



অসলী বড় নকশা গায়ত্রিকা

আপন বড় গয়ার ম্যাপ  
MAP OF GAYA

MOON  
চন্দ্র নন্দ

DESIGNE NR 2

DESIGNER BY NETAJI DAS GHOSH  
COPY RIGHT

কৈলাশ পুস্তকালয় কে. দী. নত - গয়া

## 1960 — A pilgrim's map from India

### Imagination in power at the pilgrimage site Gaya

A demon lies in the water with his head facing the skies. His name is Gayasura, meaning 'demon Gaya'. The city shown on the map bears his name. Gaya is a place of pilgrimage and lies on the Phalgu River in the north Indian state of Bihar. The map shows various temples, as well as the nearby hills, the setting sun, a full moon, the railway bridge over the river, trains and a series of Hindu gods. The map depicts the myth of the pilgrim city's origins, a centuries-old tale that has made Gaya the destination to this very day for millions of pilgrims. The map portrays the unique experience undergone by pilgrims, as a pilgrimage to Gaya is a journey to salvation.

Long ago, so the story goes, the demon Gayasura practised asceticism (*tapas*) for so long and to such an extreme extent that the gods feared his fiery power would destroy the world. So Vishnu granted Gayasura a favour to persuade him to stop: Vishnu would make his body the most important pilgrimage destination (*tirtha*) on Earth. To restrain Gayasura, the gods placed a massive rock on his body.



Photograph of the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya by J.K. de Cock, c. 1909–1910 (Instituut Kern, N-000389).

That rock is called Dharmashila, or 'rock of the law'. The map clearly shows the rock of the gods, with Vishnu in the middle, on the demon's chest.

Just above Gayasura's head is the body of a dead person in the same position as the demon, with a cremation fire at their feet. This expresses the deeper meaning of the story: Gaya has long been one of the main sites for ceremonies surrounding ancestor worship (*shraddha*) and cremation. The performance of rituals for deceased relatives is the main reason why pilgrims travel to the city from far and wide. The trains, station and railway bridge shown on the map are references to the pilgrims' journey and the accompanying experiences.

In addition to the huge body of Gayasura, various other elements refer to holy places and temples. The temple on the far left is in fact located outside Gaya. It is the famous Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, a town fifteen kilometres to the south. Bodhgaya is one of the holy places of Buddhism as tradition has it that the Buddha achieved enlightenment (*nirvana*) under the bodhi tree there. The Buddha is depicted next to the temple, sitting in his characteristic lotus position.

The mapmaker has added the word 'south' next to the Mahabodhi temple. On the right-hand side of the map is the indication 'north'. The map therefore differs from the European tradition in which maps are usually oriented north. Maps in India traditionally have the east at the top, but in this map the east is marked at the bottom. It may be that the mapmaker opted for an orientation to the west as that would allow a panoramic view of the city on the western bank of the Phalgu river.

The landscape around Gaya is an important aspect of the city's identity. Here too, mythical elements dominate. The hill to the west, shown at the top left of the map, is called Brahmayoni, which means 'womb of Brahma'. Various gods are depicted above the hill:



Similar map of Gaya, published by Eureka Publicity Service Dharamtala in Kolkata (Private collection).

Krishna with a flute, four-headed Brahma, Vishnu with a crown, Shiva with a trident, his wife Parvati with her son Ganesh in her arms, and then Ganesh himself with his elephant head. Finally, the dancing figure is the fifteenth-century saint and mystic Caitanya. He met his guru in Gaya when he was there to perform the *shraddha* ceremony for his deceased father. The hill in the east, depicted to his right, is called Pretashila, the 'rock of the deceased', and is connected to the *shraddha* rituals. The spirit of a dead person floats above the hill. The smaller hill to the north, on the far right of the map, is called Ramashila, or 'rock of Rama'. Rama can be seen in the bottom left in the company of his wife Sita, half-brother Lakshmana and servant Hanuman. Vishnu is seen again in the centre of the map, this time in the temple of Gadadhara, 'bearer of the sceptre'. Vishnu is the central deity of the city. The large temple complex on the left of Gadadhara temple is dedicated to his footprint, Vishnupada.

The map is one of a series of similar pilgrim's maps of Gaya produced by local publishers. This particular map was published by Kailasha Pustakalaya in Gaya, as is stated at the bottom in the Devanagari script. All these pilgrim maps have the same basic layout, centred on the stretched-out body of Gayasura in the Phalgu river, and are clearly derived from the same source map. The origin of this source map is unknown but the image itself is found in descriptions of Gaya in the medieval Purana literature. Souvenir shops sell such maps as posters to the many pilgrims who visit Gaya each year. The city is one of the leading pilgrim's destinations in Bihar. For example, an estimated 50,000 people

come together in autumn during the popular Chhath festival to worship the goddess Chhathi Maiya and bathe in Gaya's Suraj Kund, or 'sun bath'. Gaya is also part of a pan-Indian system of pilgrim's routes. It is clear that the map is intended for a multilingual readership from the fact that the key elements are shown in English, Hindi and Bengali.

The pilgrim's map of Gaya presents an idealised landscape in which topographical elements are linked to divine presence. In all its strangeness and colourfulness, the map makes you aware that maps always have a certain perspective – they are never a direct representation of the real world but instead give shape to a particular experience of that reality. With this map, the Hindu pilgrim can see Gaya not as a collection of houses and streets but as a unique place on Earth where the divine becomes tangible. (PB)

**MADE BY** Netai Dass Ghose (designer), Kailasha Pustakalaya (publisher) **TITLE** Map of Gaya **PLACE OF ISSUE** Gaya **DATE** 1960 **TECHNIQUE** Colour print **DIMENSIONS** 38 x 50,5 cm **SCALE** c. 1:15,000 **ORIENTATION** North to the right **SIGNATURE** Bakker collection, COLLBN 054-19-006