

**WORLDLY BUSINESS OF THE ‘OTHER-WORLDLY’ MONASTICS:
A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF STUDIES
IN SOCIETAL LINKAGES OF INDIAN MONASTIC BUDDHISM**

*Birendra Nath Prasad**

In a significant section of Indian Historiography, in which Buddhism is regarded as an individualistic soteriology of World Renouncers, a stultifying quagmire surfaces quite frequently: “*What Buddhism actually did in Indian History?*” Thus N. N. Bhattacharya, one of the acknowledged authorities on Indian Religions, laments that “even after decades of research, there is no serious study of what Buddhism actually did in Indian History. To what extent could it transform the caste-based social order, patriarchal structure, and what was its relationship with the state?”¹ In the same book, it has been asked, rather contemptuously: “Did it (Buddhism) exist outside the monastery.”² His judgment is quite unequivocal that it was just one of the philosophical systems of India,³ hence it could have hardly done anything beyond the monastic walls. Within the monastery too, it was just an individualistic soteriology, a *moksha sastra*.⁴

If he reflects one extreme of perceptions of Buddhism and the role of the *Sangha* within that, and it must be added that they have been built upon the researches of the previous century; another extreme is provided by the ideologues of *Navayana* (neo-Buddhism in India). In this schema of things, Buddhist monasteries promote ‘Capitalism’ and are the centers for organizing resistance and rebellion against political tyrannies whereas the Brahmanas and their temples stand for active collaboration with the ruling powers for the oppression of the downtrodden.⁵ Should we try to explore any middle way between these two extreme positions? It may be noted that genesis of both extremes lies in the researches on the natures and functions of Buddhist Monachism. Writing in early 1840s, Koppen, a close friend of Karl Marx, has declared the Buddha to be the greatest revolutionary, the greatest liberator of the oppressed mankind has produced so far, and the greatest political innovator of his age⁶ and he was severely denounced by his contemporary scholars who accused him of unnecessarily temporalising an ‘other-worldly,’ ‘individualistic soteriology’ par excellence. The latter view, due to a variety of factors, seems to have prevailed in the studies in Indian Monastic Buddhism, but that in no way means that it is the correct view or that it is the only correct view.

Any attempt of surveying the ‘functional dimensions of Indian Monastic Buddhism in the last one hundred years’ may not be an easy task, given the fact that almost any book on Early Indian History is likely to contain some paragraphs on Buddhism and at least some lines on Buddhist monasteries. This enormity notwithstanding, there are actually

*Lecturer, Department of History, Assam University, Silchar (A Central University) Assam, India. Invited Research Fellow at the *Centre for Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist Art Studies*, Wuhan University, China. Email: birendra176@yahoo.com; bp2628@yahoo.com

¹ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Buddhism in the History of Indian Ideas*, Delhi, 1993, p.18.

² Ibid, p.188.

³ Ibid, p.19.

⁴ Ibid, p.88.

⁵ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, Delhi, 2003, p.173.

⁶ N.N. Bhattacharya, *op.cit*, p.8.

very few studies in the functional dimensions of the same: here at least N.N. Bhattacharya appears to be alarmingly true. Though there is no dearth of studies on art and architecture of Buddhist monasteries, it is the high time that studies on Buddhist Monasticism in India must move beyond purely Art Historical domain and they should be studied with reference to wider societal processes, in their interactions with other societal institutions. The present essay, based upon the survey of existing literature, would attempt to ask certain fundamental questions: *what did Buddhist monasteries actually do in Indian Socio-economic history in general, and in the institutional evolution of Indian Buddhism in particular?* Can we think of Indian Buddhism without monks and monasteries? In the case of Tantric Buddhism of Kathamandu Valley at least, this has in deed propounded to be the case.⁷ But can this be generalized for India; even when we concede that the Buddha's first two disciples were traders from Kalinga, the collective body of the monks, the Sangha was later addenda;⁸ and even when contemporary 'Protestant Buddhism' is gradually rendering Monachism less central to Buddhism than what it has earlier been in many Theravada countries?⁹ The contemporary Navayana movement in India treats monasticism as unnecessary, and expects its monks not to be a 'perfected being' but as a kind of social activist.¹⁰ To what extent does it reflect the earlier theory and praxis, if we concede to the fact that no vision just descends from the blue; in some way it is a continuation of earlier processes?

The skepticism notwithstanding, the core thesis of the present Survey would generally follow the line of argument of most of the earlier scholars and would treat the Sangha as the institutional nucleus of Buddhism, the very cradle of the faith, the very prism through which much of the history of Buddhism in India is reflected, but Sangha not as an ideal retreat from the world to pursue *nirvanic* goals only, but in a dynamic interaction with other Societal Institutions, acting and reacting with them, influencing them and getting influenced by them in turn. The present essay does not purport to be an all-inclusive, exhaustive and chronological survey of available literature on Indian Monastic Buddhism. It would rather endeavor to see how its institutional evolution has been tracked in the

⁷ M.R.Allen, 'Buddhism without Monks: The Vajrayana Religion of the Newars of the Kathamandu Valley,' *South Asia*, 1973, vol.2, pp.1-14.

⁸ One of the earliest scholars treating the Sangha as (perhaps undesirable) addenda to 'original lay Buddhism' was C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Sakya or Buddhist Origins*, London, 1931. The role of the laity in shaping the trajectories of evolution of the Sangha, particularly lay demands leading to the deliberation of injunctions of the Vinaya has been sharply pointed out by B.G. Gokhale in 'The Samgha and the Laity', in his *New Light on Early Buddhism*, Bombay, 1994, pp.13-24. Recently, the notion of inherent ritual 'superiority' of monks over laity has been questioned, forcing us to think of a new paradigm for monastery-laity interaction. See Robert Bluck, 'The Path of the Householder: Buddhist lay Disciple in the Pali Canon,' *Buddhist Studies Review*, 19 (1), 2002, pp. 1-18. T. Ling, *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilisation in India and Ceylon*, London, 1973, pp.133-135 has already noted that between the common people and the Sangha, there exist one important relationship, not of reciprocity exactly, but of complementariness. This is the line of argument which would be pursued in my Essay.

⁹ Richard Gombrich (*Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London, 1988, pp.172-197), has noted the development of a new kind of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the Colonial Period and aftermath which is indeed closer to Christian Protestantism. It rejects spiritual hierarchy and emphasizes the direct access of the laity to the Scriptures. However, it has been noted that this Buddhism is confined only to the urban middle class and the intelligentsia (p.197), and Sinhalese peasantry is predominantly inclined towards the monk – dominated traditional Buddhism (p.197).

¹⁰ Gail Omvedt, *op.cit*, p.4. See my forthcoming 'Dilemmas of Revival of Buddhism in India,' *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Varanasi for a review of her approach.

historical ‘constructs’; particularly its evolution as a consequence of its interactions with other societal institutions and its functional roles in the periods of (a) formative phases of Buddhism to the last phases of reign of Ashoka when it spreads out of its mid-Gangetic core; (b) the process by which Buddhism spreads out of the original tracts of *Puruttbima*¹¹ and the role of the Sangha in that process and the mutations it might have undergone in the process; (c) evolution of Mahayana and the changing functional role of the monasteries; (d) early Medieval mutations: retardation, retraction, decline and ‘disappearance’ of the faith from India, and the extent to which alleged changed roles of the monasteries were responsible for this process. The Essay shall end with a retrospective look at the researches in the functional dimensions of Indian Monastic Buddhism in the last one hundred years, and would try to chart out some of the prospects for future researches.

At the very outset, some clarifications are necessary. The present study will treat Buddhism as just one of the Traditions of India, always in close interaction with other Traditions, hence will frequently employ insights from studies in institutions of other religious systems of India. ‘India’ in this essay will basically cover the present geographical areas of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Such a diverse land mass as India consisted of many eco-zones, supporting diverse material cultures and cultures and much of its cultural personality has crystallized as result of the encounters between different ecozones.¹² It has been noted elsewhere by me that cultural communications involving great cultural transformations are communications of continuums and not communications of ruptures or disjunctures.¹³ Due to this it will be difficult for us to visualize Buddhism, with its institutional nucleus in the Sangha as a Mid-Gangetic Great Tradition swooping down over other parts of India and imprinting its *Dhamma* on a credulous *Tabula Rasa*. Rather what Lopez has propounded for the process of spread of Buddhism outside India¹⁴ can be applied to the process of spread of Buddhism within India as well. And any study of this process will have to take in to account the tremendous geographical

¹¹ *Puruttbima* roughly meant the “Eastern Tract” – roughly the area between Rajagir and Kushinagar, the Cradle land of Early Buddhism, and the monks of this tract claimed privileged position within the Order. It was claimed in the Vaisali council that “it is in the *Puruttbima* that the Buddhas are born; therefore monks of this are the true representative of the Dhamma.” See S. Dutta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India: Their History and their Contribution to the Indian Culture*, London, 1962, pp.102-103.

¹² G.D. Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India*, Delhi, 1993. p.VII in Preface. Also see; idem, ‘The *Vana* and the *Ksbetra*. The Tribal Background of some famous cults’ in G.C. Tripathy, H. Kulke (ed.), *Religion and Society in Eastern India*, Delhi, 1994, pp.117-164; B.D.Chatopadhyaya, ‘*Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India*’, Calcutta, 1990, Introduction; idem, ‘Reappearance of the Goddess or Brahmanical Mode of Appropriation: Some Early Epigraphical Data Bearing on Goddess Cult’ in *Studying Early India*, Delhi, 2002, p.186.

¹³ Birendra Nath Prasad, ‘Cultural Communications in Early Medieval India: Some Preliminary Observations,’ in *Prajna Bharati*, Journal of K.P.Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, Forthcoming.

¹⁴ Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, New Jersey, 1995. The Volume begins with a fundamental question; whether one can speak of “The Buddhist Tradition’ or ‘Buddhism’ or whether those terms are better rendered in plural; despite surprising parallels among the practices of Buddhist cultures across time and topography (p.3). He then proceeds to propound his core argument: Buddhism less as the inevitable unfolding of a distinct and self identical entity, and more as a dynamic process of borrowing, conflict and interaction between and within traditions that have been identified as Buddhist” (p.3). This process of spread, he has rightly cautioned, should be thought as ‘not so much of a disembodied Dharma descending on another culture from above, but rather of a more material movement of monks, texts, relics and icons – along trade routes and across deserts, mountains and seas” (p.8).

variations within India. Long ago, Arthur Geddes has visualized much of the unfolding of Indian History as a result of continuous interactions between its core 'grain land', viz. the Upper and Middle Gangetic Valley and its 'grass lands' and 'forest lands'; with the latter two in a continuous flux as a result of interactions with the material culture and cultures of the 'grainlands'.¹⁵ The thing to be stressed is that Buddhism appears to be the first Institutional Religion of the 'grain lands' to penetrate the 'grasslands' and 'forestlands' in the Indian Peninsula, Northwestern regions and the swampy jungles of Eastern India. How does the role of the Sangha mutate across this variegated space? How did it relate to the existing economic and cultic system as it moved out of its Middle Gangetic Core? Did it offer any economic incentive to induce this integration? In a nutshell we need to see the roles of the Sangha beyond the monastic walls, and beyond the norms of the *Vinaya*. The present Essay is a humble attempt in that direction.

Much of the stereotypes we encounter in the perceptions of the nature, functions and evolution of Indian Monastic Buddhism have their genesis in the way most of the early Buddhologists of Europe, the representatives of Post Industrial Revolution European mind, imbued with a "Protestant Ethics" and under the heavy intellectual influence of Hegel and Gibbon, have perceived the genesis and decline of Indian Buddhism.¹⁶ What they encountered in India was a tradition dead and spent by then, but before their Indian encounter, they have already seen its institutionalized and living presence in Sri Lanka, South East Asia and East Asia. The more researches progressed in Indian Buddhism unraveling its multiple mutations across time and space, the more difficult it became to classify it under the common rubric- "Buddhism."¹⁷ Yet it was important to re-construct a coherent history of what they believed to be 'Buddhism,' with a clear chronological beginning, maturation and decline and some explanation for them. For the 'progressive,' triumphant, Post Industrial Revolution British Intellectualism, Hinduism with its 'decrepit,' 'superstitious' paraphernalia, was the proverbial 'Other,' in which Buddhism was soon perceived to be some thing like a 'Protestant Movement.' Soon a schema crystallized in which "original," "primitive" Buddhism constituted of the teachings of the Buddha only, which, as per their perceptions, advocated an eremitical mendicancy; but soon the eternal 'lethargy' of India found its way among the monks leading to the birth of monasticism. This body of monastics, under further influence of existing Indian Traditions, succumbed to superstitions and started worshiping the Buddha as a god in the Mahayana phase. Subsequent monastic 'corruption' and 'sexual profligacy' in the garb of Tantricism was a total turnaround, stimulating its assimilation within Hinduism.

This approach is discernible in Spence Hardy,¹⁸ though he largely pre-dates British studies on Indian Buddhism. He was a Christian Missionary landing in Sri Lanka in 1825, and began to study the texts of Buddhism, 'a religion I was trying to replace'¹⁹ and its

¹⁵ Arthur Geddes, 'Some Geographical Factors in Indian History,' in *Man and Land in South Asia*, ed. by A.T.A. Learmonth et al., Delhi, 1982, p.94.

¹⁶ For a brilliant analysis of this whole process, see Christian K. Wedmeyer, 'Tropes, Typologies and Turnarounds: A Brief Genealogy of Tantric Buddhism' *History of Religion*, Vol.41, 2001, p.224.

¹⁷ For a brilliant analysis, see Philip Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge, 1988, especially Chapter 1.

¹⁸ R. Spence Hardy, *Eastern Monachism: An Account of the Origin, Laws, Discipline, Sacred Writings, Mysterious Rites, Religious Ceremonies and Present Circumstances of the Order of Mendicants Founded by the Buddha*, London, 1860. Reprint, Delhi: 1989. All references are from the reprint edition.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.VI in Preface.

Institutions. Probably he was the first European to recognize the focality of Monasticism in the institutional Evolution of Buddhism. Notwithstanding his ambitious title ‘Eastern Monachism,’ which suggested that he was referring to entire Buddhist Monastic system, his study was based primarily upon information gathered from the books current among Sri Lankan Monks (Singhalese versions of the Pali Canon, as well as Buddhist Manuals in Elu, an ancient Ceylonese dialect), and many other texts of post 13th century period, as well as legends current among the populace. The information he gathered was quite piecemeal, but the judgment he passes are quite unequivocal. Though he had a doubt that “how much of the system that bears his name was originally propounded by the Buddha himself,”²⁰ and a skeptic admiration of the genius of the Buddha: “*if it is proved that there were other monastic Orders in existence and Gotama was not the institutor of this (monastic) System, it will place in a more striking way his genius in having established an Order that has long survived all contemporary monastic systems, and is a living tradition in many corners of Asia.*”²¹ He has no doubt about the overall historical character and functions of Eastern Monachism: “*the history of monastic institutions, notwithstanding their claims to our respect and veneration, is confession of failures and defects. Their avowed aim has been the reformation of manners, for the accomplishment of which each succession Order begins in poverty but gradually increasing in wealth becomes alike corrupt and a relaxation of discipline was the consequence. Each new institution arose from the degeneracy of its predecessor, and was an additional proof to all who had eyes to see and minds to understand, that the System had inherent impotency and was utterly incapable to produce the consequences that were desired.*”²² This ‘inherent impotency of the System’ surfaces time and again in writings on Buddhist Monachism. Max Weber,²³ writing around hundred years after Hardy, and attributing Indian failure to undergo the transition to Industrial Capitalism to the structural problems in its religions, had at least some words of praise for Hinduism for its ability to build and sustain a Social Whole however decrepit and rotten that might be, and also for Jainism because ‘it was as exclusive, or perhaps more, merchant religion as was Judaism in the Occident’²⁴ he was bitterly hostile to “*asocial Buddhism, a specifically un-political and anti political status religion, more precisely a ‘religious technology’ of wandering and intellectually-schooled mendicant monk.*”²⁵ Thus, “*Early Buddhism of the Pali Canonical Texts was merely a status ethics, more correctly speaking, the technology of contemplative monkhood,*”²⁶ and “*unlike the later Christian ethic, Buddhist monastic ethic simply does not represent rational, ethical endeavor supported by special ‘inner worldly’ ethical conducts as channalised in the social Order, but it takes precisely the opposite direction, principally an asocial course. Therefore no true reconciliation between the worldly and monastic ethics by way of ‘status relativism’ as is the case in the Bhagavata beliefs and Catholicism*

²⁰ Ibid, p.385.

²¹ ibid. p.387.

²² ibid. p.453.

²³ Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and D. Martindale, New York, 1958. Reprint edition Delhi 1992. All references from the reprint edition.

²⁴ Ibid, p.193.

²⁵ Ibid, p.206.

²⁶ Ibid, p.215.

could ever be consummated with a comparable success,”²⁷ as “to change the social Order in this World neither early nor later Buddhism has attempted. The monk was indifferent to the world. Not as in the case of Ancient Christendom because eschatological expectations stamped it so, but the reverse because there was no sort of eschatological expectations.”²⁸ He concedes that the demands of the laity were primarily responsible for the emergence of Mahayana,²⁹ and in Mahayana, ‘the dependency of the monks on the ruling strata was greater and the less world denying they were,’³⁰ but in his ultimate analysis, what the Mahayana and its Monachism performed was that “*first through formalistic prayers and finally through the techniques of the prayer mills and prayer ships hung in the wind of spat-upon idols, it attained a high point of cult –mechanism and joined it to the transformation of the entire world in an immense magical garden.*”³¹ In this kind of worldview, he asserts, hardly any internal evolution towards Industrial Capitalism is possible. It is however entirely a different thing that when he was composing these words on the historical role and functions of Buddhism in general and its Monachism in particular; Japan, a country traditionally under heavy Mahayana influence, was effectively competing with Industrial Capitalism of Europe and America, and Buddhism played no insignificant role in her modernization process³² and “asocial and indifferent to the world” Theravada Monasticism was playing not an insignificant role in the anti-colonial struggles in Sri Lanka and South East Asia, and in the modernization of the only independent country in South East Asia, Thailand, role of the Sangha was fundamentally important.³³ But it was hardly a great deal for the school of thought he represented for which ‘original’ Buddhism is what has been prescribed in the (normative) texts; how does it interact with the context and undergoes mutations is hardly their concern. No wonder their experiences of anthropological studies on ‘lived’ Buddhism are that of shock. Spiro, for example, dismays after his observations on the ‘lived’ Buddhism among the peasantry of Burma: “*how can a religion which is materialistic (the doctrine of no soul), atheistic (no Creator God), nihilistic (all real things are sentient), pessimistic (everything is suffering) and renunciatory (the only solution is to abandon one’s self, family and possessions) be the official religion of so many countries.*”³⁴ Some reasons behind royal patronage to the ‘other-worldly’ Buddhist

²⁷ Ibid, p.218.

²⁸ Ibid, p.227.

²⁹ Ibid, p.234.

³⁰ Ibid, p.244.

³¹ Ibid, p.255.

³² See Winston Davis, ‘Buddhism and the modernization of Japan,’ *History of Religion*, 28, 4, May 1989, pp.304-339.

³³ See Somboon Sukksamran (edited with an Introduction by Trevor O. Ling) *Political Buddhism in South East Asia. The Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand*, London, 1977.

³⁴ M. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, London, 1971, p. xii. This perceived disjuncture between the norms and praxis, has recently been explained on the basis of “Buddhist Functionalism,” where it has been noted that underneath the apparently ‘rigid’ doctrines of Buddhism, a degree of inbuilt functional flexibility is discernible which enables Buddhism present its message across the vast expanse of Asian Cultural Settings. See David Scott, “Buddhist Functionalism: Instrumentality Reaffirmed,” *Asian Philosophy*, 5, 2, 1995, pp.127-149. It may be emphasized here that our present essay is a quest for this ‘functionalism’ vis-à-vis the monastic Buddhism, the generally believed repository of normative Great Tradition of Buddhism.

monks and monasteries, and ‘anarchic doctrine of Buddhism’³⁵ has in deed been proffered by Conze; that it opiates the masses to the tyrannies of the ‘habitual despotic’ rulers of Asia and promotes social status quo with its *Karma* theory.³⁶ Needless to say historical Constructs of this sort are reflections of sustained stereotypes Buddhism has to face.

It has been observed and rightly so, in the context of Theravada Buddhism, but can be rightly generalized for the entire Buddhist spectrum with some necessary modifications, that Buddhism contains a hierarchy of teachings and roles and it co-exists with other systems in a structured hierarchy.³⁷ How did the role of the monasteries mutate across the rungs of this hierarchy across time and space and especially on the what has been rightly called, the ‘open frontier between Buddhism and Animism’?³⁸ It is with these questions that we shall begin our survey.

One of the earliest teachings of the Buddha to the monks, as we are told in the Pali Canon, was that ‘not two of you would go in the same way;’ and that eremitical ideas were very prominent in the earliest phase of Buddhism, as the followers of the Buddha were just among many *Parivrajaka* communities.³⁹ Gradually monasticism developed within Buddhism and becomes its defining feature.⁴⁰ Generally most of the available Writings on the genesis of Buddhist Monachism have stressed the key role of the institution of *Vassa-Vasa* (Rainy season retreat for the monks) in the evolution of later sedentarised monasteries. But the practice of rainy season retreat was not confined to Buddhist monks only. Why did monasticism not develop among other wandering monk communities of that time? Why monasticism got institutionalized only in the case of Buddhism? Nagasena, in his long dialogue with Milinda, stresses that monasticism ensures easy availability of the monks for the laity and thus ensures greater chances for merit making for them, hence the need for sedentary monasticism.⁴¹ In deed ‘demands of the laity inducing institutionalization’ has been stressed by many modern scholars as well.⁴² Is it that simple? If that be the case, how do the interactions of the Sangha with other societal institutions influences the trajectories of its institutional evolution?

Unfortunately, this quest is hardly discernible in most of early writings on Buddhism. No doubt these scholars have done an immense service to Buddhological studies in its formative phases in India by providing general outline of “Three Jewels” of Buddhism, generally beginning with a narration of the life of the Buddha, then his teachings, and in the end, some thing like an appendix on a rather static description of the Sangha, which were generally not much different from almost a verbatim reproduction of the

³⁵ E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Delhi, 1994, p. 73. Originally published in 1951. All references from the reprint edition.

³⁶ Ibid, p.74.

³⁷ David N. Gellner, ‘What Is Anthropology of Buddhism About,’ in *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism, Weberian Themes*, Delhi, 2003, p.51.

³⁸ Trevor Ling, *Buddha, Marx and God*, Second Edition, London, 1979, p.74.

³⁹ S. Dutta, *Early Buddhist Monachism*, Delhi, 1984, p.12. Originally published in 1924, from London. All references from the reprint edition.

⁴⁰ K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, 3rd Edition, Bangalore, 1955, p.42, has long ago noted that the ‘birth of Buddhism was the birth of organized monasticism in the world.’ It has been re-asserted recently by Richard Gombrich, *op.cit*, p. 19) that “in all the Sramana traditions of India, it was only the Buddhist who invented monastic life.” Also see, S. Dutta, *op.cit*, p.110.

⁴¹ S. Dutta, *op.cit*, p. 98.

⁴² S. Dutta, *op.cit*, p. 99; Richard Gombrich, *op.cit*, p. 115; B.G. Gokhale, *op.cit*, pp.13-24.

injunctions of the Pali Vinaya; with hardly any attempt to see its evolution as an institution in dynamic interaction with its larger societal context. There had been some occasional highlighting of the fact that the Buddhist *Sangha* was modeled on the political pattern of the *Ganasangha* states⁴³ and in that sense, it was fully 'democratic,'⁴⁴ but hardly any study of factors inducing this alleged interface.

This tendency is discernible in the writings on Indian Buddhism from a very early phase to the very recent present: in different writings of T.W. Rhys Davids (*Outlines of Buddhism: A Historical Sketch*, 1934; *Manuel of Buddhism*, 1932; *Buddhist India*, 1903). The last one was an interpretation of Ancient Indian socio-economic history from a Buddhist perspective, which incidentally does not contain a single line on the role and place of monasteries in the same); J.H.C. Kern, *Manuel of Indian Buddhism*, 1896; Monier Williams, *Buddhism*, 1889; E.J. Thomas, *Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, 1927). More recently, the same attitude is visible in a compendium edited by P.V. Bapat in 1972 to mark the 2500th anniversary of foundation of Buddhism, *2500 Years of Buddhism*. It was an attempted holistic survey of different aspects of Buddhism in its entire Asian Spectrum, with contributions from acknowledged authorities. But it doesn't have a single chapter on the functional dimensions Monastic Buddhism either in India or in any other country. Even N.N. Bhattacharya in his *History of Researches on Indian Buddhism* (1981) displays the same attitude; and this shows the (lack of) attention monastic Buddhism enjoys in mainstream Historiography.

This apathy notwithstanding, there have been some remarkable attempts in this direction. Dutt, in his *Early Buddhist Monachism*, offers a brave departure however rudimentary that may be, and due to this reason, he demands a greater discussion. What renders his work stand apart from the earlier 'handbooks' is a very sharp understanding of the evolutionary character of the Sangha and the need to study it in conjunction with the larger societal context in interactions with which it evolves. It is at its best when he laments the tendency of 'straying away from the historian's point of view' in the study of Indian Buddhism, exaggerating the evolution of ideas and minimizing the material factors that made that evolution possible and determined its character.⁴⁵ He has rightly asserted that "the history of Buddhism can not be viewed apart from the growth and development of the Buddhist Sangha and apart from the organization of monastic life and community, ancient Buddhism is at best an abstraction, a system interesting more to the philosopher than to the historian."⁴⁶ What is even more interesting is the sharper understanding of the evolutionary character of the Sangha. He denies that the Sangha was a fixed type from the very beginning; that most of its laws, if not all laws, were laid down by the Buddha himself; that its organization was essentially of the same fixed character for the next five hundred years till the origins of the Mahayana; as "*the Sangha was not in a perpetual state of arrested progress nor were its laws like the laws of the Medes and Persians that altereth not.*' *The Buddhist Order (The Sangha), on the other hand had a remarkable capacity for growth, development, variations, adjustments and progress.*"⁴⁷ Needless to repeat it is the approach we have been trying to emphasize form

⁴³ K.P. Jayaswal, *op.cit*, p.43.

⁴⁴ Gokuldas De, *Democracy in the Buddhist Sangha*, Calcutta, 1955, p. 5.

⁴⁵ S. Dutt, *op.cit*, p. 6

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.7.

the very inception. He has also rejected that the entire Pali Vinaya Pitaka was composed in one go (in the Council of Vaisali): they consist in fact “of much earlier and much later materials welded together by a theory. When they are arranged in their proper sequence, they will afford us evidences of an evolution of Buddhist Monachism as reflected in the (Pali) Vinaya Pitaka.”⁴⁸ He has noted the tussle between the earlier prominent eremitical mendicancy and the forest monk tradition, and the emerging Monachism and has asserted that the earliest episode of Conflict in the Order between these two Principles is embodied in the story of Devadatta who “seems to have attempted unsuccessfully at a revival of an old mendicant, eremitical Ideal,”⁴⁹ but he does not analyze the process or the material factors which allowed the emerging monastic tradition to supersede the earlier forest monk tradition. He has noted the growth of the Buddhist Coenobium by *Vassa Vasa--- Avasa-Arama--- Sangharama* modal, but again does not offer the analysis of any socio-economic factor entailing this transition. He has noted the absence of notices to Buddhist Monachism in the Greek writings on India till the Second Century AD, and has rightly concluded that for a long time after the Macedonian invasions (4th Century BCE), Buddhist monasteries were neither numerous nor striking enough to attract the notices of foreign writers in India,⁵⁰ but in the next chapter, in his reconstruction of communal life at *avasa*, he goes on almost a verbatim reproduction of the Pali Vinaya and does not address a rather anomalous problem. The injunctions of the Pali Vinaya envisage a fully developed institutionalized Monasticism, but as he has noted in the context of Greek Writings and as supported by archaeology, this kind of fully developed Monachism did not appear in India before the early Kushana period.⁵¹ So how the rules of the Pali Vinaya can be used to reconstruct the situations which apparently did not exist. Besides, he displays a remarkable reluctance to use archaeological data, and insights from Vinayas other than the Pali one and thus leaves much to be desired. Almost a similar approach is visible in his reconstruction of pre-Mahayana Monachism in his later and much larger book, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India* (1962) though he has used a diverse range of Sources in reconstructing the same from the Mahayana phase onwards. In this monograph, he has noted the gradual metamorphosis in the monasteries and their institutional management from the early centuries of the Common Era, their spread along trade routes to the Deccan and beyond, the mercantile and royal patronage

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.11.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.96.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.98.

⁵¹ J.Marshall, *Taxila*, Vol.1, Delhi, 1975, pp. 233. (First published in 1951, Cambridge) He has asserted that “the ordered, quadrangular, high walled monastery or *Vibara*, seems to have made their first appearance in the *Sangharamas* of Northwestern India during the First Century AD, and thence to have found its way southwards and eastwards to the rest of India. Before the close of the First Century AD, the old types of *Sangharamas*, with its haphazard methods of planning, lack of secrecy and privacy for its inmates have disappeared.” Elsewhere he has noted (J.Marshall, *Monuments of Sanchi*, Delhi, 1940, 1: 63) that even in the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites, such as Bodhagaya, Saranatha and Rajagir, no monastic remains pre-dating the Mauryas have been found so far. Even at Sravasti, the urban centre where the Buddha spent his twenty five *Vassa Vasa* out of total forty five, “it seems likely that the site was occupied by the Buddhist monasteries as early as 6th-5th Centuries B.C., contemporary with the Buddha himself, we can conclude that it is only after the Kushana period that the scale of monastic establishments has developed to a great extent. Most of the structural remains of the monastic establishments exposed here belong to the Kushana and Gupta periods, though some come down to the Post-Gupta period and some may go back to the Sunga period or even earlier.” Yoshinor Aboshi *et.al.*, ‘Excavations at Saheth Maheth 1986-1996,’ *East and West*, Vol. 49, No. 1-4, p. 118.

they received, shrinkage of Buddhist space across India from the Gupta period onwards, emergence of 'Monastic Universities' (Nalanda etc) in the Early Medieval Period. He has taken the support systems of the monasteries in to account, but how that support increased or diminished from time to time and what were its consequences on monastic life, and also upon the trajectories of Buddhism in India and its decline, has been only perfunctorily been studied. That in no way reduces the importance of the Work. This being the earliest macro survey of the monastic experience of India will remain as a mandatory reading for any study on the functional dimensions of Indian Monastic Buddhism.

Reconstruction of the Pre-Mahayana Buddhist Monachism largely on the basis of Pali works is visible in Conze (1951), V.P.Varma (1971) and Richard Gombrich (1994). Conze for example begins with the traditional stereotypes as noted in the previous pages, hardly makes any attempt to see the process of institutionalization of the Sangha or its evolution. He has asserted that the 'monks are the only Buddhists in the proper sense of the word',⁵² and that 'the continuity of the monastic organization has been the only constant factor in Buddhism'.⁵³ But continuity with a change or arrested evolution? This follows from his attitude of taking the Vinaya injunctions to be narrative, not normative, and basing his narrative solely on the basis of the Pali Vinaya. He has noted that the 'monastic life was regulated by the rules of the Vinaya.'⁵⁴ Then he proceeds to discuss three "essentials" of Monastic life-poverty, celibacy and inoffensiveness - with the core thesis that the 'Monk possessed no property at all,'⁵⁵ but makes no attempt to study the variations of this norm (which he wrongly treats as the universal praxis) across time and space. By his time, the factors behind the very first schism in Sangha (In the Vaisali Council) on the question of possession of private property by the monks, as well as the phenomenon of the evolution of Early Medieval Monastic Landlordism within India and outside were well documented. But that is of hardly any use for him, for he represents a school which believes that 'real,' 'authentic' Buddhism is to be found only in the Pali works.

V.P. Varma also suffers from the same limitations of exclusive dependency on the Pali Canonical and Semi-Canonical works in his reconstruction of the "Sociology of Buddhist Monasticism." The impression he has emphasized is that "Early Buddhism was a Creed of Individualism,"⁵⁶ which "taught the transitoryness and evanescence of the worldly phenomenon and a retreat from them."⁵⁷ Thus for him monasteries are a retreat and escape from the world. But that contrasts sharply with his own analysis of the social patronage received by the Sangha during its formative phases: from business magnets like Anathpindaka to rulers like Ajatsatru and Prasenjit, and numerous *gahapatis*. What functional return did the Sangha offer to them? He has noted the differences between the Early Buddhist Monachism and Early Medieval and Medieval Catholic Monachism in some detail, the key difference being that "the Buddhist Sangha is based upon a republican structural modal and it did not have any theocratic head comparable to the Roman

⁵² E. Conze, *Buddhism; Its Essence and Development*, Reprint Delhi, 1994, pp.53.

⁵³ Ibid, p.53.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.54.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.54.

⁵⁶ V.P. Varma, *Early Buddhism and its Origins*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 379.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 380.

Catholic Pope.”⁵⁸ He has also noted that Buddhist monasticism, unlike its Christian counterpart, did not develop any doctrine of apostolic succession derived from the personality of the founder, nor was there any ‘sacerdotal keeper of the keys to the heaven in the Buddhist Sangha’⁵⁹ - a very interesting observation indeed. That notwithstanding, basic objective of the Chapter of offering a sociological analysis of institutional evolution of the Sangha is hardly fulfilled.

Uma Chakravarty on the other hand offers much more astute observations on the institutional evolution of the Sangha in the backdrop of the prevailing socio-economic milieu at the time of the Buddha, and relates the differential patronage to the Sangha to the Political Structure of the Realm. Thus she has noted that the institution of *Vassa* – *Vasa* came in to being when peasants started complaining to the Buddha of the damage done to their newly sown crops due to the incessant movements of the monks during the rainy season;⁶⁰ that despite being deeply related with the Second Urbanization of the Subcontinent,⁶¹ agrarian similes and metaphors played no less important role in the evolution of the Laws of the Sangha.⁶² She has also noted the differential nature of patronage in the Monarchical and Republican Polities during the period of the Buddha. In the Monarchical States based upon individual ownership of Property, the Sangha attracted the patronage of the Cross section of the Society, while in the Republican States, based upon the notion of collective ownership of property in the hands of the ruling *Khattiya* clan only, the Sangha could not receive any mass patronage, hence the number of monasteries in these regions was less compared to the same in the Monarchical States.⁶³ She has also noted that the Buddha has modeled his emerging Sangha on the political pattern of the *Ganasangha* States, which she has noted on a number of occasions, was a ‘vanishing Order,’⁶⁴ but has proffered no explanation of why did the Buddha choose to model his emerging *Sangha* on a ‘Vanishing Order.’ But as whole her approach is quite refreshing. She has also noted that those who joined the Sangha, most of them were from well-to-do families, with the Brahmanas forming the single largest group, followed by

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 381.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 382.

⁶⁰ Uma Chakravarty, *Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Delhi, 1996, p. 82.

⁶¹ The relations between the genesis of Early Buddhism and Urbanisation of Upper and Middle Gangetic Valley are well documented. See particularly, Max Weber, *op.cit*, p. 204, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, Reprint, Delhi, 2005, pp. 63-85 (originally published, London, 1903). D.K. Chakravarty, ‘Location of Buddhist Sites as Influenced by Political and economic Factors,’ *World Archaeology*, 27(2), 1995, in which he has noted three major stages of growth and expansion of Buddhism, (6th century BC, 2nd Century AD, and 1st- 3rd Century AD) each phase “closely linked to the successive growth and expansion of urban base in India” (pp 185). Also see, K.T.S. Sarao, *Urban Centres and Urbanisation as Reflected in Pali Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas*, Delhi,1990; B.G.Gokhale, ‘Early Buddhism and Urban Revolution,’ Reprinted in his *New Light on Early Buddhism*, Bombay,1994, pp. 43-57. Gokhale has boldly asserted that “Early Buddhism and Jainism belonged to the urban milieu much more than either the earlier Vedic persuasions or later Brahmanism (Hinduism) of Post Maurya times. The Buddhism of our texts (i.e. Pali canonical literature) is a Buddhism predominantly cities, towns and market places. Its social heroes are the great merchant-bankers and the new kings, perhaps in that order of importance.” (P.53)

⁶² Uma Chakravarty, *op.cit*, pp.18-19.

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 90-92.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

the *Khattiyas*, and only a few 'low born' joined it.⁶⁵ That is to say, the Sangha was not an avenue for the run away escapists, at least in the days of its genesis.

Gombrich may be taken as the continuation of the tradition of near exclusive dependence on Pali texts for the reconstruction of the evolution of the Sangha; an 'institution consciously and carefully designed by the Buddha towards a particular end.'⁶⁶ In one of his later writings he has noted the congenital heterogeneity of the Sangha, as the earliest converts to Buddhism came from different background and due to the rudimentary institutional structure of the *Sangha*, 'many members of the Sangha must have gone on using some of their former terms and concepts.'⁶⁷ In the present book, he has focused upon the missionary impulse of the *Sangha* from the very beginning and its role as the institutional nucleus of Theravada Buddhism—"the history of Theravada Buddhism, seen from the point of view of the Tradition itself; what anthropologists call the emic view, is the History of the Sangha. It constitutes the very core of Theravada Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is a product of Texts composed by, and indeed largely for, monks and nuns. To look for a lay Tradition of Theravada Buddhism is a misunderstanding of the same sort as to look for a low caste Brahmanism: were it lay tradition, it would not be Theravada, the Doctrine of the Elders."⁶⁸ It is doubtful that any religion can be reduced to its Textual Tradition by a near total denial of the larger societal contexts, the role of the laity and continuous interaction between the Text and Context; an interaction leading to continuous metamorphosis of the Sangha. And of course anthropological studies have proved not only the existence of a thriving lay tradition of the Theravada Buddhism; the *Kammatic* Buddhism, and a near 'Universal weakness of *Nibbanic* Buddhism everywhere,' but also a much more mundane 'apotropaic' Buddhism,⁶⁹ the only form which survives its institutional liquidation and later helps in the re-institutionalization of the Sangha:⁷⁰ and also the fact that the more normative and text-bookish the Sangha becomes, the more detached are the monasteries from the laity hence they have greater vulnerability for decay and decline.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Uma Chakravarty, *op.cit.* pp. 122-149. Also see, B.G. Gokhale, 'Early Buddhist Elite,' *Journal of Indian History*, XIII, part 2, pp. 391-402, for a similar conclusion.

⁶⁶ Richard Gombrich, *op.cit.* p. 18.

⁶⁷ Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of Early Teachings*, Delhi, 2002, 2nd Edition, p.19.

⁶⁸ Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ M. Spiro, *op. cit.* pp.12-13.

⁷⁰ In a brilliant study of the process of re-emergence of the Sangha in Cambodia after its virtual institutional elimination by the demolition of larger numbers of monasteries and physical elimination of the majority of monks during the Khmer Rogue Era (1975-78), it has been observed that under the conditions of such extreme persecution, the Sangha 'reverted to most basic apotropaic form' (p.74); and it survived this calamity by the secret performance of magic, traditional rites to comfort the sick, the bereaved and the terrified by the defrocked monks (p.74), and after the Civil War, the Sangha rapidly re-grouped itself by adjusting to the new regime. See Ian Harris, 'Buddhist Sangha Groupings in Cambodia,' *Buddhist Studies Review*, 18, 1, 2001, p.74.

⁷¹ Richard A. O'Connor, 'Interpreting the Thai Religious Change: Temples, Sangha Reform and Social Change,' *Journal of South East Asian Studies*, 24, 2 (September 1993), pp. 330-339. It has been brilliantly observed that as a consequence of the attempts of the Bangkok Political Elites to promote a strictly Textual (strictly Pali Canonical Theravada), normative Buddhism, 'today *Wat* (the temple cum monastic complex) is less Thai and more Buddhist' (p.335), entailing a 'continuous tension between the *Wat* as an agent of Village solidarity and the *Wat* as an agent of the National State,' thus disrupting its centuries long function

Gombrich notes that the ever lamented ‘corruption’ (by that he seems basically to mean the accumulation of property by the monks and the Sangha), began in the life time of the Buddha itself,⁷² that is, the norms of the Pali Vinaya was not followed in letter and spirit in the earliest days itself; and later the “lay and royal pressure to accept gifts probably accounted for most of Sangha’s recurrent corruption.”⁷³ But why was the Sangha forced to accept gifts which went beyond its ‘basic doctrines’ and disciplines? He does mention that “the Sangha, in its very early phase had to accommodate to the facts of political power,”⁷⁴ and also the fact that “the Sangha and hence Buddhism had a particular need of political patronage if it is to flourish—History has shown time and again that without State support – which need not mean exclusive State support—the Sangha declines from this very reason. The Sangha need the Secular arm of the State to purify itself.”⁷⁵ This indeed has been the case in many countries where political consolidation of the ruling elite results in to ecclesiastical centralization and rigid institutionalized hierarchisation of the Sangha; and the more galactic the Polity turns the greater institutional disarray for the Sangha.⁷⁶ His observations are the beginning in the right direction. We need a greater contextual study of the encounters of the Sangha laws and injunctions with secular laws and regulations and the resultant mutations at both ends. But can this study be undertaken by treating the, as it appears, normative Vinaya as narrative? In fact a terrible contradiction exists in his approach of handling the Vinaya (which for him is Pali Vinaya only). At one juncture, he has used the Vinaya to reconstruct ‘how exactly the members of the Sangha were *supposed* to live’⁷⁷ (emphasis added), but in the very previous page, he has noted that the “Vinaya provides a complete way of life, a rule of conduct for the monks, nuns and novices; it was an attempted guide to monastic rules when the monastic life became radically standardized and simplified.”⁷⁸ The last line is more important for us. When did the monastic life become ‘standardized and radically simplified’ to entail this kind of normative uniformity? As has been noted earlier, it was not before a considerably later period. So can this data be literally used for the formative phases of the Sangha?

This undue emphasis on the norms of the Vinaya in tracing the evolution of the Sangha largely blinds us to the multiple mutations the Sangha undergoes as a part of its localization strategy across time and space, as a part of its ‘translation in to local idioms;’ a common feature of the localization strategy of any World Religion.⁷⁹ As early as 1951, Frauwallner, noting the close similarity between the Vinayas of different schools, have

of joining the lay and monastic communities (p.335); a long term institutional shift rendering it peripheral to the society.” (p. 336)

⁷² Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 93.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 115.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.115.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 116-117.

⁷⁶ S.J. Tambiah, *The World Conqueror and the World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge, 1976, p.189.

⁷⁷ Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 89.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 88.

⁷⁹ It has been brilliantly observed that “If external ideas are ever to have any meaning, they must connect in some way with the pre-existing ideas and understandings: only then when they have underwent the process of ‘translation’ in the local idiom, can they begin to have effect.” See Geofry A.Oddie, *Religious Transformations in South Asia: Interactions and Change*, Surrey, 1998, p. 6. It is high time that we should explore differential localization strategies of the Sangha across time and space.

opined that the an original 'Proto-Text' of the extant Vinayas must have existed during the earliest days of the Sangha,⁸⁰ and Lamotte has largely corroborated that "If remarkable similarities can be discerned in the outlines of the various Vinayas—and we are thinking particularly of the Pali, Mahisasaka and the Dharmaguptaka Vinayas—this fact can be explained by a parallel development. Buddhist communities did not live in complete isolation but were interested in the work carried out by their neighbors. It is therefore not very surprising that they worked with the same methods and followed practically the same plan. If nothing is more like one Buddhist Vihara than another Buddhist Vihara, it is normal that various known Vinayas should reveal the close link which connected them."⁸¹

Charles S. Prebish's study of early Buddhist Monachism, based largely upon S. Dutta, is important for his advocacy of 'middle way' regarding the significance of the Vinaya texts in the institutional evolution of the Sangha, between the two extremes propounded by Andre Baraeu and A.C. Banarjee: the first holding that only doctrinal matters were responsible for the emergence of sects, and the latter holding that there was hardly any difference regarding the interpretation of the Dhamma, it was differential interpretation of the Vinaya injunctions which lead to the emergence of sects. Prebish advocates a middle way, but with a propensity towards the greater significance of the Vinaya in the institutional evolution of the Sangha; he has noted that 'it can not be mere coincidence that the schools with the most developed Vinayas have prospered while the others have dissipated.'⁸² But what is the co-relation between different Vinayas, and what is the interaction of the text with the context? He has translated the Sanskrit Vinayas of the Sarvastivadins and Mulasarvastivadins in the same book, but it could have been immensely more illuminating had he offered their textual and contextual differences or the lack of that, and factors behind these, with the Pali Vinaya.

Interrelationship between different Vinayas, their similarities or dissimilarities have invited rigorous research. It has been noted that similarity is only between the Vinayas of the individual sects of the two Schools of the First Schism (the Sthaviravadins and the Mahasanghikas) and not across the Schools.⁸³ Largely the same thing has been observed in the rules prescribed for the *Upastha* ceremony in the various Vinayas of the Same School.⁸⁴ Agreed that at the level of normative Great Tradition, a uniformity has been envisaged across sects, and may be also across Schools. But how does that translate in to practice?

It may be asserted that despite these brilliant studies on the Vinayas and the reconstruction of Early Buddhist monastic practices in India as per the norms of the Vinayas, there is hardly any study of the process by which Monasticism emerges among an eremitical monk community. Mention must be made of Robin Coningham's brilliant

⁸⁰ E. Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of the Vinaya Literature*, Rome, 1956, pp. 205-207.

⁸¹ E. Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism; From the Origins to the Saka Era*. English Translation by S. Webb Boin, Louvain-la-neuve, 1988, p. 179.

⁸² Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, Reprint, Delhi, 2002, p. 28 (Originally published in 1975, Pennsylvania).

⁸³ Shayne Clarke, 'Vinaya Matrka: Mother of All Monastic Codes or Just Another Set of Lists? A Response to Frauwallner's Handling of the Mahaasanghika Vinaya', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 47, 2004, pp. 80,115.

⁸⁴ Jayeeta Gangopadhyaya, *Upastha Ceremony: The Earliest Traditions and Later Developments, Mainly from the Vinaya Traditions Preserved in Chinese*, Varanasi and Delhi, 1986, p. 51.

study of the institutionalization process of the Sangha in Sri Lanka.⁸⁵ He has noted that the transition from cave dwelling forest monk tradition to institutionalized, sedentarised and ‘domesticated’ monasticism was closely related with the process of transition from the Chieftain Polities to that of loosely centralized Paramount Sovereign ruling over the whole of Sri Lanka;⁸⁶ a process rendering the Sangha and the State increasingly interdependent. At a later stage, the more centralized the Polity became, the greater the temporal assets of the Sangha, ultimately leading to the development of Monastic landlordism.⁸⁷ A similar process of the Monastic Tradition superseding the ‘original,’ Forest Tradition of the formative Phases of Indian Buddhism has in deed been noted by Reginald Ray, but without analyzing the factors and the process behind the gradual establishment of Monasticism as the ‘Authentic’ Tradition.⁸⁸ He begins with a critic of traditional Monastery Centric Buddhist historiography in India in which the monasteries form the prism through which much of History of Indian Buddhism is cast:⁸⁹ entailing the construction of a “Two Tier Modal” of Indian Buddhism, in which the monastics occupy the upper tier and practice a “Buddhism of Emulation” viz. taking the Buddha as a role modal than as a an object of devotion and veneration; whereas the laity form the lower tier, practicing a “Buddhism of devotion” i.e. devotion and reverence to the Buddha and the Sangha.⁹⁰ The primary aim of the book is to ‘amplify the voice of forest Buddhism by focusing upon the Forest Saint,’⁹¹ but in the process, he offers certain interesting observations on the nature and functions of Monastic Buddhism in India; its interaction with the laity and with the forest monks. For him, the Forest Monk tradition is the ‘original Buddhism’ which has been suppressed or at least obscured by the Settled Monasticism.⁹² Thus Monastic Buddhism is ‘institutionalized,’ ‘regulated’ and ‘ordered’ Buddhism,⁹³ and was the seat for maintenance and contemplations of the textual tradition.⁹⁴ Its proximity to and dependence upon the social, economic and political establishment often compelled it to accept and reinforce the status quo of the societal context.⁹⁵ In fact ‘by its emphasis on order, regulation and scholasticism, Monasticism reflects just as or perhaps even more so a Brahmanisation of the earliest Buddhism.’⁹⁶ But despite these castigations, he could not deny the interdependence both have developed in

⁸⁵ Robin A.E. Coningham, ‘Monks, Caves and Kings: A Reassessment of the Nature of Early Buddhism in Sri Lanka’, *World Archaeology*, 27(2), 1995, pp. 222-242.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 221.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 238. For a similar study of interdependence of the Sri Lankan Crown and Sri Lankan Sangha, see S.M. Haladar, ‘The Robe and the Throne: An Analysis of the Symbiotic Relationship between Buddhism and the State in Ancient Sri Lanka’, *Indian Historical Review*, XXXI, no.1-2, January- July 2004, pp. 18-30.

⁸⁸ Reginald A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, New York, 1994,

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. vii in Preface.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. viii in Preface.

⁹² This may be contrasted with S. Dutta’s (*op.cit*, p. 96) analysis of the very first schism in the Sangha, during the lifetime of the Buddha itself; the episode of expulsion of Devadatta from the Sangha, ‘who seems to have attempted unsuccessfully at a revival of earlier mendicant, eremitical ideal for which he got no credit’.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 436.

⁹⁴ For a similar argument, see David McMohan, ‘Orality, Writing and Authority in South Asian Buddhism: Visionary Literature and the Struggle for Legitimacy in Mahayana,’ *History of Religion*, 37.3, February 1998, pp.249-274.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 439.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 447.

course of time. The forest produced the saints but could not retain them, they had to come back to the settled world of monasticism, and become part of the monastic life.⁹⁷ Excessive institutionalization and scholasticism on the other hand compelled some of the monastics to the forest.’⁹⁸

No doubt Reginald Ray displays a remarkable scholarship yet he chooses to overlook certain important things. Despite his denials, a substantial influence of S.J. Tambiah’s and Michael Carrithers’s study of Forest Monk Traditions of Thailand and Sri Lanka respectively is quite discernible on him. Both Tambiah and Carrithers have visualized that the State, the *Gramavasina/Nagarvasina* (Village/Town) Monasteries and the *aranya-vasina* (‘Forest Dwelling’) Monasteries together formed a functional matrix, on the modals of the ‘Core – Periphery’ dialectics; the State and the *Gramavasina/Nagarvasina* Monasteries together forming the ‘core.’ In this schema of things, the Forest Monks Tradition functions as the repository of doctrinal and meditational purity, hence the fountainhead of legitimacy whenever the State faces any grave internal or external crisis. Should we visualize a similar role for the Forest Monk Tradition in Indian Buddhism? Moreover when a *Nagarvasina/Gramavasina* monk chooses to go to the forest, what is impact of this migration on the Forest society? Do they transmit the ideas and praxis of the Settled Agrarian World or just practice ever higher forms of meditation in a total aloofness from their surrounding world? Ray does not engage these questions; he is content only with the ritual (and spiritual) aspects of this complex matrix. Some interesting generalizations have recently been made, on the basis of archaeological sources, regarding the functional relationship between Buddhist monasteries and Second Urbanization of the Subcontinent. Oldenburg onwards it has been observed that the genesis of Buddhism was deeply related with the Second Urbanization of the Subcontinent, but how did it affect the location of the monastic sites? Erdosy’s Article is illuminating in this aspect. He has pointed out the dependence of the monasteries on the cities and towns. He has convincingly shown that it were only the largest towns and cities, more often, the capital city of emerging Polities in the Gangetic Valley from 6th-5th century BC onwards which were able to support the monasteries.⁹⁹ He has noted the spatial distribution pattern of the monasteries, either on the trade routes connecting these cities and towns; or just outside the cities (as was the case with Besanagar, Sanchi, and Benares, at Saranath); or just inside the city (as was the case with Pataliputra and Kausambi); or a rather diffused type, without any obvious concentration but dotting the entire landscape (as was the case with Vaisali, Rajagir, Mathura, Ahichhatra and Tilaurakot).¹⁰⁰ That is, as per his analysis, early Buddhism and its monastic sites were totally dependent upon the resources of the towns and cities. A similar pattern has been noted by D.K. Chakravarty as well in the locational analysis of early monastic sites.¹⁰¹ James Heitzman is much ore systematic in his analysis of the relationship between the location of the monastic sites, Trade and Empire and the role played by this triad in the spread of the *Sangha* beyond its Mid-Gangetic core. He has noted that the foundation of the Mauryan Empire and the resultant political and administrative unification of the

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 446.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 441.

⁹⁹ G. Erdosy, ‘Early Historical Cities of North India,’ *South Asian Studies*, 3, 1987, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ D.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit*, p. 194.

larger part of the Subcontinent resulted in to a flourishing of long distance trade. Thus in an environment of expanding trade linkages and crystallizing State power, Buddhist monasteries, dependent upon royal and mercantile patronage, flourished in or around important towns or along the trade routes linking them. Based upon the analysis of the locational pattern of the monasteries, he has rejected the earlier modal of D.D. Kosambi of direct participation of the monasteries in trade; nonetheless their indirect contribution to trade has been recognized. He has noted that the monasteries provided ideological support to their royal and mercantile patrons, and the three together formed a mutually supportive matrix.¹⁰² This article largely explains the process of the spread of the Sangha beyond its Mid-Gangetic core to the outlying areas: a process in which trade and traders seems to have played no less important role than the enthusiastic missionary impulse of Ashoka. Indeed in a brilliant article, exploring the nature and extent of Ashokan engagements and interventions in the Sangha, it has been observed that in the Schism Edicts (at Kosambi, Sanchi and Saranath), Ashoka is not concerned with the Schism in the Buddhist Church (The Universal Sangha of Four Quarters) but divisions within local individual Sanghas. This was in line with the contemporary realities, as at that time, the level of organization in Buddhism did not go beyond individual *Sanghas*.¹⁰³ But here too, trade had role in the Ashoka's concerns of preventing the *Sanghabbhedā*; “as a result of the Schism many new competing *Sanghas* could have come in to being and a possible source of conflict, which in turn interrupts the smooth flow of trade.”¹⁰⁴ The role of Trade in influencing the location of the monasteries has been brilliantly documented in the context of Early Historic Deccan, a theme we shall turn to now.

In the early 1950s, D.D. Kosambi, based upon his observations of direct participation of the Chinese Buddhist monasteries in trade, has propounded a similar monastic participation in India in general and Early Historic Deccan in particular. In his approach, monasteries became totally dependent upon trade and commerce, and their other roles were largely denied. H.P. Ray has largely built on his modal, though with fundamental modifications, in advocating a more dynamic pattern of monastic interactions with the society and economy in Early Historic Period (c. BC 300-AD 300). Her different wittings on the functional role of monasteries, in the last twenty years or so, show a very remarkable transition : from the earlier emphasis on the dominance of the material factors (trade, agrarian expansion, Secondary State Formation Process in the tribal areas of the Deccan) to the internal dynamics of religion and pilgrimage in determining the fate of monasteries.

The first approach is visible in her ‘*Monastery and Guild*’ (1986) in which she has emphasized the role of the monasteries as catalytic factors in facilitating the transition from Tribal Chiefdoms to Institutional State in Deccan. She has noted the location of the monasteries in the fertile Upper Godavari and Bhima valleys and their role in both agriculture and trade,¹⁰⁵ as well as the chronological evolution of the functional role of the Satavahana period monasteries. Thus in their earliest phase in Deccan (around First Century BC), they probably acted as “pioneers and as centers providing informations on

¹⁰² J. Heitzman, ‘Early Buddhism, Trade and Empire,’ in G.L.Possel, K.Kennedy (ed), *Studies in Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology of South Asia*, Delhi, 1984, pp. 121-132.

¹⁰³ Herman Tiekens, ‘Asoka and the Buddhist Sangha : A Study of Asoka's Schism Edicts and Minor Rock Edicts,’ *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, London, 2000, p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.27.

¹⁰⁵ H.P.Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas*, Delhi, 1986, p.207.

cropping patterns, distant markets, organization of village settlement and trade”¹⁰⁶ as well as agents for the integrations of the frontier areas for the emerging Polities by assisting in the “establishment of channels of communications in the newly colonized regions and these channels could be then used by the State to enforce its authority,”¹⁰⁷ as well as by “providing anchorage in an environment characterized by changing alignment of social ties.”¹⁰⁸ She has also noted that with increasing trade and commerce, the monasteries could have got involved directly in trade and could have accumulated wealth.¹⁰⁹ Changes in the rock cut architecture in western Deccan and the shift to exclusive royal patronage in the Gupta-Vakataka period has also been noted and she has stressed the need to see these changes in the background of socio-economic mutations and a probable re- alignment in the balance of power between the State, the Monasteries and laity.¹¹⁰ Her approach of rejecting any unilinear and *a priori* fixed role of the monasteries is indeed a laudable effort, as well as her approach to see the continuous mutations in their roles as result of their interactions with the other Societal Institutions.

Largely similar arguments have been re- articulated, rather sharply, in some of her next writings. Her analysis of functional dimensions of the monastic complexes at Sanchi and Bharahut follows her earlier modal of ‘frontier integration offered by the monasteries’ and their close linkages with the trade routes. She has argued that the Mauryan line of control of minerally rich Deccan passed through these regions. The Mauryan attempts to get the co-operation of the tribal communities of the Deccan perhaps lead to the evolution of a triangular relationship between the State, these tribal communities and the Monasteries which represented the most institutionally developed

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 207. For a similar use of the Buddhist Monasteries in the pacification and integration of turbulent Central Asian frontier regions by the Chinese State, see Antony Forte, ‘Chinese State Monasteries in the Seventh and Eight Centuries’ in *EchOo Go Tenjiku den Kenkyu*, ed. By Kuwayama Shoshin, Kyoto, 1990, pp. 214-258. For the similar integrative role of the Thai Sangha in the tribal northwestern frontier regions of Thailand, see Sanit Wongs Prasert, ‘Impact of the Dhammacarika Bhikku’s Programme on the Hill Tribes of Thailand’, in K.M.Desilva *et.al* (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in the Buddhist Societies : Srilanka, Burma and Thailand*, London ,1988, pp. 126-137. This Article is immensely important for our purpose. It analyses the three pronged strategy of the State Sponsored Dhammacarika Bhikkhu’s Programme (DBP) in the traditionally shifting cultivation, tribal areas. As part of their integrative strategies, at the individual and household level, monks provide primary health care and help villagers and hill tribals to deal with local Administration in matters such as Taxes, registration for birth and deaths etc (p.129). At the community level, their main task is to impart new agrarian technologies, particularly that of Wet Rice Agriculture (p.129). Besides they encourage the pilgrimage to local and National Buddhist Pilgrimage Centres by these Hill Tribes (p.129). It has been noted that among those tribals who have been taught at DBP schools, around 85% of them have already adopted Wet Rice Agriculture (p.130). In India, role of Brahmanical Temples in the integration of the turbulent frontier regions is well documented. See. A. Appadurrai, ‘Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 AD,’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIV,1, January-March 1977, where it has been aptly summarized that the sectarian leaders associated with the temples were ‘crucial intermediaries for the introduction, extension and institutionalization of the (Vijayanagara) Warrior control over constituencies and regions that otherwise might have proved refractory’ (p. 55). Likely such roles of the Buddhist monasteries in different parts of India should be explored.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 207.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 208.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 210.

form of religion that time.¹¹¹ She indeed has provided some hints regarding the evolving autonomy of the monasteries *vis- a- vis* trade and towns. It has been brilliantly noted that initially the monasteries had to be located in either rich agricultural areas or along trade routes where surplus was available to support the monks. Later a considerable change: the simple redistributive and reciprocal relationship between the monasteries and the hinterlands altered with the monasteries constantly acquiring greater wealth and evolving in to independent socio- economic institution; a parallel Order in society.”¹¹² This helps us understand why some monasteries survive and prosper even after the decline of trade and towns, by becoming deeply embedded in the agrarian structure of a given region.

In her *Winds of Change*, she has attempted some bold sub-continental generalizations regarding the functional role of the monasteries, though the focus is of course on the Peninsula. She has noted the support provided by the monasteries at different levels, in the phenomenal expansion of trade and commerce in the Early Historical Period. At the ideological level, she argues, Buddhism exhorted the accumulation and re-investment of wealth in trade and commerce; at the societal level, Buddhist monasteries provided status to the traders and other occupational groups; while at the economic level, the monasteries were repositories of information and necessary skills such as writing and medicine.¹¹³ She has noted the role played by the monasteries in agrarian expansion in the Satavahana Deccan, where except one land grant to the Brahmanas all other land grants are in favor of the monasteries. In her subcontinental analysis of the location of the monastic centers, she has noted their concentration along the trade routes or near important towns; though she has assigned the absence of the structural remains of monasteries or *stupas* in areas such as Bengal, Tamilnadu and Kerala to the problems in generating agrarian surplus capable of supporting resident population of monks.¹¹⁴ In a nutshell, she has been largely successful in reconstructing the multiple role of the monasteries and their diverse linkages with the wider societal processes.

A fundamental paradigm shift is visible in her study of the monastic complex of Kanheri, located near a suburb of modern Bombay. Kanheri shows a continuous occupation from the First Century AD to the Tenth Century AD, while most of the monastic sites of Western Deccan decline after the Fifth Century AD. She has probed two fundamental questions in this Article: (1) the position of Kanheri within the monasteries of Western Deccan, and (2) the reason behind the continued occupation of Kanheri when

¹¹¹ H.P. Ray, ‘Bharahut and Sanchi: Nodal Points in Commercial Exchange,’ in B.M.Pande, B.D. Chattopadhyaya (ed.) *Archaeology and History, Essays in Honour of A.Ghosh*, Delhi, 1987, p. 627.

¹¹² Ibid, p.621. For a similar analysis of functional autonomy of the Sanchi monastic complex vis-a vis the nearby urban Centres, see Upinder Singh, ‘Sanchi : The History of Patronage of an Ancient Buddhist Establishment,’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33(1996), pp. 1-35.

¹¹³ H.P. Ray, *The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia*, Delhi, 1994, p. 122. Also see, Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India. Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, Delhi 1991. Zysk has noted the key role played by Buddhism in the advancement of Indian medicine through its institutionalization of medicine in the Buddhist monastery and its role in entailing the transition in Indian Medicine from ‘magico-religious system’ of the Vedic Ages to the subsequent ‘empirico-rational system’ of the later ages. See particularly, chapter III, ‘Medicine and Buddhist Monasticism.’ An archaeological corroboration of the same thesis has been done by Chhaya in her M.Phil. Dissertation, *Early Healing Practices: A Study Based on Buddhist Literary and Archaeological Sources*, submitted to Center for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in 2001.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 143.

other sites in the same region show signs of decline.¹¹⁵ Based on a study of the votive inscriptions, Copper Plates and, votive stupas built by the pilgrims, she has pointed out that a combination of two fortuitous factors were responsible for the continued prosperity of Kanheri in contrast to other monastic sites Of Western Deccan : (1) location of important port towns in the close vicinity of Kanheri (Chaul, Sopora, Kalyan etc) which made possible the continuous flow of mercantile patronage and (2) its wide spread pilgrimage networks, attracting pilgrims from such far off places like Sindh and Gauda (Bengal).¹¹⁶ Thus maritime trade was important for the fortunes of the site but the role of pilgrimage was no less important.

The autonomy of the monastic centers, vis-a-vis trade and towns has been re-affirmed in her recent writings. It has been observed that in the coastal Andhra where most of the Early Historic monastic sites have been found, a few urban centers have been identified in archaeological records, and here pilgrimage provided an alternate strategy of mobilization of resources for the monasteries.¹¹⁷ She has also attempted to construct hierarchy within the peninsular monasteries on the basis of their size and longevity, but she has largely ignored their spatial linkages with the landscape.¹¹⁸ That notwithstanding, its very brave departure. Such hierarchisation have been attempted in the study of Buddhist monasteries outside India,¹¹⁹ even in the case of Brahmanical temples within India,¹²⁰ but this has been a rarity in the studies in Indian monastic Buddhism. Hopefully her attempt would inspire further researches in this area as well as in the re-construction of the Pilgrimage Geography of major and minor monasteries.

Let us come back again to the lower Krishna Godavari delta and see a brilliant study by H. Sarakar on the emergence and growth of Buddhist monasteries in the same and their linkages with the process of Urbanization. The Article begins with a fundamentally important observation that the Buddhist monasteries and the Stupas formed part of a larger social and economic matrix and should not be studied in isolation.¹²¹ He could visualize diverse subsistence bases of the monasteries and their differential strategies in different landscapes in the micro region of Krishna Godavari delta. Thus some monasteries were located near 'agrarian cities' such as Bhattiporulu¹²² and depended more on agrarian resources ; some were located near port towns and depended more on mercantile patronage; whereas some monasteries like Nagarjunakonda were located near royal centers, were built and patronized by the ruling strata; and significantly at such centers Buddhist monasteries shared sacred space along with the Brahmanical temples,¹²³ and they were just one of the institutions from which the ruling strata derived

¹¹⁵ H.P.Ray, 'Kanheri: The Archaeology of an Early Buddhist Pilgrimage Site in Western India', *World Archaeology*, 26(1), 1994, p. 37.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.39.

¹¹⁷ H.P. Ray, *The Archaeology of Sea Faring in Ancient South Asia*, Cambridge, 2003, p.264.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p.260.

¹¹⁹ Robert Jammes Miller, *Monasteries and Cultural Change In Inner Mongolia*, Weisbaden, 1959, pp. 11-23. Also see David N. Gellner, "The Newar Buddhist Monastery: An Anthropological and Historical Typology' in his *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism*, Delhi, 2003, pp. 134-138.

¹²⁰ James J. Preston, "Sacred Centres and Symbolic Networks in India', in S. Mahapatra (ed), *The Realm of the Sacred*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 79-112.

¹²¹ H. Sarakar, "Emergence and Growth of Urban Centers in Early Historic Andhradesa" in B.M.Pande, B.D. Chattopadhyaya (ed).*op.cit.*, p.632.

¹²² Ibid, p.635.

¹²³ Ibid, p.639.

its legitimacy. The core outcome is: even within a single micro region, the monasteries had differential roles across time and space.

As noted earlier, we have a flood of literature on the monastic art and architecture, but hardly any study on their societal implications. Nagaraju's study of monastic art and architecture in Western Deccan stands as a brilliant contrast. He has observed the phases of monastic architecture in the region and their societal implications. (A) In the earliest phase, mere isolated cells, with hardly any water storage structure (as they were located in the drier regions of Western Deccan, they had to store water for the use of monks in the non-rainy seasons of the years)- so they represented the phase of *Vassa –Vasa* in monasticism.¹²⁴ (B) From around Second Century BC to the Third- Fourth Century AD, architecture is more developed, as well as water cisterns, being made with lay patronage, and with this increased availability of water for the resident monks, greater sedentarisation. In this period, monasteries attracted the patronage of the cross section of the society – traders, farmers, artisans as well as royal patrons, and this wide base of patronage was reflected in architectural vibrancy.¹²⁵ (C) In the next phase between 4th-7th Century AD, a gradual narrowing down of the patronage base and exclusive dependence on royal patronage has been noted. Based upon the study of cell architecture within the monasteries, emergence of hierarchy within the monk community as well as the functioning of some of the monasteries as Educational Centers has been noted.¹²⁶ (D) From 7th century AD onwards, the pattern was fundamentally different: total dependence on royal patronage, emergence of monasteries as owners of big landed estates, further increase in their role as education centers; and within the monastic complex, further differentiation within the monks, with some of them getting deified and sharing the same precinct with the Buddha.¹²⁷ His concluding observations are very remarkable - *“with land , money , spiritual leadership of the monks and emergence of monasteries as centers for learning we come to a phase in which the Buddhist monasteries began to act as a competitor for power with other sections of the society. We wonder whether this ambition to exercise power without the necessary backing of the social and ideological equipments was responsible for the gradual decline of Buddhism in western India, nay India in general. With the loss of royal; patronage as a result of competition in the power game and the consequent depletion of number of clergy, Buddhism simply disappeared from the scene and the laity gradually assimilated themselves in other religious denominations.”*¹²⁸ This is a fundamentally important for us in perceiving the more proactive role of the monasteries – not merely a recipient of social patronage but also a source or center for the interplay of social hegemonies, with monasteries as an institution themselves exercising hegemony, however rudimentary that may be, rather than merely bestowing it to their patrons.

But why only some monasteries attract royal patronage while others fail to do so? Richard. S. Cohen's study of the Ajanta Complex is very important in understanding this , though the Article appears to be primarily concerned with or much larger issue:

¹²⁴ S. Nagaraju, “From Spirituality to Power: A Millennium of Buddhist Monastic Architecture as A Mirror of Social History,” in K. Sankaranasayan *et al* (ed) *Buddhism in India and Abroad: An Integrated Influence in Vedic and Post Vedic Perspective*, Mumbai and New Delhi, 1996, p. 302.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 304-305.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 306.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 307.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 308.

localization strategy of the Sangha when it is trying to establish itself a new area ; a process by which the “Buddha becomes ‘of the place’ by resolving uniquely local problems.”¹²⁹ At Ajanta, the Sangha worked at two levels simultaneously. Ajanta monastic complex acted as a stabilizing factor on the troubled frontier region of Vakataka regime hence received a substantial Vakataka patronage.¹³⁰ At the cultic level, it offered one of the avenues for the Buddhist cultic integration of the animistic *Naga* cult;¹³¹ another example of what has been earlier referred to as the “open frontier between Buddhism and animism,” a phenomenon which has started getting documented in the studies of Indian Buddhism.¹³²

In the context of Early Historic India, societal networks and interactions of Buddhist monasteries have been studied mostly in terms of the patronage they attracted and the return which they provided to their patrons; a return which is supposed to be legitimacy and social status. Changing patronage base has also been noted so as its impact on the fortune of the Sangha. Thus both Romila Thapar¹³³ and Vidya Dehejia¹³⁴ have noted that in the Early Historic Period, the main support base of North Indian monasteries came from the individual traders, merchants, artisans, farmers, monks and nuns, and in the context of Sanchi collective patronage from some villages. Royal patronage was of course not absent, but was not so significant. Both have noted dissipating social base of patronage by the beginning of the Gupta period, and both have attributed the decline of Buddhism to this factor.¹³⁵

Xinriu Liu has brilliantly depicted the dynamic relationship between the monasteries and the laity in the Kushana period North and North West India in her *Ancient India and Ancient China*. Two chapters of the book, “The Monasteries and the laity in Kushana India” and “Further changes in the Indian Buddhist monasteries” are greatly helpful in illuminating the diverse engagements of monasteries with society and economy, as well as the role of these linkages in doctrinal evolution and institutional innovations in Buddhism. Thus it has been noted that due to thriving trade and commerce and resultant increase in the practice of donation to the Sangha, the Sangha got involved in social economy,¹³⁶ leading to many innovations. Thus monks owned property and offered donations to the Sangha¹³⁷ and like individual monks, the monasteries also accumulated and owned property, not from the land grants by the ruling dynasty (as was the case in Satavahana Deccan) but probably through the patronage of the mercantile community or

¹²⁹ Richard S. Cohen, ‘Naga, Yakshini, the Buddha: Local Deities and Local Buddhism at Ajanta,’ *History of Religion*, 37.4. May 1998, p. 362.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.370. For a different perspective, i.e. total dependence of the Ajanta complex on the Vakataka patronage for its very survival, see Walter M. Spink, ‘Before the fall: Pride and Pity at Ajanta’ in Barbara S. Miller, *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 65-77.

¹³¹ Richard S. Cohen, *op.cit*, pp. 366-368.

¹³² Yogendra Singh, ‘Influence of Naga Worship in Buddhist Art,’ in R.C. Sharma (ed), *Interactions between Buddhist and Brahmanical Art*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 30-35.

¹³³ Romila Thapar, ‘Patronage and Community,’ in Barbara S. Miller (ed), *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 19-34.

¹³⁴ Vidya Dehejia, ‘The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage: Sacred Monuments, BC 100-AD 250’ in Barabara S. Miller, *op.cit*, pp. 35-50.

¹³⁵ Romila Thapar, *op.cit*, p. 30, Vidya Dehejia, *op.cit*, pp. 44-45.

¹³⁶ Xinriu Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchange, AD 1-600*, Delhi, 1988, p. 104.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 105.

even through direct participation in trade,¹³⁸ though she has provided no evidence for the same. As the value of donations to the Sangha by the laity increased donors came to expect more in return, leading to the emergence of the concept of transfer of merit, and ultimately to the evolution of Mahayana¹³⁹ she has also noted the transition to exclusive royal patronage to the Sangha in the Gupta period, lessening monastic interactions with the laity compared to the earlier period, and the monastic attempt to maintain the relationship with the laity by the organization of rituals, ceremonies and their public performances by the monasteries, and lay participation in the same.¹⁴⁰ In her writings a core argument of near total dependence of the Sangha on trade and commerce is discernible.¹⁴¹ But what about their role in the agrarian sector? For Satavahana Deccan, monastic involvement with both trade and agriculture has already been discussed. It may not be improper to look for a similar role the monasteries in some other parts of India

As far as the reconstructions of functional relations of the monasteries with the wider societal processes and institutions are concerned, some fundamental paradigm shifts are discernible in recent years. Mention may be made of the works of Gregory Schopen, Julia Shaw and Lars Fogelin. Each of them has unsettled many Sacred Cows in many ways. While Schopen has formulated his generalizations on the basis of a combined use of Archaeological, Epigraphical and Textual Data from Sanskrit Vinaya literature, with a greater propensity towards the use of votive inscriptions, Shaw and Fogelin are primarily interested in the Archaeological Landscape of Monasteries to formulate certain micro generalizations regarding the functional relationship between the monastery and the countryside.

Schopen, in many ways, heralds a brave departure by asking a simple, but fundamentally important question: to what extent, if any, Buddhist Monastic practices in India should be visualized as a derivation or a deviation from the Vinayas in general and the Pali Vinaya in particular? They should be treated as narrative or normative? He has been associated with the Edition, Translation and interpretation of the manuscript remains from Gilgit (mainly the Sanskrit Vinaya of the *Mulasaravastivadins*) and has noted the its textual and contextual differences with the one in Pali, but some of his most brilliant formulations are based upon interpretations of the Votive inscriptions. His different Papers, written on disparate occasions have been recently reproduced in the form of a book, *Bones, Stones and Tools: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*, 1997.

Mention must be made of his forceful criticism of Scholarly obsession with the Pali Vinaya and a near total exclusion of all other sources in the study of monastic Buddhism in India in his ‘Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism’ (reprinted as Second Chapter in *Bones, Stones and Tools*). Scholarly preferences for Textual Sources, he tries to show, is influenced by the ‘Protestant Presupposition’ that ‘true religion is to be found only in the Scriptures’. If archaeological and epigraphical data show contrary picture, they are regarded as ‘Perversion,’

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 107.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 133.

¹⁴¹ This approach has been further expanded in her next book, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration in to the Material Life and Thought of the People, AD 600-1200*, Delhi, 1996. See particularly pp. 49-72.

'decadence' or 'exception'¹⁴² and he has tried to prove this with specific examples of sustained continuation of certain perceptions based upon Textual sources even when well known archaeological findings have proved it to be wrong in the early Buddhological scholarly discourse. Textual Sources will expect us to believe that monks were to observe strict poverty (a perception propagated by Rhys Davids etc). He by an in-depth analysis of votive inscriptions, coin and coin mould finds from monasteries, has tried to show that the monks not only inherited their ancestral property¹⁴³ (a theme which has been further amplified in his 'Deaths, Funerals and Division of Property in a Monastic Code,' in Donald S. Lopez, *Buddhism in Practice*, New Jersey, 1995, pp.473-502), but they themselves were one of the biggest donors to the Sangha.. In his another Article, based upon a combined use of Archaeological and Textual data ,he attempts to show that "all of the Vinayas as we have them fall squarely in the middle period of India Buddhism, between the beginnings of the Common Era and the Year 500 AD. They can not , and do not, tell us what monastic Buddhism 'originally' was, but they do provide an almost an overwhelming amount of detail about what it has become by that time;"¹⁴⁴ a formulation which has been further augmented in his 'Doing Business for the Lord : Lending on Interest and Written Loan Contracts in the Mulasarvastivadina Vinaya,' *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 114, No.4, 1994, pp. 527-554, in which he has adds a new formulation; that it is the *Mulasaravastivadina* Vinaya which is likely to be the mainstream Indian Vinaya as it is the Vinaya which shows a greater interaction with the Brahmanical, larger Indian concerns. By an analysis of donative inscriptions, he has shown that contrary to the Canonical injunctions, it were mainly the monks and nuns and not the laity, who sponsored the production of cultic images. Thus 'from the very appearance in the inscriptions, Mahayana was a monk-dominated movement,'¹⁴⁵ and 'not only was the image cult an overwhelmingly a monastic concern, it was also, on the basis of available sources, a monastically initiated cult.'¹⁴⁶ If his formulations are corroborated by future researches, we can think of a more diversified world of monastic activities : direct participation in trade, lending the monastic money on interest and preparing written Contracts for the same, greater complexities arising out of the interface between the ecclesiastical laws and the secular laws, the problems of management of landed estates of monasteries , which he has shown to have begun quite early than the generally accepted Early Medieval Phase, etc; and in that case, Early Medieval Mutations in Indian Monastic Buddhism will not appear as 'Feudal Decadence' but as natural evolution of an enduring continuum.

Application of Landscape Archaeology in understanding the localization strategies of the Sangha in a particular area has brought certain refreshing paradigm shifts regarding the functional role of the Monasteries. Mention must be made of the works of Julia Shaw and Lars Fogelin. Around the monastic complex of Sanchi, a network of Dams has earlier

¹⁴² Gregory Schopen, 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,' *History of Religion*, 31.1, 1991, p.4.

¹⁴³ Idem, 'Monastic Law Meets the Real World: A Monk's continuous Right to Inherit Family Property in Classical India,' *History of Religion*, 35.2, November 1995, p.108.

¹⁴⁴ Idem, 'Deaths, Funerals and Division of Property in a Monastic Code,' in Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, New Jersey, 1995, p. 476.

¹⁴⁵ Idem, *Bones, Stones and Tools: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Text of Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu, 1997, p. 32.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.32.

been noted by Marshall and Cunningham, but they have not been studied in relation to the monastic sites. In her earlier Articles (Julia Shaw, J. Suitclif, ‘Ancient Irrigation Works in the Sanchi Area : An Archaeological and Hydrological Investigation,’ *South Asian Studies*, London, Vol. 17, 2001, pp. 55-75, and, Julia Shaw, ‘Sanchi and Its Archaeological Landscape; Buddhist Monasteries, Settlements and Irrigation Work in Central India,’ *Antiquity*, Vol. 74, 2000, pp.775-796), based upon her archaeological survey in the 20 Kilometer radius of the Monastic Complex, Julia Shaw has analyzed the relative positioning of the Monasteries, Dams and, Contemporary Settlements and Cult Spots, to gauge the degree of interaction of the monastic sites with the countryside, particularly their role in irrigation and wet rice agriculture. It has been postulated that the introduction of Wet Rice Agriculture was a concomitant result of the introduction of Buddhism in the Sanchi area, and the monasteries might have taken the pioneering role in making this possible by their active involvement in the construction of the irrigation devices from 3rd-2nd Century BC onwards. In her next Paper, she has offered some ambitious generalizations for the process of religious change for entire South Asia. Based upon a comparative study of the active role of monasteries in Hydraulic Management at Sanchi, Junagarh Complex in Gujarat and dry zones of Srilanka, it has been asserted that “the control of water harvesting and irrigational facilities was not only a means of political legitimacy for local rulers, but also formed a central component of the Buddhist Sangha’s propagation strategies.”¹⁴⁷ This can be largely corroborated for the dry Trans-Vindhyan regions. In the context of the Gangetic Valley, her theory can be accepted only in the sense of a more active role of the Sangha on agrarian frontiers.

Lars Fogelin, in his survey of archaeological landscape of the Thotalikonda monastery, has noted that a single monastery performed multiple roles: functioning as retreats for the monks, offering economic engagements with the mercantile community and religious engagements with the laity. Religious engagement not in terms of the Buddhist doctrines but in the practice and conduct of daily, mundane ritual.¹⁴⁸ Needless to repeat, Shaw and Fogelin largely provide the models for future studies on Indian monastic Buddhism. Our focus should not be on grand generalizations but on the localization strategy of individual monasteries, or a group of monasteries, in a select sub-region.

Its a bit amazing to see the turnaround in Indian Buddhism in the Post- Gupta period, a period when Indian Buddhist missionaries set out to conquer China, Tibet and some parts of South East Asia, yet at the same time, as we are informed by Huen -Tsang, Indian Buddhist communities were anxiously waiting for impending disappearance of Buddhism from India; a phenomenon leading to the Emergence of “Central Buddhist Realms” in many Asian countries who hardly required any spiritual legitimacy from great Buddhist Centers of India.¹⁴⁹ At a time when *mahaviharas* like Nalanda, Vikramashila, Ratnagiri and Somapura emerged, the same period was marked by a general retraction of Buddhist space across India and with the Muslim destruction of the these big monasteries, Buddhism disappeared from India as “Buddhism did not exist outside the monastery in

¹⁴⁷ Julia Shaw and J. Suitclif, ‘Water Management, Patronage Networks and Religious Change: New Evidence from the Sanchi Dam Complex and Counterparts in Gujarat and Srilanka,’ *South Asian Studies*, London, 19, 2003, p.75.

¹⁴⁸ Lars Fogelin, ‘Sacred Architecture, Sacred Landscape: Early Buddhism in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh,’ in H.P.Ray, Carla M.Sinopaly(ed), *Archaeology as History in Early South Asia*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 377.

¹⁴⁹ Tanasen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade; Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400*, Delhi, 2004, p. 56.

India”: thus goes on a popular historiographical construct of the Early Medieval mutations in Indian Buddhism.

As we have noted in the preceding pages, Buddhist monasteries had diverse linkages with society and economy, and they not only consumed social surplus but directly or indirectly contributed to it, and it was due to these diverse linkages that they survived and thrived. If we observe a crisis of bare survival in Indian Buddhism in the Early Medieval Period, genesis factors should not be attributed to some external factors such as Islamic invasions. We see the re-appearance and prospering of Buddhist monasteries in Central Asia as late 13th century,¹⁵⁰ lingering of Buddhism in Sindh till 15th century,¹⁵¹ and its continued survival in Bengal,¹⁵² the seat of biggest Islamisation east of the Indus. *So our focus should shift from external factors to the possible faultiness in their linkages with society and economy.* “Disappearance” of Buddhism can not be attributed merely to the destruction of the monasteries and the elimination of monks. This is not to deny their role as the institutional nucleus of Buddhism. We have already noted that in Pol Pot Era in Cambodia, amidst a sustained attempt of the communist regime for the physical elimination of the monks and monasteries, Buddhism assumed extreme apotropaic form and after the regime change quickly reorganized and regrouped itself.¹⁵³ The same was the case with Jaina temples and monasteries in medieval Gujarat.¹⁵⁴ Why Indian Buddhist monasteries could not regroup themselves after the initial shock and holocaust of Islamic attacks? We hear of monks educated at Nalanda, going to China and Korea in Late 13th – Early 14th Century and offering diverse services to the State.¹⁵⁵ Why they could not do the same thing at home? *It has also been suggested that one of the fundamental factors in the decline and disappearance of Buddhism in India was due to the “social failure”: that it became confined to the monasteries and offered insufficient cultivation of the laity.* It has been in deed pointed out by P.S. Jaini that unlike the Jainas, the Buddhists in India hardly devised any code of conduct for its lay adherent¹⁵⁶ and one of the explanations for this

¹⁵⁰ M.L. Bhatia, ‘Identifying Buddhism in Early Islamic Sources of Sind,’ *Buddhist Studies Review*, 19(2), 2002, p.179.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.181.

¹⁵² Sukomal Chaudhury, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh*, Calcutta, 1982; A. M. Khan, *The Maghs: A Buddhist Community in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1999; N. Ahmed, *Discover the Monuments of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1984. He has noted that contemporary Bangladesh has a Buddhist population of around half a million with their main concentration in Chittagong, Comilla and Dhaka Districts i.e. basically in Samatata area (p.45).

¹⁵³ Ian Harris, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-106.

¹⁵⁴ P.S. Jaini, ‘The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism in India: A Study in Contrast,’ in his *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, Delhi, 2001, p.142. Originally published in A.K. Narain (ed.) *Studies in History of Buddhism*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 81-91.

¹⁵⁵ Arthur Waley, ‘New Light on Buddhism in Medieval India’, *Melanges Chinols et bouddhiques*, 1931-32, (Full text downloaded from <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MEL/WEale.htm>), p.372. This remarkable Article is based upon the translation of a ‘political inscription’ (1378 AD) on a *stupa* in a Korean Temple, in the memory of an Indian monk Dhyanaabhadra. The inscription definitely suggests that Buddhism was living force in the 14th century Bengal, Kanchipuram (Tamilnadu), in the Chola Kingdom, Jalandhara (The Punjab), at Dvaravatipura (the capital of the Hoyasalas of Karnataka) and probably in Gujarat as well (p.355). Despite these early and significant writings on the survival of Buddhism after the Turkic destruction of its great monastic centers, due to some strange reasons, the theory of the apocalyptic collapse of Buddhism has been internalized in the mainstream Indian Historiography, giving us a lopsided impression that Buddhism did not exist outside the monastery.

¹⁵⁶ P.S. Jaini, *op.cit.*, he has sharply pointed out that in contrast to the Jaina clerics who have written many ‘codes of conducts’ for the laity, the Buddhist could manage only one such ‘code,’ *Upasakajanalankara*, and

apparent monastic apathy to the laity has been found in the “fact” that “Buddhism has nothing to do with lay people and it was never a social movement.”¹⁵⁷ As we have seen in the previous pages, this generalization is not tenable.

With references to the integrative role of the Brahmanical temples in Early Medieval India it has been rightly asserted that the rapid growth in the number and network of temples in this period was closely linked, as were the Brahmana dominated *Brahmadeyas* and *agraharas*, with the formation of sub-regional and regional kingdoms and their legitimization, consolidation of their resource base and forging of linkages across communities for social integration.¹⁵⁸ As we have seen for the Early Historic Phase, Buddhist monasteries were pioneers in this “forging of linkages across communities for social integration” in a major part of India. Why did they fail to retain their lead in the Early Medieval Period? The Marxist wisdom would attribute it to their failure on the agrarian frontiers and in the detribalization process; a theory which has now become almost axiomatic. Kosambi, one of the earliest propounders of this thesis, explained the gradual triumph of Brahmanism and gradual decay and disappearance of Buddhism due to their differential roles on agrarian frontiers: by 7th century A.D. “the major civilizing function of Buddhism has ended,” and the Brahmin at that time “was a pioneer who could stimulate production, for he had a good working calendar for predicting the times of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. He knew something of new crops and trade possibilities. He was not a drain upon production as had been his sacrificing ancestor or the large Buddhist monasteries.”¹⁵⁹ Early Medieval ‘Parasitical Monasteries consuming agrarian resources without providing anything in return’ have invited the attraction of another Marxist Scholar, R.S. Sharma.¹⁶⁰ Andre Wink has added the dimensions of long distance overland and maritime trade as well in explaining this phenomenon: that by the 11th Century AD, Islam replaced Buddhism as the ‘greatest trading religion of Asia’ while the agrarian world within India was gradually lost to the Brahmanas by the Buddhist; and it is this simultaneous loss of agrarian and mercantile space, Wink asserts, which has precipitated the Systemic Crisis within Indian Buddhism.¹⁶¹ ‘Agrarian failure’ of Buddhism in Early Medieval India may be bit surprising as in the very same centuries, Buddhist monasteries, by virtue of their institutional management and control over irrigation system and new agrarian technologies, controlled a significant part of agrarian sector in Sri Lanka¹⁶² and Burma¹⁶³ and emerged as the biggest land owners in these two regions. Kosambi, Sharma and Andre Wink are required to be sifted carefully.

At the time of Arab invasion Buddhism did assume a distinct agrarian colour in Sindh.¹⁶⁴ In Maitraka Gujarat, the old matrix of Buddhism and maritime trade continued

that too not until the Eleventh Century. Worse, it was not the work of any Indian monk, but was written by a Singhalese monk in South India, in Pali language, p. 144.

¹⁵⁷ N.N. Bhattacharya, *Buddhism in the History of India Ideas*, Delhi, 1993, p.238.

¹⁵⁸ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, Delhi, 2003, p.166.

¹⁵⁹ D.D. Kosambi, ‘The Decline of Buddhism in India,’ in *Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Method*, Pune, 1986, p. 66. Article originally published in 1956.

¹⁶⁰ R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay*, Delhi, 1987, p.131.

¹⁶¹ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1999, pp.349-350.

¹⁶² R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka*, Tuscon, 1979.

¹⁶³ See Kenneth R. Hall, ‘Buddhism as an Economic Force in Pagan Burma,’ in Nicholas Tarling (ed.) *The Cambridge History of South East Asia*, Vol. I, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 240-245.

¹⁶⁴ M.L. Bhatia, *op.cit*, p. 164.

at Vallabhi,¹⁶⁵ and these monasteries had a very close involvement with the agrarian sector.¹⁶⁶ In Tamilnadu, through the agrarian world was gradually lost to the Brahmanas and Brahmanical temples, Buddhist monastic associations with port towns and maritime trade continued to prosper.¹⁶⁷ In Orissa, the monasteries kept on attracting lay patronage and pilgrimage, rendering Ratnagiri 'second only to Bodhagaya as a pilgrimage centre,'¹⁶⁸ and there Buddhist monasteries had a 'subterranean survival,' resurfacing again in the Mahima Dharma movement.¹⁶⁹ In the case of Early Medieval Bengal a very complex matrix of Buddhism, maritime trade and agrarian expansion developed: a phenomenon we would try to discuss in some detail later. At this juncture, sufficient it would be to assert that it may be ahistorical to homogenize the functional dimensions of Indian Monastic Buddhism for the Early Medieval Period, rather, for any Period. We need micro studies, with a regional perspective, to be at a better footing to understand the differential localization and socialization pattern of monasteries across the diverse landscapes in India.

Unfortunately, this approach is hardly visible in the available macro studies on Early Medieval Indian Buddhism. Thus K.L. Hazra¹⁷⁰ in his reconstruction of Buddhism as depicted in the writings of Chinese Pilgrims, is more interested in seeing the sectarian affiliations of the monasteries, their arts, doctrines they pursued, but has hardly any concern to see the transition taking place between the periods of Fa-Hain and Huen Tsang and beyond. L.M. Joshi, in his study of Buddhist Culture in India during the 7th-8th Centuries AD, begins with a promising start and attempts to study certain new themes such as evidences of royal control over ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Sangha;¹⁷¹ management of their landed estates by the monasteries; inter-monastic hierarchy, basically by drawing inferences from one monk controlling many monasteries.¹⁷² Long before him, S. Dutta has already proposed that Early Medieval Monastic Universities of Bihar and Bengal together formed a hierarchic network;¹⁷³ but neither of two had delineated a functional basis, and chronological evolution, of the same. Moreover, Joshi, by his assertion that the pattern of endowments to the monasteries as mentioned by Fa-Hain 'could be applied in 'Toto' in understanding the same in the 7th-8th centuries,¹⁷⁴ largely refuses to recognize the institutional transitions in the Sangha as per its interactions with geographical and chronological variables.

Ronald Davidson (*Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*, 2004) on the other hand provides a brilliant contrast and demands a greater treatment. In a significant section of Buddhological Historiography, Early Medieval mutations in

¹⁶⁵ Nandini Sinha, 'Early Maitrakas, Landgrant Charters and Regional State Formation in Early Medieval Gujarat,' *Studies in History*, 17, 2, n.s., 2001, p. 158.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.158.

¹⁶⁷ R.Champakalakshmi, 'Buddhism in Tamilnadu: Patterns of Patronage,' in *Buddhism in Tamilnadu, Collected Papers*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai, 1998, pp. 81-82.

¹⁶⁸ Debala Mitra, *Ratnagiri* (1958-1961), Memoir of Archaeological Survey of India, no. 80, vol. 2, New Delhi, 1981, p.31.

¹⁶⁹ N.N. Vasu, *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, Calcutta, 1911, pp. 174-175.

¹⁷⁰ K.L. Hazra, *Buddhism in India as Described by Chinese Pilgrims, A.D.399-689*, New Delhi, 1983.

¹⁷¹ L.M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India during the Seventh and Eight Centuries A.D.*, Delhi, 1967. Reprint, Delhi, 2002, pp.74-75. (All references from reprint edition).

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p.75.

¹⁷³ S. Dutta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, London, 1962, p.353.

¹⁷⁴ L.M. Joshi, *op.cit*, p.66.

Indian Buddhism in its ‘degenerate’ Esoteric, Tantric garb have been perceived to be fundamentally important in its eventual disappearance from India; of course without offering much analysis of the factors which forced Buddhism to take a form somewhat different from its earlier Theravada and Mahayana traditions. It is in this backdrop that importance of Davidson may be properly analysed. He provides a brilliant and powerful counter-rhetoric to this thesis by situating the Early Medieval mutations within Indian Buddhism in the material and social milieu of the Age. His study, based primarily upon the analysis of Buddhist Tantric texts in Sanskrit and their Tibetan and Chinese translations, is a welcome contribution. However, on the part of the author, a reluctance to use art historical, archaeological and epigraphical sources is discernible; and it may not be surprising if reservations remain regarding his methods or interpretations. He has tried to trace the genesis and trajectory of Tantric Buddhism in the backdrop of material mutations and ideological involutions of Early Medieval India; though the feudal factor always seems to be the bedrock in formulating his core arguments.

In the volatile Early Medieval period, Davidson argues, Buddhism had a great distress due to diverse factors : evaporating mercantile patronage due to decline in the long distance trade and Arab domination of the High Seas, rendering it increasingly dependent on Royal, feudal patronage;¹⁷⁵ lessening participation of women in Buddhism, and ultimate disappearance of the order of the nuns within the Sangha;¹⁷⁶ militant Saiva competition; and a serious dent in the “previous Buddhist monopoly of dealing with the Barbarians, outcastes, tribals, and foreigners” by the Bahamans who were now willing to travel great distance in search of land and patronage.¹⁷⁷ All this resulted in to gradual spatial shrinkage of Buddhism, and its contraction to select areas of strength. Coupled with it was the larger intellectual crisis: Buddhist intellectuals of this age developed an agenda of Skepticism, and the epistemology which followed brought it dangerously close to Brahmanism,¹⁷⁸ resulting in to a creeping realization within Buddhist community of Buddhism being a “Tradition in Duress.”¹⁷⁹ It is here that core arguments of Davidson crystallize: evolution of Esoteric Buddhism was the result of adaptations by a “Tradition in Duress” to the *Samanta* Feudalism, for its very survival. As a result of this adaptation, Buddhism was forced to feudalize itself, leading to the genesis of Esoteric, Tantric Buddhism. In fact, “Esoteric Buddhism as Sacralised *Samanta* Feudalism”¹⁸⁰ sums up the core argument of the book, and it is the *Saamanta* Feudalism, Davidson tries to show, which largely determined the tropes and trajectories of Tantric Buddhism.

Davidson then proceeds to examine the differential but interrelated functions of ‘Institutional Esoterism,’ developing within the Monasteries,¹⁸¹ and “Non—institutional esoterism” of the *Siddhas*, both developing a symbiotic relationship ultimately. In the centers of institutional esoteric Buddhism, there was a concerted attempt to forge a closer alliance with the royalty to have greater royal patronage, and due to this there was great internalization of Feudal values and ethos not only in the management of their

¹⁷⁵ Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, Delhi, 2004, pp. 77-83.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 91-98.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 95-105.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 166.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 114.

landed estates but also in their very rituals and dogmas. The author has noted that there was a close resemblance between the monastic management of their landed estates, control and administration of 'branch monasteries' by the 'mega-monasteries' like Nalanda and Feudal management of their landed estates and subordinate *samanta-mandala*,¹⁸² an interesting observation in deed.

The other spectrum of Buddhist esoterism was the "Non-institutional esoterism" of the *Siddhas*; the non-conformists, who coming from disparate backgrounds and lacking any Pan-Indic Institutional Structure, borrowed freely from other institutional religions, yet at the same time, developed most fiery criticism of all of them including institutional Buddhism. The *Siddhas* gradually made their way to the monasteries; developing a symbiotic relationship with the monks, sharing a common syllabus, ritual vocabulary and a grudging respect for the scriptural compositions and spirituality of each other. Within a remarkably short period (mid 7th to mid 11th century) Esoteric Buddhism produced a voluminous literature, and spread rapidly to Tibet, China and rest of East Asia. And thus Esoteric Buddhism, Davidson concludes, was "a tenacious success"¹⁸³ which 'stemmed the Saiva tide sweeping up from the South,' influenced the Buddhist Traditions of Tibet, China and rest of Eastern Asia, and "indeed the overwhelming success of the Secret Path i.e. Esoteric Buddhism, has propelled it in to a position where it has become perhaps the least secret of all Buddhist meditative systems."¹⁸⁴

However, it is difficult to concur with his concluding observations that Tantric Buddhism, developing within the monasteries, was a 'tenacious' and 'overwhelming' success. Historical evidences seem to suggest otherwise. The overt aim of the book is to attempt a "social history" of Tantric Buddhism, i.e. Tantric Buddhist pattern of socialization and localization in the Early Medieval landscape. Not long after the evolution and growth of Esoteric Buddhism, Buddhism did disappear from the larger parts of India, and this disappearance can not be solely blamed on "Islamic Iconoclasm": the assumption may not be invalid that some fundamental fault lines might have crept in Esoteric Buddhist pattern of socialization and regional adaptations. In deed it is in the regions dominated by Tantric Buddhism in the Early Medieval Period; East Bengal and Swat valley, where medieval Islamisation has been most spectacular. It will be definitely a promising area for future research to analyze the possible fault lines in the Tantric Buddhist Patterns of socialization and localization within a regional framework.

Two regions to be studied carefully to understand the Early Medieval Monastic localization and socialization patterns are Bihar and Bengal, more especially, Bengal. Larger parts of Bengal seem to be hardly touched by Buddhism in the Early Historic Phase and the boundaries of the *Madhyadesa* ended near Rajamahala during the period immediately after the Buddha.¹⁸⁵ Buddhism seems to be the first institutional religion to penetrate its swampy jungles, with the monasteries forming a very complex matrix with maritime trade and agrarian expansion in the Early Medieval Period and even earlier; yet the Delta offers the most fertile ground for Islamisation in the subsequent Medieval Period : a period when it becomes an "expanding agrarian civilization whose cultural counterpart was the growth of the cult of Allah;" in which rural mosques made of thatch

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 106.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 339.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 187.

¹⁸⁵ S.Dutta, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, London, 1962, p. 103.

and wood, ‘linked politically to the State and economically to the hinterland’ were functioning as ‘nucleus of integration’¹⁸⁶ for integrating various ‘tribal’ communities to the Islamic Great tradition. In the vast landmass of South and Southeast Asia, from the Satluj to the Mekong, eastern Bengal is the only land irreversibly lost by the Indic World. To what extent, if any, Buddhist Monasteries were responsible for leaving this kind of socio-economic and cultural vacuum which was later used by Islam? Yet, to our surprise, why in entire India, Buddhism has a continued survival as a living religion in (South Eastern) Bengal only? Unfortunately, most of available studies, of the sort of “Buddhism in Ancient Bengal” or “Religion in Ancient Bengal” hardly show even the awareness of this enigma. In this category, we may count the celebrated *Bangalir Itihasa, Adiparva*, by N.R. Ray¹⁸⁷ (English translation by J.W. Hood as *History Of Bengali People*), Rama Chatterji,¹⁸⁸ Pushpa Niyogi¹⁸⁹ and more recently Chitaranjana Patra.¹⁹⁰ Nearly all of them are concerned with monastic art and architecture, identifications of their locations, occasionally in the land grants the monasteries received. Hardly any of them offer any analysis of the functional role of the monasteries in the society and economy.

B.M. Morrisson stands as a brilliant exception. In his *Political Centres and Culture Regions of early Bengal*, based upon his analysis of Bengal Inscriptions, he could visualize four sub-regions within the Bengal Delta; with the first three viz. the central, western and northern sectors of the Delta showing evidences for fully developed property relations and stratified society, in fact they “were the heartlands of Brahmanical culture in the Delta.”¹⁹¹ But the fourth sub-region, Sylhet-Komilla-Chittagong sector (roughly the region referred to as Samatata in inscriptions) the pattern was fundamentally different. It was more or less a ‘frontier’ society with relatively sparse population and large uncultivated or forested landscape, a society which has just made the transition to State level Polity. Here huge tracts of lands were granted to the Buddhist monasteries or hundreds of Brahmanas.¹⁹² Here Buddhist monasteries were acting as, as it appears, nucleus of integration, aiding and abetting the transition towards a more complex society. We may add here that his study forces us to leave aside macro generalizations regarding the functional role of Buddhist monasteries in Bengal Delta, say for example between Somapura Mahavihara of the Pala Age and Mainamati Complex as they were functioning in different locales and interacting with different socio-economic variables. His Monograph on the Mainamati Complex (*Lalmai: A Cultural Centre in Early Bengal*, 1974), he has offered an in-depth analysis of the functional role of the same within the Samatata region, as well as the evolution of the monastic complex. Based upon his archaeological survey, he could discover 57 monastic sites within the complex for which hardly any literary data is available. He has proffered an inter-monastic hierarchy within

¹⁸⁶ Richard M. Eaton, ‘Who are the Bengal Muslims? Conversions and Islamisation in Bengal’ in R. Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding Bengal Muslims*, Delhi, 2001, p.35.

¹⁸⁷ N.R. Ray, *History of the Bengali People*, Translated by J.W. Hood, Calcutta 1994. See the chapter on Religious conditions.

¹⁸⁸ Rama Chatterji, *Religion in Bengal during Pala and Sena Times*, Calcutta, 1985.

¹⁸⁹ Pushpa Niyogi, *Buddhism in Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1967. See especially pp. 50-80 for the analysis of landgrants to the monasteries, but without considering any spatial variations.

¹⁹⁰ Chitaranjana Patra, ‘Spread of Buddhism in Bengal’, in A. Dutta (ed.) *History and Archaeology of Eastern India*, Delhi, 1998, pp. 200-212.

¹⁹¹ B.M. Morrisson, *Political Centre and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Tuscon, 1970, Jaipur, 1980 (Indian edition), p.38. (All references from Indian edition)

¹⁹² Ibid, p.35.

the Complex. He has noted the absence of any Settlement Site in the immediate neighborhood of the Complex or in the countryside, and in their absence, he has done hinterland analysis of the Complex on the basis of inscriptional evidences, to situate it within the Samatata region, and he could visualize that it was the very hub, the very nucleus of the same. To situate it within the larger spatial context, viz. in the Bengal Delta, he has compared the Mainamati sites with other excavated sites of Pre- Muslim Bengal. One may not fully agree with his method that the size of hinterland of a monastery can be estimated by dividing the distance between any two contemporary monastic centers,¹⁹³ his approach as a whole is quite refreshing.

The Monastic Complex at Mainamati demands greater research. No doubt it was the political, economic and spiritual nucleus of the Early Medieval Samatata region. In the same region, we see a continued endowments to the monasteries by the newly Sanskritised Tribal Rulers,¹⁹⁴ that is the monasteries were having some role in the tribal State formations and their legitimizations. In the same Centuries, maritime focus of the Bengal Delta shifts towards the East, towards the Chittagong Coast.¹⁹⁵ And Samatata, unlike most other parts of South Asia, shows a continued tradition Silver coinage. What is the role of the monasteries in this complex matrix? In fact a much more intricate linkages between the Early Medieval Bengal monasteries and maritime connections is discernible than what we generally perceive. We see one *Mabhanavika* ('The Great Mariner') Buddhagupta of Raktamrtika monastery¹⁹⁶ going to Java; monasteries at the Port town of Tamralipti decline with the decline of the port,¹⁹⁷ whereas they crop up at an emerging inland riverine port cum warehousing settlement, *Vangasagarasambhandagarika*;¹⁹⁸ and Devaparavata (located somewhere near the Mainamati Complex, but yet to be identified in the ground) itself functioned as a port.¹⁹⁹ But here is a big dilemma for us. When Samatata monasteries were active on the agrarian and maritime frontiers, and were acting as stabilizing factors for the emerging Polities, why do we witness the biggest

¹⁹³ Idem, *Lalmai: A Cultural Centre in Early Bengal*, London, and Seattle, 1974, p. 129.

¹⁹⁴ See G. Bhattacharya, 'A Preliminary Note on the inscribed Metal Vase from the National Museum of Bangladesh,' in D. Mitra (ed.), *Explorations in the Art and Archaeology of South Asia: Essays Dedicated to N.G. Majumdar*, Calcutta, 1996. The inscription records the donation of land to Buddhist monastery by one Devatideva Bhattaraka (8th century A.D.), who belonged to the non-Aryan *Khasa* tribe who had embraced Buddhism (p.239). Also see G. Bhattacharya, 'An Inscribed Metal Vase, Most Probably from Chittagong' in A.J. Gail and G.J.R. Mevissen, *South Asian Archaeology*, 1991, pp. 323-338.

¹⁹⁵ Ranabir Chakravarty, 'Vangasagara Samabhandagarika: A Riverine Trade Centre in Early Medieval Bengal,' in his *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*, Delhi, 2002, p. 153.

¹⁹⁶ S.R. Das, *An Interim Report on Excavations at Rajabadidanga and Terracotta Seals and Sealings*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 57-58.

¹⁹⁷ From 6th-7th Century A.D., the port of Tamralipti started declining, and there is no evidence to prove that sea-faring merchants used it for maritime adventures from 8th century A.D. onwards (A. Bhattacharya, 'Trade Routes of Ancient Bengal,' in A. Dutta, *op.cit.*, p.164). This is reflected in the decreasing number of monasteries. Fa Hain saw 22 monasteries but Huen-Tsang could see only 10 monasteries (Chitaranjana Patra, *op.cit.*, p. 203), and later records are silent about the presence of monasteries at Tamralipti.

¹⁹⁸ Ranabir Chakravarty, *op.cit.* He has convincingly identified Vangasagara Sambhandagarika, a riverine port with ware- housing facilities with Sabhar, 24 k.m. N.W. of Dhaka (p. 145.), and this place contains stupa and monastery like structures.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Islamisation within Bengal in this sub-region only?²⁰⁰ More importantly, why within Bengal, Buddhism could survive as living tradition in the Medieval period and beyond in Samatata only? Hopefully future researches will unveil some aspects of this vexed problem.

Available studies on Early Medieval Monasteries in Bihar do not offer very encouraging picture. R.C. Prasad (*Archaeology of Champa and Vikramashila*, 1987), B.M. Kumar (*Archaeology of Pataliputra and Nalanda*, 1987), and B.N. Mishra (*Nalanda*, 1998 in three volumes) do not leave any other impression except being a compendium of available informations. This is most regretful in the context of Misra and Kumar. Misra in his monumental work has devoted two and a half volume to the study of such themes as art and architecture, iconography (one whole volume); reminding us once again the prophetic words of D.K. Chakravarty – “one should not entertain the idea that nothing more needs to be done at Nalanda. No attempt has been done to study Nalanda as an ancient settlement of which the famous monastery was only a part.”²⁰¹ Hopefully this type of study will provide some insights in to the functional relationship between the Monastic Complex of Nalanda and its immediate neighborhood. Reconstruction of its pilgrimage geography can of course be done with a combined use of epigraphical and literary data.²⁰² R.K. Chaudhury has indeed offered some interesting details about the role of the monks of *Vikramashila Mahavihara* in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism in his *The University of Vikramashila* (1975), but he has not analyzed the support system of the monastery or its interactions with the wider socio-economic processes.

In the end mention must be made of a brilliant study of the Tabo Monastery in Himachal Pradesh by Laxman S. Thakur entitled *Buddhism in the Western Himalaya: A Study of Tabo Monastery* (2001, Delhi). The monastery had its beginnings in 9th-10th centuries and it is continuing as living institution in the high altitude Lahaul and Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh. Though much of his study is concerned with Art Historical themes, he has brilliantly analyzed the alignment trans-Himalayan trade routes and the monastic involvement with that; pattern of land grants to the monastery and its participation in the peasant economy; the role played by the monastery in the cultic integration of the Pre- Buddhist Bon religion. He has been largely successful in tracing the variegated functions performed by the Monastery; a multiplicity which ensures its continued survival. We need more studies of individual monasteries in other parts of India.

Concluding Thoughts

What was attempted in the previous pages was indeed a very sketchy outline of the functional dynamics of Buddhist monasteries in India and offering any grand generalization on the basis of this kind of Survey is likely to be invidious. However, some suggestions may of course be offered. It may be safely suggested that it may be ahistorical to reduce the functional dimensions of monasteries to the injunctions of the Vinaya

²⁰⁰ Richard Eaton, *op.cit.*, p. 43. M.R. Tarafadar, ‘The Cultural Identity of Bengali Muslims as Reflected in Medieval Bengali Literature,’ in Perween Hasan and M. Islam (ed.), *Essays in Memory of M.R. Tarafadar*, Dhaka, 1999, p. 445.

²⁰¹ D.K. Chakravarty, *Issues in East Indian Archaeology*, Delhi, 1998, p. 97.

²⁰² My Doctoral Research at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University is trying to explore these two aspects of Nalanda: its relationship with the immediate neighborhood, as well as its place in the wider Buddhist World.

Texts: a better approach may be to see the interactions between the text and context, to analyze the trajectories of the complex functional matrix monasteries have created or were a part thereof. Buddhism was one of the earliest World Religions, yet it has developed remarkable local colours across the vast landmass of Asia. This “localization” process, what has been earlier referred to as ‘translation in the local idiom,’ has been well documented in the case of many Asian countries, but it has barely begun in India. Future researches on the functional dimensions of Indian Monastic Buddhism will have to negotiate one core issue: how does the *Sangha* localize at a particular place, yet retains its supra-local character. To analyze the twist and turns of this supralocal-local dialectic, shifting the focus away from the *Aryacaturdisa-bhikshusangha*, “Universal Sangha of Four Quarters,” to the individual monastery may not be a bad idea.