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Challenging Stereotypes in Early Indian Buddhism

by

Susan Verma Mishra



INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
40, MAX MUELLER MARG, NEW DELHI-110 003
TEL. : 24619431 FAX: 24627751

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Challenging Stereotypes in Early Indian Buddhism*

The papers covered diverse topics and presented new perspectives and ideologies in the study of Buddhism in India, and included themes related to epigraphy, archaeology, iconography and the use of computer analytics in current Buddhist studies.

The conference had an auspicious beginning with the recitation of a prayer by the keynote speaker, Ven. Doboomb Tulku of the World Buddhist Culture Trust (the video is available at <https://vimeo.com/331415693>—thanks to Dr. Noemie Verdon). He enumerated on the concept of dharma, and its significance in today's world. The ancient system of understanding the knowledge of dharma was the result of the interplay of listening, reflection and meditation. The body of dharma is three-fold, namely ethical conduct, meditative techniques and the realisation of truth. The scriptures were not the original medium of communication of dharma, but it was passed on from the guru to the people directly. Dharma does not have 'A' particular author, but rather signifies an unbroken lineage, a succession of teachers over the ages. The preserved dharma thus is not

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* The Conference on 'Challenging Stereotypes in Early Buddhism' was coordinated by Himanshu Prabha Ray and held under the Anneliese Maier Research award of Humboldt Foundation and Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich in collaboration with India International Centre, Delhi, from 11th to 13th February 2019. This report was prepared by Susan Verma Mishra.

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Besides gurus and the Sangha, the teaching can come through spiritual friends or *kalyanamitra*, or those who inspire and lead, and this individual may or may not be directly related or known to the aspirer of dharma. He further warns of the implications of the digital era, and reminds us of being cautious and diligent while looking for a spiritual guide. According to him, 'Guru' means a perfect or near perfect person who guides an individual along the perfect path. The essence of Buddhism is the chanting of mantras and various ceremonies, the essential concepts of rebirth and karma that are closely linked through the *karma-phala* system, and the union of wisdom and method are the essential messages of Buddhism. The foundation of Buddhism is the expansion of the mind (*Bodhicitta*) and the heart, with the focus on the former being on spreading compassionate thoughts. This is of relevance with regard to dependent origination in Buddhism, according to which there is no self, and that the self or anything else exists independently.

There is no I and others or suffering and happiness, as all exist in mutual existence, and are thus devoid of their inherent nature. The cultivation of the *Bodhicitta* loosens the grasping to self, and teaches compassion towards all sentient beings under the influence of karma.

Even though historically Buddhist studies have tended to focus on the two-model theory of Pali for southern Buddhism and Sanskrit for northern Buddhism, yet these are superfluous. While each Buddhist school has distinctive features and unique contributions, yet none is monolithic. These contributions of Buddhism have enriched the tapestry of culture by providing deep thoughts and insights into philosophy. In a world economically and culturally connected, Buddhist unity

is overdue as there is a dire need of non-conflict all across the globe.

The first paper presented by Peter Skilling was titled ‘New Frames for New Landscapes: Paradigm Shifts in Buddhist Studies’, and aptly highlighted the theme of the conference (video available at <https://vimeo.com/334212917>). Skilling traced Buddhist studies from its inception in colonial times, in its varied aspects, up to the present times involving the use of technological advances and numerous archaeological and epigraphical discoveries that have resulted in shifts in paradigms of Buddhist studies. He spoke of the stereotypes that have persisted, and that this heritage of received ideas is an enormous baggage on Buddhist studies. The source of the stereotypes can be traced to the 19th century, and even pre-19th century mindsets, and these affected and infected the entire secondary literature on Buddhism, Indian religion and religions in general. The inherited frameworks, concepts and paradigms continued without critical analysis. These stereotypes flourished in the soil of colonial, Christian and social studies assumptions and prejudices. With progress in the study of Buddhism in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century, further assumptions and paradigms and prejudices complicated the study. This led to reactions, reframing and reconfiguring of the old stereotypes resulting in new stereotypes—Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, secularist, modernist, as well as nationalist and internationalist such as Indian, Sri Lankan, Thai, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc.

We need to be reminded that a revolution has occurred in Buddhist studies over the past decade, which has brought about a major shift in the paradigms or conceptual frameworks that underpin the study of Buddhism. The critical mass of new information available inevitably does not fit into the old frames, and thus calls for new frameworks to be adopted. This new set of data comes from both textual studies and archaeology, which call for the re-working of our frames.

Added to this is the crucial role played by advances made in the use of technology for archaeological and textual studies, for instance as in the case of manuscripts where technology aids to enlarge and view digital images of manuscripts that were earlier almost impossible to read.

The other important source for study of early Buddhism, as pointed out by Skilling, is the memoirs of the Chinese travellers. These began to be studied in the 19th century, yet they need to be also carefully relooked at, and new editions are required. The account of Xuanzang after 100 years of translation by Samuel Beal and James Legge, is being translated by Max Deeg, who has also translated into German, a massive annotated version of the travels of Faxian. At the same time, Skilling makes us aware of not simply rejecting the older translations and versions, but rather using both old and new and comparing them.

Some of the themes that Skilling raised and which were also addressed by other speakers are as follows:

Language Studies and New Evidence

Even though there have been advances in the field of textual studies, yet Skilling underlined the fact that there exist several canon/ canons that we call Buddhist literature, located either in libraries, or temples around the world. Of these, many have not yet been tapped by researchers. This task of unravelling, unpacking manuscript collections is a mammoth task, and a long term one which requires language and script specialists. While some support towards this is being provided by foundations, universities and governments, yet the number of specialists is not adequate. Once an esteemed subject of studies in universities, now language studies is not viewed as an appealing subject for students. There is a need for universities

across the world to nurture ‘small studies,’ so as to further the possibility of unravelling manuscript collections. The other impediment to manuscript studies is the fact that a large portion of the manuscripts is largely inaccessible to most as these have neither been edited, nor been made available publicly as digital images, or printed books. The case of the Gandharan manuscripts, which have radically configured the picture of the Indian Buddhist textual tradition and redefined the linguistic map of Buddhism, highlights the importance of accessing and studying new manuscripts. These manuscripts make the old bifurcation of Buddhism into Pali and Sanskrit redundant and offer new paradigms.

It is important to remember that different schools used different languages, and so the two-fold model does not hold validity any longer; instead diversity in linguistic tradition was the rule, and there was no single language for Buddhism. Nevertheless, Prakrit has not received its due importance in the study of Buddhism, though several schools used distinctive Prakrits. At the site of Kanaganahalli near Gulbarga in Karnataka, there are label inscriptions in a unique Prakrit, and it is imperative that Prakrit studies become stronger and gain momentum. As for Pali, everything will have to be redone as new editions and new translations will be required, and also translations of works such as the commentaries which have hitherto not been done. The Southeast Asian compositions in Pali, particularly the Thai tradition require further attention. Also, the numerous Tibetan works have to be translated, and a number of them are being made available as digital files. The Chinese Agamas are another important source of study of early Buddhism, as they are the counterparts of the Pali Nikayas which are not available in original Indian languages.

The framework of Buddhist linguistic studies was greatly transformed by the find of numerous manuscripts in the Gandhari language from various sites. The paper by Stefan Baums entitled ‘Early Buddhist Literature in Pali and Gandhari’,

highlights the need to turn our attention to a shared Buddhist knowledge prior to its being codified, and the importance of Gandhara in the early Buddhist world in the transmission of texts. He negates the long-held belief that early Buddhism was

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He negates the long-held belief that early Buddhism was represented by Theravada Buddhism. He provided an introduction to the Gandharan manuscripts, looked at the early Buddhist literature or shared Buddhist literature such as the *Arthapada*, and compared it with Pali and Chinese versions, and delved into the relation between Gandhari and Pali commentaries.

represented by Theravada Buddhism. He provided an introduction to the Gandharan manuscripts, looked at the early Buddhist literature or shared Buddhist literature such as the *Arthapada*, and compared it with Pali and Chinese versions, and delved into the relation between Gandhari and Pali commentaries. The local Gandhari language and Kharoṣṭhi script spread along the silk route all the way upto China, and evidence is found in India at the sites of Mathura and Vidisha. The chronological range is placed between the 4th century BCE and the 2nd / 3rd–4th CE, and the earliest evidence for use of Kharosthi dates to the 3rd century BCE as seen in the Asokan edicts.

The Gandhari-Prakrit manuscripts are datable from the 1st century CE, and are written on birch bark, and the manuscript culture continued till the 2nd–3rd century CE. The earliest Buddhist translations in Chinese were based on Gandhari and other Prakrit versions, and only in a later period on Sanskrit. The Kharosthi script is noticed on various mediums such as Ashokan edicts, relic inscriptions, on containers, silver sheets and bilingual coins of the Greek rulers and their

successors. In 1892, a copy of the *Dhammapada* written in Gandhari Prakrit was discovered near Khotan in Xinjiang, western China and for a long time scholars debated as to the possibility of the existence of a manuscript culture in Gandhara. The discovery in the 1990s of about 100 very long birch bark manuscripts, and a larger number of smaller fragments within clay pots confirmed their belief. The transition from Kharosthi and Gandhari to Brahmi and Sanskrit was clearly noticeable at the site of Bamiyan where palm-leaf was the preferred writing material.

The numerous Gandhari Prakrit manuscripts are currently located in the collections of the British Library, the Library of Congress and private collections such as Schoyen collection, Senior collection and the Split collections. Even though they carry the same language and script, yet the content of these manuscripts varies. The manuscripts of the Split and Senior collection contain very early Buddhist mainstream, or shared Buddhist texts with parallels in the *Anguttaranikaya*, and these were custom made as a Buddhist Dharma relic. The British Library collection has no Mahayana texts. The *Arthapada gatha* is an early Buddhist verse text which has only partial parallels in Pali. The preservation and reconstruction of these manuscripts is an intricate process. They are preserved between glass plates, and different imaging techniques such as natural light and infra-red light are used in the documentation process. The reconstruction of the fragments in order is attempted after looking for parallels in Pali and Sanskrit texts and canons. The use of scripts is depicted in Gandharan art from Swat, as well, and a relief depicts monks sitting around a table and seemingly discussing a manuscript which is held in the hand by one of them.

A close analysis of the linguistic background of the manuscripts reveals translation mistakes, and this in Baums' opinion is due to the fact that the old Gandhari texts

were translated from other sources. The inconsistencies encountered in writing the same sound is attributed to the possibility of these being written while being recited, and not directly copied from another written source. In the Chinese tradition, while copying a manuscript to manuscript, the original is read out while copying. In the Gandhari manuscript, a result of this copying process was that some lines were skipped by the copier. The manuscripts have linguistic traces of Pali, and this Pali does not correspond to Pali of Sri Lanka, but rather a Pali closer to that found on the Girnar Rock edict of Ashoka.

The *Arthapada* is an early Buddhist text which is foundational for the education of Buddhist novices. In Gandhari Prakrit collections, one fourth of the text and commentaries have been found, even though Sanskrit fragments of these are known from Khadalik and Qizil. This text has association with stories found in Chinese translations, and has no parallel with Indian versions. Further, the *Mahavyuhasutra* has also inconsistencies in spelling in the manuscript, and the ends of the chapters are marked with small lotuses. What is interesting is that here the chapters are called *varga* and not *sutra*. The Gandhari, Sanskrit and Pali sutras of this are all arranged differently as chapters of the *Arthapada*. And within the context of Gandhara also, there was no single Gandhari recension, but there existed multiple ones. What was noticed in the Gandhari commentary was a fluid rearrangement of *padas* and stanzas, and these free re-arrangements of the manuscript are indicative of being written in an oral context.

The other question relevant here is whether these manuscripts contained the whole text, and close examination reveals variations in this as well. In the case of the *Reverse Commentaries* or *Niddesa*—in one instance it fills only part of the recto, in another it covers three scrolls, and in the third it is found written at the end of the scroll. A scientific and technical analysis of the manuscripts was carried out in

terms of functional words, linguistic explanations, citations from other Buddhist texts and categorical reductions. Most of these contained texts from different *Nikayas*, the *Theragatha* and unidentified citations. The commentary pattern was the same in Gandhari and the *Suttaniddesa* in Pali, pointing to a shared inherited exegetical material.

One component of exegetical procedures was reductions. It is noticed that Gandhari texts never neatly side with the Pali or Chinese parallels. The text was preserved in multiple Gandhari manuscripts like the *Dhammapada*. The process was known as *Vijateti* signifying the disentangling of the verse by the commentator. In this regard, the *Peṭakopadesa* ('Instructions in [interpretation of] the *Pitaka*') has an important exegetical menu. Even though this is preserved in Pali, but it was originally composed in a north western language. The *Petakopadesa*, is an early work on exegetical technique.

The general topic of the *Arthapada* relates to disputes and an admonition of this, yet this general message is made nonsensical in the Gandhari *Arthapada*. It is interesting to note that while the *Arthapada* in Gandhari is a root text manuscript, but its commentary sides more with the Pali, and not with the Gandhari root text manuscript. The free re-arrangement of *padas* of different Pali verses in Gandhari resulted in different meanings and interpretations. While at times the text fills an entire scroll, in other instances it sometimes fills only the front part and at times front and back both.

In the case of the *Sangitisutra* which is found in Pali and Sanskrit fragments recovered from Gilgit and Turfan, and has a Chinese translation and fragments of Sanskrit commentary from Bamiyan, yet there are linguistic differences and variance in Gandhari and Pali versions. The Gandhari text cites the Chinese

version. In the British Library manuscript, the *Sangitisutra* has *udanas* called *sankshipt* Niddesa or brief Niddesa, and the *udanas* itself have been subject to categorical reductions. The *bhumi* system in the *Sangitisutra* has close parallels in the *Peṭakopdesa*.

There are no exact parallels of Gandhari sutras either in Pali or Sanskrit, but similarities do exist. Inter textual relations can be deduced from the three *Ekotarrikagana* type sutras, two of which have parallels with Pali texts in *Anguttara Nikaya*, but the third one has no parallels. The original compositions of the Gandhari commentaries in the British Library collection adopt exegetical techniques similar to Pali tradition, but represent an early stage in reductions of doctrinal concepts. The process was carried out in accordance with a four-fold classification of the audience which included those with cravings, wrong views, and while some are dull-witted, others are sharp-witted. Manuscripts were produced through oral discourses during which notes were taken, and some texts seem like rough listeners' notes of the *Avadana* manuscript.

In the movement of texts between Gandhara and north India, one can consider the role of the western India coast which had historical connections with Gandhara through Kshatrapa rule. Thus, Gandhari and Pali were givers and receivers in an exchange that extended over a hundred years, as in the case of commentaries 5 and 15 which are not contiguous in Gandhari, but contiguous in a Pali *udana* setting. In addition to this within Gandhara, there existed a variety of textual traditions. Gandhara becomes an important region for the study of Buddhist linguistic and textual traditions, and in this process of transmission, the Bhanaka, who were primarily monastics played a vital role. It is only in the 4th century CE that a complete written *Agama* was recovered from Bamiyan in Kharosthi and Brahmi. Up till the 3rd century CE, it was the oral recitation tradition that thrived.

Archaeological Sites and New Interpretations

In the field of archaeology, Skilling stressed the need to have a more holistic approach, and to include along with the monument, selected settlements, the natural and human environment as well as ecology, while studying Buddhist sites. It is regrettable that in the early period, the focus was only on the monument at the expense of the greater site or complex, even to the point of disassembling the monument. This inhibited our understanding of the site, and also limited the area or space to be preserved and protected. There have been many new excavations and discoveries such as at Kanaganahalli in Karnataka, Phanigiri in Telangana, a complex of several stupas have been excavated in Odisha over the last 20–30 years, and Pauni in Maharashtra. The sites of Kanaganahalli and Phanigiri have added significantly to the corpus of Buddhist inscriptions

in Prakrit. The Phanigiri stupa complex, which has numerous fine sculptures, was located at the centre of a landscape of neighbouring viharas and stupas. In Andhra Pradesh, clusters of Buddhist sites are found along the coast which have altered the picture of Buddhism in the region, and it is no longer possible to only speak of sites such as Amaravati, Bharhut and Sanchi. New sites mean new inscriptions, and in addition to documentation of old ones which need to be re-read, the new ones also call our attention. We therefore need to ‘Mind the Gap’ and ‘Fill in the Blanks,’ since certain areas have rarely been taken into account such as Kanheri,

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Elephanta, Sopara in Maharashtra and Chaneti in Haryana, and sites that were earlier excavated by the British archaeologists need to be re-excavated. Sites such as Kasrawad excavated by the Holkar state in the 1930s also need new excavation. In addition to these, it is necessary to carry out their preservation and photo documentation. One must also take into account the partition of artefacts from various Buddhist sites.

Diwakar Kumar Singh's paper entitled 'Mapping the Sacred: Archaeology of Some Minor Sites in the Vicinity of Nalanda' highlighted the necessity of shifting focus from a study of major monastic sites for architectural and sculptural analysis, to one of locating these within the wider landscape, and in relation to other Buddhist sites in their vicinity to have a more holistic picture of Buddhism at a site or region. We need to go beyond categories such as stupa, monasteries and viharas while studying and describing Buddhist sites and rather focus on landscape archaeology. The site was earlier known as Kundilapur and has been subjected to excavations and explorations over the past two centuries, beginning with Francis Buchanan Hamilton who visited the site in 1811–12, and the identification of the site of Nalanda on the basis of inscriptions found on two sealings by Alexander Cunningham who was motivated to find and locate Buddhist sites mentioned in the travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang. It is important to study and include sites around Nalanda which are necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of developments at the site between the 6th and 12th century CE. Also, important to consider are relations between these sites around Nalanda and the site of Nalanda itself, as well to discern the ritual hierarchy and expansion. The sites of relevance are Aungari, located 23 kms west of main Nalanda monastic complex, Tilahara, 29 kms west of Nalanda, Jaufardih, Chandimau and Jagdishpur. At many of the sites one encounters Buddhist as well as Hindu sculptural remains. In the village of Aungari is a Sun temple containing

many Surya images, as well as those of other minor deities of the 8th–12th century CE, as well as an image of Kali that may be identified with Tara. The site of Tilahara is mentioned in the account by Xuanzang which mentions the presence of an old sangharama with 1000 priests that studied the Great Vehicle, and Cunningham found an inscription mentioning donation by an oil presser. The mound at the site was excavated in 2013–2015, but the report is unavailable. The stratigraphy of the site dates from Mauryan to Pala period without any breaks. Seals from the site suggest that the monastery had its own seals, and also an image of Yamantaka was found. This image has been used by historians to argue for dissension and rivalry between the Buddhist and Hindu religion. But this does not seem a viable explanation as the site also yielded a Tara image, and besides the mound many places inside the village have Hindu images datable to the 8th–12th century CE, such as those of Mahisasuramardini and Ganesa. Also noticed were numerous small images of Buddhist and Hindu deities inside the village. Buddhist images include a mutilated Buddha image and three Avalokitesvara images, and under a tree in the village are about 40 mutilated images. In addition to this, there is a place called Nagdih indicative of the site's association with Naga worship.

The site of Jaufardih was excavated in 2006, and for this site also there are no published reports. Excavations revealed a mud brick stupa on a solid circular base which was raised in the third period. The site has a stupa and no monastery which then questions the stereotypical notion of the presence of a monastery with a stupa. From the site of Jagdishpur as well one comes across both Buddhist and Hindu images. The site of Chandimau was excavated in 2001–2002, and is located 7 miles southeast of Nalanda. Besides a stupa, many Naga figures dating to the 10th–12th century CE were seen. The site has 12 votive stupas and images of Tara, Buddha and Marici. The plethora of sculptures include Buddhist and Hindu, and are indicative of the massive involvement of agencies which may

have been organised on a large-scale, and were responsible for the production and distribution of images and artisans who were making and transporting the images. A study of sites in the vicinity of the major Buddhist site of Nalanda highlights the diversity in religion around a site, and a reconstruction of their identity needs to be understood in a broader process of historical change.

Archaeological researches in recent years in the state of Gujarat highlight the importance of the region in Buddhist studies in India. Y.S. Rawat's paper entitled 'Buddhist Remains of Vadnagar and Taranga in north Gujarat: The Monasteries of Anandpur visited by Xuanzang' provides insights into Buddhist archaeological sites. It also highlights the presence of Buddhist establishments both within and outside the fortified area of settlement as revealed at sites of Taranga and Vadnagar, located in proximity to each other. Both sites were strategically located on important trade routes, yet the location of Buddhist structures differed. Research on Buddhism in Gujarat dates to 1889, when James Campbell excavated the Boria stupa in the Girnar forest, which contained a huge stupa about 15–20 mtrs in height. A trench was dug across it which brought to light relic caskets. Located at 15–20 kms distance from the stupa is the site of a vihara with a seal recording its name as Rudrasena Vihara. There are many other structures in the vicinity of the Boria stupa that have not been excavated, and cannot be either as one would now require permission from the forest authorities.

The site of Vadnagar had access to mineral resources of the Aravalli hills and was also located at the junction of two major trade routes: one from Malwa region to Sindh, and the other from the coastal region to north India. This is also the site from where the Nagar Brahmanas originated, and later spread all over Gujarat. The site of Vadnagar is mentioned by Xuanzang who notes the presence of 10 sangharamas with 1000 monks of the Sammitiya school. Explorations were carried

out in 1952 by S. R. Rao and thereafter by M. S. University of Baroda, though on the periphery of the city. Excavations reveal a continuous occupation of the site from the 4th century BCE till present, when occupation continues within the fortified area. A lake was constructed in the 13th century CE, but prior to it the site lay along a meandering river bank which is now a palaeo-channel. A moat once surrounded the site, and the Buddhist monastery excavated was located within the fortification. The gate of the fortified city has been continuously maintained, and so was the slope to ensure easy flow of traffic. The period of construction of the monastery, and the beginnings of fortification which was initially a mud rampart, and the lower levels date to the Mauryan period as evident from the measurement of the bricks. The last phase of repairs of the wall is datable to the Maratha and Sultanate period, attesting to the continued importance of the site. The antiquities recovered are datable to the 2nd century BCE, and include cast coins and an ivory seal. The seal is significant as the symbols on it attest to the presence of diverse religious beliefs, such as a pillared structure within a *vedika*, a *dhvaja* or truncated flag and a tree in railing being worshipped by a man wearing a *pagdi* or headgear, and the legend on the coin reads *Mahayatakas*. Similar structures are noticed in the coins of the Udumbaras. The first image recovered from the monastery was in 2009 from an agricultural field which had an inscription on the pedestal that read: it was a gift of a nun from Samat for her own *caitya*. The nunnery excavated at the site was located within the fortification at the entry point. The structure is small with nine cells with entry from north and two staircases in the eastern and western side. It had stupas outside which were circular structures, and later square. The nunnery had a swastika layout, and found here were *Bhumaka* and *Maitraka* coins, as well as bricks of the Kshatrapa period. What is interesting and unique to this nunnery is the presence of a cellar.

The stupa revealed two phases of which the latter is datable to the Maitraka period

when the dome was encased with moulded elements which are contemporary to temple sites such as at Gop. Also, the base was moulded and the small votive stupas had fluted or faceted projections. Numerous Buddha heads from the site depict a Bodhi tree on the back and speak of Gandharan influence. The numerous pottery shards recovered from the site are inscribed with terms like *dhamma sakasya*, *deva shri rishi* and *dhamma* and are datable to the 2nd century CE. The other interesting finds are numerous amulets from all over Vadnagar as also, torpedo jars, images of the Kushana period and a coin datable to 364–367 CE with a Roman legend on one side and Brahmi on the other. The nunnery seems to have been visited by people from various regions.

The other site in north Gujarat is Taranga, located 20 kms from Vadnagar, with recently discovered fortifications on top of the hill. The site lay enroute from Rajasthan to Gujarat, and the site's continued importance is attested by repairs of the gates as late as the 16th to the 18th century CE. Buddhist remains in this case are located outside the fortified remains, and scattered all along the hill. The site is currently famous for the Jaina Ajitanatha temple built in the 12th century CE. Bricks of the Kshatrapa period were noticed in the fortification, and small steps leading to the top of the hill were also evident. The town was in existence even before the Kshatrapa period, and can be associated with the town of Anarthapura, mentioned in the inscription of Mihir Bhoja. It may be contemporaneous with Rajagrha in Bihar, as the construction of the fortification wall has similarity even though this needs further research.

The site of Taranga has Buddhist remains of the 9th century CE, and was seen as the last stronghold of Buddhism in Gujarat. The images are located in a rock shelter, and amongst it is an image of Tara, and a mandapa was added in the Solanki period. The Jaina text *Kumarpala Pratibodh* of the 13th century describes

the transition of the site from a Buddhist to a Jaina stronghold, through the story of king Venivatsraja who was a patron of Buddhism, and was converted to Jainism by Khaputacharya; and who instead of building a temple dedicated to Tara, made it for Siddhayika devi. There is a small temple at the site dedicated to Dharanamata with a marble image of Tara with *ye dhamma hetu* inscription, and this image is the last evidence of Buddhism in Gujarat. By the 11th century CE, the Buddha image is seen in Rani ki Vav at Patan as an avatara of Vishnu, thus indicating the incorporation of the Buddha within the Vaisnava pantheon. Deborah Klimburg Salter mentions the existence of a manuscript currently in Cambridge which is from Tarapur in Latadesa or Gujarat. According to Salter, the Tabo monastery sealings had designs on them which were imported from this region.

Recent excavations at the site have also brought to light constructions on the right bank of the rivulet which appears to be an altered base of a small stupa because two large sized terracotta images of the Buddha in *padmasana* have been recovered from its top surface. Another significant and interesting find from the site is evidence for an ancient water harvesting system. Below the *Dharanamata/Taranmata* shrine on the right bank of an ephemeral rivulet, there is a small rock-cut tank (*kund*), possibly belonging to the early historical period, which is a perennial source of water. It seems that to exploit this source of water and to store the rainwater for year-long consumption, a small dam was also constructed across the narrow stream. The recent excavation and survey conducted at Vadnagar and Taranga Hill has confirmed that north Gujarat was an area where Buddhism flourished from its very beginning, and that it continued until the 10th–11th century CE. It appears that this area was a comprehensive Buddhist sanctuary from at least the 3rd century BCE to the 11th century CE. This discovery puts north Gujarat firmly on the Buddhist map of ancient India.

Vinay Kumar Gupta in his paper ‘Buddhist Landscape of Mathura: An Archaeological Perspective’ examined archaeological evidence for the presence of sites mentioned in Buddhist literature, with reference to Mathura and its surrounding environs. He considered all the references in Buddhist literature, and analysed details of places and find spots of various Buddhist sculptures and available epigraphical evidence. The literary evidence consists of the Pali Tripitika and Atthakathas, the Sanskrit Avadana literature, the Vinaya texts of the Mulasarvastivadins, and the accounts of Chinese travellers Faxian and Xuanzang. Pali texts refer to Mathura as Madura, and in the Brahmanical texts it is termed Madhupuri or Madhuri. In Sinhalese texts, the city is Uttara Madura, while the southern Madura is the site of Madurai. The *Mulasarvastivada Vinayavastu* places Mathura near Bhadrasva and Ojala, and within the territory of the Surasena kingdom. The *Lalitavistara* mentions Mathura along with other cities and the *Milindapanha* mentions it along with Ujjayini, Saket, Magadha and Swat.

There are few references found in the Pali texts that relate to the Buddha’s visit to Mathura, and these mention that he visited Veranja twice. The *Vinayavastu* also mentions the visit of Buddha to Mathura on two occasions; and in the *Anguttara Nikaya* there is mention of his journey along the highway between Madura and Veranja. Vinay Kumar Gupta then identified many sites mentioned in Buddhist literature that were not previously identified. Three other papers were based on archaeological data, and included overviews of the Buddhist caves at Kanheri by Susan Verma Mishra, and the Buddhist Heritage of Ladakh by Sonam Spalzin Bangkoklok. Shanker Sharma discussed the results from excavations at three archaeological sites like *Raja-Vishal ka Garh* in Vaishali (2011), *Raja-Bali ka Garh* alias *Balirajgarh* (2014) in Madhubani and *Vanigarh* in *Titira* (2018) of Siwan district, all situated at different locations in northern Bihar.

New Frameworks and Shared Buddhism

According to Peter Skilling, the units of Buddhist history are not Hinayana, Mahayana, Indian, Chinese, mainstream, Tibetan, Central Asian, East Asian etc. The frames have to be chosen carefully, followed and examined. Attention needs to be paid to traditional histories, instead of continuing the threefold division of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. A unified history of Buddhism taking into account shared heritage and recent methodological, empirical advances is required. There was no monolith mainstream Buddhism, but rather ‘Shared Buddhism’, which included aspects such as paying homage to the Buddha, and to the image of Sakyamuṇi.

Taiken Kyuma’s paper entitled ‘Rethinking the Decline of Indian Buddhism: Perspectives on Buddhist Monasteries from the Gupta Period’ questions the stereotypes associated with the decline of Buddhism, and also the relation between Tantric and non-Tantric philosophy, with a focus on the study of the Vikramshila monastery. It is not clear as to what extent Buddhism witnessed a decline in the post Gupta period, and on the contrary one sees that a number of Buddhist monasteries were active around the 12th–13th century CE. This also corresponds to the period when the system of Tantric Buddhism developed as a whole, even though it may have been under the influence of Hinduism.

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Stereotypically, Tantric and non-Tantric have been treated independent of each other in the field of Buddhist studies, and this in Kyuma's view seem invalid as in the monastic tradition of later Indian Buddhism, most doctrines came to be integrated into the whole system of practice. His paper dealt with primarily three issues: what kind of Tantric and non Tantric practices were used by the monks of the Vikramshila monastery; how can the relationship between Tantric and non-Tantric be explained by the monk scholars of that monastery; and if there existed a community of shared or common *Suttas* with regard to Tantric and non-Tantric philosophy.

With regard to the first question, the researchers of the project worked in collaboration with the Indo-Tibetan Lexical Resource to create a database of the various sources quoted by monks of Vikramshila monastery, as well as the colophons of Sanskrit manuscripts related to the monastery. This database is available on the ITLR Hamburg website. The database is quite detailed as seen from the entries found related to Vikramshila itself, and further each entry contains many items as variant names, Tibetan renderings and also names of the pundits of the Vikramshila monastery are included. In addition to this are also discussions pertaining to secondary sources on the entry made.

For a solution to the second question, the researchers focussed on a number of famous panditas such as Ratnakarasanti and Abhayagupta, and the findings of the research team have been published in various journals. As for the third issue on the possibility of a shared *Sutta*, researchers of the team noted that most of the authors of the Vikramshila monastery agree that Tantric doctrines are superior to non-Tantric ones, but the views and explanations regarding this differ. Thus, it seems possible that there were some sects who participated in the same discussion within a single monastery, as for instance while Jayasrimitra subscribed to the

Sakaravada, but Ratnakara subscribed to Nirakaravada and both resided in the same monastery. It seems more probable that at any given point of time in the *vihara* there existed not a single opinion, but many different ones, which may include Mahayana philosophy as well.

The stereotypical explanation for the decline of Indian Buddhism in the post-Gupta period has been ascribed to the rise of Vajrayana or Tantric forms of Buddhism, and these arguments seem to compartmentalise Hinduism and Buddhism, and contestation and schism between the two. Such assumptions are one-sided as the interaction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist was a common phenomenon throughout the history of Indian Buddhism, and was not merely limited to the time period of the study. There are indications for the existence of a network of interlinked institutions that these major monastic centres were a part of. This is evident in the work of the Tibetan scholar Taranath which mentions headships of different centres of Buddhist learning such as Nalanda and Odantapura, as well as the movement of monks to and from these sites. For instance, Atisa is said to have received ordination at Nalanda from where he went to Odantapura for further studies, and then became the head of Vikramshila, from where he was escorted to Tibet. Similarly, Sakya Sri Bhadra travelled from Kashmir to Nalanda to visit the Buddhist monasteries, and then proceeded to Bengal. Thus, different seats of Buddhist learning in eastern India functioning under the Pala rulers formed a network of interlinked institutions.

While addressing the question of decline, it becomes imperative to delve into micro histories for effective research on the topic rather than make generalisations, and over simplify the issue. Also, it is necessary to consider Hindu and Buddhist patronage as also to include religious plurality in the study of Buddhism in India. The stereotypical compartmentalisation of Buddhism into Hinayana, Mahayana

and Vajrayana is now ineffective and redundant. As for Vajrayana itself, rather than perceive it as an isolated and degenerative form of the preceding systems, it needs to be understood more as a social religion, and in the need to fulfil certain aspirations of worshippers, it incorporated various elements such as Bijayantra, Madhyamaka and Yogacara within its system. Also, rather than speak of a total decline, Kyuma mentions the possibility of the existence of Tantric ascetics in this period who may have been independent of monastic restrictions, and were active independent of the monastic institution.

Umakant Mishra's paper on 'From Stūpa as a *śarīra dhātū* to Stūpa as a *maṇḍala* and *dharmadhātū*: Continuity and Changes in the Sacred Landscape and Religious Ideologies' explored the continuity and changes in the sacred landscape of the Buddhist site of Udayagiri in Odisha, and the underlying religious ideologies which prompted these changes. Udayagiri saw four major phases of developments which brought about many changes in the sacred landscape. These changes reflect the continuity and changes in the religious ideology around the worship of the stupa and image worship. The stupa as containing the corporeal relics of Buddha or Buddhist saints remained an object of worship throughout Buddhist history. The beginning of Udayagiri saw the development of a stupa (STR 60) in Udayagiri II area of the site in the 2nd century BCE. This stupa also saw structural activity in the nearby area where two more small brick stupas also came up in the first phase. The stupa saw enlargement in the second phase (4th to 7th centuries CE) by converting it into an apsidal *caitygrha*. This change was obviously prompted by the need for congregation of pilgrims. Few of the paved pathways were engraved with Shell-brahmi inscriptions datable to the 4th–5th century CE. It was during this phase of the enlargement of the stupa that Simhaprasta Mahavihara came up in the Udayagiri II area.

However, by the end of this second phase, there seems to have been massive construction activities in and around the stupa area, by adding numerous small structural stupas. This underlines the spiritual magnetism of the area which made people construct other structural stupas near STR 60. Some of these stupas have yielded reliquaries indicating the proclivity of the establishment to consider the area as a sacred zone, and a predilection for the construction of stupas. Many stupas came up on the approach road leading to the closure of the northern approach pathway to the main stupa. Another approach road was constructed from the eastern side. This is also the time that Simhaprasta Mahavihara came up to the south west of the stupa.

The third phase, starting from the late 8th century CE, was marked by major developments in the religious landscape of Udayagiri. Stupa 60, which became an apsidal *caitygrhya* in phase 2, began to be expanded further by making it rectangular; and further, by constructing a lion pedestal south of the main stupa, the entire area was enclosed. Simultaneously, the Udayagiri I area came up during this period. A *mandala* stupa came up on a high platform. Along with this stupa containing four Buddhas flanked by two Bodhisattvas each, another monastery, called Madhavapura monastery, came up during the third phase of the construction activity. Unlike, the stupa (STR60) which saw a lot of structural activities throughout history, this stupa seems to have restricted access to the public as the area did have very limited evidence of other structural and votive stupas. The naming of new viharas within a single sacred complex is quite unique. What prompted the religious monastics of Udayagiri to distinguish Udayagiri I from the earlier Udayagiri II area? In my view, this new area was moulded on the basis of a new ideology of *carya* and *yoga tantra*, based on the *Mahavairocana Sutra* and *Sarvathagatatattvasamgraha*. The evidence of Garbhadhatu mandala alignment of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the high platform stupa; Vairocana image as a

universal emperor with kirita mukuta near the Monastery I *Gandhakuti* door frame, *Vairocana mandala* sculpture, all attest to the new ideologies of Udayagiri.

The relative absence of structural and votive stupas in and around this *mandala stupa*, in sharp contrast to the STR 60 stupa, does not mean that the newly delineated area experimented with new religious ideologies of the mandalas, while the Udayagiri II continued with older forms of stupa and image worship. On the other hand, archaeological evidence attests to two major developments in Udayagiri II area suggesting organic linkages with the Udayagiri I area. One is the evidence of *dharaṇis–Bodhigarbhalamkaralaksa, Pratityasamutpada*-etc, as a deposit–dhatu–within the stupa. This practice, according to the Odisha State Museum *dharaṇi* inscription and other Buddhist texts, supposedly bestowed on the donor the merit of consecrating one lakh stupas. In addition to this new practice, which is quite evident from numerous stupas, there was another important development. Towards the northwest of the Monastery II (*simhaprasta Mahavihara*), a shrine chamber (*adhithana*) came up. No image has been found on the pedestal, but the pedestal indicates the installation/consecration of a deity. This again attests to the possible alignment of sculptural *mandalas*. Moreover, the *mandala* stupa also came up in the extreme southwest corner of the Udayagiri stupa area with *Bhrikuti, Cunda* with their family Buddha. The emergence of stupa *mandala* of female divinities also coincided with the introduction of *anuttara yoga tantra* such as the *Guhyasamaja tantra* where Aksobhya became the central deity of the *mandala*, in contrast to the *carya* and Yoga tantra where Mahavairocana is the central deity of the *mandala*.

Noemie Verdon's paper 'Gandhara and Kapisi between the 7th and 11th century CE' provided fresh insights into the politico-religious situation in the specified region within the time period under study. The area comprises of Sistan, Zabulistan and Kabulistan, and she noted that in Bactria in the 8th–9th century CE, Buddhism

and other cults were present. The stereotype of the coming of Islam leading to the end of other religious beliefs and practices is negated through her in-depth study of the area. Prior to the 1000 CE, there was not much Islamic influence in the Gandhara and Swat valley, and the land was practically unknown to the Muslims prior to this period. The situation was far from being monolithic, and rather different traditions interacted. The process of Islamisation was not a sudden event, but a gradual process.

Verdon thus sees the term ‘decline’ with respect to Buddhism in the region as problematic, and proposes that it was not an overarching phenomenon. Rather it varied from region to region, and thus regionalism is important to take into consideration while discussing Buddhism. This is evident in the fact that data for the presence of Hinduism from the 7th century CE appear from Kabulistan and the Swat valley, which was under the Turkish Shahi who had Buddhist leanings. One must be cautious in analysing sectarian affiliations through concepts of compartmentalisation as rulers were not promoters of one or a single unique religion. In these peripheral regions, it was the co-existence of different religions that was the norm.

Gendered Studies of Buddhism

Another theme addressed in the conference was archaeological, epigraphical and literary data pertaining to gender studies in Buddhism. Garima Kaushik’s paper ‘Bridging the Gap: A Gendered Survey of Buddhist Sites in India and Sri Lanka’ presents a comparative analysis of inscriptional and archaeological data to identify structural remains associated with *bhikshuni sanghas* in Sri Lanka. One type of structure is the three room structure as seen at Sanchi where Ashoka’s queen is said to have become a *bhikshuni*. Evidence of royal women becoming monastics

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is also found at Ratnagiri where a copper plate inscription mentions that Rani Karpuracari spent her later years as a renunciant at the site. The only hard archaeological evidence though for the presence of a *bhikshuni vihara* is from the site of Vadnagar in Gujarat, where inscription and archaeology clearly identify a structure as the *bhikshuni vihara*.

In Sri Lanka, possible *bhikshuni vihara* structures are located in and around the site of Anuradhapura. Literary data on the presence of *bhikshunis* in Sri Lanka are found in the *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* which mention Theri Sanghamitra, daughter of Ashoka who travelled to Sri Lanka with the Bodhi tree. Inscriptional evidence from the two regions pertaining to women donors reveals similarities and differences as well. In these inscriptions, women donors constitute their identity within the four-fold familial status based on their relation to male members such as wife, mother and daughter. In some instances, there are deviations from the norm, where women constitute identity on the basis of the place of origin, or only personal name, devoid of reference to any male members. The difference lies in the fact that while at most Buddhist sites in India, the number of male and female donors are almost equal, in Sri Lanka it is mostly dominated by males, and women do not occupy much epigraphical space. In India as well as Sri Lanka, the most preferred association is 'wife of', but in both regions the second most preferred category is different—in India it is 'mother of' and in Sri Lanka it is 'daughter of'. Furthermore, there is a preference given by *bhikshuni* and *upasikas* to certain sites for donations in India, but in Sri Lanka, it is noticed that even

amongst the few women donors, almost 90 per cent are lay and royal women, even though references to donations made by peasant women are found in folktales of the region.

While making these donations, women were executing property rights by buying, selling and leasing land from their own property, and were also exercising this right on behalf of the entire family. With regard to access to wealth by monastics which enabled them to be donors, the system known as *vasak* becomes significant wherein monasteries receive grants of which the monastics are entitled to a share of the endowment. The senior monk of the monastery was entitled to a greater share or more than one *vasak*. The monastic then also had the right to sell this extra *vasak* that was not required and was a source of income that could then be used to make further grants. In addition, at monastic sites, spiritual merit could be brought through a stipulated sum of money, and this was also an additional income for the monastery, further adding to its earnings and incomes. Instances where the sum of money could be given would have been for certain ceremonies, and the entitlement to hear the dharma on certain occasions. The landed property donated to monasteries was at times exempt for donation.

Amongst the various structural remains encountered in Sri Lanka at monastic sites, three stand out as representing structures related to women monastics or renunciants: namely the stupa with the *ayaka* projection or *vahalkada*, the *vatadaga* and *bhikshuni viharas*. The *upasika* vihara was for lay women who were not officially ordained, but were renunciants such as the *Dasasilamatas* who followed the ten precepts. Certain circular structures on the basis of a comparative analysis with those in India help identify these as belonging to women. Also included are the three-room structures found at major monastic sites of Anuradhapura.

In the case of the *vahalkadas*, that is stupa with *ayaka* projections, two inscriptions on stone slabs have been found associated with such a structure at the Ruwan valley *dagoba* which mentions a donation of 44 bricks used in the construction of the *vahalkada* by a king, along with *upasika* Chitta who may have been the queen. This is the only evidence of a male donor associated with an *ayaka* donation. Another inscription is from Abhayagiri *dagoba* where the *vahalkada* holds relics of Metavi. The inscriptions found are carved on reliquaries enshrined below the *vahalkadas*. The assumption of these being *bodhigaras* or Bodhi tree shrines, or *asangaras* cannot be supported on the basis of locational analysis of these within the monastic site, with reference to other structures. These were not *bodhigaras* as these have no drains, and the Nilikagama excavated *bodhigaras* have a square ground plan and not a circular one.

The circular structures found in the *Pabbataviharas* may be divided into three categories on the basis of location: southeast, southwest or northwest. The *Pulukumavi* structure in the *Pabbatavihara* is categorised as Type 3 as it is circular, located in the southeast and faces the image house. The negation of these being *asangaras* is based on the fact that many of the circular structures have revealed only a rectangular slab and no images were found. The Type 2 are located facing the *uposthagaras* which was the common meeting ground of the laity and the monastics, and thus located in close proximity to lay monastic interface.

In the Indian context, a similar structure was noticed at Nagarjunakonda with a rectangular stone slab inside, carrying an inscription stating it to be a *Chayakhamba* raised in memory of Vamabhata, mother of Rudrapurusadutta and daughter of a Mahaksatrapa. Similar inscribed slabs were also found from the site of Sannati and other sites in south India. As of date, no such inscription has been identified in the context of Sri Lanka, but the evidence from India amply

proves that these structures were not *asangaras* or pedestal for images, but rather memorials dedicated to lay women. The *vatadaga* is also circular with a small mound or stupa within it, and has a low parapet around it and two concentric rings of stone pillars.

There was clear association of circular stone structures, and queens and inscriptions refer to kings and queens who settled at monastic sites such as Jetavana Mahavihara. The texts prescribe that *bhikshuni viharas* were to be situated near towns, villages and cities, but in the case of Anuradhapura this is not the case as the *bhikshuni vihara* was located in the forest zone. It is also noted that in India many of the *bhikshuni viharas* are located in the eastern direction within the monastic area, and in Sri Lanka about 70 per cent of these circular structures are also in the same direction. This is not to say that every *Pabbatavihara* was a nunnery, but rather forest monasteries were convents that accommodated *bhikshunis* as well. Thus, there seemed to have been *bhikshuni vihara* clusters in Anuradhapura and the Ruhuna centres, which were the centres of economic and administrative control. In a similar note, the biggest cluster in India is noticed at Sanchi in central India which was also strategically located at the junction of two major trade routes. The presence of *bhikshuni viharas* is further attested by the fact that most of these structures in Sri Lanka date to a period when *bhiksuni sangha* was flourishing, and consequently as the *bhikshuni sangha* witnessed a decline, so do these circular stone structures which start disappearing from the Buddhist landscape of Sri Lanka.

Henry Albery's paper entitled 'Women, Politics and Buddhist Soteriology in the Indic North and Northwest' assessed the depictions of women in textual traditions and inscriptions in the above-mentioned region in the period from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE. The Buddhist literature is replete with manifold

stereotypes regarding women and gender discourse. It is the context in which and the degree to which stereotypes functioned as a productive force, or as the product of a given context that needs to be assessed. Due to an over reliance on textual sources, the context of the stereotype is missing. To study any social group, it is insufficient to consider gender apart from the constellation of numerous other factors which constitute a social body or individual, and these include class, age, economic status, activities and access to wealth and space. The paper carried out a sociological analysis with regard to epigraphical and textual sources pertaining to the Indic northwest at the turn of the Common Era. Women formed a wealthy and politically well-connected group through their relations with the *Aparacharajas* and had soteriological agency. The soteriological status is a category itself, and access to status and the opportunity to perform that status in a ritual context had an impact on the shaping of gender roles.

Analysis of a total of 263 inscriptions which are predominantly in Kharosthi script and Gandhari Prakrit language, and date from the 2nd century BCE to the 3rd century CE show three major components: date with the month and day and in the regnal era, they specify objects of donation which range from lamps, images, Buddhist relics, and mention of participating secondary donors and beneficiaries. They also mention aspirations to affect certain existential benefits through donations such as welfare, happiness of various sets of beneficiaries, and rare soteriological purposes as well. The primary and secondary donors form the core focus of the analyses. A total of 449 individuals are mentioned in the 263 inscriptions, and women constitute about 14 per cent of the total. Within this, a monopoly is noticed of women from a specific social class that had access to wealth as these material donations required some amount of expenses. In this corpus of inscriptions, only 35 belong to monastics, of which only two mention nuns or *bhikshuni vihara*. A majority of the monastic donors were monks, and

carried specific titles reflecting their intellectual, pedagogic, administrative or residential status within the hierarchy of the monastic institution. These include *sramana*, *bhikṣhu*, *dharmakathika* or preacher of the dharma, *Tripitika*, stupa *navakarmika* or *Upadhyaya* denoting a quasi-pedagogic residential title.

From the category of non-monastic donees, most bear individual titles indicative of their social roles: familial, occupational and institutional, and at times, toponym or their place of origin. Most of the men and women mentioned bear titles. Women express themselves with a given social role—familial relation, male counterpart—which is a patrilineal identity. Occupational titles for women are noticed in two instances where they are mentioned as *Antapurika* or women of the inner court.

There is a very low incidence of Buddhist institutional titles such as *upasaka*, *viharasvamin*, but when they are encountered, these titles precede other titles. It appears that the Buddhist identity was given preference due to the role in ritual context in constructing and maximising group identity. The women donors were related to the *Aparacharajas* in the 1st century BCE/CE. The donations were made in the formative years of the establishment of the Buddhist institution, and this group is prolific and most of their dedications concern relics and stupas established. Out of 21 such donations, 10 of these are by women and this accounts for about 30 per cent of all dedications by women in the region. Thus, the number of female dedications is relatively high. These dedications record the establishment of relics and stupas, and the purpose of the donation was for puja, and to honour a set of beneficiaries ranging from *Pratyekabuddhas*, *Arhants*, *Brahma* and family members. The titles of the women suggest that the women were politically connected. There is only one instance of a non-political woman who is mentioned as the wife of a goldsmith and she dedicates a Buddha statue.

The soteriological role of women is further attested by the find of a pot dedicated by Vasavadatta, along with four other pots, from the site of Hadda. One of the pots had several Kharosthi manuscripts and included 52 Avadana type texts, of which 10 per cent specifically concern women, and three of the five pots found were donated by women. Thus, the presence of women in the narratives and them being donees of the pots is indicative of their status as important, and prominent lay supporters that played a prominent public role in Gandhara, and they had the capacity to be faithful devotees.

The *Avadana* texts were composed to articulate normative modes of behaviour, stereotypes and identity in a propagandist manner. They were composed according to a sociologically and politically motivated design whereby male and female figures are presented as an idealised merchant, ruler, etc. They are presented as engaging with the Buddhist institution in a manner suited by their individual social circumstances. Thus, specific works were composed for specific social groups. The internal contradictions within the *Avadana* literature is seen in the way these groups are presented, depending on the specific audience to which these were directed. It is the later *Avadana* literature that reveals much more regarding gendered stereotypes, such as in the case of the women in the palace, as seen in Gandhari and Chinese sources. These indicate that women could derive treatment beyond the established social norm through soteriological agency, as seen in the story of the *Asokavadana*, which highlights spatial connectivity and undermining of spatial separation. Further an inscription regarding a relic established by women of court mentions two-three monastic figures as well, and this shows direct engagement of women of the court with monastic figures. The *Asokavadana* deals with the soteriological aspect, and that in the soteriological agency, there were concrete shifts in the social circumstance of women.

The association between women related to Aparacharajas and soteriological agency is confirmed by two inscriptions in which two soteriological aspirations are mentioned, i.e. *Nirvana* and *Parinirvana*. These soteriological aspirations are rare occurrences in inscriptions, and out of the 13 instances, four are related to women of which two are related to *Aparacharajas*. One of these is the reliquary inscription of *Ariarava*, and her establishment of relics with stupa, has connections with political context. This inscription is important as here her aspirations are written in first person as she mentions 'I establish'. Thus, the perception of future attainment and articulation of that aspiration in a public context enabled her to perform the merits of her past and future states.

It is evident that donative practices need to be understood in a cosmological sense as a means for people to perform their merit, and to perform their existential status, and there is a need to look for contextual instances of soteriological practice. In the case of the Indic northwest, women had soteriological agency and had gained access to wealth and space to make donations and served an instrumental role in the formation of political and Buddhist institutional power.

Iconographical Analysis

Papers relating to the theme of iconography highlight the necessity to study images within their specific context, instead of formulating generalisations, as well as looking to other literary sources, besides those in India to explain iconographical developments. Elora Tribedy's paper entitled 'An Assessment of Cult of Tara within the Religious Dynamics of Early Medieval Period and Eastern India' focused on the issues of assimilation, existence and persistence of Tara from the Mahayana period to the present day, and negates the widely held view of associating a site with the cult of Tara based on the find spot of Tara images. She

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out by colonial art historians and Buddhist specialists focussed primarily on the iconography and sculptures, and this led to the creation of an abstract identity of

is popularly known as the goddess of protection, and representations are found at sites across the western Deccan, the Swat valley, Lumbini, Amaravati and Gujarat as well as other parts of the subcontinent.

While in the early phase, there is no consolidation of the goddess, images from Bihar, parts of undivided Bengal and Orissa datable to the 6th/7th century CE to the 12th/13th century CE are the possible constituents of a religious system of Tara in the early medieval period. In the context of southern Bihar and coastal Orissa in eastern India, there are many temples dedicated to this goddess, and a number of Sakta/Tara piṭhas associated with her.

The stereotype challenged is one set out by scholars and researchers studying Himalayan Buddhism and different living traditions of Buddhism, of identifying and correlating recently discovered Tara sculptures with living Buddhist traditions. The Tara images of early medieval times have to be studied and analysed in their particular context and not in relation to the Himalayan traditions. Researches carried

the goddess, devoid of its actual scenario or the importance of a particular Tara image in a given monastery or religious institution. The continuity of worship of Tara images is absent from these works.

In its initial phase, Tara images are found sculpted in the caves of western Deccan such as Karle, Nasik, Ajanta, Aurangabad and Kanheri, but their identification as either the prototypes of later Tara images, or as female manifestations of Karuna and Pragma are still debatable. The location of these images within the context of the cave complex questions the widely held view of the relation between the presence of the Tara image, and the existence of a Tara cult at the site. At sites such as Karle, the image is not found near the main *Caitya* and rather on one of the back walls, indicating a later inclusion. Since Tara is found carved next to Padmapani datable to the 7th century CE, it is evident that it was not a part of the major sculptural programme at Karle. A similar intrusion is noticed at Ellora where Tara is seen accompanying Padmapani or Rakta Avalokitesvara and Bhrikuti, and in caves datable to the 8th century CE, she does not have an independent shrine dedicated to her. Over time, with an increase in her importance, she comes to occupy a separate shrine as seen at cave 11 at the site. In the caves of the western Deccan, the position of the goddess is within a strict hierarchical position.

In the eastern part of India, primarily Orissa, 57 images have been recorded and these were made for different and varied purposes which included not only worship, but also esoteric purposes, as well as part of a larger architectural scheme or layout. It is important to address themes such as the meaning and function of an image as well as its context. Until now mostly, the find spot of a Tara image has been equated to the site being a centre of Tara worship, and this equation is not always valid as images have constantly been subject to change, both long term and short term, re-contextualisation and transformations.

There were schematic changes beginning from the 9th century CE with the addition of different types of visual symbols, and Vajra Tara can be seen as a culmination of the iconography of this goddess from the monastic complex. The maximum number of Tara images are datable to the 10th–11th century CE, and consequently from the 12th century CE, there is a decline in the number of images encountered. There are very few of the Vajra Tara images, and most of those found are simpler representations of the goddess seated in *varadamudra* and with a lotus. Thus, as compared to monastic centres, it is the simpler form of the deity that was the preferred representation, and this also questions the normally held belief of the monastic control in the production of Tara images. Even though there are 85 locations from where images have been reported, as of now many have been lost and the generalised view of associating a Buddhist site with a find spot of Tara images is invalid. The goddess can be associated not only with monastic settings, but with individual Buddhist establishments, hill top Buddhist or religious establishments, early medieval settlements and temples and also many a times as loose sculptures which have been incorporated into later temples and shrines. Thus, Tara images were made for varied purpose. There was an increase in the number of sites with Tara images in the 9th–10th century CE, and these were primarily non-monastic and unexcavated mounds, and there seems to have been a horizontal and schematic spread in the cult of Tara in the period from the 9th to 11th centuries CE. Rather than the monastery it was its surrounding area where people were actively involved in the production of Tara images. For instance, at the sites of Mahuri and Baragarh located at a distance of 10 to 15 kilometres from Nalanda, it seems probable that Tara was not worshipped on a large scale around Nalanda.

Similarly, sites in the lower Vaitarani river from where rich yields of Buddhist remains are encountered, the find spot of Tara images is very low. In the area

with the richest cluster of Buddhist sites, such as the Jajpur area where sites of Udayagiri, Lalitagiri and Ratnagiri were excavated, even though a number of Tara images have been recorded, these are not located in the monasteries and are mostly loose sculptures. It thus becomes important to study the context of these images with the people and the settlement, rather than turn to monastic centres for explaining their presence in the religious landscape of the region.

There is a difference in the iconographic scheme of Tara images found within monastic and non-monastic contexts. For instance, the *Astamahabhaya* Tara from Ratnagiri, and those from the non-monastic site of Balia carry different iconographic details. The miniature images from Nalanda are inscribed with the *Pratityasamutpada gatha*, and another small image hails from Jajpur with *dharani*, and these may have been either votive or perhaps portable images used for personal worship which is part of the Tibetan Himalayan Buddhism. Two sealings from Ratnagiri have legends of Tarasadhana. The stereotypical association of traders and merchants with the worship of Tara is also no longer acceptable, as a number of inscriptions mention different occupational and social groups associated with worship and production of Tara images such as scribes and oil merchants.

The context of Tara images have also undergone changes as seen at the site of Achyutarajapur, where after the decline of institutional Buddhism, the stone and metal images were shifted to nearby shrines. This relocation and reconfiguration involved the people as agencies who selectively installed Tara images in new shrines, and in a way ensured the continuity of the worship of the goddess. The Tara image of the 8th century CE from Kasba in Bihar was enshrined, and the site became an important Tara Saktipitha. It would be simplistic to associate Tara with the Sakta Tantra tradition, since the goddess can be associated more with Mahayana practices.

Juhyung Rhi's paper 'Indian Buddhist Art and the East Asian Looking Glass' highlights the necessity of considering texts from Japan while studying iconographical developments and features of Buddhist images. The scholarship on Buddhist Art that spans over a century has been studied with certain perceived preconceptions. A great amount has been studied in the context of the East Asian side where a greater amount of evidence is available in textual traditions which have been preserved. Knowledge of East Asian sources often played an important role manifestly or implicitly in exploring and elucidating on Indian Buddhist art. This knowledge of the situation in East Asia was frequently projected to that of earlier India as its precedent or parallel.

This stereotype was questioned, and new data brought forth regarding the study of the image of Amitabha Buddha. From the late 19th century, Buddhism as a living religion has been an obsolete idea, except in the marginal areas. The Buddhist images or monuments are hardly recognised as such, or their proper significance highlighted. The scholarly exploration of Indian Buddhist art was constructed on the basis of the knowledge of traditions of south India where Buddhism was very much active. The first book on Indian Buddhist art *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien* by Albert Grunwedel was published in 1893, and the other important work was *Das Buddha Pantheon von Nippon* which was translated by Johann Joseph Hoffman in 1850s, and was part of a series titled *Nippon* by Heinrich Philipp von Siebold. *Das Buddha Pantheon von Nippon* was a German translation of a Japanese work on the pictorial vocabulary of Buddhist images, namely *Butsuzozüi*, first published in 1690. This became a popular compendium and was printed multiple times. It describes the Buddhist deities in diverse categories, and contains more than 600 illustrations along with brief notes. The Japanese work was literally translated, and also expanded with additional remarks for each entry by citing diverse sources in Japanese, Chinese and European languages. This was the first work of its kind to

be published in a European language, and Hoffmann covered most of the deities, except for those of the eminent monks. The work was also one of the important sources for Grunwedel's initiation with Buddhist iconography. Both *Butsuzozüi* and *Das Buddha Pantheon von Nippon* were texts dealing with iconographic taxonomy, and these significantly affected the shaping of scholarship in the later period which tended to deal with iconographical classification and identification. On the Indian side, B. Bhattacharya's book *Indian Buddhist Iconography* published in 1924, which was based on the *Sadhananmala* gave further impetus to such Buddhist studies. Even though this text is important to a study of Buddhist iconography, yet it reflects the latest phase of Indian Buddhist Art.

Grunwedel's book was translated into Japanese in 1906, and exerted influence on Japanese scholarship which at that time was eager to assimilate modern scholarship from outside Japan. Bhattacharya's book also became quickly known in Japan. Thus, iconographical taxonomy was not unfamiliar in Japan as seen in the prominence of *Butsuzozüi* which became a major source of European authors on Buddhist iconography.

The earliest scholarly work on Buddhist images in modern Japan was titled *Study of Buddhist Images* by Ono Gemmyo which more or less followed the same iconographical format as seen in the *Butsuzozüi*, beginning with the Buddha then the Bodhisattvas, Vidhyarajas and then Deva. It is evident that the approach adopted by *Butsuzozüi* in dealing with iconographic taxonomy left a lasting impression on many popular compendiums of Buddhist art published in Japan. In the Indian context as well, the text was hailed as essential for the study of Buddhist art, as evident in a recent publication of the text in English in 2010. It was a useful compendium reflecting the popular ideas in a systematic hierarchical order.

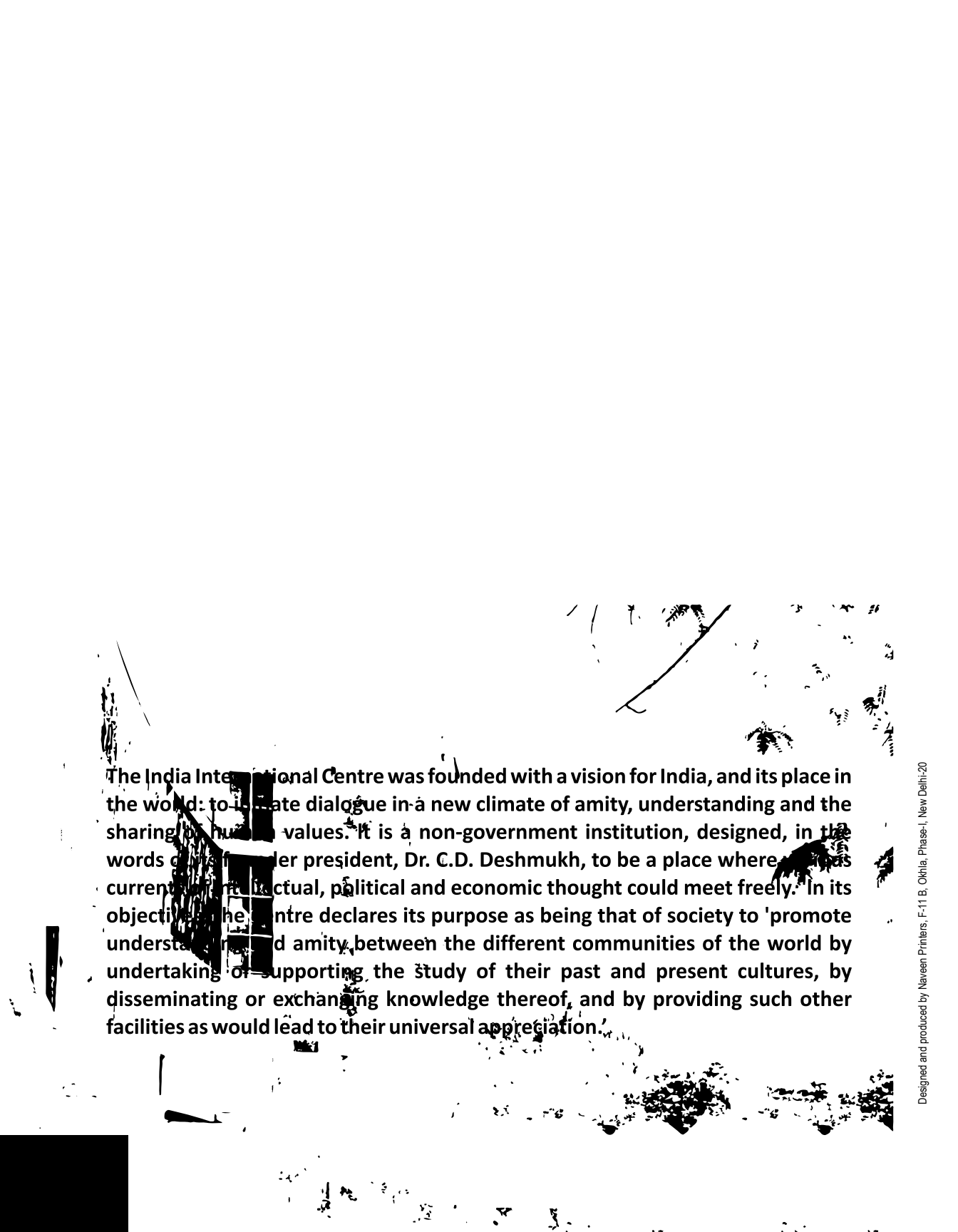
As for the Amitabha cult, it is undoubtedly the most popular in Japan, Korea and China. Amitabha was worshipped as a saviour and called upon for salvation, regardless of birth or sectarian affiliation. He occupies a significant and important position in Buddhist sculptures of east Asia, and one of the principal sutras of Amitabha has been translated as many as 12 times in Chinese Buddhism. While Grunwedel also dealt with Amitabha, he was unable to present a clear picture of the iconography of the deity. Many later scholars examined the possible presence of Amitabha in Indian Buddhist art, and tangible evidence for the deity are from certain sites such as Sanchi where Lokanatha Amitabha is seen inscribed on a pedestal. In 1977, an image pedestal from Govindnagar, Mathura, dating to 153 CE records the installation of an image of Amitabha, and another image recovered in 1982 has a small Gandharan inscription recording the name of Amitabha and Avalokitesvara. Grunwedel was the first to suggest the identification of a particular image from Gandhara as Amitabha Buddha, and this could have been possible if he was aware of some pictorial representation of the deity, either from China or Japan. Excavations carried out by Spooner unearthed a number of fragments which he labelled as 'Complex Steles'. It is Japanese scholars who have more vigorously tried to identify Amitabha in Indian Buddhist images and 'The Pure Land Schools/Sect' are actively involved in it. Chinese depictions of Amitabha in Sukhavati show affinity with the Gandharan examples, and it is hard to establish an Indian prototype of the Chinese depiction. The early depictions of Amitabha upto the late 6th century CE are more relevant for comparison with Gandharan examples, even though both are very different in form. The early depictions are indistinguishable and from the end of the 6th century CE and early 7th century CE, one notices Chinese Buddhist development of Amitabha in Sukhavati in a distinct form. The transmission, if any from Gandhara to China, may have related only to the form. Only with the development of esoteric Buddhist, one can

discern meticulous codification of iconography of individual deities, goddesses and their placement in the mandalas.

The conference thus addressed varied stereotypes that have existed in different fields of the study of Indian Buddhism, and highlighted the need to question these and propose new frameworks. The necessity of incorporating the vast pool of new data, which is continually growing and expanding, and re-looking and reanalysing the earlier set of data available through different perspectives is vital to unfold the wide-ranging, multifarious and variegated themes of Buddhist studies.

About the Author

Susan Verma Mishra is a Senior Fellow, Dr. Desai Endowment Fund, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai and joint author of *The Archaeology of Sacred Spaces: The Temple in Western India (2nd century BCE to 8th century CE)*, Routledge, London-New York, 2017.



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