Buddhist circuit on the global map (Geary).

Coursing through the year, Bodh Gaya observes its peak season for tourism in December and January and goes off season in February. In this dense period of pilgrimage, tourism flows as the bazaar comes to life with street vendors, Tibetan merchants, restaurants, beggars, and hawkers who come to pursue opportunities. A large sector of pilgrims from the Himalayan regions migrate to Bodh Gaya around this time and devote themselves to lamas or

Rinpoches from the various Tibetan schools. Religious tourism also gives birth to multiple grassroots initiatives and entrepreneurial activities in the villages nearby (Geary).

The event of Bodh Gaya turning into a world Buddhist site impacted pilgrimage and tourism majorly, as they became significant contributors to Bodh Gaya's local economy, largely within the informal sector. Religious tourism dictates their way of life and has opened up a new door for job opportunities, decreasing the dependence on agriculture-based jobs (Geary). Geary also mentions how the presence of Tibetan refugees and the arrival of the Japanese caused tourism to flourish.

The dissertation lays emphasis on 'Brand Buddhism' as well, which is significant owing to the fact that 375 million Buddhists all over the world see this propagation of the glorified past of Bihar as a ticket to resurgence in the global stage. Efforts by the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru have been notable in the light of promoting India as the homeland of Eastern religions, and thus was celebrated the 2500th Buddha Jayanti, during which all nationalities installed their own Buddhist institution of worship and practice. This evoked the transnational feelings which uplifted the dying religion into a thriving world centre of Buddhism (Geary).

Two benchmarks are significant regarding 'Brand Buddhism;' firstly, the completion of the Gaya International Airport, bringing forth hundreds of tourists and pilgrims from across national boundaries, and secondly, as is mentioned before, the declaration of Mahabodhi as a World Heritage Site. It is interesting to note here that not only this rejuvenates the maintenance activities within the peripheries of Bodh Gaya, but also the fact that a great deal of upkeep is now in international hands (Geary).

In Bodh Gaya, locals imagine Buddhism differently from those who visit it. For the natives, it is fundamentally about new forms of profit and income. As Geary reiterates, "For many marginalized and subaltern groups, the informal economy of tourism offers an alternative source of employment outside the deprived agricultural sector but it also generates new dreams and aspirations for social mobility and economic advancement that are tied to transnational migration and new networks of foreign sponsorship."

### **2.5 Socioeconomic Aspects**

In a temple town currently revered as the centre of Buddhism, the population census comes as a shock. According to the 2011 census, Hindus make up 90% of the population whereas Buddhists make up a mere 0.41%. This explains all the Hindu practices that still

seem to have a grip over this town. The dissertation, *Destination Enlightenment: Buddhism and the Global Bazaar in Bodh Gaya, Bihar* by David Geary addresses the socio-economic impact of the evolution of Bodh Gaya from a religious space to a sought after spiritual destination. The recent past shows the residents of Bodh Gaya still dwelling in the clutches of the zamindari system (Geary). Even though this has been abolished, agricultural labour is still the primary source of occupation in this land. This seasonal livelihood renders 70% of the population is close to abject poverty. However, this pattern is gradually being altered. With UNESCO declaring the Mahabodhi temple complex as a World Heritage Site in 2002, roads previously traversed by pilgrims are now heavily thronged by tourists. The paper analyses the impact of this title as seen in the bazaar that has sprouted up adjacent to the temple. Catering to the year round local grocery needs, during the winter months this bazaar transforms into a spirited atmosphere. It aims to attract various tourists, who have come seeking the glorious history of the birth of Buddhism by walking the path, now a part of the temple complex that led Prince Gautama to enlightenment. This religious tourism gives birth to a multiplicity of odd ventures and even odder earning opportunities. Butter lamp wick preparation, lotus flower cultivation, and incense manufacturing are all sold to unsuspecting tourists with the guarantee of adding to their spiritual experience. The obsession with the Bodhi tree has spawned an entire micro-industry in the neighbouring village of Siddhartha Nagar, where children soak and dry Bodhi leaves in order to market them outside the temple complex (Geary).

Another important aspect that fuels the local economy according to this research is the mass migration of the Tibetan refugees to Bodh Gaya that has led to another form of seasonal employment provided by the subsequent Tibetan Refugee Market. A number of restaurants serving exotic meats, relished by tourists, are a point of contention between the local Hindus and the Tibetans. The conflict, as reported by Geary, begins with Hindus trying to protest the consumption of a beef and pork in a sacred space such as this one. However, it ends with the Hindus turning a blind eye to these practices, as the Tibetans are the cogs that run the local tourist economy. In order to appease to the Hindus, these refugees hire local scheduled castes, such as those from the Bhuinya tribe, to butcher meat in the hidden depths of their restaurants. This not only provides stable labour to these backward castes, but also allows them to escape the otherwise oppressed position and interact with a multitude of new people. Upon the point of caste, Geary observes that it has received further blows as previously bonded scheduled caste/tribe labourers now serve as respectable workers in Buddhist hostels

and monasteries. The influx of tourists and their investment in Bodh Gaya has even led to the upliftment of various castes. Today, many members of the “Other Backward Castes” classification, such as Kahar and Yadav are successful hoteliers in Bodh Gaya. This brings one to the current landscape in this temple town, clustered with hotels, filled with livelihoods derived from the booming tourism, used by the locals as a means of upward class and social mobility (Geary).

Even though it was Buddhism that put Bodh Gaya on the tourist circuit, locals are not always happy with the attention directed to its related institutions such as monasteries. This is a result of the fact that the taxes and economies paid by them are handed over to Buddhist institutions on the pretext of being religious and charitable organizations. Although, this burden has decreased with the City Development Plan, in association with HUDCO, being put into place. The upkeep of the Mahabodhi Temple is looked after by this body and private beneficiaries and donors contribute more so. The existence of temples corresponding to different strongholds of Buddhism in Asia such as the Burmese monastery, Thai monastery etc rake in a mammoth of donations for their maintenance.

Hence, Geary’s report on Bodh Gaya centres itself around the temple town as a function of its religious tourism, providing various insights into the impact of the same. It highlights social aspects such as caste only in relation to tourism based livelihoods. Though it mentions superficial details of the local inhabitants and their culture, it illustrates the lives of the tourists and those who engage in occupations stemming from it, additionally, it makes no mention of the daily lives of the Buddhist monks within the temple complex (Geary).

Gaya, the chief site for the *shraddha* ceremony, is a prototype of Hindu life dictated by stringent caste norms. L.P. Vidyarthi has illustrated the little of what is known of the socio-economic conditions here in the book *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya*. Home to many renowned temples and vital practices such as *pinda daan*, the livelihoods of its residents are fuelled by religion. From priests, monks and astrologers to sacred singers and even barbers, they all claim to be sacred specialists in their own right. Although residents of Gaya are composed of many sub-sections of the caste system, this book focuses on the Gayawal, i.e. the upper caste priestly groups who function to perform shraddha sacrifice and worship at the Vishnupada temple. They are hired by the local *Mahant* to officiate priestly ceremonies and some earn the other half of their income by undertaking clerical duties in nearby offices. The closed orthodox system that the Gayawals fortify themselves behind sets

them apart from other civilians. They only marry in-group and have strict codes for food and dress alongside a unique dialect that serves to set them apart. A critical opinion that this text highlights is that Gayawals, as a faction, feel that the seepage of western thought as a by-product of the rising tourism in Gaya district has led to the contamination of the traditional religious education imparted in this region. Their condemnation of tourists is further reflected in the fact that entry to the Vishnupada temple is only restricted to Hindus. The welcoming of tourists to Bodh Gaya with open arms is juxtaposed by the disapproval of the same in Gaya (Vidyarthi).

While Vidyarthi confirms the priestly Gayawals to be the best example of the strongly upheld caste ideals, he does not make a mention of other sections that comprise Gaya. This text itself is quite dated, significant changes have probably taken place in the current Gaya terrain in terms of its social dynamics. This site sees more pilgrims and thus its economy runs on the goodwill of those come to see off their ancestors (Vidyarthi).

From the secondary research we have conducted, we have found that there have been studies on the coexistence of the religions, the coexistence of the two centres, and about aspects of both cities independently, however the gap of a contemporary study that encompasses the physical spaces, and socioeconomic aspects of the two temple towns and the interactions between them, is the one we aim to fill through our comparative study of Bodh Gaya and Gaya.

### **Chapter 3: Findings and Analyses**

This chapter will focus on our findings on field, which we have split into two segments: the first being Religious Spaces, and the second being Business and Tourism. Large parts of the findings that have resulted from this study, are associated either directly or indirectly with the temples at the centre of these towns. The second half of this chapter concerns itself with the businesses that fuel the economies of these temple towns. Tourism is considered as a separate part of the second half, considering its significance to the economies of Bodh Gaya and Gaya which both draw immense figures of Indian and international tourists each year.

#### **3.1 Religious Spaces**

The Mahabodhi and Vishnupad temples are the focal points of this study, and all other aspects will be studied with the context of these religious spaces in mind. These temple towns have their roots shrouded in religious historicity and mythology of the location. The faith of the pilgrims plays an equally crucial part in constructing their identities. Within the religious complexes, the streets are walked on predominantly by nuns, monks, pandits, and pilgrims - all of them feeding their faith with the religious significance of the two sacred centres. Being major centres of their respective religions - Buddhism and Hinduism - they are inescapably crowded with shops selling temple ornaments, valuable totems, and other holy trinkets. The main temples do not stand alone, as roads around them lead to smaller temples of worship, forming the temple complexes. This section aims to address:

- The temple complexes,
- The rituals performed within them,
- The people who are part of these rituals and otherwise associated with the temples,
- The management, maintenance, and funding of these temples.

#### **Understanding religious spaces:**

Keeping in mind Mircea Eliade's text "the Sacred and the Profane", his theories and analyses have been put to in application in order to understand the existence of a sacred space. This project revolves around two major temple complexes, which thereby pave the course for all that is implied and interpreted as a result of these two sacred spaces.

The religious man exists and seeks to exist in a space that is within the peripheries of a world which has been made, or is perceived by him as a sacred space. What sets the

Mahabodhi and Vishnupad temple complexes apart are the extended spaces which surround its primary origin of religious sentimentality: the Bodhi tree and the Vishnu's *pada*. Both have histories draped with mythological beliefs that subtly transcend the gap between the *real* and the *reality* for a religious man. It is thereby important for the observer and the reader to understand the functions and the reason behind the existence of the extended spaces and how they came into being inculcated within the boundaries of a multifunctional sacred space.

The emergence of any sacred space begins with a sign, either one that the man perceived as a sign of sacrality, or one that was evoked. Here, the temple complex of the Mahabodhi began with a legend of a tree and a holy man that meditated below it. The legends and myths that thereby followed are a virtue of this tree that presented itself as the sacred sign and over the years evolved from having a marked territory around the tree to various religious symbols that started to present themselves with the ages. With the extent of time and man's ascending levels of complex symbolic representations, the Mahabodhi temple complex came to be in existence. Here every relic became a sacred entity, and the area around it: the sacred space.

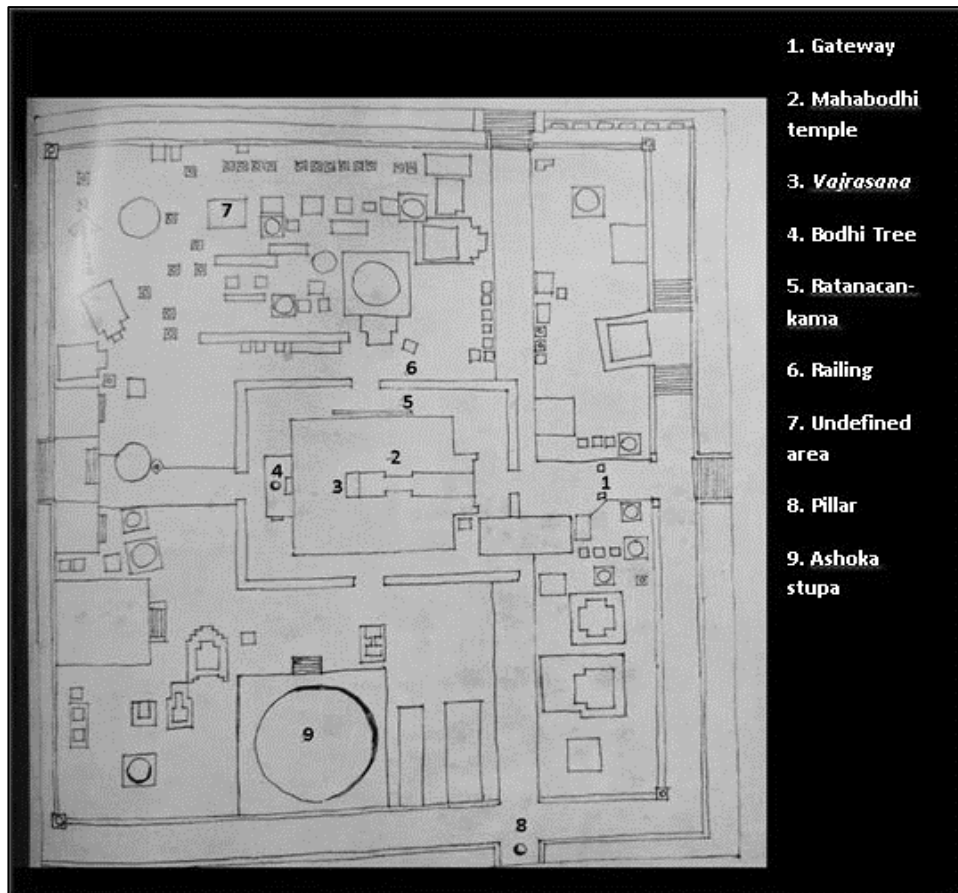
Another theory that Eliade observes is every time a god is said to present himself in the cosmic reality where the religious man resides, for the purpose of purging the evil or for the vanquishing of demons, a sacrality is established. The victory of one's God over the evil marks any space as sacred, and the relics giving mythical proofs of this theophany become sacred symbols. Gaya city is established with the mythical origin of being the periphery of Gayasura's body, and the place where Lord Vishnu was believed to have placed his foot in order to bury the demon, is the sacred symbol: the Vishnu's *pada*. Once again, a temple has been established to demarcate the sacred space, the house of God which sanctifies the evil and the sinned. Moreover, the mythical presence of Sita performing Pinda daan at the banks of Phalgu, an already sacred center, overlaps with the sacred identity of this space. The complex therefore, contains ritualistically entitled spaces that bear mythical origin, as well as the sacred space where the relic is placed. From here onwards, the space has evolved to encompass the sacred spaces as well as the functions and rituals that materialize as a result of its respective religion.

### **3.1.1 Bodh Gaya**

The town of Bodh Gaya was built around the religion of Buddhism. The area seems almost planned in accordance with the temples and shrines constructed. There are ten countries who have built temples and monasteries in Bodh Gaya, representing their idea of the religion.



Bhutan, Myanmar, China, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Tibet, Taiwan and Sri Lanka have made their mark on the town where their religion is believed to have been born. The roads form a complex network, all leading to a form of Buddhism followed by countries around the world, but they all end at one common destination, the Mahabodhi temple.



**Fig. 3.1: A floor plan of the Mahabodhi Temple Complex**

### *3.1.1.1. The Mahabodhi Temple*

One must walk through the chaos of the shops and requests for donations to make their way into the Mahabodhi temple. It was a shrine commemorating the location where the Buddha is believed to have attained Enlightenment, built in 260 BCE. More obstacles await, in the form of security checks. Since the 2013 bombings at Mahabodhi, which was an act of violence carried out by a Mujahideen group, the entry of each and every person into the temple has been closely watched. First and foremost, every individual must deposit their personal belongings at a checkpoint right at the entrance. No personal possessions are allowed including phones, shoes, cameras, and any other electronics. Upon entering, they are frisked to ensure that no contraband is being taken inside, and finally one must put whatever it is they have on their person through a metal detector to gain entry into the temple. Security cameras can be spotted in every nook

one can spot, with guards overseeing the happenings around them. Their paranoia, while valid, has caused an inconvenience to the monks and nuns who visit the temple daily. In an interview with Sonam Dorjee, a monk at the Mahabodhi, it was revealed that the dynamics of the holy temple shifted greatly since the bombing. According to him, the sanctity and purity of the temple has been affected, making visitors more cautious and anxious than peaceful (Dorjee).

### **Box 3.1. 2013 Bombings**

As dawn struck on the 7th of July, 2013, a series of nine bombs went off within the Mahabodhi temple complex. The four explosions that took place within the premises of the Mahabodhi temple not only left five visitors wounded but also shook the city. Two Buddhists, one- a retired soldier and the second- a student monk, were gravely injured.

The attack that was perceived to be carried out on a terrorist agenda was allegedly perpetrated by two homegrown Indian Muhajideen members. Upon interrogation, one of the assailants confessed to attacking Bodh Gaya owing to its status as an international centre. The objective was not to harm locals, rather target the diaspora of foreigners in this sanctified Buddhist town.

Since this unfortunate incident, security at the temple has conspicuously been increased.



**Fig. 3.2: The Mahabodhi Temple**

Nevertheless, the Mahabodhi stands proud in the centre of the crowd of practicing Buddhists. The main temple is quite large on the outside, however visitors are not allowed to explore further than the main hall and the surrounding relics. According to a guard stationed at the main hall of the Mahabodhi, Swati Singh, the upper floors of the shrine were cordoned off

since the constant flow of visitors had caused damage to the infrastructure (Singh). One must go through another metal detector in order to enter the main hall, where the golden statue of the Buddha lies. It is a shrine to honour his memory and his presence, constructed by the Burmese' in their mission to restore Buddhism in Bodh Gaya in 1874 (Trevithik). Queues stand in wait to catch a glimpse of the statue which is garbed in clothing donated by those of the faith. Opposite the statue stands a donation box for visitors to make their contribution to keep the legacy of the Buddha alive. According to the interview conducted with the secretary of the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC), Mr. Nangzey Dorjee, these donation boxes, sprinkled around the infrastructure, are a major source of funds for the maintenance of the temples.



**Fig. 3.3: The Buddha statue inside the Mahabodhi temple**

The donation box shadows over a Shiva-ling, a small relic of Shiva that keeps the Buddha company. As legend dictates, a Shiva-linga was present when the Buddha sat in meditation and to emulate the same, the relic sits guard at the temple. In an interview with the guards at the Mahabodhi, it was disclosed that countless Hindu pandits regularly visit the shrine to show their reverence for the Shiva-linga.

Another phenomenon that catches attention is the presence of two temples that surround the Buddhist shrine. Alan Trevithik's paper explains this occurrence. The temples are a result of the era in Bodh Gaya where Buddhism had declined and a Hindu Mahant had taken over the responsibility of the religious space in the 12th Century. Staying true to his religion, temples were constructed to serve the Hindu residents of the city (Trevithik).

Moreover, the Buddha in Hinduism, is often considered an avatar of Lord Vishnu, colloquially referred to as *Boudhavatar*<sup>1</sup>, automatically making him a representative of the religion. Such a claim was made by Mahesh Gupt, a Gayawal *panda*<sup>2</sup> in Gaya. He stated that:

Different traditions of the same religious thought, lead to what we call 'cults' today. Similary, [Buddhism], emerged from Hinduism. [The Buddha] was not a non-Hindu, so he did not come from the Muslim faith. Regardless, we [Hindus] believe in, and revere him in our scriptures, as the *Boudhavatar* (Gupt).

This belief, of the Buddha being an avatar of Lord Vishnu, can also be traced to Benimadabh Barua's book, "*Gayā And Buddha-Gayā: Book 1 Pre-Buddhistic History Of Gayā*" where he speaks of the intermingling of the two religions in terms of the influence of their respective mythologies on one another (Barua).

Such markings were spread all over Bodh Gaya, assisting us in understanding the confluence of the two religions, while remaining mutually exclusive.

#### 3.1.1.2. *The Temple Complex*

The main temple also consists of the Bodhi tree. It is adjacent to the temple and has grown from a sapling of the original Bodhi tree under which the Buddha, as the legend denotes, attained enlightenment. It consists of the *Vajrasana*<sup>3</sup> or the Diamond Throne. The tree is partially barricaded in order to make it inaccessible to the visitors. It was an attempt to avoid vandalism and to prevent the public from plucking leaves from the holy site. Ironically, marketeers outside the temple sell what they claim to be leaves from the Bodhi tree as souvenirs for the visitors.

The religious space has several other landmarks such as the Muchalinda lake. According to Buddhist literature, the Buddha while meditating was about to be drowned by a tsunami that was coming out of that particular lake. However, Lord Muchalinda, the god of serpents, arose from the water and protected him

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<sup>1</sup> *Boudhavatar*: The Hindu term for the Buddha as an avatar of Lord Vishnu

<sup>2</sup> Gayawal *pandas*: The group of Hindu pandits who, according to mythology, are the single group allowed to perform pind daan in Gaya

<sup>3</sup> *Vajrasana*: The legend dictates that King Asoka built the Diamond Throne as a way to mark the exact spot the Buddha sat at when he attained Enlightenment



**Fig. 3.4: Statue at the Muchalinda Sarovar**

A statue stands in the middle of the lake to memorialise the legend. There are also other landmarks made around the main structure: stone pillars that signify each facet of the eight-fold path that is prescribed by Theravada<sup>4</sup> Buddhism as a way to reach Nirvana.



**Fig. 3.5: Sculptings of the Buddha on the Mahabodhi temple pillars**

More importantly, the temple also consists of the Pancapandav temple. It is a small structure adjacent to the main hall. According to many, the temple consists of statues of various *Bodhisattvas*. That belief is heavily debated by Hindus who have and continue to believe that the statues are representations of the five Pandava brothers from the Hindu mythology--the Mahabharata. Conflicts have occurred over the ownership of the temple between Hindus and Buddhists and it continues to be a point of disagreement.

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<sup>4</sup> Theravada: One of the two major traditions of Buddhism, mainly practiced in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

### 3.1.1.3. Rituals

Rituals are part and parcel of religious spaces. In Bodh Gaya, the people have their own methods to express their faith. The Buddhists follow a unique practice when they dutifully visit the birthplace of the religion. The pilgrims and tourists are seen to walk on the pathways the Buddha is believed to have walked on, meditate opposite the diamond throne, under the shadow of the Bodhi tree, and hope for a few minutes of peace and tranquillity.

Additionally, specific practices were also followed. For instance, practicing Buddhists were seen performing the *panipata*, or full body prostrations showing reverence to the triple gems of Buddhism: the Buddha, the *Dhamma*<sup>5</sup> and the *Sangha*. Visitors of the Mahabodhi temple also witnessed the *Kora*, or circumambulations, which are a meditative practice prominent in Tibetan Buddhist traditions.



**Fig. 3.6: Kora - Circumambulations around the Mahabodhi temple**

### 3.1.1.4. People

The people at the Mahabodhi are a fascinating mix of nationalities. Practicing Buddhists from countries such as Japan, China, Thailand, Singapore, Burma and other Southeast-Asian countries come to pay their respects to the town where Buddhism was believed to have been born. Their clothing of choice are mainly robes, which differ in colour dependent upon the sect of Buddhism to which they belong. Such an influx of tourists is highly appreciated by local businesses, who earn a fortune during the peak months (December - February) of Bodh Gaya.

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<sup>5</sup> *Dhamma*: another term for dharma, especially among Theravada Buddhists

Furthermore, during the field research, most Buddhists insisted that their religion does not condone subordination of anyone based on their gender or caste. Women claimed that they are given equal opportunities and choices in Buddhism. However, in an interview conducted with a nun, Stanzin Dolma, from Ladakh at the Mahabodhi temple, it was understood that in earlier times, they were obligated to adopt a lifestyle of a nun. The interview was as follows:

There is no distinction between a monk and a nun. Firstly we all became nuns at a very small age like 4 or 5 years. So at the time, we did not get any options. In Ladakh most of the houses, it is compulsory to become a nun or a monk from a house. But now these days it has become our choice (Dolma).

The nuns we interacted with revealed that as literacy and modern influence has taken over, they have noticed women to have more agency. It is no longer mandatory for Buddhist women to devote themselves to their faith, but rather an option they can choose at their will.



**Fig. 3.7: Nuns from Ladakh at the Mahabodhi Temple**

In spite of gathering this information, it came to our notice that the monks far outnumber the nuns in Bodh Gaya, and are seen to occupy a variety of spaces throughout the day, such as tea-stalls and restaurants, unlike nuns who are far less visible outside the temple complex. This gestures to the fact that subtle gender biases permeate the Buddhist society, contradicting their insistence of equality among their people. Where the group encountered many women-sellers in Bodh Gaya, they barely encountered women freely visible in a buying capacity whether it be around street-stalls, the local-fair, or even convenience stores. Therefore, though Bodh Gaya sees far more women occupying public spaces, the gaps in their public presence did not warrant the claim of gender equality in the city, as claimed to be the case by many of its occupants.

Additionally, there has come about a group of people known as the neo-Buddhists who are Buddhist converts from Hinduism. The neo-Buddhist movement was led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian political leader to escape the caste system which remains a reality in Hinduism. In October, 1956, he took to Buddhism along with 5,00,000 followers, marking the advent of the neo - Buddhist movement. In an interview with Mr. Kailash Prasad, a professor of Buddhist studies in Magadh University and a member of the governing body of the Mahabodhi Society of India, we gained clarity on the aforementioned movement.

Dr. Ambedkar initiated the neo - Buddhist movement. He first approached the Dalits<sup>6</sup> in Maharashtra, promoting Buddhism as an alternative for the rigid caste system. The Dalits were willing to change their religion because the realities of the caste distinction was inescapable. Dr. Ambedkar explained to them that as long as one belongs to the Hindu religion, follows their beliefs, he or she will not see any improvement in the status of the caste they belong to. Citizens of the lower castes must endure the hardships that accompany their status, no matter how much they educate themselves (Prasad).

#### *3.1.1.5. Management*

The responsibility of maintenance and daily upkeep of the Mahabodhi temple lies with the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee, which was formed in 1949 as a result of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act. The amendment dictates that the temple must be governed by a team of nine members. There must be four Hindus, four Buddhists, and the last seat must be filled by the District Magistrate. The religion of the DM was also under dispute. The law dictated that he or she must be a follower of Hinduism, making them the majority in the committee. That law was recently changed to allow Buddhists to become DMs in order to balance the ratio, as a result of protests from the Buddhist community.

This committee is responsible in maintaining and improving the infrastructure of the temple, ensure the visitors are abiding by the rules and regulations put in place, and to regulate the functioning of the temple. As far as the history and current status of the committee is concerned, women have been included for temple management from the early years, although their presence is infrequent. The current committee has the ratio of seven men to two women. The BTMC ensures that their representation remains true to the egalitarian ideology that

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<sup>6</sup> Dalit: (in the traditional Indian caste system) a member of the lowest caste.



Buddhism believes in. The Mahabodhi temple being a World Heritage Site, the committee must also write a report of the changes made, their outcomes, and changes planned for the future. It must be sent first to the Bihar government, from where it goes to the Archaeological Survey of India, and finally reaches UNESCO.

The BTMC are not the only ones responsible for the Mahabodhi Temple. Security officials privately hired by the Mahabodhi temple, senior monks, and the Gaya police all play a major role in the management of the complex. The main responsibility the aforementioned agencies have is to maintain order among the visitors and ensure their safety. Since the act of terrorism inflicted on the temple complex in 2013, security has become the management's primary concern.

### **Box 3.2. Bodh Gaya Temple Act**

This act was first instituted in 1949 by the Bihar Government. It focused on the formation and constitution of a Committee that was entrusted with management and control over the Mahabodhi Temple. This Committee came to be known as the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee, also known as the BTMC. The Committee itself was to comprise of four Hindus and four Buddhists and the District Magistrate was to be appointed the ex-officio Chairman of the same. However, the act also made clear that if the District Magistrate was a non-Hindu, then another Hindu had to be appointed as the ex-officio Chairman. This created a furore over time as it meant that in the end, Hindus held majority status in the Committee over Buddhists.

Eventually, in 2013, A Buddhist organisation by the name of Bhante Arya Nagarjun Surai Sasai filed a petition stating that even as the initial act ended the proprietorship of the Mahant over the temple, the decisions of the Hindu members dominated over those of the Buddhist members due to the unequal representation. Moreover, the neglect of the Committee over the years had led to the mismanagement of the property. The Archaeological Survey of India even found the Bodhi tree to be in danger of decay. Ultimately, the Supreme Court amended the act wherein even a non-Hindu could potentially be elected as the head of the Committee.

#### *3.1.1.6. Funding*

The aforementioned Heritage site maintenance is funded by donations that are given by followers of the religion around the world. The donors are all devout followers of Buddhism

who personally fund various developmental or maintenance activities carried out by authorities in the Mahabodhi temple. In doing so, the temple is thriving on private funding instead of needing funds from the government. In an interview with the Chief Monk of Mahabodhi Temple, Bhikkhu Chalinda, it was revealed that the temple does not receive any monetary support from the government of India or governments of other Buddhist countries. It is dependent on the funds received from visitors and pilgrims at the Heritage site and from those abroad, trying to do their part for their religion. While he claims that the donations provided are enough for the maintenance of the site, he also mentioned that the Indian government must do more than what they do now, in order to maintain the status of being a Heritage Site. He specified that funds from the Indian government would aid in maintaining the hygiene of the temple and help in paying for cost of labour that is employed within the temple (Chalinda).

The monasteries too, are run similarly. They are also dependent on generous donors for funds and lack the support of national governments. Additionally, they are high earners during peak tourism months, December - January, since the influx of visitors multiplies. As no luxury tax or VAT is levied by the monasteries, they become a cheap and popular option for stay for the practicing Buddhists.

While exploring the religious spaces of Bodh Gaya, we stumbled upon a Hindu structure that was surreptitiously standing behind the Mahabodhi temple, near the shores of the Niranjana River that runs adjacent to the town. The structure was supposedly the Hindu *math*, which was the home of the Mahant<sup>7</sup> who ran the Mahabodhi originally, before the Buddhists demanded the ownership of the temple. The *math*, in itself has been left in a decrepit state. The pandits who live there are taught the ways of the Gayawal *pandas*, but the learners are few in number. The state of disrepair of the *math* reflects the negligence shown towards other infrastructures as opposed to the focussed attention given to the Mahabodhi temple complex. Despite the *math* being in such proximity to the Mahabodhi temple, it is quite literally overshadowed by the Buddhist centre.

In terms of the development and progress of the city, the locals and pilgrims have diverse opinions. While some praise the infrastructural and technological development achieved to bring Bodh Gaya into the 21st century, others condemn it as an act of losing touch with the fundamental purpose of the town. While speaking with a Swedish pilgrim, Thomas

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<sup>7</sup> Mahant: A chief priest of a temple or the head of a monastery

Johnson, it was brought to light that many believe that the way the town is progressing, the locals and pilgrims are forgetting the simpler ways they propagate and follow in Buddhism (Johnson).

The Mahabodhi temple complex was and continues to be the crowning jewel of Bodh Gaya. The architecture of the temple remains unchanged and the Buddhist practitioners visit round the year, like clockwork and multiply during the peak season (December - January). Essentially, the centre for Buddhism has largely retained its glory over the decades and maintains its high stature. The temple was deemed a World Heritage site, in the year 2002. This was a result of the town and its rich history, the melting pot of nationalities in the form of residents, pilgrims and tourists, and its efforts to carry forward the legacy of Gautama Buddha.

#### *3.1.1.7. International Representations of Buddhism in Bodh Gaya*

The rest of the Mahabodhi complex consists of temples and monasteries that represent Buddhist countries from around the globe. Temples and monasteries representing Indonesia, China, Japan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Tibet, and Myanmar have been built in Bodh Gaya. An amalgamation of their cultural influence, mythology and history of the region forms their interpretation of Buddhism.

The governments of the aforementioned countries are the major contributors for the maintenance and development of the temples and monasteries. Other stakeholders include private donors who wish to contribute to the preservation of the religious site. Hence, the depth of reverence among the people of the country play a major role in the funding provided by the government.

For instance, the Japanese believe the idea of westernization is dominating over spirituality among the younger generations, therefore decreasing the number of people of faith in Japan. According to Kiran Lama, the caretaker of the Japanese temple in Bodh Gaya, the influx of tourists and pilgrims has taken a major hit due to the new generation departing from religious beliefs and adopting more of a non-religious lifestyle. Therefore, the Japanese have also reduced funding of their temple in Bodh Gaya, making the efforts of running the holy site difficult to sustain (Lama).

### 3.1.2 Gaya

#### 3.1.2.1. The Vishnupad Temple

The grandeur of the Vishnupad temple isn't quite projected as one would expect it to be, as one makes their way in a rattling rickshaw or *tuk-tuk*<sup>8</sup>. Towns and cities identified as tourist-centric with a religious significance have a knack of sporting well-defined and rather adorned gateways and alleys preceding the actual temple itself. However, perhaps due to the nature of rituals presiding over the activities of this temple, the overall hues surrounding the aura and the structural composition of the temple are those of grey and black. This is quite literally true, for the temple whose *shikhara*<sup>9</sup> reaches a hundred feet in the air, is constituted of large grey granite blocks. Furthermore, the grey clouds of smoke emanating from the eastern side of the temple dominate the skies and the littered streets outside the Vishnupad temple. Tufts of dark smoke and similar aura arising from the burning pyres and the mourning relatives at the banks of the Phalgu River designated as the cremation grounds for the Vishnupad temple, are thus an addition to the greyness of this religious site.



**Fig. 3.8: Cremation grounds in Gaya**

The temple's design conforms to that of the conventional Hindu temple design, i.e. the *vastu-purusha-mandala*<sup>10</sup> and is further embellished by an intricately carved superstructure known as the *shikhara* that sits like an umbrella over the Vishnu's *pada* which

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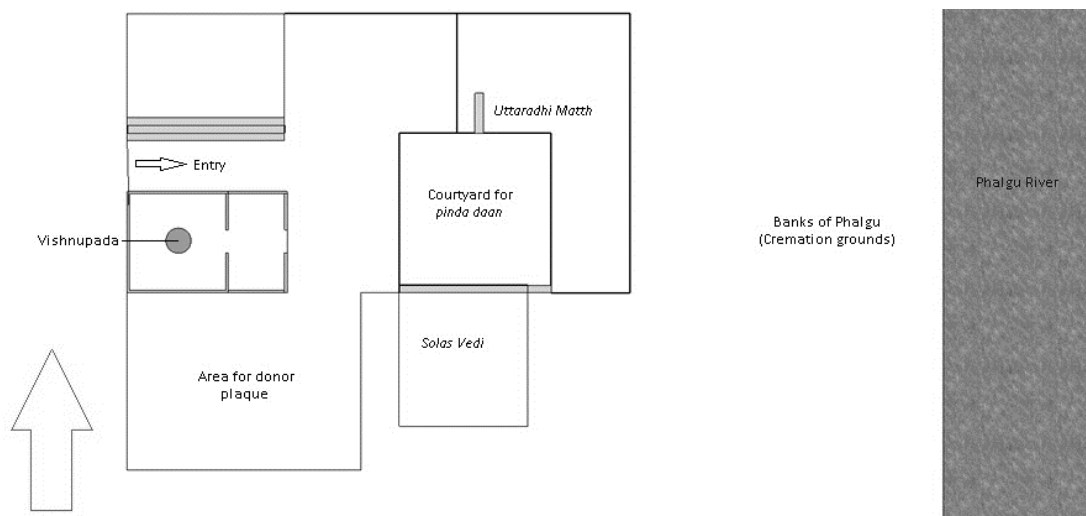
<sup>8</sup> *Tuk-tuk*: Rickshaws used for intracity travels

<sup>9</sup> *Shikhara*: Sanskrit for 'mountain top', refers to the towering superstructure in North Indian Hindu temples

<sup>10</sup> *Vastu Purusha Mandala*: it is an element of the Vastu Shastra, or the Hindu system of architecture, that provides a geometric template for the designing of spaces, coursing the movement of heavenly bodies and supernatural forces

is placed in the centre of the the *Manduka Mandala*<sup>11</sup>. The imprint on the basalt is claimed to be that of Vishnu's *pada* or foot and are ornamented by a silver plated basin surrounding it and offerings of coins, milk, flowers and rice balls (Vidyarthi).

Apart from this, no idol of any Hindu God is present in the vicinity and thus marks this sacred centre as a separate category as compared to a conventional Hindu temple and has now evolved into a larger complex embellished with a great number of activities than simply enshrining the idol or in this case, the Vishnu's *pada*. The temple complex is open from three sides, one of which is at the banks of the Phalgu River and the other two being in the Western and the Northern directions. It is right here, at the gateway, where the keen *Pandas* come seeking for pilgrims who are here to perform *pinda daan* for their ancestors and thereby, steering them directly to *Pandas* of their *kshetras*<sup>12</sup>. At this very gateway, the welcome is however, not extended to Non-Hindus. So as to not be overseen, this information is mentioned in 3 languages on a board right before one enters the main temple complex. While one entrance is an extended alleyway consisting of chai shops and stalls selling ritual-related trinkets and items, the other gate descends right onto the streets of Chand Chaura, Gaya.



**Fig. 3.9: A floor plan of the Vishnupad temple complex**

### 3.1.2.2. Functions and Rituals

<sup>11</sup> *Manduka Mandala*: it is the most often recurring and sacred template used for a Hindu temple design as instructed by the Vastu Purusha Mandala, set on a 8x8 grid

<sup>12</sup> *Kshetra*: (Hindi) field or region

The temple complex is segmented into various functional spaces which surpass the usual activities of a Hindu temple. Characteristically, this sacred space is not a temple, not only due to its significant lack of an idol, but also due to its functional inherence of being a site for *pinda daan*, and therefore making it a *Vedi*<sup>13</sup>. However, the presence of the Vishnu's *pada* as a relic has drawn a large number of people over the years which has come to be worshipped. The significant lack of an idol has therefore been replaced by Lord Vishnu's *pada* which not only fulfils the function of idol worship in a temple, but various other objectives: performance of rites, rituals, and for offerings. This makes the label of this sacred centre ambiguous; functionally it is regarded as a *Vedi* where *pinda daans* are to be performed, but the presence of the *pada* resembling the purpose of an idol makes it a temple (Katariya). This ambiguity extends itself wherever the temple complex finds its mention; the locals recognize it as a *vedi* and yet continue to call it a temple. Similarly, academic literature refers to this site as a temple and therefore, keeping in mind the social context of its lay man's label along with its designation in all kinds of literature, this site will be hereby referred to as the Vishnupad temple.

An open courtyard right in the heart of the temple is the designated space for the *pinda daan* to take place. Lined there are various priests with their respective groups of pilgrims clustered around them, performing the multitudinous rituals to liberate the souls of their deceased relatives.

*Pinda daan* is one of the primary rituals performed at Vishnupad temple, as part of a larger complex of rituals under *Gaya Shraddha*. *Shraddha*<sup>14</sup> is considered a sacred ceremony performed on the death date of one's ancestors. It is a means of seeking salvation for the departed souls of one's ancestors and invoking their blessings, as the Hindus believe that the blessings of one's ancestors and the peace for their souls is imperative for the peaceful functioning of one's life. *Gaya Shraddha* in this respect resembles other ritualistic worships following one's death, but what sets it apart is that the *shraddha* ceremony is performed in a sacred ground designated for the public as opposed to a local sacred centre. The Gayawal

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<sup>13</sup> *Vedi*: in Vedic religion, it pertain to a sacrificial altar. Here, in the context of Gaya, a *Vedi* is a site where the ritual of *Pinda daan* is performed

<sup>14</sup> *Shraddha*: as per Hindu religion, it is a ritual performed with sincerity to pay homage to one's ancestors. It finds its mention and the detailed process for its performance in texts such as *Agni*, *Kurma*, *Garuda*, *Padma* and *Visnu puranas* alongwith its reference in *Grhyasutras* and *Manusmriti*

*pandas* are the ritual specialists who are assisted by *Acharya*<sup>15</sup> or the priests who are thereby guided by the *pandas* (Pathak). Several auspicious texts such as *Vishnu Sutra*<sup>16</sup> and *Manusmriti*<sup>17</sup> are followed by the *pandas* for the step-by-step process of the ceremony. Several inexpensive adaptations are writ by local priests which are widely used now. *Gaya Shraddha Paddhati*<sup>18</sup> is considered a universally accepted text for this practice. (Vidyarthi)

*Tarpana*<sup>19</sup> and *pinda daan* are two elaborate rituals that are observed by the *Kartha*<sup>20</sup> or the performer of the *Shraddha* (not to be confused with the *panda* who guides the occurrence of the rituals). The one who performs the sacrifice, or the *kartha*, observes strict regimes avoiding certain kinds of food and drinks depending upon which *kshetra* they belong to, and thus, what belief systems they have, and abstains from acts that are considered polluting in effect.

Following the ritualistic shaving and bathing in the holy Phalgu, the *kartha* clads himself in the ritualistic garments: a white shoulder cloth and waist cloth and then invokes the *panda* as a representative of his ancestors. The *kartha* begins the complex set of rituals within *tarpana*, a kind of water offering which involves four stages of rites: first being an offering made to the Gods or the refreshing of the Gods, the second stage being offerings made to the 10 holy sages, the third stage involving an offering made to the God of Death Yama and

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<sup>15</sup> *Acharya*: These are the Brahmin priests within the temple apart from the primary priest or *purohit*, who perform rituals under the guidance of the primary priest (in this case, the Gayawal *pandas*)

<sup>16</sup> *Vishnu Sutra*: it is one of the eighteen books of the Mahapurana, a medieval text followed greatly in the Hindu religion. According to it, Vishnu is the pervader, cause of everything, present in everything, from what everything comes and to what everything returns. He is considered as the preserver of the Hindu trinity of Gods

<sup>17</sup> *Manusmriti*: It is considered as a primary and foremost ancient text of the Dharmashastras that dictate the doctrine of the Hindu laws which was observed by all those who practiced the Vedic faith. Manu is considered as the first man as per the Hindu mythology and as the father of the human race. He is considered the author of these religious laws

<sup>18</sup> *Gaya Shraddha Paddhati*: an ancient text mentioning the process and the codes of conduct involved while performance of the *shraddha* ceremony. It also mentions who performs the rituals and the legends and the myths that give birth to the significant presence of the Vishnupad, i.e. the myth connoting that it was Lord Brahma who presented the said Veda to the Gayawal Brahmins

<sup>19</sup> *Tarpana*: a vedic practice that involves offering of water along with sesame seeds to the dieties

<sup>20</sup> *Kartha*: doer; performer of the pinda daan for his ancestors

Chitrugupta and the last stage consists of offerings to be made to all *pitris*<sup>21</sup> or the deceased ancestors for whom the *Shraddha* ceremony is being performed. (Vidyarthi)

The next and primary kind of ritual performed in addition to the *tarpana* is *Pinda daan*; *Pinda* being small balls prepared from the flour of rice. This too, is performed under the guidance of the Gayawal *Panda* by the *Acharya* for the *Kartha*. The several stages involved in the performance of *pinda daan* are as follows: first is the *Sankalpa*<sup>22</sup> or dedication where the one performing the sacrifice reiterates the names of his ancestors to be salvaged, discloses his *gotra*<sup>23</sup> and caste and defines the purpose of this ritual. The second stage involves recitation of mantras and Vedic hymns like the *Gayatri Mantra*<sup>24</sup>. The third stage involves the symbolization of the Gods and manes and the *Pitri*. Here the offerings of the rice balls are made wherein rice balls represent the material body to which the soul is attached. However, it is important to note that rice balls are only used for the *pinda daan* of Brahmin pilgrims, whereas wheat balls are used for the pilgrims of other castes. The *Pinda* or the rice/wheat ball sacrifice is said to ensure the pavement of the path for the peaceful departure of the soul from the *Pitru-loka*<sup>25</sup> to heaven, which in the Hindu Universe is deemed necessary for every soul. The next stage is *Sapindikarna*, which involves the joining of the offerings for Gods and the *Pitris* or the manes which signifies the unification of the Gods with the *Pitri*. This concludes the ritual of *pinda daan* where the sacrifice performs a ritualistic salutation in front of the aforementioned unified symbols and then, the rice balls are either left to submerge in the Phalgu or are left to be eaten by the cows and the crows.

As one moves further within the intricacies of the scattered floor plan of Vishnupad, they will come across the Uttaradhi *Math*<sup>26</sup> which serves as the school for all the children, both girls and boys, belonging to the families of the Gayawal priests, educating them with all that is required for attaining priesthood at a later age. Beyond this *Math* lies the Phalgu River where

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<sup>21</sup> *Pitri*: deceased ancestors

<sup>22</sup> *Sankalpa*: conception of an idea or resolute notion to perform or achieve something

<sup>23</sup> *Gotra*: clan

<sup>24</sup> *Gayatri Mantra*: a hymn or mantra from the Rigveda revering and evoking the sun deity: Savitr

<sup>25</sup> *Pitru-loka*: In Hindu mythology, Pitru loka refers to the world that three generations of one's forefathers reside after death. It is said to exist between the world of the living and heaven. The *pitris* or the deceased ancestors stay there until they obtain a physical body to take form again in the world of the living.

<sup>26</sup> *Math*: Monastery



lie stacked mounds of firewood ready to be set up on pyres, next to a washing area where dead bodies are cleansed and further prepared to be cremated. Therefore, this layered floor plan with intersecting spaces for varying functions is what comprises the Vishnupad temple. Apart from the demarcated spaces within the temple for the above mentioned activities, another characteristically significant element of the temple is the unusually large number of donation boxes that are erratically placed all over the temple and are usually accompanied by descriptive boards or haggling priests who authoritatively, and even aggressively, demand for funds from the passing pilgrims and others alike.



**Fig. 3.10: A *pind daan* being performed**

### *3.1.2.3. People*

The temple also serves as a residence to a few Gayawal priests or *pandas*, who are acclaimed as the custodians of this religious site. The temple provides meals prepared by the Brahmins residing in the temple themselves to all the other priests and the pilgrims alike. The complex functions as a system of sustenance where the priests are the guardians and the caretakers of the temple and run their livelihoods from the earnings of the temple. As legend dictates, this *Vedi* was presented to the Gayawal Brahmins by Lord Brahma and they have since then been the acting custodians.



**Fig. 3.11: Sign outside the Vishnupad temple**

The Gayawal *pandas*, quite literally the priests of Gaya, are the primary priests or the *Teerthpurohit*<sup>27</sup> of the temple and are assisted by another priest that is not necessarily a *panda*, but another Brahmin priest. The *panda* families are hereditary owners of *kshetras* or regions and pass off the ownership to a subsequent *panda* of their own family through heirship.

A *kshetra* is defined as the region any pilgrim hails from, for only a *panda* assigned to that *kshetra* can perform the *pinda daan* for the same. A *panda* assigned to a district within Maharashtra can perform *pinda daan* only for pilgrims hailing from that area and no other state or region. The *panda* families function collectively when it comes to doing their job as priests or being partakers in the activities of the temple. While the male becomes the *panda* and performs his sacred duties of performing rituals and so in the temple, it is the unsaid duty of the female of the house to take care of the various pilgrims who are treated as guests and take shelter in the *panda*'s houses and *dharmashalas*<sup>28</sup> whilst on their visit to Gaya.

Even though it is claimed that both boys and girls attend the *Uttaradhi Math* for lessons on priesthood, one will find that subsequently, only the boy ends up being a priest. Amongst the Gayawal *pandas*, there is no sighting of a priestess, for it is believed that priesthood is the implied duty of the male and the domestic spheres are thence dictated by the female. However, one may find women performing the Pinda daan as a *Kartha* in the Vishnupad temple as

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<sup>27</sup> *Teerthpurohit*: A purohit in the Hindu religious sense refers to a family priest, *pura* meaning front and *hit* meaning placed. Teerth refers to the pilgrimage site and in this case is the Vishnupad Temple, thus making the Pandas the Teerthpurohit, respective to their own *kshetras* or regions.

<sup>28</sup> *Dharmashala*: a rest house for travellers. It, however, is a religious entity in the sense that different *dharmashalas* are either owned or founded upon by people from a religion who provide these amenities to especially those travelling for the purpose of pilgrimage or other travels meant for religious tourism

opposed to women being the *Boktha*<sup>29</sup> or the Gayawal *panda* woman to be performing the rites on behalf of the *Kartha*. This however remains an exclusive feature of the Vishnupad temple owing to the legend that claims that Sita was the first woman to perform *Pinda daan* for Dasharatha. This role of the *Kartha*, we were told, can be only taken over if no male heir is available or present to perform this ritual for his deceased ancestors. Even though this opportunity for the women to perform this sacred ritual remains conditional, it still places Vishnupad *Vedi*, in this respect, one step ahead of other *Vedis* as far as gender roles go within religious complexes and their functions. This is explicitly stated by Pandit Ranjit Lal Pathak on the issue of whether women can be employed within the temple or not:

Only the men can perform this task [of *pinda daan*], and not the ladies. The reason behind the same is that this is not the designated work of the ladies. The job of the women is domestic chores like cooking, etc. and not temple related activities like *pooja*<sup>30</sup>. You won't see any ladies in the temple here because they're not capable of doing so much work. My wife can stay at home and cook, know the hymns and the mantras for various pujas, gain knowledge about priesthood but cannot perform *pinda daan* as the *panda*. However they can do the *pinda daan* for their ancestors, since Sita performed the first *pinda daan* here, thus the women here have the right to perform *pinda daan* for their ancestors...but only those who don't have a son, or whose husband has passed away, or who don't have any children...

Another such *panda*, Mahesh Gupt, had rather strong opinions when it came to women and their roles within the temple:

In the works of the *Purohit*, there is no significance of women. There is no difference between the Brahmin men or women, both are important. But in our scriptures and according to the traditions, only men are deemed important for *Purohit* related works. Women have no contribution in this. What the scriptures say, we follow. In the scriptures it is writ, that one must hold customary meals for Brahmins, does it say anywhere that one should feed the Brahmins Many people call Brahmins sometimes...it's not like they can't

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<sup>29</sup> *Boktha*: Brahmin priest or priestess who performs the ritual

<sup>30</sup> *Pooja*: worship or prayer

be invited to meals, of course they can [be]...but in the scriptures it says nowhere that one should feed the Brahmins. Nowadays you may find widows here [performing *pinda daan*], but that's not a part of our tradition as dictated by the scriptures. As you can see that India has passed through a phase where women have come a long way from being in *purdah*<sup>31</sup> to being like they are today, they were only restricted to domestic chores....

Earlier women could not even recite the *Gayatri Mantra*, they couldn't even touch the statue of Hanuman. Therefore, it's a matter of era.

There is no objection in educating them, women scholars have existed since a long time. It is only a matter of execution where the women cannot be allowed to be *pandas*. The concept of job-oriented education is a thing of today. They don't necessarily have to work just because they're educated.

As mentioned afore, the temple space is managed and taken care of by the Gayawal *pandas*. They are responsible for all activities ranging from cooking to maintaining and collecting funds in the temple. The cleaning and maintaining is however only supervised by the Brahmin pandits, for the actual task of cleaning the temple is undertaken by Dalits or other members of lower castes who behold this as their communal duty to be performing the tasks that are perhaps considered too menial by the *pandas* themselves. This was distinctly reported in a rather interesting interview with a member of the cleaning staff, Mr. Virendra, who was repeatedly interrupted by a *panda*:

I do the entire cleaning and sweeping for the temple...It has been 15-20 years since I've been doing this...earlier my father used to this here [in Vishnupad] and now I do it. It is my wish to be involved in the work of God, where else would I go? I'm 35 years old now...what else will I do? I haven't been educated so how will I do anything else? Everyone from the cleaning staff here belongs to my caste: a lower caste.

This holds true for most temples around Vishnupad, where all the cleaning staff employed belongs to a substantially lower caste. This, in most cases, is not considered disdainful by the workers, who in fact see it as a traditional duty to be doing this work. When further enquired about why he (Virendra) feels entitled to be doing this work here, a *panda*

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<sup>31</sup> *Purdah*: curtain

readily interjected stating that “This has been the tradition...if it is *pandaji*’s work, then *pandaji* will do it, if it is their work, then they will do it.”

One will find, that a great amount of conversations that revolve around gender and caste distinctions, or merely their assigned roles, start or end with the quoting of scriptures. The functionality of the temple depends on these ancient religious texts and have not deviated from the paths suggested by these texts, or their interpretations.



**Fig. 3.12: Beggars too are not an uncommon sight outside of the Vishnupad temple**

It must be noted that the streets right outside the temple are neither looked after by the temple, nor the municipal corporation. Just as the rest of Gaya, Vishnupad finds itself in a narrow lane littered with domestic waste and disposals of the temple, collecting in mounds right outside the *teerthsthal*a that is deemed rather significant by the Gayawal *pandas*. This makes it evident, that only the compounds of the Vishnupad are a matter of concern and the rest is perhaps left to be looked after by the government.

The government, which has time and again tried to seek the ownership of this temple, has made no attempts to show their attempts towards the maintenance of the *Vedi* or the area around it. Mr. Katariya divulged that Gaya Municipal Corporation witnesses a serious lack of staff all around the year as the staff is employed on contractual basis and therefore, there are no long-term employees looking after the cleanliness and maintenance of the city. Moreover, the machinery and other resources provided by the Central Government never reach as far as the local offices of Gaya to be put into use. Here, the State Government’s negligence towards Gaya is rather evident, as on the other end, doorways and bannisters were freshly repainted in Bodh Gaya when the entire city came together to welcome the Dalai Lama for Kalachakra in December 2016.

#### 3.1.2.4. Management: Then and Now

There is a certain air of territoriality when it comes to the Gayawal *pandas* who time and again feel threatened by many forces, be it in the guise of the Government or the changing face of the upcoming generations in the *panda* household. The foundation of the ownership and liability of this temple is a mythical one and therefore, constant attempts by the Government have been made to acquire this land and many other *Vedis*. A certain *panda*, Dhananjay Katariya, reported that during the period of BJP ministry from 1990-1997 under Lalu Prasad Yadav, 55 *Vedis* out of the 100 pre-existing ones were either demolished or taken over by immigrants and the State Government alike. Presently, 51 *Vedis* exist, Vishnupad being one of them. The acquisition of this *Vedi* has been time and again fought off by the Gayawal *pandas* whose primary source of income lies within the religious businesses emerging and branching out from this temple.

Overcoming this hurdle, the *pandas* were also subjected to constant cases and petitions filed by various trusts and the local government debating the ownership of not only the Vishnupad, but all sacred centres, as they believe that spaces like these “should be declared as public property, as they should [be]”, as was reported by the BSRTB chairman: Kishore Kunal. Due to a certain case involving the Padmanabhaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram, the ownership of Vishnupad was once again brought into light by the Bihar State Religious Trust Board (BSRTB). An enormous discovery of a treasure from the Padmanabhaswamy Temple fuelled the interest of the board and thus the ownership of the Vishnupad temple became a contested topic all over again, just as in 1998. The verdict of the 1998 case pronounced the ownership of Vishnupad as a private property of the priests owing to the legend of Brahma presenting it to the Gayawal *Pandas*. However, the case revived again by the BSRTB in 2011 where they decided to file a petition invoking the Gaya district court to pass over the ownership to the board as a private property; a property whose worth is said to be approximately 400 crores (Mishra). The case, however, continued to remain pending in the Gaya district court, keeping the *pandas* - whose livelihood is run by the temple - on their toes.

Apart from the fee from *pinda daan*, *Gaya Shradha* and earnings during the *pitrapaksha* festival, the *pandas* also maintain small time businesses outside the temple’s periphery. While some have shops and stalls selling a variety of items like temple trinkets and

other *samagri*<sup>32</sup>, there are others who maintain lodges or *dharmashalas* that cater to their own pilgrims (Katariya).

The yester decade's generation of *pandas* is visible in the temple space, and even though their opinions are keeping in line with the conservative trajectory of their forefathers, there seems to be a minute deviation in terms of thinking about occupational roles as opposed to responsibilities. *Panda* Dhananjay Katariya, who was a keen participant, disclosed that he was employed as part of management staff in a hotel in Delhi, after having completed his undergraduate education. He, however, chose to overtake his *panda* duties in due time or else, the hierarchy of *kshetras* and other *panda* inheritances would have been lost after the retirement of his father. Similarly, many young *pandas* were met who confess that despite the ready availability of a job as a *panda*, many have aspired and even attained higher education in various educational centres followed by a well-profiting job. Some feel that due to the restrained quality of the earnings of a *panda*, there has always been a lack of lucrative opportunities, if not the lack of a supremacist Brahmin status.

This is in contrast to the attitude of other older and more established *pandas*, such as Mahesh *panda*. Known popularly as the *Peetal Darwaze*<sup>33</sup> *wale* Mahesh *panda*, he takes pride in coming from a family of *pandas* who are widely popular in Gaya. An attestation such as *Peetal Darwaza* is like a surname, something that people use to identify and differentiate between families of *pandas*. Mahesh *panda* explicitly divulged that his popularity is due to the good name of his fathers before him, and just as tradition dictates, he too would proudly continue this legacy of this particular *panda* family.

And yet, being a *panda* also operates as something of a back-up option if all else fails or if one's other pursuits face an economic slump, as Katariya himself admitted to have been true in his case. At the moment, how much profit one garners is also a function of which region one is the designated *panda* for - therefore, for those whose regions are in pre-partition India or the now-Bangladesh, little income is to be expected. For *pandas* assigned to regions with a

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<sup>32</sup> *Samagri*: commodities. Here, specifically used for temple commodities used for rituals and offerings

<sup>33</sup> *Peetal Darwaza*: Brass door: Here, is a distinct identity of Mahesh *panda* whose ancestor's house used to have a brass door which signified their wealth and affluence at a particular time

large population of Hindus, like perhaps districts in Gujarat - large sums are expected in the form of Dakshina.

### **Box 3.3. Dhananjay Katariya**

A quintessential resident of Gaya, *panda* Dhananjay eagerly welcomed all our visits to the Vishnupad temple. Along with being the go to source for everything Gaya, his conversations with us, wove his life story bit by bit. Hailing from this temple town itself, he spent his youth in Delhi, studying hotel management there. Consequently, he took up a job at a hotel there. Unable to suppress the urge to work towards the welfare of his hometown, he eventually returned to Gaya. He wanted the government to show greater attention towards this city. He expressed a strong sense of responsibility towards his *panda* lineage, wanting to not let go of his ancestral *kshetra*. Currently, alongside being a *panda* he is also an active part of youth organisations.

While doing rounds of the temple, he elucidated his strong opinions on various topics. In line with his peers, he went on to identify the need for women to be domestically inclined as their husbands went out to earn. Amongst his sea of qualms, one that stood out the most was his perceived difficulty with being categorised as a Brahmin, which left him unable to avail of the reservations usually set aside for minority groups.

#### *3.1.2.5. Funding*



**Fig. 3.13: Donation box in the Vishnupad temple**

The fillings of the temple's donation boxes and the collective fees from the rituals undergoing within the temple is what constitutes the temple's fund and is maintained and presided over by the Vishnupad temple management committee. This committee is comprised



of *pandas* who are voted and thus elected by the Gayawal *pandas*. It is the rightful duty of every adult member of the *panda* family, their households intertwined with the temple, to vote. However, only the male *pandas* vote and maintain their beliefs that the women are not interested in the on-goings of the temple. Unfortunately, no *panda* woman was encountered upon within the temple or generally in the streets of Gaya, to confirm this attestation. Nor were the *pandas* with whom repeated meetings/ interviews were conducted keen to allow us to interact with their families.

### **3.2 Business and Tourism**

The identities of the two temple towns are intertwined with their religious significance, which is common ground on which this comparative study is based. The previous section has visited the Temples and their associated complexes - this section will journey outwards from the main religious site to the boundaries of the complexes and beyond. The Businesses of Bodh Gaya and Gaya are either directly or indirectly impacted by the temple complexes— and the findings and analyses in this section will be concerned with the Tourism and the Businesses of Gaya and Bodh Gaya. It will speak about those business closely related with the religious centres, and of those that are distant from them— nonetheless, all of these businesses benefit from the influx of tourists into these towns.

#### **3.2.1. Bodh Gaya**

##### *3.2.1.1. Businesses Within the Temple Complex*

Bodh Gaya pulls pilgrims and tourists from all over the world, its central attraction being the Mahabodhi Temple. Of course, the roles of pilgrims and tourists often overlap, but pilgrims are classified as such because they have come to the place for religious reasons. Since the main religious practices are based out of this temple, much of the locals' livelihoods are built around it. Hence, right outside the temple, the vibrant chaos of the street markets is a stark contrast to the tranquil atmosphere of the Mahabodhi temple. The density of the markets increases as one goes closer to the Mahabodhi temple from the Tibetan temple where stalls lace this entire path. Popular items on sale are mainly concerned with religious practices, like Tibetan singing bowls and flags, prayer wheels, rosaries, replicas of the Mahabodhi temple, semi-precious stones, and antiques.



**Fig. 3.14: A stall in a Bodh Gaya market selling religious wares**

As soon as one exits the Mahabodhi temple, there are hawkers that set up their small roadside stalls which sell an incredibly diverse range of objects from Tibetan snacks, to beads, to souvenirs. One such hawker was Mr Kelsanj, a Tibetan Expat, selling snacks and sweetmeats from the country of his origin. “This time my main target is to make some money and different people have different purpose and mostly people come here for the teaching, to attend Kalachakra, and then people come here to make some money. So that’s what I do” (Kelsanj).

#### **Box 3.4. Kalachakra Festival**

As lakhs of national and international Buddhist pilgrims, monks and tourists on a spiritual journey gathered at the Kalachakra *maidan* under the watchful eye of the Dalai Lama, the 34th Kalachakra festival was set into motion on 2nd January 2017. Spanning over twelve days, this festival generally begins with Buddhist teachings being passed on to devotees and monks. This 62nd year of the Kalachakra was held at various holy sites in and around Bodh Gaya such as the Daijokyo temple, the Mahabodhi temple etc. Bodh Gaya was chosen as it marks the beginning of Buddhism and seat of Buddha's enlightenment, thus holding an indispensable place in Buddhism.

As we travelled along the Kalachakra grounds, our rickshaw driver turned to us and whispered, "this year's Kalachakra could be the last one that the current Dalai Lama attends, you know..considering his health and all..."

Alongside these vendors, there are also stalls that represent the street food of various Buddhist countries, such as line-ups of Tibetan stalls and pop up restaurants selling memos and

*thukpa*<sup>34</sup>, an entire lane of restaurants run by Bhutanese expats, an authentic Japanese restaurant<sup>35</sup> right next to a brand new Thai restaurant<sup>36</sup>, and even a Russian cafe<sup>37</sup>. It's perhaps the ready availability of this food that pilgrims from all over the world feel at ease in Bodh Gaya: a home away from their home. Women more than men are seen often in this capacity, handling stalls, and preparing street-food.



**Fig. 3.15: The inside of a Tibetan pop-up restaurant**

Where there are businesses that profit from the temple outside of it, there are businesses that gain profit from within as well. Local tour guides are found in abundance within the expanse of the temple providing information and photography services since cameras are banned inside. This also propagates the business side of this sacred space, where an amount of hundred rupees per day has to be paid in order to carry devices for documentation and otherwise for personal use.

#### *3.2.1.2. The Mobile Markets of Bodh Gaya*

As mentioned, religious businesses in this town revolve around the temple complex since it attracts a sizeable crowd, more than any other sector of Bodh Gaya, with tourists and pilgrims as potential customers. The crowd moves, the markets move; thus, Bodh Gaya's

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<sup>34</sup> *Thukpa*: Traditional Tibetan noodle soup

<sup>35</sup> Maya Rooftop Restaurant, Bodh Gaya

<sup>36</sup> Siam Thai Restaurant, Bodh Gaya

<sup>37</sup> Rose Apple Café, Bodh Gaya

mobile markets build and rebuild themselves from scratch, according to which areas are popular at what time. This practice is especially common with Tibetan markets, which is in agreement with David Geary's dissertation *Destination Enlightenment: Buddhism and the Global Bazaar in Bodh Gaya, Bihar*. These Tibetan markets are run predominantly by the Tibetan community who are expats in Bodh Gaya, along with a minority of locals, and are a major source of income for them. Since the temple complex largely runs on donations from pilgrims and international patrons, setting up of donation stalls is also in the same fashion as that of these mobile markets. It was observed that donation stalls are set up to fund the building of Buddhist religious structures elsewhere, in other countries, and to provide relief to grief stricken countries such as the donation stalls to help those affected by the 2015 Gorkha earthquake<sup>38</sup> in Nepal.



**Fig. 3.16: A donation stall outside the Tibetan Karma Temple**

### *3.2.1.3. Businesses Beyond the Temple Complex*

In Bodh Gaya, the economy being largely tourist-oriented, a significant slice of locals contributing to the agrarian sector have drifted to the business of catering to tourists. As the Head of Bodh Gaya's Nagar Nigam, Ms. Priti Singh said, "People have businesses and jobs. Some are farmers but it wasn't like they were leaving their work for jobs. However now, slowly, as people are earning more, they are moving towards the business of tourism to establish themselves according to their desired standard" (Singh).

One of the most profitable businesses for locals is public transport. Unique to only a few towns in India, including this one, electric rickshaws ("e-rickshaws") are a popular choice

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<sup>38</sup> The April 2013 Nepal Earthquake which resulted in 9,000 deaths and as many as 22,000 injuries

of transport amongst tourists and pilgrims. They are eco-friendly and ideal for Bodh Gaya (as opposed to the widely spread out city of Gaya) where business is booming, the distances are short, and tourists are abundant during the winter months. E-rickshaws are driven only within the town since they have a limited charge that lasts about six to seven hours and require the same duration to start once drained.

Local drivers rent these rickshaws for three hundred rupees a day through depots, earn around six hundred to seven hundred rupees per day during the peak tourist season, and two hundred per day otherwise. On interviewing an e-rickshaw driver, Mr Munnilal, the impact that the shift in seasons has on them was made evident.

Our earnings take a massive hit. How much will a local person give? Five rupees here, five rupees there. Thank god the lamas and foreigners are here right now, for where usually we would earn fifty rupees, we earn a hundred. It depends on the customer's wish, usually the local rent is five rupees (Munnilal).

On field, we also gathered that e-rickshaws are slowly wiping out other forms of public transport, like the cycle-rickshaw, and are competing within the town with auto-rickshaws that run on diesel. They have put cycle-rickshaw drivers at risk of losing their livelihood completely since cycle-rickshaws are comparatively far cheaper and these drivers cannot afford e-rickshaws. Therefore, there exists some unease regarding cycle-rickshaw pullers' dwindling earnings with the swift advent of e-rickshaws in the recent years. However, the e-rickshaws limitations automatically make auto-rickshaws or tuk-tuks the only option for intra-city travel between Bodh Gaya and Gaya, which makes the tussle between the two a never-ending one.

Women drivers exist in very few numbers, six to be exact, we collected from Sapna, a female e-rickshaw driver. However, Bodh Gaya still gives more agency to women in this sphere than Gaya does. These women opt to drive e-rickshaws only in extreme conditions where the patriarch of the family is absent and they are left to fend for themselves and their kin. The e-rickshaws are provided to them by an NGO, Karuna-Schechen, working to build a network of women e-rickshaw drivers, as opposed to depots that provide rickshaws to male drivers in Bodh Gaya. The introduction of these e-rickshaws also adds to the overall positive perception of this town, with it having the Mahabodhi Temple, a World Heritage Site, and located in Bihar, which is commonly perceived as a lawless, corrupt, economically destitute state (Geary).



**Fig. 3.17: Ms. Aarti, an e-rickshaw driver in Bodh Gaya**

Other businesses outside the temple complex in Bodh Gaya consist of the food and hospitality sectors, for the most part. Tibetan and Bhutanese expats, along with working in markets, the functioning of these restaurants is usually a collective family effort - and therefore the workload is shared by men and women alike. We gathered from Geary's *Destination Enlightenment* that behind most restaurants owned by locals, Tibetans, and Indian Dalits are employed as butchers and are made to work in dire conditions. However, owners refrained from commenting on this phenomenon.

Hoteliers also use Bodh Gaya's image as a sacred space to market their hotels by using Buddhist names for their establishments, like 'Hotel Mahayana Palace' or 'Hotel Siddhartha'. It is also a hub for religious festivals, during which the economy soars. Pop-up restaurants and shops, with their short lifespan, are seen in large numbers during these festivals. Tourists and pilgrims from Nepal, Bhutan, and other neighbouring countries who come in the winter months to earn profits from Bodh Gaya's tourist-driven economy. The town thrives on its peak season which is during the winter months of December to January and almost all businesses depend heavily on the tourism that these months observe.

#### *3.2.1.4. Current Events*

In light of the Demonetisation undertaken by the Government of India in November 2016, it was found on field that businesses in Bodh Gaya as well as the monasteries' funds have taken a serious hit. According to Karma Tsering, the Head of Donations for the Kagyu Monlam temple, poverty exists in large margins in Bodh Gaya, the problem which cannot be solved by cheques (Tsering). Organising drives, camps, and ceremonies for them is a difficult task since these require large sums of money, which they may be forced to acquire through

questionable means.

### **Box 3.5. Bodh Gaya Biennale**

The Bodh Gaya Biennale was an art festival that took place in Bodh Gaya for the first time from the 17th to the 23rd of December, 2016. It is envisioned as a festival that aims to showcase artwork from around the world from artists of all nationalities. Bodh Gaya was chosen as the city among all other cities in Bihar for the Biennale since it is the town with the highest influx of tourists. With the aim of displaying the art for large and diverse audiences to see, Bodh Gaya seemed an ideal site.

The theme of the arts festival was 'peace'. It was meant as a commentary on the 2013 bombings that had shook the peaceful temple town. A Mujahideen group had planted explosives within the main temple. Fortunately, the bombs were accidentally detonated prematurely in the early morning hours, limiting the number of people injured in the violent attack. The Biennale thus intended to reflect upon the tranquillity of the city through artistic expression.

#### *3.2.1.5. Tourism and Town Planning*

Business and Tourism are intricately linked in Bodh Gaya as it is a vibrant manifestation of both. The economy is fuelled by religious tourism, with the seasonal influx of tourists, expats, and pilgrims. As a town, Bodh Gaya has been carefully planned in a manner that all the roads lead to the Mahabodhi temple, making the purpose of the town obvious. As we came across in the essays of *Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Sites*, development-wise it has intentionally stayed away from the kind of construction that cities observe, so as to maintain its image of being the religious epicentre for Buddhism and to avoid distracting the tourists and pilgrims from the sanctity of the temple (Rodriguez). Where cities see metropolitan infrastructure in terms of high rises, transport and road development, Bodh Gaya assumes the identity of a small town with short-storeyed buildings, basic means of transport and no major road development. However, we saw shards of the consumer society's aspirations during the Kalachakra 2016-2017 festival of Bodh Gaya, where a pop-up café (Café Coffee Day) that is widely spread through metropolitan cities was built within a few days on the main road in time for the arrival of the Dalai Lama. An Axis Bank, too, opened up in late December on the same main road leading to the Mahabodhi Temple. Also, the main road leading to Bodh Gaya saw the rapid laying out of paver blocks on the pedestrian pathway at this time. On the contrary, the *kaccha* or undeveloped roads that outnumber the developed main

road, saw no such structures. These developments were in line with the season during which Bodh Gaya anticipated profit, that is, during the tourist influx. This raises questions as to whether Bodh Gaya is finally moving at a faster pace or whether they succumb to urbanisation from time to time to maintain a certain impression of being open to development in order to subdue the rising temper of locals, who hold the Buddhist temples and monasteries responsible for not being able to achieve a certain standard of living within the town walls.

#### *3.2.1.6. Structures*

The most prominent tourist sites are within the temple complex– the Mahabodhi temple, the monasteries of various countries, and the giant eighty-foot statue of the Buddha. These structures are maintained efficiently by the BTMC and the BSTDC, unlike Gaya’s neglected tourist sites. A lot of the tourists and pilgrims from South East Asian countries come to the Mahabodhi temple and settle in Bodh Gaya as expats, flooding local job opportunities<sup>39</sup>, and occupying spaces alongside locals. The monks constantly conduct religious ceremonies in which as many as fifty-five other countries participate in, as Karma Tsering, the Head of Donations for Kagyu Monlam<sup>40</sup> elaborated on:

...we think this [Kagyu Monlam] is very special because this is multicultural, multi-religion and specially the Buddhists from every country participate and this is very important not only for Bodh Gaya, but for India. It is very important, I have been working in this pooja since 1996 and we have seen a lot of developments in Bodh Gaya through it. In a way this pooja is also a big help to develop the place here (Tsering).

The emergence of the Gaya International Airport has seen a surge in the number of tourists and pilgrims as well, ensuring faster and more efficient accessibility to the town. Along with this, there is a railway station at Gaya and not at Bodh Gaya, hence access to Bodh Gaya is further problematic and only possible through Gaya. Market structures of Bodh Gaya are small and kitschy in comparison to the Gaya marketplace that stretches over a wide expanse of land. Overall, structures of Bodh Gaya are limiting and cater more to the tourists and pilgrims than to the locals’ basic needs, as was observed on field. The fact that Bodh Gaya has been given importance internationally has resulted in the formation of a certain kind of perception towards

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<sup>39</sup> The expats compete with locals primarily within the hospitality industry of Bodh Gaya

<sup>40</sup> Tibetan Buddhism’s prayer festival



it. Where the government's ignorance has made the lands around it a swamp, Bodh Gaya alone blooms like a lotus (McKay).

### **Box 3.6. Japanese Wives**

Out of all the things that come as a surprise in Bodh Gaya, Japanese wives take the cake. Japanese footfall may have decreased over the years, but the 80s and 90s saw them arrive in clusters. The initial seeking for a Buddhist experience transformed into a deep liking for the locals. Young Japanese women befriended and were subsequently besotted by local men. The attention they failed to receive in their native land was amply provided by local men in Bodh Gaya. Born out of these unlikely bonds were Indo-Japanese marriages. When we met with Mr. Sudama Kumar, a hotelier, he told us of his marriage to Yuki Inoue. Their marriage was initially contested and eventually accepted by both families. Their own lifestyle is peppered with Japanese and Indian traditions. Where Kumar, a Hindu, refuses to allow his children to consume beef, Inoue takes them on month long trips to Japan every summer.

However, as this trend grows, the innocence of it is slowly being lost. Mr. Kumar railed against the fact that Indian men are entering these marriages with vested interests. This means that they marry a Japanese woman in hopes of being able to go to Japan and procure a spousal visa so that they can work there. Many have also misused the naivety and trusting nature of these young women, marrying them despite having an Indian wife and keeping both in the dark. In spite of helping break several stereotypes, this mistreatment has been one of the factors that has led to a decrease in the Japanese visits to this temple town.

### **3.2.2. Gaya**

#### *3.2.2.1. The Vishnupad Temple: Its Religious and Resulting Businesses*

##### 3.2.2.1.1. Pinda Daan

The Vishnupad temple that lies at the heart of Old Gaya, lacks any extensive market area. A scant number of vendors sit calmly around the perimeter of the temple and in its adjacent alleyways. *Samagri* such as rice and wheat mixtures, powder in different colours, *rudrakshas*<sup>41</sup>, dried leaves, and metal utensils are sold for the purposes of *pinda daan*. Miniature idols, jewellery and footwear also make appearances amongst the better displayed religious paraphernalia. Unlike Bodh Gaya, the vendors show close to no signs of eager hankering to rope in customers. This could be attributed to the fact that those seeking the temple

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<sup>41</sup> *Rudraksha*: A seed traditionally used to make prayer beads, especially in Hinduism.

have to pass these alleyways by default either while entering or exiting the temple. Additionally, once a *Panda* is assigned to a group of pilgrims, he steers them to certain stalls that he has partnered up with, to buy the necessitated *samagri* and receives a commission for the same. This practice outlines the palpable relationship between business and religion.



**Fig. 3.18: A *samagri* seller in Gaya**

This is not the sole way that the pilgrims support the *panda*'s earnings. *Pinda daan* in itself could be perceived as transaction owing to the fact that the pilgrims are instructed to remit differing amounts to the *pandas*. Well-to-do pilgrims fork out huge sums whereas those from lower classes pay a substandard fee. A certain *Panda* revealed that it is a norm to pay the required fee and if pilgrims do not have money on their person, they furnish something else of value such as watches, cows or land.

In dire times, such as the recently born phenomenon of demonetization that has left many cashless, pilgrims go home and courier the payment (Pandey). Capitalizing on technology, *e-pinda daan* websites have sprouted over the last few years. The idea behind it is that one can pay for a *pinda daan* via the internet and a *panda* in Gaya would perform the same on behalf of the person. However, this modern spin on an age-old practice has left some of the *pandas* at the Vishnupad fuming. They consider it downright swindling of money and untrue to the spirit of the tradition. One of the interviewees remarked that the phrase "*dharm ke naam pe vyaapar*"<sup>42</sup> befitted this situation.

When it comes to employment directly related to the temple, caste rears its head. As

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<sup>42</sup> *Dharam ke naam pe vyaapar*: Business carried out in the name of religion.

mentioned earlier, only Brahmins can be ascribed a *Panda* status whereas sweepers and barbers, hired in order to rid the temple of the remnants of *pinda daan*, predominantly belong to lower castes. However, this division of labour based on caste is majorly implemented only with respect to the temple where social mobility is considered unfathomable. This highlights how apparent caste still is with respect to the temple in turn affecting any businesses it stimulates.

#### 3.2.2.1.2. Ashramas

Another prominent business as a result of pilgrim influx are the various *ashramas*<sup>43</sup> run by *pandas* and their wives. Despite Panda Ranjit outright barring women from performing *pinda daans* and relegating them to the status of homemakers, as wives (Pathak), they manage and oversee the *ashramas*. They originally put up the pilgrims in their own house, however with an increasing number of them and the potential to make a profit out of it, *Pandas* have rented out or bought spaces that serve as *ashramas*. Many of them are region specific. The Jain Bhawan, reserved for all the Jains hailing from Gujarat and Rajasthan as well as the Bengali *ashrama*, specifically for Bengalis from around the country, are prime examples. This trend, however, is seeing a quick change. Hotels have been coming up in the recent past, as the population of Gaya staggers to a high figure of four lakhs. Often, the tourists and Buddhist pilgrims that visit Bodh Gaya during large scale Buddhist festivals such as the Kalachakra festival spend their nights in Gaya. This is a result of all the hotels in Bodh Gaya being filled to brim, unable to accommodate more, hence many come seeking stay in Gaya. Thus, hotels with their better amenities have appealed to many, especially pilgrims, who have begun to lead this shift.



**Fig.3.19: Jain Bhawan at Gaya**

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<sup>43</sup> *Ashrama*: A place for spiritual hermitage, a monastic community or a religious retreat in Indian religions.

### Box 3.7. Pitrapaksha Festival

As pilgrims come to Gaya to perform *pinda daans* for their deceased loved ones or ancestors, a duration of fifteen days is reserved for the *Pitrapaksha* festival. Generally occurring in the dark half of the *Ashvin* month, i.e. September-October, it attracts masses from all over India. For a regular *pinda daan*, the *Shraddha rituals* are performed on a specific date, however during *Pitrapaksha*, they can be performed for whichever late relative or ancestor on any of the fifteen days. This is not considered a funeral rite in itself, rather a supplementary one.

In addition to all the steps that a normally followed whilst doing a *pinda daan*, individuals are not supposed to wear or buy new clothes. Additionally, hair is not to be cut, men are not to shave their beards and women are not to wash their hair. Strictly vegetarian food is eaten, even cutting out garlic and onions from the diet. Money, offerings and donations are given to Brahmins who are said to be able to contact the deceased.

#### 3.2.2.2. Pitrapaksha

The *Pitrapaksha* festival generates a substantial crowd as well. It takes place around September, extending over 16 days. Hindu pilgrims from all over India and abroad visit in order to perform *pinda daans* for their deceased family members. These hordes of people occupy the entire city, generating seasonal employment and revenue for the city in multiple capacities. An aforementioned *panda*, namely Dhananjay Katariya, at the Vishnupad temple shed light on the same. He explained that stacks of *samagri* is required for this festival and is brought from the markets during this auspicious time in abundance. The shopkeepers and the *pandas* have an understanding wherein the *pandas* promise to repay them once *Pitrapaksha* is over as they would have raked in more than sufficient funds by the end of it. He stated:

...if we buy anything from a general store nearby - we will give them money when we have it, of course. They have a relationship with us so they know that we will pay them back as soon as we can - this is mostly the case with the *panda* family (Katariya).

Born out of this religious practice and further catalysed by the *Pitrapaksha* festival are *pinda daan* agents. They provide packages to the pilgrims that consist of hassle free-stay and immediate allotment of region specific *pandas*. Panda Dhananjay further added that they take

their commission directly from the visitors, giving the *pandas* a cut from it.

### 3.2.2.3. *Businesses Beyond Temple*

The phrase '*dharma ke naam pe vyaapar*' does not ring true for the market area covering the newer, more developed part of the city. Completely removed from the temple area, it resembles any other market found in small Indian cities. This dense market has stocks of clothes, jewellery, groceries, and appliances. The larger portion of the market area branches off into tiny tributary-like lanes, with particular ones dedicated to selling meat, fruits and vegetables, scrap, textiles, and food such as buns, *parathas*, and *tilkut*<sup>44</sup>. A large part of the *tilkut* industry is confined to Gaya - making the sweet synonymous with the city. It accordingly fuels a significant part of Gaya's economy, specifically in the winter months during which it is produced, providing employment for many since it requires as many as 2000 skilled labourers. Other sweets such as *lai* and *khaza* are also popularly found in here, constituting an entire industry of sweets.



**Fig. 3.20: A *tilkut* shop in Gaya**

The stalls in this market area are largely run by men. Though it is compact, cramped and crowded, it observes a paucity of women. The ones that are controlled by families, see women working in small capacities, and only when a male member such as a husband or a son is present. The handful of individual female vendors that are seen, are spread infrequently throughout this area. The crowd itself has very few women traversing the market by themselves. We observed this to be in line with the general steadfast norms that constrict

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<sup>44</sup>Tilkut is a sweetmeat predominantly produced in Bihar and neighbouring state Jharkhand. It is made using sesame seeds and jaggery. Gaya city is known for producing some of the finest Tilkut in India.

women. As has been earlier been highlighted by various *pandas* such as Panda Mahesh and Panda Ranjit, the idea of women playing roles as housewives translates into them being absent from the market area.

With reference to employment in the market, businesses not directly related to the temple, and other such ventures do not necessarily adhere to norms surrounding caste. The newer parts of the city, not significantly affected by religion have been gradually advocating an achieved over an ascribed status. A hotel owner and restaurateur, Mr. Pramod Kumar Bhadani, shed light on the current class mobility that has allowed many from lower castes to attain success with their multiple ventures. He divulged that hailing from a lower caste himself and from a lower socio-economic class, he furthered his sweet shop business and today owns Gaya city's first fine-dining restaurant. Be that as it may, Mr. Pramod's forefathers owned a sweet shop that was allegedly well-known in Gaya in its older days. Although the shop may have been small, it allowed for the family to build and monopolise on their brand as serving quality sweets. This brand could have significantly eased Mr. Pramod's ascent to success (Bhadani).

The link between religion, religious spaces, their norms and business resulting from the same is explicit as one gets closer to the Vishnupad temple. Even as the market areas are more removed from the temple and its casteist norms, gender norms originating from there still impact it.

Finally, the temple, the economy created around it and the market areas that have sprouted away from it are all threaded together and fuelled by the same factor -- religious tourism.



**Fig. 3.21: A Market-place in Gaya**

### 3.2.2.3. Pilgrimage at the Vishnupad temple

Where Bodh Gaya brings in multitudes of tourists from all over the world, Gaya attracts a more niche mass of Hindu pilgrims. This is due to the fact that non-Hindus aren't allowed to perform *pinda daans*, they aren't even so much as allowed to set foot into the Vishnupad temple which is among the centres for tourism in Gaya city. All those that come to visit, hardly ever come with the idea of looking around Gaya and experiencing the city, it is more with a set goal of performing *pinda daan*. Hence it can rather be considered a place of pilgrimage.

The faith that pulls people here is so strong that believers spend large amounts of money and effort to get here. A South African pilgrim of Hindu origin, Mr. Ranjit Ram Narayanan, was chanced upon at the Vishnupad temple. He reflected that being such a staunch Hindu, he had changed 2 flights and took 2 trains in order to get to Gaya to perform a *pinda daan* for his late wife and parents (Narayanan)

Multiple *Pandas* at the Vishnupad temple explicitly stated that there was no point in any non-Hindu entering the premises as there was nothing to do but *pinda daans* and those were reserved solely for people observing the Hindu faith. They alleged that the same was stated in the *Puranas* in some capacity. Nevertheless, this does not bar those who aren't of Indian origin from setting foot inside. They further added that as long as an individual has readily embraced and decided to adopt Hinduism, they are sanctioned to enter. For instance one of them recalled that once, a Caucasian woman had come to Gaya wanting to enter the Vishnupad and perform a *pinda daan*. Once she had voluntarily converted to Hinduism she was granted her request.

This is quite contrary to the welcoming nature of Bodh Gaya, where even pandits freely visit the Mahabodhi temple and anyone is allowed to sit in on Buddha Pujas.

### 3.2.2.4. Negligence by the government

Even as the Vishnupad temple is the main area of interest, multiple *pandas* argue that it is not given the right amount of funding and not maintained well. They protest that the Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation gives the Mahabodhi temple a considerably larger amount of importance. This is evidenced by the fact that the Chief Minister of Bihar, Mr. Nitish Kumar went to Bodh Gaya to oversee the preparations of the Kalachakra festival that was to take place in January 2017 (The Times of India). However, no such actions have been extended towards Gaya, especially around the time of *Pitrapaksha* festival.



**Fig. 3.22: Crowd inside the Vishnupad temple complex**

The Vishnupad temple, we were told by Panda Ranjit, is not under the jurisdiction of the Bihar State Government. The government has tried hard to acquire this land and run it according to their standards. The *pandas* belonging to the Brahmin community in Gaya have fought against this and retained the property, running it as per their discretion (Pathak). Yet, they are bitter about the lack of attention given to Gaya and the Vishnupad, specifically from the Bihar State Tourism & Development Corporation.

### **Box 3.8. Pretshila**

Pretshila is a temple placed on a hilltop on the outskirts of Gaya. It is special because it is where the *pinda daans* for people who have suffered untimely deaths (such as accidents or suicides) are conducted.

To reach the temple itself one has to climb over 700 steps and then perform the ritual. The conduction of the *pinda daan* itself at Pretshila is vastly different from the way it is conducted at the Vishnupad temple. The entire process takes only ten to fifteen minutes, in contrast to the lengthy ritual at the Vishnupad temple even featuring substantially lower prices in comparison. It is conducted by the Dhami *pandas* who claim to be different from the Vishnupad's Gayawal *pandas*.

The Dhami *pandas* strongly despise the process of the *pinda daan* at the Vishnupad temple, claiming their lengthy process to be a sham, saying that Gayawal *pandas* are partakers in a money making agenda and not true to the ritual.

Pretshila stands as a fascinating point of conflict with the city of Gaya itself and clash of ideologies inside the same religion.

*Pinda daans* for those who have died of unnatural causes is conducted a few kilometres



away from the Vishnupad temple, at the top of a mountain called Pretshila. Upon visiting Pretshila, the head *panda* there lamented as to how this site is completely neglected and that there is an ongoing water crisis. This shortage of water has made it difficult for the pilgrims who walk 700 arduous steps to the peak only to learn of its absence. The *panda*, almost moved to tears, spoke of how the government has completely turned a blind eye to this holy part.

Gaya is revered in Hindu scriptures - especially in the Gaya Mahatmya - as the *tirtha* where Gayasura was subdued by Vishnu and where Sita performed *pinda daan* for King Dasharatha. However, lately the image of Gaya has been moving away from that of a solely religious destination - its image as a religious centre is giving way to a more multifaceted identity of a city that is developing into the commercial, administrative, and educational centre of the district.

## **Chapter 4: Comparison: Contrast, Confluence, and Conflict**

Through the previous chapters, using both literature on the subjects of our study, and our findings on field - we hope to have established two things:

1. That there are enough commonalities between Bodh Gaya and Gaya that a comparison between the two is feasible.
2. That the contrast, confluence, and conflict between the elements of these temple towns merits a closer inspection - and stands to shed light on the relationship they share.

This chapter aims to make apparent the implicit comparisons that have taken root in this report, and reiterate the explicit ones - to materialise what this report has been steadily building towards - the comparative aspect of this study. This chapter will enter the temples, branch into the temple complexes and venture out into these temple-towns. It will concern itself with the interactions of the temple towns and the people associated with them - through multiple lenses in attempts to represent the stakeholders.

### **4.1. Temples and Complexes**

#### **4.1.1. Space**

The Mahabodhi temple and the Vishnupad Temple, both centres of bustling religious activity, see great influx of pilgrims from varied backgrounds. Historians place the construction of the Mahabodhi temple around 260 BCE. The Vishnupad temple is known to have been rebuilt by Devi Ahilyabai Holkar, the then ruler of Indore, in 1787 - but the date of its original construction remains unknown - this also highlights the temporal difference between the two religions of which these temples are representative.

The Mahabodhi temple is open for people from all walks of life, a sign right outside the entrance of the Vishnupad temple reads 'Non Hindus Not Allowed' in English, Hindi, and Urdu to make it abundantly clear. While this sign is probably all that stands guard at the Vishnupad temple, the Mahabodhi temple has multiple checking systems in place to weed out those who have banned objects on their person<sup>45</sup>, effectively ridding people of most worldly possessions one can carry before they can enter the premises. Upon entering the Vishnupad temple, one would face Gayawal priests with a list of questions about one's *kshetra*, lineage,

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<sup>45</sup> This development has been largely due to the 2013 bombings.

caste, and previous *pinda daans* conducted within your family. As one answers such questions, they would be pointed to the *Panda* responsible for *pinda daans* of those from your *kshetra*. Both these spaces have elaborate criteria for entry - one set focusing on statuses ascribed, and the other focusing on potentially dangerous items. Both these spaces define threats rather differently - while for the Mahabodhi the threats are sharp, potentially explosive, and dangerous objects, the Vishnupad defines threats as Non-Hindus - which sets the tone for the interactions that occur within these spaces. The status of The Mahabodhi temple as a world heritage site and the lack of such status attributed to the Vishnupad temple might explain the disparity in security measures.



**Fig. 4.1: Genealogical records in the Vishnupad Temple**

#### **4.1.2. Purpose**

Religious narratives are the foundation of the construction of both these religious sites. The Mahabodhi temple was built with the purpose of the commemoration of the spot where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment, reaching a state of nirvana after seven days of continuous meditation. The purpose of the Mahabodhi temple would be that of a place of worship, and of a place that commemorates an event that every Buddhist should ideally aspire to - nirvana being a state they believe any human has the potential to reach. It is a place where people usually sit in quiet meditation, often chanting, reading from Buddhist literature, and performing full-body prostrations.

The Vishnupad temple, as outlined in the previous chapter, is not strictly a temple, but is a *vedi*. It has been given the identity of a temple by locals and visitors who worship the Vishnupad at the centre of the structure. A *vedi* by definition is a sacrificial altar, which puts the performance of ritual offerings - *pinda-daan* in this case - at the focus of its purpose. This is also used to justify the exclusion of non-Hindus from the site, citing that one would have no interest in performing *pinda-daan* if they are not of Hindu faith (Katariya). The Mahabodhi temple plays the role of a space of quiet, contemplative meditation, and for one to do as they please - keeping in mind the context of such a temple. The Vishnupad temple, on the other hand - is a space for specific rituals, to be performed by specific people, in the presence of designated individuals.

#### 4.1.3. Rituals

*Pinda-daan* is a ritual prescribed by scriptures - one that is strongly advocated for by the Gayawal *Panda* community. They do so by citing how it helps free the souls of one's ancestors from the material world, and to a state of independence from the cycle of rebirth. The *dakshina*<sup>46</sup> that is given to the officiating priest for the performance of *pinda-daan*, is the primary source of income for most Gayawal *Pandas*. This *dakshina* could be monetary or in kind - and since the purpose of a *vedi* is the performance of *pinda-daan*, the Vishnupad temple is also a space for transactions to occur. Rituals on display at the Mahabodhi include the *panipata* and *kora* - which are rituals that could take place at any other Buddhist temple. The one thing that distinguishes the Mahabodhi temple from all other Buddhist temples, and gives it the amount of visitors it gets - is the fact that it is built around the spot where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. Rituals are ordinary actions, performed repeatedly within the physical and social contexts of a sacred space (Smith). Considering this definition, what can be seen as a ritual unique to the Mahabodhi temple, is that of following the footsteps of the Buddha as he was born, attained enlightenment, preached his teachings, and then attained salvation.<sup>47</sup> Pilgrims can often be seen meditating in the same places that the Buddha is said to have been at nearly any time of day, further reinforcing this ritual. Unlike the Vishnupad temple, there are no transactions, monetary or bartered, that occur within the Mahabodhi temple for the performance of rituals.

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<sup>46</sup> *Dakshina*: A kind of fee given at the end of a ritual or ceremony, to the priest that conducted it

<sup>47</sup> Pilgrims often visit Bodhgaya and the Mahabodhi temple, as the second leg of the Buddhist circuit - Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar

#### 4.1.4. Religions

Buddhism and Hinduism have something of a presence in both Gaya and Bodh Gaya - which is probably a factor of the dominance of either religion in each city, and the proximity between the two. On field, we confirmed what we had read in Jacob N. Kinnard's '*The Polyvalent Pādas of Viṣṇu and the Buddha*' that in Bodhgaya and Gaya, these *padas*<sup>48</sup> are attributed to either lord Vishnu or the Buddha, depending on local and social contexts. We found many representations of the *padas*, some as small souvenirs, others as sacred cloth to be used for ceremonies - their identities were distinguishable only when associated symbols were attached with them.

The reverence of Buddhist icons as Hindu deities - such as veneration towards *bodhisattva Tara*<sup>49</sup> as a Devi shows the fluid identities of the figures these religions. The contested identity of the Pancapandav temple, regarding whether the five statues are those of *Pandavas* or *Bodhisattvas* - further blurs the line between symbols representing these religions - increasingly depending on the pilgrims to bring context depending on their religious leanings (Prasad).

The Neo-Buddhist movement saw the mass conversion of communities wronged by the evils of the caste system to Buddhism, around the 1950s and 1960s. The movement saw Buddhism as an egalitarian alternative to the evils of the caste system, and by extension, Hinduism. Neo-Buddhist communities have a presence within Bodh Gaya, owing to its relationship with Buddhism. However, they are often looked down upon as people who converted to Buddhism out of despise for caste system, instead of out of admiration for the ideologies of Buddhism - as per Kailash Prasad, professor of Buddhist studies at Magadh University, Gaya - in an interview during the Bodh Gaya Biennale 2016. He also noted that though lately there are very few direct conversions of people to Buddhism, it has affected the world around us on a larger scale (Prasad).

“When it comes to conversions to Buddhism in this day and age, people might not identify as Buddhists. But there is a leaning towards the teachings of Buddhism that has captivated a lot of people. And a lot of people now say that

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<sup>48</sup> Footprints that are subject to mass veneration on account of having been impressions of the feet of deities or similarly revered entities

<sup>49</sup> Tibetan Buddhist deity, considered to the icon of success in work and achievements

I am a proponent of *manavata*<sup>50</sup>. They would rather not mention that they are Hindus or Brahmins, there is no boasting of their ascribed statuses. So this is a significant change - where people do not want to be associated with their *jatis*<sup>51</sup>. People of lower-caste communities such as Dalits did not want to disclose their *jatis* because that would change the way people would look at them. Now even those of higher castes choose not to disclose their *jatis*, it is not as important a subject as it once was. Now even declaring your religious affiliations is unnecessary. So this is a social change that is moving towards the ideas of *manavata*, a more human religion. The closest match to that would be the ideologies of Buddhism - which is also called *manava dharma* in some cases. The word Buddhism caught on only because the Buddha was the one who preached it.”(Prasad)

Prof Kailash Prasad also had much to say about the influences of Hinduism on Buddhism, which have pushed the evolution of the monastic religion into directions that are quite contrary from the original teachings of the Buddha and the Pali scriptures. Whether that is a positive or a negative, remains rather difficult to ascertain. He explains:

One can be a Buddhist even without having to perform Buddha Puja, or other forms of idol worship. So Buddhism has always concerned itself with the mannerisms of the individual. Buddhism also had almost negligible associations with the performance of rituals or sacrifices - it became part of Buddhism much later. Things that were previously not part of the ideals of Buddhism, like the idea of a god - the deification of the Buddha into a god-like figure. Along with the addition of a great amount of rituals, and the idea of priesthood - it has become quite difficult to discern what parts of Hinduism are absent in Buddhism (Prasad).

Buddha Pujas were often private affairs conducted within monasteries - and were ingrained enough in the practices of Buddhism that no monks or other Buddhists mentioned them as out of the ordinary. To conclude his ideas on the contrast, confluence, and conflict between the two religions, and the relationships between the two, he cites a final comparison.

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<sup>50</sup> *Manavata*: Hindi word for humanity, closer to ‘humanism’, in this context

<sup>51</sup> *Jati*: A caste or sub-caste, in the Indian caste-system

A lot of aspects of Hinduism have seeped into Buddhism, the ideologies of Buddhism have found their way into Hinduism. Even Hindus now want to disassociate themselves with the caste system, or at least the discrimination that has become synonymous with it - they too want to be associated with *ahimsa*<sup>52</sup>. There is such interpolation of these two into each other, that due to this exchange of ideologies - the same person is both Hindu and Buddhist simultaneously [in their sensibilities] (Prasad).



**Fig. 4.2: Buddha Puja in the Bhutanese Monastery**

The similarities of these religions and their subsequent evolution as a result of each other - is representative of the transactions that occur between these temple towns.

## **4.2. Business and Tourism**

### **4.2.1. Tour Guides and *Pinda Daan* Agents**

The impact that the Mahabodhi temple exerts on Bodh Gaya is apparent throughout the town - with the extension of its power through a temple complex spanning a 1 kilometre radius, comprising of Buddhist temples and *viharas*<sup>53</sup> from 10 countries with Buddhist following besides India. Buddhist chants emanate from speakers set up on poles within the complex, on days of special veneration. The Vishnupad Temple, on the other hand, is part of Old Gaya - and its visible, physical influence on the city starts and ends within the boundaries of the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ahimsa*: The idea that that all living beings have the spark of the divine spiritual energy; therefore, to hurt another being is to hurt oneself

<sup>53</sup> *Vihara*: Sanskrit and Pali word for a Buddhist Monastery

complex itself - outside of which Gaya city takes on the identity of a large town anywhere in India. The impact of these temples on the livelihoods of people is seen most apparently with the businesses that function in close quarters with the temples – even those seemingly irrelevant to these religious attractions are affected by them indirectly, as mentioned in earlier sections.

Businesses in Bodh Gaya often compete to serve the same cut of people – hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, hawkers, and rickshaw drivers – are all dependent on the influx of tourists for the majority of their revenue. Gaya, on the other hand - has an economy that unlike Bodh Gaya, is not heavily dependent on tourism. Textiles, household and handicraft businesses, and agriculture play almost if not as important roles in fuelling the city's economy. Here of course, it is important to note that these 'temple towns' as we call them aren't nearly equal in size. Gaya city is about six times the size of Bodh Gaya - which explains the multiple sources of livelihood in Gaya when compared to Bodh Gaya.

Writing about businesses with ties within the temple complex, what first comes to mind is the travel and tourism industry. There are those who come to these temple towns on their own, but a significant chunk of visitors leave the planning and logistics of their trips to travel agencies. These agencies put out packages that take care of the travel and accommodation of their clients - they provide them with tour guides, and often plan their days around visiting specific temples and other tourist attractions. Vinod Kumar, the owner of a travel agency, endorsed the career-choice of being a travel agent in Bodh Gaya.

Actually, I am a resident of Bodh Gaya, and I know it very well. The reason I decided to open a travel agency here is because it is a major hub for the Buddhists. These temples and monasteries attract a lot of visitors every year - and that is why I thought this was a good job in Bodh Gaya (Kumar).

It was observed in Gaya that travel agents are more closely involved with the Vishnupad temple, than those in Bodh Gaya with the Mahabodhi. The functionality of the Vishnupad as a *vedi* - a site for the performance of the *pinda daan* ritual - coupled with the number of pilgrims that visit it each year, makes it a site of mass transactions. The travel agents of Gaya city have used the religious importance of the Vishnupad to their advantage as *pinda daans* have found their way into the packages offered to those planning to visit Gaya. Manohar Lal Chaurasia, who identified himself as a *pinda daan* agent outlined the system.

I live near the Vishnupad temple. I have built a lodge, where I house South Indian pilgrims, who are my main clients. They come from Tamil Nadu,



Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, from everywhere in the south. I arrange their stay, their meals, *pinda daans*, their sightseeing - practically anything they would need. My family has been doing this for five generations - we have a relationship with the temple - everyone has a tie-up, we pay commission to them for *pinda daan* (Chaurasia).

It was confirmed by a Panda, Dhananjay Katariya, that they receive payments from the travel agents on conducting *pinda daan* for their clients. Major benefactors of the revenue generated by the Vishnupad temple, are those that successfully claim ownership over it - the Gayawal *Pandas*. The *dakshina* that is received by the priests for conducting *pinda daans* varies greatly in value depending on what a pilgrim can give, and on how elaborate the ceremony is. Besides that, the offerings of the pilgrims - which could range from fruits to jewellery - are collected by those the *Pandas* responsible for conducting the *pinda daans* for those pilgrims. No such transactions were made apparent through observations or interviews at the Mahabodhi temple (Katariya).

#### **4.2.2. Hoteliers, Monasteries, and Ashramas**

One major aspect of travel to a religious space - is the accommodation. One thing common for both of these temple-towns, is the fact that there is great competition for players in the hospitality industry. The hotels of both towns are not only competing with each other - but also with the monasteries of Bodh Gaya and the ashramas of Gaya. Sudama Kumar, a local business tycoon and leading figure of the Hotels and Restaurants of Bodh Gaya, was fuming at the mention of monasteries.

These monasteries here have built huge guest houses in the name of temples without following a master plan. They do not keep a record of the foreigners that visit. The reason behind this is that they take black money... They do not keep a track of their donations, there are no receipts... 6 months back, we complained to the Chief Secretary about this, now we feel that gradually attention will be given to these monasteries. Now with the Modi Government it feels more so that regardless of whether you are religious, whether you are a businessman, their eyes will be on everyone. (SUDAMA PSL CITE)

This animosity is also present on the side of the representatives of monasteries, who feel they are being wrongly accused Kiran Lama, the caretaker of the Japanese Monastery in Bodh Gaya.

From Hieun Tsang's record you can find the word 'Rest House', these rest houses have been built by most monasteries over here to house their pilgrims. Everyone says that "these temples are running hotels", earlier those days, 15-20 years ago - where were all these hoteliers? We built all these monasteries because there were no hotels here. They kept on accusing, and we would keep quiet all these years, recently we were all summoned by the government, like criminals... we are catering to the needs of the pilgrims, this is what I clarified, and it was noted by them. We are not doing business, the way we cater. We take donations from rooms not above ₹400 or something. We don't charge like hotels - hotels they don't have fixed tariffs they see people and they just charge! Now you see during Kalachakra they give rooms for ₹11,000 a day, ₹9,000 a day they are booked - who's going to check that? No one is checking (Lama).

The *ashramas* run by the Pandas, are run as a business - and the complaints of the Pandas are regarding their *ashramas* losing out on business due to the competition of air conditioned rooms with television and fine-dining facilities. It has been difficult to ascertain which of these sides are in the wrong in these conflicts that are so similar between both of these cities, with the data we collected on field. An impression has been created in the minds of the locals - that religion and business have become intertwined with each other that a distinction between the two is quite difficult to make. The juxtaposition of the loss of faith of some locals, and the immense faith of the pilgrims - with the dependence of the locals on these religions for their livelihoods - leaves a startling impression.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Through the course of this study, we have analyzed Bodh Gaya and Gaya as places of religious and cultural significance, of business and commerce, and of people of a range of dispositions from all over India, and the world. In order to study them in their totality, we had to take consideration the ancient mythology and history associated with this temple. Which from our preliminary readings, rather overshadowed our understanding of these places. In retrospect, however, these temple-towns are more deeply involved with their respective religions, and their identities much more diverse and complex than previously thought to be.

As we mapped the temple complexes, we realised how each complex was a metaphor for the religions it represented. The Mahabodhi temple complex had representation from most Buddhist majority countries. The regimented, organised structure of its sects, clothing, religious texts, and leaders is also seen in the way that the complex is organised. As for the Vishnupad temple complex, the untraceable origins, myriad layers of social hierarchies, overlaps and conflicts between religious texts and mythologies of Hinduism seem to translate into its structure with its numerous and scattered sections that all seem to be encroaching on each other and yet remain separate - while still standing strong on a structure with an ancient foundation.

The first two, and perhaps what seemed to be the most daunting of our aims was to study the coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism as religions, and with respect to the geographical context of Bodh Gaya and Gaya. And we did so, taking inputs from priests and monks, pilgrims and tourists, locals and expatriates, academic authorities on the two religions with respect to the sites, and our own observations. We found that both these religions have evolved over time - and often as a result of interactions between these religions that resulted in similarities. Independent development of these religions - especially in the case of Buddhism as it spread far and wide - has resulted in contrast.

The third aim was to document the daily functioning of Bodh Gaya and Gaya with reference to the temples, pilgrims, expatriates, locals, monks, priests, and tourists - all of whom have been represented as stakeholders in multiple forms within this report. The fourth aim was to study tourism and its impact on the locals. For this, we have looked at businesses and tourism as functions of each other - and the impression that locals hold for the tourists. Our fourth and final aim was to study the funding and maintenance of the temple complexes, which we have

achieved using interviews of administrative personnel overlooking the maintenance of different aspects of this temple complex.

On examining the secondary sources required for this project to take form and pave a path for a structurally strong foundation, it was found that these cities/towns prominently find mention in religious texts highlighting the significance of the sacred spaces that have come to be regarded as the origin points of these temple towns. Moreover, texts that extensively touch the themes addressing more contemporary issues, which by themselves are also subsidiaries of the dominating religious faith, are writ in regard with either of the towns, but not both. Religious texts speak of both towns with overlapping mythologies in terms of chronology and state of affairs, rituals and practices. Here, the biased views of authors of religious texts and scriptures have been taken into consideration by many academicians, who have tried to set straight the stories of these towns. However, this project brought into consideration not only the ancient texts that dictate the mythologies and administration of these places, but also the literature provided by more recent scholars that speak analytically of these towns in terms of physical spaces, and spaces inhabited with multiple religious ideologies.

This was put into application to study these temple towns in contrast with the other, the reason being not only the proximity, but years of shared and overlapping histories and mythologies that bring together and yet divide the inhabitants of these places. One necessarily has to pass from Gaya in order to reach Bodh Gaya, and none can visit Gaya without resisting the central attraction of Bodh Gaya. The unique interaction of these towns was what sparked the curiosity for this project to materialize; this uniqueness being reflected in the contemporary population residing there who have coexisted for centuries transcending boundaries between their faiths, resulting economies, and more or less: their physical existence.

The gap of a contemporary study that encompasses the physical spaces, and socioeconomic aspects of the two temple towns - and the interactions between them, is the one we have aimed to fill through this comparative study of Bodh Gaya and Gaya. From the aims outlined in the previous paragraphs and the ways we tackled them - and of course, the chapters that precede this conclusion - we hope to have filled this gap in some respect. We travelled the road that runs parallel to the Phalgu River, back and forth, forty minutes each. We watched as the shops and stalls named Siddhartha and Lumbini gave way to shops and stalls named Laxmana and Krishna. We spoke to tight-lipped monks, and outspoken priests, to hawkers at their roadside stalls, and business tycoons within their lush hotels, to municipal heads and the

receptionists who sit outside their offices. More than anything, we have been spectators, observers, and listeners - with the intent to capture these living, breathing, constantly evolving temple towns - as they are and as they are not. Bodh Gaya and Gaya have received their fair share of attention from academic studies. However, we hope to have through our research, reflected upon aspects that were not readily apparent in secondary material accessed before we visited these two temple towns.

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