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Monuments of Bihar : A Syncretic Culture

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Abstract : Bihar is a land affluent in natural beauty, whispering forests, sparkling lakes, majestic forts and palaces, holy shrines and natural hot springs emerging from a backdrop of eternal snow. It is a magnetic destination attracting tourists who throng every year. With tremendous potential for growth in numbers and quality, Bihar is one of the eastern states in the Indian union endowed with immense tourism potential. The presence of numerous ancient monuments represents the rich culture and heritage of the state. Bihar, as of today after bifurcation, is still studded with monuments of its past glory- monuments that bear the memory of Jain Mahavira- 24th Trithankar of Jainism and

Lord Buddha- founder of the Buddhism. The ruins of Nalanda and Vikramshila bear the testimony of our being on the zenith of culture and civilization some 2500 years ago. This is the land on which Lord Buddha and Mahavira started their religious orders. Monuments in Bihar can be further classified on the basis of religions- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity representing the syncretic culture of Bihar.

Key words:- Heritage, Magnetic destination, Archeology, Tourist etc.

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Introduction:

Bihar is a land affluent in natural beauty, whispering forests, sparkling lakes, majestic forts and palaces, holy shrines and natural hot springs emerging from a backdrop of eternal snow. It is a magnetic destination attracting tourists who throng every year. With tremendous potential for growth in numbers and quality, Bihar is one of the eastern states in the Indian Union endowed with immense tourism potential. The presence of numerous ancient monuments represents the rich culture and heritage of the state. Bihar, as of today after bifurcation, is still studded with monuments of its past glory- monuments that bear the memory of Jain Mahavira- 24th Trithankar of Jainism and Lord

Buddha- founder of the Buddhism. The ruins of Nalanda and Vikramshila bear the testimony of our being on the zenith of culture and civilization some 2500 years ago. This is the land on which Bhagwan Buddha and Mahavira started their religious orders. Monuments in Bihar can be further classified on the basis of religions- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity.

Objectives:

The purpose of this research is to reawaken interest in monuments of Bihar and bring awareness among the future generation about the rich heritage of our state.

Methodology:

- Study of various books concerning the history of Bihar.
- Information collected from the reports of the Tourism Department of the state government.
- Study of the monuments and records maintained and preserved by Patna Museum.
- Study from different journals and magazines, audio and visual documents(television) and internet etc.

Monuments of Patna

Patna known in ancient times as “**PATLIPUTRA**”, is the capital of Bihar. The city is among the world’s oldest capital cities with unbroken history of many centuries as imperial metropolis.

Monuments in Patna :

1. Kumhrar
2. Pathar ki Masjid
3. Har-Mandir Takht
4. Golghar
5. Martyr's memorial
6. Patna Museum

1. **Kumhrar** : Kumhrar, 5km from the Patna Railway station, is the site of the ancient city of Patliputra. Archaeological excavation have revealed relics of four continuous periods from 600BC-60AD. An important find is the remains of a huge hall supported by **80 sandstone**

pillars constructed during the **Mauryan Period**.

2. **Pathar Ki Masjid** : The Pathar ki Masjid lies adjacent to Har-Mandir Sahib, on the bank of the river Ganga. This mosque is so named because it was built of stone and wood brought from a place named Majhowli in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. This beautiful mosque was built by **Parwez Shah, son of Jehangir**, when he was the governor of Bihar from 1621-24AD. The inscription on the monument gives the date of its construction as A.H.1036(1626AD), which was perhaps completed a year after the death of Parwez Shah in 1625 AD. It is also called **Saif Khan's Mosque, Chimmie Ghat Mosque and Sangi Masjid**.

3. **Har-Mandir Takht** : **Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th guru** of the sikhs, was born in 1660 in Patna. The Har-Mandir Takht is one among the four sacred shrines of the sikhs. Since Guru Gobind Singh spent the early years of his childhood here, the Takht has a number of things that were once used by him and also by his father **Guru Teg Bahadur**. The temple was renovated by **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** and this temple contains belongings of Guru Gobind Singh and the holy text of the Sikh's **Guru Granth Sahib**.

4. **Golghar** : One of its attractive surviving landmarks, Golghar, also famous earlier as “**Bankipore Gola**” , is to Patna, what Qutub Minar is to Delhi and Char Minar is to Hyderabad. Golghar was built by **Captain John Garstin, an army engineer** , as a huge granary for British army in 1786, after famine of 1770. It is a massive beehive shaped



structure, 96 feet high with walls 12 feet thick at the bottom, on the outside, two sets of stairs of 144 steps spiral up to the top. The winding stairway around this monument offers a brilliant panoramic view of the city and river Ganga flowing by.

5. **Martyr's Memorial** : The Martyr's memorial is a memorial to 7 freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives during the Quit India Movement of 1942. The Martyrs were shot dead at this very spot when they tried to hoist the national flag. The modern structure in black conveys their sacrifice beautifully.
6. **Patna Museum** : Located in the heart of Patna, Patna Museum is housed in a magnificent red and white building with domes and arches. The Patna Museum contains all the remarkable treasures like the **1st World War cannon, metal and stone sculptures of the Mauryan and Gupta periods, Buddhist sculptures and quaint terracotta figures** which are several centuries old. A special attraction is a **16m long fossilized tree**.

Monuments of Rajgir :

Rajgir was known in ancient times as "**RAJGRIHA**" meaning "**Home of Royalty**". Rajgir is a hill fort town in the midst of lush green forests. This was the **first recorded capital as per Indian history**. The place is also associated with Buddhism and Jainism as **Lord Buddha** and **Lord Mahavira** spent some of their time here meditating and preaching.

Monuments in Rajgir :

1. Shanti Stupa
2. Ajatashatru Fort
3. The Cyclopean Wall
4. Bimbisar Jail
5. Swarn Bhandar

1. **Shanti Stupa** : The Vishwa Shanti Stupa is located on a **400m high Ratnagiri hill**. The actual construction of this **160 feet high Pagoda** was started in 1965. The Stupa is built in marble and on the 4 corners of the Stupa are 4 glimmering statues of Buddha. This place is also called the "**Griddhakoota**". To reach the top of the hill one has to come through the ropeways.



2. **Ajatashatru Fort** : Ajatshatru fort was built by Ajatshatru in 6th century BC. He was the king of Magadh during the Buddha's time. The 65sq m Ajatshatru's stupa is also believed to have been built by him.
3. **The Cyclopean Wall** : The Cyclopean wall 40km long encircled ancient Rajgir built of massive undressed stone carefully fitted together, the wall is one of the few important **Pre-Mauryan stone structures** ever to have been found. Traces of the wall still persist, particularly at the exit point of Rajgir for Gaya.
4. **Bimbisar Jail** : King Bimbisar was imprisoned here by his impatient son and heir, Ajatshatru. The captive king chose this site for his incarceration. For, from the spot, he could see Lord Buddha climbing up his mountain retreat atop the Griddhakoota hill. It now provides a clear view of the Japanese peace Pagoda.
5. **Swarn Bhandar** : Swarn Bhandar is said to be a store house where king Jarashandh used to store his gold. An unread story about the cave is that there is a lot of gold in this cave and a script written on a stone is the code to unlock the door of this Swarn Bhandar.

Monuments of Nalanda :

Nalanda, is one of the famous ancient places of learning and was founded in the 5th century AD.

The **ruins of the world's most ancient university** lies here. The ruins of its temple and monasteries convey a stunning impression of the peaceful and ordered life of meditation and learning that prevailed here.

Monuments in Nalanda :

1. Nalanda University Ruins
2. Nalanda Archeological Museum
3. Hieun-Tsang Memorial Hall

1. **Nalanda University Ruins** : Nalanda university is one of the most well known ancient seats of learning. At least **2,000 teachers and 10,000 students** from different parts of the Buddhist world lived and studied at this **residential international university** of the world. Lord Buddha visited Nalanda several times during his lifetime. This famous centre of Buddhist learning shot to fame much later. Chinese visitor **Hieun-Tsang** stayed here in the 7th century AD and gave a detailed description of the excellent educational system and purity of the monastic life in the university.



2. **Nalanda Archeological Museum** : Nalanda archeological museum is just opposite the entrance to the ruins of the university. In the museum there is a small but beautiful collection of Buddhist and Hindu bronze and a number of undamaged statues of Lord Buddha that were found in the area. **Two enormous terracota jars of the 1st century** stand intact behind the museum in a shaded enclosure. The collection includes **copper plates and stone inscription, coins, pottery and samples of burnt rice(12th century AD)** found among the ruins here.

3. **Hieun-Tsang Memorial Hall** : This is a new construction in memory of the great **Chinese traveller, Hieun-Tsang**. The memorial hall has been built in the memory of the Chinese traveller Hieun-Tsang who was a student at Nalanda and subsequently became a teacher of the ancient Nalanda Mahavihara. This hall is in the process of becoming a centre for academic and cultural activities highlighting the teachings and culture of Buddha.



Monuments of Vaishali

Vaishali, **the land of Ambapali**, surrounded by banana and mango groves amidst paddy fields, does not appear to have changed much since ancient times. Vaishali is considered as an **important religious site** as **Lord Mahavira, founder of Jainism was born** here and **Lord Buddha preached his last sermon** here. Vaishali is also credited with being the **world's first republic** to have a **duly-elected assembly** of representatives.

Monuments in Vaishali

1. Ashokan Pillar
 2. Raja Vishal ka Garh
 3. Buddha Stupa I and II
 4. Bawan Pokhar Temple
1. **Ashokan Pillar** : The Ashokan Pillar, also known as the **Lion-Pillar**, was built by **Emperor Ashoka (king of Maurya dynasty)** at Kolhua. This 40 feet high red sandstone pillar bears the **typical Mauryan Polish** and inscriptions that extol the "**Dhamma**" or the law of piety propounded by



- Ashoka. The thickness of shafts gradually decreases from 4 feet to 3 feet as it tapers to the top which is capped by a capital and further surmounted by a life-size animal like a lion, attached by means of copper bolts.
2. **Raja Vishal ka Garh** : There is in Vaishali an excavated site that is believed to be the remains of **ancient Parliament House** where the federal assembly gathered to discuss and regulate the ancient republic. The original building believed to have an 8 feet high wall with 140 feet deep moat around it and was approached by a broad embanked causeway from the south.
 3. **Buddha Stupa I and II** : One eighth of the sacred ashes of the Lord Buddha were enshrined in the Buddha Stupa I in a stone casket. The exterior of the stupa is now in a decaying condition and it has a plain surface. Buddha Stupa II was formed in 1958 when during digging of this site it led to the discovery of another casket containing the ashes of the Lord Buddha.
 4. **Bawan Pokhar Temple** : Bawan Pokhar Temple is an old temple built in the Pala period. The temple is situated on the northern bank of Bawan pokhar and it enshrines beautiful images of several Hindu Gods.

Monuments of Bodh-Gaya

Set on the bank of river Niranjana(Falgu) and silhouetted against a row of hills, it was here in 531B.C that **Shakya Prince Siddhartha first saw light under the Bodhi tree**. Bodhgaya is the greatest pilgrim centre for Buddhists of the world. Many South East Asian countries have established their monasteries here in their native architectural style.

Monuments in Bodh-Gaya

1. The Mahabodhi Temple
2. Ratnagarh
3. Archeological Museum
4. Vishnu Pad Temple

1. **The Mahabodhi Temple** : The **1200 years old** main shrine of supreme enlightenment, the Mahabodhi temple is unique amongst other north Indian temples. It has a spire instead of the usual curvilinear contours. The four smaller towers at the four corners give balance to the structure. Inside the shrine is a **gilded image of Buddha**. The ancient railings which surround the temple are of the 1st century B.C. and are among the very interesting monuments in the country.



2. **Ratnagarh** : The **Buddha spent one week here**, where it is believed that **five colours came out of his body**.
3. **Archeological Museum** : The museum was established in the year 1956. The museum consists of two galleries and an open courtyard as well as two varandah displaying antiquities. The museum exhibits are **bronze and stone sculpture of Buddhist** and Brahmanical faith of Pala period, scenes related to Buddhist pantheon, surya, zodiac signs on railing of Sunga age etc.
4. **Vishnu Pad Temple** : The **2500 years old temple** symbolising the final salvation of wandering souls was **renovated in the 18th century by Rani Ahilya Bai Holker**. 900 sculptors were brought from Rajasthan who helped in the renovation work which was completed in the year 1765. The temple is the important '**Vedi**' or altar identified for the performance of '**Pindadaan**'.

Monuments of Pawapuri

Pawapuri is also known as **Apapapuri or the sinless town**. **Pawapuri**, is very well known to the Jains living in different corners of the world. **Lord Mahavira, the exponent of Jainism was born**

here and also attained salvation here in Pawari. All through the year, Jain pilgrims travel through Pawapuri visiting the places.

Monuments in Pawapuri

1. Jalmandir
2. Samosharan

1. **Jalamandir** : It looks like floating on water. The legend has it that after Lord Mahavira was cremated a large number of his disciples came here to take away part of his ashes. The demand for his ashes was so great that a large amount of soil was removed from around the funeral pyre, creating the **water tank**. This temple is made of white marble which can be reached by crossing a small bridge constructed over the water.

2. **Samosharan** : This is also a **Jain temple** and the **entire structure is circular and white**. Lord Mahavira squatted to give sermons to his disciples from this place. The Samosharan temple has steps leading to the top through several concentric terraces. There is a **beehive-shaped shrine on the top containing the foot prints of Lord Mahavira**.



Monuments of Sasaram (Rohtas)

Sasaram is one of the important ancient towns in Bihar. Legendary tradition, as in vogue in the locality, would associate Sasaram with the famous **Haihaya king named Sahasrajuna**. Early in the 16th century Sasaram was a Muhammedan town, forming part of the Jaunpur kingdom and under the control of Hasan Khan Sur, the Pathan chief.

Monuments in Sasaram (Rohtas)

1. Shershah's Mausoleum
2. Rohtasgarh Fort

1. **Shershah's Mausoleum** : The mausoleum of king Sher Shah Suri was built in the 16th century in the beautiful and impressive Afghan structure. It is built of stone and is the **second highest tomb in India**. The tomb was built on an island in the middle of a tank and could be originally approached from the north through a bridge.

2. **Rohtasgarh Fort** : Situated at a distance of about thirty nine kilometers from Sasaram is the Rohtasgarh fort, covering an area of 4 miles or more of a plateau. The fort is regarded among the **strongest and also the largest hill forts of India** and served as a shelter to many a great personality. Previously, there existed fourteen main gates in the fort but afterwards, Sher Shah Suri closed ten of them. This fort was used by personalities like Shah Jahan, Sher Shah Suri, Mansingh and Mir Qasim.

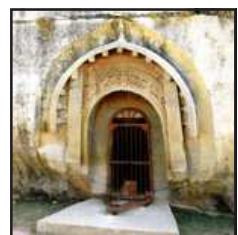


Monuments of Jahanabad

Jahanabad is one of the most popular religious places of India. It has also a great history from the time of great **Samrat Ashoka**.

Monuments in Jahanabad

1. Barabar Hill
 - a) The Karan Chaupar Cave
 - b) The Sudama Cave
 - c) The Viswa Thopri Cave
 - d) The Lomas Rishi Cave
1. **Barabar Hill** : The Barabar and Nagarjuni hills are situated 24 kms north of Gaya and contains, in all, seven-cut caves of which four are in the Barabar hills.



The four caves in Barabar hills have seven chambers and these are popularly known at **Satgharwa**.

- (a) **The Karan Chaupar Cave** : The cave facing north is known as **karan chaupar**. Right above to the entrance is a damaged **inscription of the 19th regnal year of Ashoka** (i.e 245 B.C) outside the cave, to its west, on the rock are two rudely carved human figures and a linga.
- (b) **The Sudama Cave** : The second cave faces south, it being on the opposite side of the hill. All the inscriptions on the eastern wall of the entrance recess refers to the excavation of the cave in the **12th regnal year of Ashoka**.
- (c) **The Viswa Thopri Cave** : In this outer room, on the right hand wall is an inscription recording its excavation **in 12th regnal year of Ashoka for the Ajvikas and referring to the name of the hill as Khalatika**.
- (d) **The Lomas Rishi Cave** : Two inscriptions of later Gupta period (7th-8th century A.D) both referring to **kings Sarddulavarman and his son Anantvarman of Maukhari dynasty** and another inscription in Brahmi have been discovered here in this cave.

Monuments of Bhagalpur

Bhagalpur is considered to be one of the prominent places in the country. Evidence from history suggests that the present city of Bhagalpur was known as **Champavati** in the 5th century B.C, capital city of Anga, which was one of the sixteen Mahajanpadas. It is believed that Subhadrangi mother of Ashoka belonged to and made Mahindra his son, governor of this provincial city later. **This city is well known all over the world for its silk products and therefore it is also called as "Silk city".**

Monuments in Bhagalpur

- (a) **Vikramshila University** : The relics of Vikramshila University, is a n o t h e r ancient seat of learning apart from Nalanda University.



Founded in the late 8th century A.D, the University's ruins are located nearly 50kms east from the district headquarter of Bhagalpur. This University excelled in the field of education and science, it flourished as a well-known centre of Tantrism. This University was founded by King Dharmapala who was apparently very generous in giving funds. 108 resident teachers were found along with the non-teaching staff. **To secure admission the students had to satisfactorily answer queries of the teachers present at the six main gates.**
- (b) **Bhagalpur Pillar** : The pillar is a mighty monolithic structure which is **17ft high**, located in close proximity to the shore of the river Ghagra. The pillar possesses a capital at the top, which comprises of a slab of circular shape supporting a cone. It is constructed by rough grey sand stone and is worshipped by the people of the locality. It is believed that the Bhagalpur Pillar was constructed in 900 A.D.

ACT RELATED TO MONUMENTS OF BIHAR

Bihar Act XIX of 1976 :

This Act provides for preservation of ancient monuments and archeological sites and remains other than those declared by or under law made by Parliament to be of National importance for the

Regulation of Archeological excavation and for the protection of antiquites in the state of Bihar.

Bihar's Tourist inflow for the year 2006-2009

YEAR	NATIONAL	FOREIGN	TOTAL
2006	1,06,70,268	94,446	1,07,64,714
2007	1,03,52,887	1,77,362	1,05,30,249
2008	1,18,89,611	3,45,572	1,22,35,183
2009	1,52,41,147	4,14,288	1,56,55,435

RECENT FINDINGS

Presently excavations are being carried out in:

- **TELHARA** – Hilsa block, in Nalanda
- **CHERAN** – Near Ganga, in Siwan
- **SHIKLIGARH** – in Purnia

Suggestions :

We as youth can be a major driving force to protect these monuments and raise our voice against the destruction of places of tourist interest. People around should be made aware of their importance.

- We should avoid writing on the walls of the monuments.
- We should not litter such places.
- As far as Govt. is concerned strict laws should be enforced and punishment should be given to the guilty.

Conclusion :

Bihar, the ancient land of Buddha has witnessed a golden period of Indian history. It is the same land where the seeds of the first republic were sown and which cultivated the first crop of democracy. The fertile soil has given birth to numerous intellectuals who spread the light of knowledge and wisdom not only in the country but in the whole world. For its geographical location, natural beauty, mythological and historical importance, Bihar feels proud of the assets it has been gifted by time, and for its moral contribution in the field of art and literature, religion and spiritualism, it knows no competitor. The synergetic cultural traditions exist in the region. There is a need for special efforts to promote the view that a

composite cultural heritage has co-existed in Bihar, which has helped in maintaining social harmony. Medieval architecture of Bihar is an enduring concrete impression of a tolerant cohesive culture of Bihar. The historical monuments of the state are our heritage and our pride. They are considered as the wealth of the nation. It is the duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture which has to be handed over to the next Generation.

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