

FASCINATING DISCOVERIES

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1. REMEMBERING DR. A. S. ALTEKAR,
A RENOWNED HISTORIAN,
ARCHEOLOGIST AND NUMISMATIST

1. FOR DISCOVERING THE SACRED
CORPOREAL RELIC OF GAUTAM
BUDDHA AT VAISHALI

2. IT IS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL EIGHT
PORTIONS OF THE MORTAL REMAINS
(BONES AND ASHES) OF GAUTAM
BUDDHA WHICH WERE DIVIDED
AMONG THE DIFFERENT CLAIMANTS
IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS DEATH IN
486 B.C.

3. ALL THE ORIGINAL EIGHT RELIC STUPAS WERE 'EARTHEN ONES'

4. THE EARTHEN STUPA AT VAISHALI WAS BUILT BY LICHCHAVIS DURING 485 B.C.

5. THE RELIC WAS INCORPORATED IN THE CASKET OF 'SOAPSTONE'

6. LATER, EMPEROR ASHOKA UNEARTHED 7 OUT OF THE 8 RELIC STUPAS AND AFTER TAKING OUT RELICS; DISTRIBUTED IT IN 84,000 BRICK-BUILT STUPAS, ALL OVER INDIAN SUBCONTINENT AND BEYOND

**7. DR. ALTEKAR PLANNED THE
EXCAVATION AT VAISHALI IN 1958
AND TOOK THE HELP OF THE
TRAVELOGUE OF XUAN ZANG (HIUEN
TSANG) TO LOCATE THE STUPA,
WHICH WAS HIDDEN SOMEWHERE IN
THE URBAN SITE OF THE THEN
HISTORIC 'VAISHALI' TOWN**

**8. THE DISCOVERY OF THE SACRED
CORPOREAL RELIC OF GAUTAM
BUDDHA, AT VAISHALI, BY DR. A. S.
ALTEKAR IS ONE OF THE 'FASCINATING
HISTORICAL DISCOVERIES OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY**

**9. PRESENTLY, PATNA MUSEUM IS THE
PROUD REPOSITORY OF THE
'ORIGINAL RELIC OF BUDDHA'**

**BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF DR. ANANT
SADASHIV ALTEKAR**

**Anant Sadashiv Altekar (1898–
1960;[1] Devanagari: अनंत सदाशिव
आळतेकर) was a historian,
archaeologist, and numismatist from
Maharashtra, India. He was the
Manindra Chandra Nandi Professor
and Head of the Department of
Ancient Indian History and Culture at
Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi,
India, and later the director of the**

**Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research
Institute and University Professor of
Ancient Indian History and Culture at
the University of Patna, both in Patna,
India.**

WORK IN ARCHAEOLOGY

**1. In 1936, at the invitation of the local
government, he conducted an
archaeological and historical survey of
Kotah, and made many discoveries
there, including the excavation of
many old forts and temples; the most
important of his discoveries from this
expedition were three stone pillars
dated to the year 295 of the Vikrama
Era (AD 238), the second-oldest
Vikrama inscriptions known.**

2. From 1951 to 1955 he led another excavation at Kumhrar, under the auspices of the Jayaswal Institute; his discoveries there confirmed the theories of D. B. Spooner that the site, which Altekar described as "probably the earliest huge stone-pillared structure to be built by Indian architects", was a relic of the Maurya Empire.

3. On display at the Patna Museum is a casket excavated by Altekar at a Buddhist monastery near Vaishali in 1958, said to contain the ashes of the Buddha.

STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

1. Altekar corresponded in 1932 with Gandhi concerning Hinduism and the untouchable castes.

2. His 1934 book Education in Ancient India provided a comprehensive review of all aspects of education in India until around AD 1200, with some additional treatment of topics up to the start of the British Raj.

3. In his book, Altekar collected extensive historical information on education in India from Sanskrit, Brahminic, Pali and Buddhistic literature, along with inscriptions and accounts by foreign travellers.. He also

included defects in his study in the last chapter. In the book, Altekar proposes a theory of steady decline in Indian literacy from an earlier golden age, which later scholars such as Hartmut Scharfe dismissed as "sheer fantasy". Scharfe called Altekar an apologist, that his anti-British theory may have been influenced by his participation in the freedom struggle against British colonialism in 1930s when the book was first published. Scharfe acknowledges Altekar collected useful historical information.

OTHER ACADEMIC PROJECTS

1. Altekar's book The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day (1938)] was the first historical survey of the status of women in India.

2. Altekar's other books include The Vakataka-Gupta Age,[3] State and Government in Ancient India, Rāshtrakūṭas and their times, History of Benares,[22] and several books on Gupta coinage.

3. In 1947 Altekar was elected the first chairman of the Numismatic Society of India, and in 1960 the Journal of the Numismatic Society of India published a commemorative volume in his

honour.[1] Altekar also chaired the All India Oriental Conference in 1958.

STORY OF THE FASCINATING DISCOVERY OF THE RELIC OF BUDDHA AT VAISHALI

1. The sacred corporeal relic of Buddha preserved in the Patna museum, is one of the eight portions of the mortal remains (bones and ashes) of Gautam Buddha which were divided among the different claimants immediately after his death in 486 B.C.

2. The archaeological finding at Vaishali was really a fascinating story! The corporeal relic was discovered by renowned historian Dr. A.S. Altekar who excavated the relic casket of soapstone from the core of the mud stupa built by Licchavis of Vaishali during 485 B.C.

3. The casket had been hidden under the massive stupa structure made of brick, which was enlarged and repaired four times in the later period.

4. According to fifth century tradition, as recorded in the 'DIVYAVADANA' and referred by the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang (Hiuen Tsang), Ashoka

opened seven out of eight original relic stupas.

5. Ashoka then took out the relic of Buddha and distributed it in 84,000 stupas (as per traditions) built by him all over the Indian Subcontinent and beyond. Though the number seems much exaggerated but Ashoka built many stupas, which included both relic and commemorative stupas.

6. However, Altekar's main thrust was on the search for the original eight stupas erected by claimants of Buddha's relic, immediately after his death.

7. Altekar planned the excavation of Buddha's relic stupa at Vaishali in 1958.

8. Thus he took the help of the travelogue of Xuan Zang to locate the stupa which was hidden somewhere in the then urban site of historic Vaishali town, spread over an area of 12 square miles.

9. Presently, in the 20th century; the archaeological site of the historic GREATER VAISHALI TOWN has been spread across several adjoining villages of the modern day Vaishali and Muzaffarpur districts.

10. The MAHAPARINIRVANA SUTRA, which for the first time revealed the

tradition of the division of Buddha's relic was built not later than 400 B.C.

11. This has been further substantiated by the archaeological findings of 'NORTHER BLACK POLISHED WARE (NBPW), which was found below the lowest layer of the earliest (mud) stupa.

12. This further proved that the mud stupa of Licchavis were erected during early NBPW culture i.e. 450-500 B.C.

13. Xuang Zang had written about the existence of 14 stupas out of which 12 were commemorative stupas and only 2 were relic stupas.

14. Altekar could identify one stupa as that of Ananda (Buddha's disciple) situated outside the north-western gate of the Greater Vaishali.

15. The other relic stupa (of Buddha) was within the city was unearthed by Altekar.

16. In fact, the stupa-site of the mortal remains of Buddha must have been the 'sacred site' and central location of the old historic town of Vaishali.

17. Today, it is located in the north of Abhishek Puskarini at Vaishali archaeological site.

18. The excavation team also found a breach in both earliest mud stupa and

later coatings (enlargements) around it built by Ashoka as mentioned in the travelogue of Xuang Zang.

19. The relic soap-stone casket revealed copper punch-marked coins, fragments of golden leaf, a conch and two glass beads.

20. But there were no silver punch-marked coins, in the relic casket; which were in circulation some time in 400-500 B.C.

21. The absence of silver in the relic casket further proved that silver punch marked coins were not in use during the time of Parinirvana of Buddha in 486-485 B.C.

22. The excavations and the findings from various artifacts from the mud stupa of Vaishali have proved beyond doubt that Licchavis had built the mud stupa of Buddha in 485 B.C.

[Mud-stupa at Vaishali]

THE GREAT APPORTIONMENT OF BUDDHA'S RELIC

1. Gautam Buddha went to Kushinagara (or Kushinara) from Pawa before Parinirvana (death).

2. Here Gautam Buddha spoke to the Bhikshus for the last time and breathed his last, in the last quarter of the night of the full moon of Vaishaka in 486 B.C. at the age of 80.

3. When Ajatshatru, the King of Magadh; and Licchavis and others heard about the demise of Gautam Buddha, they put forth their claim for a portion of his relic.

4. But the Mallas of Kushinara, in whose territory Gautam Buddha had died, refused to admit such claim.

5. This infuriated all and the situation became very tense as claimants for Buddha's relic got ready for the final showdown through bloody war.

6. But, a Brahman, Drona, persuaded them against taking such step and saved the situation from taking a tragic turn.

7. At last, seven days after the Mahaparinirvana, the body of Gautam Buddha was cremated and his mortal remains (bones and ashes) was divided among eight rulers, who later erected mud stupas on the relic in

**their respective territories as
mentioned below: -**

**PLACES WHERE PRIMORDIAL STUPA
WERE ERECTED**

**i. Ajatshatru, King of Magadh at
Rajagriha**

ii. Licchavis of Vaishali at Vaishali

**iii. Sakyas of Kapilvastu at Modern
Piprahwa**

iv. Mallas of Kushinara at Kushinara

v. Brahmans of Bethadipa at Modern Bettiah

vi. Mallas of Pawa at Pawa

vii. Bullis of Alakappa at Modern Anvalakopa

viii. Koliass of Ramagrama at Ramagrama (could not be located)

[Sacred Relic Casket of Gautam Buddha at Patna Museum]

8. The Kshatriyas of Pippalivana were late in reaching the spot and so they only got the 'Angara' left at the cremation ground. later, they built 'Angaraka Stupa' in their territory, Lauriya Nandangarh (West Champaran).

9. Significantly, most of the claimants hailed from the modern-day Bihar and rest from Eastern UP and Nepal-Terai.

PICTURES

1. Mud-stupa at Vaishali

2. Sacred Relic Casket of Gautam

Buddha at Patna Museum

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