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Title: Need to bring the sacred relics of Lord Tathagat Buddha to Lalitgiri Buddhist site in Odisha from the stores of A.S.I.

SHRI MOHAN JENA (JAJPUR): Madam, Lalitgiri is one of the three most important and promising Buddhist sites of Odisha. The other two Buddhist sites are Ratnagiri and Udayagiri which are jointly referred to as Diamond Buddhist Triangle by the Government of India.

Lalitgiri is the only Buddhist site in Eastern India from where the "Sacred Relics" of Tathagat Buddha were found in four relic caskets in 1986 during the excavation by ASI. The art of preservation of sacred relics at Lalitgiri Buddhist site is unique. The relics are found in a set of four caskets. The outermost casket is made of Khandolite, inside it was a steatite casket within which was a silver casket. The innermost casket that stored the tooth of Tathagat Buddha was made of gold. All the caskets are in stupa shape. It is now under the custody of the ASI, Bhubaneswar and kept in the strong room like any other stacked goods in an irreverent manner.

It is very unfortunate that for the last 28 years, the ASI has not taken any step to exhibit these precious relics in a befitting manner at Lalitgiri from where these relics were excavated. Several Members of Parliament including myself, over a period of time, have sent written memoranda and letters to the hon. Minister, Secretary, Tourism and Culture and DG, ASI for construction of a museum at Lalitgiri where the relics can be preserved and exhibited.

Secondly, an NGO called Buddhiana has been relentlessly fighting to bring the sacred relics to Lalitgiri.

Subsequently, due to persistent pressure, the DG, ASI and the Joint DG, ASI visited at Lalitgiri on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2009 and 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2009 respectively to select a site for the construction of a museum. The site was even selected in the vicinity alongwith approved plan and the estimate work was completed. When we are eagerly awaiting for the construction of the museum, it is truly ironic that now, after 28 years, the ASI is discussing where to place the relics.

Lalitgiri is located at the meeting point of three districts, namely, Cuttack, Jajpur and Kendrapara. Thousands of people of these areas are sentimentally attached to the Buddhist site and it is their earnest demand that the Buddhist relics should be placed at Lalitgiri.

The followers of Mahatma Buddha who chose to place the relics at Lalitgiri Buddhist Vihar before 2500 years must have their own thinking. Should we dishonour their spirit by shifting the relics to a different place? The Government must think over it.

I also demand to include the information about the Buddhist site of Odisha in NCERT books.

MADAM SPEAKER: Shri P.L. Punia and Shri Kamal Kishor "Commando" are allowed to associate with the matter raised by Shri Mohan Jena.

SHRI BHARTRUHARI MAHTAB (CUTTACK): Madam, the Minister is here. There should be a response from the Minister. He is aware of the matter...(Interruptions)

MADAM SPEAKER: I cannot say anything about it.