

**ANCIENT UTTARPATH AND MODERN GRAND TRUNK ROAD ARE TWO
DIFFERENT HIGHWAYS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses important highway system existing in ancient India and differentiates between this system with the Grand Trunk Road modernized for his time by Sher Shah. The paper also discusses the modern highway systems of Europe, India and the United States of America, in brief.

Finally, discussions also show that these types of highway systems assist in civil and military transportation of people and goods.

1. INTRODUCTION

There exists confusion regarding Uttarpath of ancient India and the modern Grand Trunk Road [1]. In this reference, these two are considered to be the same. The fact of the matter is that there exists a lot of confusion in India as some believe that the Grand Trunk Road to have been built by Ashoka who ruled between 272 to 232 BC., and not Sher Shah who ascended the throne of India at Agra in 1540 AD after defeating Humayun, the Moghul ruler of India.

The objective of this paper is to show that these two are different highways by providing historical evidences.

2. THE UTTARPATH AND DAKSHINPATH

Fig. 1 shows the map of Uttarpath and Dakshinpath. The Uttarpath was between Taxila in the present day Pakistan to Rajgir whereas the Dakshinpath met the Uttarpath near Ayodhya on the northern end and terminated at Paithan in the present day Maharashtra, in the southern end [2].

As a matter of fact, Uttarpath existed even at the time of Buddha who was born at Kapilvastu in 563 BC. There is a story about Angulimal who had studied at the Taxila University in Pakistan, a bandit in Buddha's time and Angulimal had confronted Buddha while Buddha was walking along the Uttarpath (Northern Highway). This highway stretched between Taxila in Pakistan to the ancient Magadhan capital of Rajgir as shown in Fig,1. This figure also shows the Dakshinpath (Southern Highway).

Lord Buddha gave sermon to Amrapali at Vaishali on this highway. Amrapali became a nun at this place. This is a historical place where women were allowed to become nuns in Buddhism.

Buddha died in Kushinagar. Fig. 7 shows the place where he died. King Ashoka's pilgrimage to Lumbini , the birth place of Buddha, took place around 245 to 250 BC [3,4]. Buddha himself traveled along this highway. The important places along this route

are Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Kushinagar, Kesaria, Vaishali, Patna (Pataliputra), Pawapuri and Rajgir. Figs 4 to 11 show the historical remains of various ancient sites.

Kesaria is the place on this highway where Buddha stayed and is in present day East Champaran; it has the India's tallest stupa. King Ashoka built this stupa [5]

Vaishali is the place where the second World Buddhist Council took place. The other two World Buddhist Councils took place were at Pataliputra (the third), the capital of Ashoka in his time, and the other one, the first, at Rajgir during Ajatshatru's time [5].

3. THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD

The Autobahn is the federal controlled-access highway system in Germany. The building of this system began in 1925-26 under the Weimar Government and were highly developed by the Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler [6]. The Allied army was very surprised and impressed to see Hitler's rapid troop movements during the Second World War.

After the War, the U.S.A., and the European countries also built similar highway networks. This gave rise to increased efficiency in road transportation whether for civil or military applications.

During the recent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) rule in India, it built the modern highway system called the Golden Quadrilateral as shown in Fig. 12.

On the other hand Sher Shah (1486 – 1545 AD) modernized the Grand Trunk Road shown in Fig. 2. This road passes through Sasaram which was initial capital of Sher Shah when he ruled over Bihar and Bengal. Fig. 3 shows his tomb at Sasaram and the Grand Trunk Road passes in front of this tomb.

What we see in the Indian History is that Sher Shah had already built the highway system about 400 years earlier than the Germans. Sher Shah could move his troops very rapidly and looking back, this was the main cause of his numerous victories within a very short span of time that he ruled.

For the purpose of military applications, as well as for the convenience of the people, Sher Shah connected the important places of his kingdom by a chain of excellent roads. The longest of these, is the Grand Trunk Road, which extends for 1,500

kilometers from Sonargaon in Eastern Bengal to the Peshawar in Pakistan and then to Kabul in Afghanistan. One road ran from Agra to Burhanpur; another from Agra to Jodhpur and the fort of Chittorhgarh, and a fourth from Lahore to Multan [7].

Sher Shah planted shade-giving trees on both sides of the established highways, and constructed sarais or inns at different places where, separate arrangements were made for the Muslims and the Hindus. These sarais also served the purpose of post-houses for civil; as well as administrative uses. This facilitated quick exchange of news between people and supplied the Government with information from different parts of the Empire.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper roads or highways in various historical times were discussed. Based on the evidences presented, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. India had developed form of roads and highways since ancient times stretching over long distances for travellers going from north to south or north to east.
2. Sher Shah developed a highly evolved network of highways for civil and military applications and this system helped him in his rapid victories in the battles.
3. Sher Shah introduced postal system for civil applications for the first time..
4. Sher Shah built inns and planted trees for shades for the convenience of the travellers
5. Modern network of highways began to be built in Germany during 1925-26 under the Weimar Government and were highly developed by the Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler . The Allies built their own after the Second World War.
6. In modern times, the National Democratic Alliance government in India built the Golden Quadrilateral Highway system

5 REFERENCES

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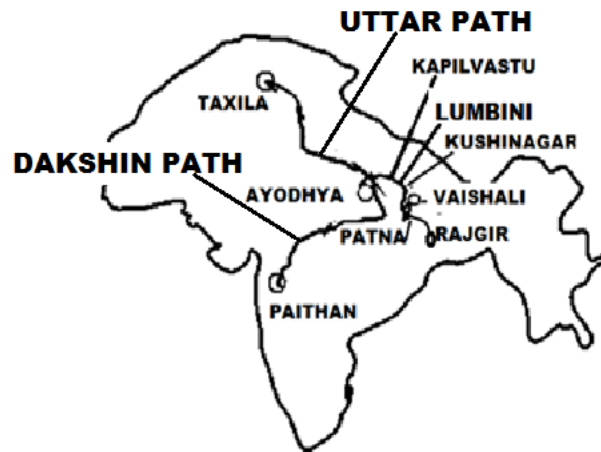


FIG. 1 UTTAR AND DAKSHIN PATHS

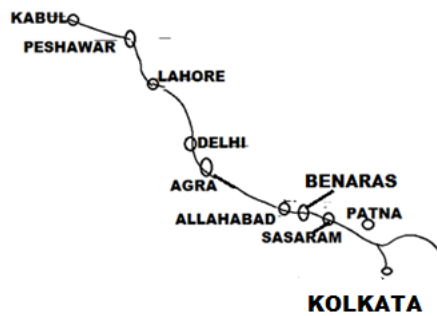


FIG. 2 GRAND TRUNK ROAD



FIG. 3 SHERSHAH'S TOMB AT SASARAM



**FIG. 4 JAIN TEMPLE ON THE TOP OF MOUNT VIPUL
WHERE LORD MAHAVIR OBTAINED ENLIGHTENMENT**



FIG. 5 VULTURE PEAK AT RAJGIR WHERE LORD BUDDHA GAVE SERMON TO KING BIMBISAR



FIG. 6 ASHOKA PILLAR AT VAISHALI

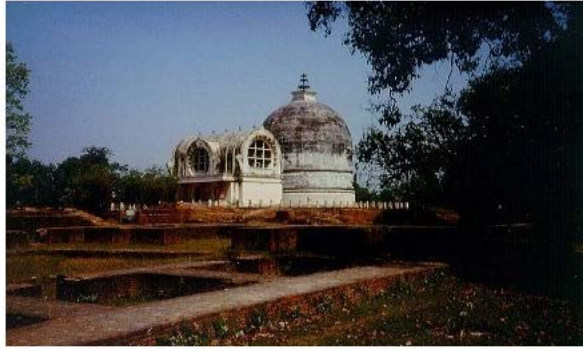


FIG. 7 A TEMPLE AT THE KUSHINAGAR WHERE LORD BUDDHA WAS CREMATED



FIG. 8 KING ASHOKA MADE PILGRIMAGE TO LUMBINI. THE PICTURE SHOWS ASHOKA PILLAR NEAR MAYA DEVI TEMPLE AT LUMBINI



FIG. 9 HOLY POND AT LUMBINI WHERE LORD BUDDHA'S MOTHER TOOK BATH BEFORE GIVING BIRTH TO HIM



FIG.10 REMAINS OF LORD BUDDHA'S PALACE AT KAPILVASTU



FIG. 11 A TEMPLE AT PAWAPURI NEAR RAJGIR WHERE LORD MAHAVIR OF JAINISM OBTAINED NIRVANA



FIG. 12 INDIA'S MODERN GOLDEN QUADRILATERAL