



**A SURVEY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF MATERIAL LIFE IN
BUDDHIST MONASTERIES OF EARLY MEDIEVAL EASTERN INDIA**

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In the present work an attempt has been made to survey the primary and secondary sources for the study of functional aspect of Buddhist monasteries in eastern India during the early medieval period. Why this time and space? Eastern India is considered to be the heartland of Buddhism. It was here, when Buddhism originated in the 6th- 5th century B.C. and effloresced during the early medieval times i.e. 5th-12th century A.D. Archaeologically speaking, almost 70 percent of the Indian Buddhist monuments, are located in this region. In the history of Buddhist architecture, the early medieval period appears to be important because the *stupa* (small oval shaped architecture) seems to gradually give way to *Chaitya* Halls and *viharas* or monasteries. At the level of patronage, community patronage was superseded by aristocratic and royal patronage, which unlike the early historic donations by merchants, traders and artisans, was quite substantial. This shift helped the construction and maintenance of large monasteries, some of which owing to their dimensions came to be known as *maha viharas* (prefix *maha* means great). There is good evidence for such developments in eastern India, roughly covering the present day states of West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar in India and Bangladesh. Nalanda monastery for example was supported by the grant of two hundred villages and other monasteries, like Vikramashila and Paharpur were equally well endowed.

Primary Sources

A major source of information for our work is the various excavated sites depicting ruins of early medieval monasteries. Although, most of them are in highly dilapidated conditions, these sites throw ample light on the monastic life of that period. The discussion of these archaeological data will automatically better our understanding of early medieval monasteries in eastern India. As there are innumerable sites corresponding to our period, it is difficult to quantify their exact numbers. However, to have some idea about them we have worked out a list of some of the major as well as minor sites (with state wise configuration) as follows:

Bengal—1. Somapura monastery(identified with Paharpur in Rajshahi district of Bangladesh). 2.Jagaddala monastery (Barind region of Bangladesh).3. Raktamrittika monastery (in Murshidabad district of West Bengal). 4. Pattikera monastery (identified with Mainamati-Lalmai Ridge in the Tippera district of Bangladesh) 5. Bhasur monastery(near Mahasthan, Bogra district in Bangladesh) 6. Tamralipti monastery (identified with Tamruk in Midnapur district of West Bengal) 7. Sitakot monastery8. Jhewari (in Chittagong district of Bangladesh). 9. The minor sites include Halud monastery (near Paharpur), Pandita monastery (in Chittagong district, Bangladesh), etc.

In Orissa—1. Ratnagiri monastery (on a small stream called Keluaain Cuttack district). 2. Puspagiri monastery (identified with the contiguous hills of Lalitagiri and Udayagiri in Cuttack district) 3. Achutrajpur (in Puri district) 4. Khiching (in Mayurbhanj district). 4. The minor sites are situated at Vajragiri (in Cuttack district), Bhorasila monastery (Puri district), etc.

In Bihar, we have—1. Nalanda monastery (in Biharsharif district) 2. Vikramashila monastery (in Bhagalpur district) 3. Kurkihar (in Gaya district) 4. And minor sites at Taradih (Gaya district), Ghosrawan (Biharsharif district), etc.

In Assam, not a single monastery has been excavated as yet, so we have only minor sites at Deo-Parvat, Dahparvatiya, Tezpur (all in Golaghat subdivision), etc.

Inscriptions constitute the major source for our study, and the majority of the inscriptions of the period are in the form of royal land grants. This type of grant was often engraved on the copper plates, but a few written on stone have also been found. The royal charters were not only the king's announcement of the endowment but also were official orders decreed upon the government officers and the villagers concerned. Though the contents of the royal land grants of our period show considerable variety, the general pattern of the charters was almost similar. Some grants begin with the genealogy of the rulers and then enumerate the details of the grant. The records are concluded with some imprecatory verses and mention the name of the scribes and the engravers. The section giving the details of the grant contains valuable information for the study of land system, taxation as well as the privileges and immunities transferred to the donees. Moreover it provides the details concerning the type of land, nature of cultivation and sometimes the exact area of land donated. Although the land grant that are not in the form of the above pattern, they too, often provide details of the types of land, boundaries, cultivation, etc., Almost all the donatory inscriptions contain information pertaining to the nature of endowment and the donee. Sometimes they mention the purpose for which the benefaction was made. These details furnish valuable information for studying the extent of property held by the Buddhist monasteries and their involvement in economic activities. Besides, they help determine the type of property donated, the nature of the patronage, which the institution received. The inscriptions have the unique importance of being contemporary sources. Moreover in many cases, they can definitely be dated and located, Hence, their information can be useful in determining the chronology of development of monasteries in various parts of eastern India during the early medieval period.

In eastern India inscription recording land grants in favour of monasteries are available only from the Gupta period (4th 5th century A.D) but the practice soon seems to have become widespread. We have a total of fifty-nine inscriptions related with the Buddhist monasteries, in eastern India during the time span of A.D. (500-1200) centuries. Twenty-one of these inscriptions are land grants ranging from small plots to vast areas covering several villages. The rest thirty eight inscriptions record donation of other kinds made by various types of people to different Buddhist monasteries(monk as community) as well as, to certain individual monks Region wise analysis of these land grants indicates that the highest number of land grants came from Bengal (8) followed by Orissa (6), Bihar (5) and Assam (1). Chronologically speaking, the majority of land grants belong to the time span of seventh-eighth century A.D, while few of them may be ascribed to the period tenth to twelfth century A.D.

Apart from the donatory inscriptions, we have used a large number of inscriptions on seals and sealings found at the site of great monastery of Nalanda. Though many religious institutions used seals for administrative purpose, only Nalanda has yielded a large number of seals and sealings containing valuable information. Most of the legends on the Nalanda seals and sealings have been deciphered and translated; yet some of them need more careful reading and interpretation. The value of the information, which can be gathered from the seals, depends largely upon the interpretation of terms used in legends. Their information can be used mainly for the study of the administrative organisation of the Nalanda monastery and also of its relation with regional monasteries and various outside bodies. The unique importance of the seals and sealings lies in the valuable light they throw on certain aspects of the internal administration of the institution and also the way in which it exercised its authority over the villages under its control, aspects which are not brought to light by other sources.

Among the literary sources, we have used for the present study the most important information comes from the records of the Chinese travellers. The Chinese monk Hsuan Tsang, who travelled in India in the first half of the seventh century A.D., has recorded his experience and impressions of various institutions and individuals. I-tsing, who went to India a few decades after Hsuan Tsang has also recorded an account of his visit. Although Hsuan Tsang visited many places in both north and south India, I-tsing's associations were limited to eastern India. Both of them spent much of their time studying and copying Buddhist scriptures and they have left valuable memoirs of several Buddhist monasteries in eastern India. However, their information is largely limited to the function and organisation of larger monasteries such as Nalanda, and therefore very little is revealed about the management of affairs of other monasteries. Yet, theirs is the only available information on certain aspects of economic function of Buddhist monasteries. In this respect, I-tsing's records contain more details than the account of Hsuan Tsang. I-tsing presents a full discussion of various problems arising from disciplinary matters within the monasteries and that out of organisation and function of the monasteries. Fa-hsien's records as compared to Hsuan Tsang's and I-tsing's records, is less informative on the afore-said issues. Of all these sources, the inscriptions though remaining the most important source for our study, are necessarily limited in number for our period of about 650 years.

In addition, as mentioned above, they are not evenly spread over the region under consideration. Orissa has yielded the largest number of inscriptions, whereas only a few have come to light from Assam. Hence, it becomes extremely difficult to study the various stages of development of certain aspects of the economic functions of monasteries. Moreover, the value of inscriptions as a source for a study of this type largely depends upon the possibility of explaining various terms and expressions mentioned in them. One has to rely on etymology though it is not always a satisfactory method. On the other hand, certain terms, though clear by themselves, do not enlighten us on their specific relevance to the subject. Therefore one has, for the interpretation of such terms, to consider evidence from other regions. Yet, the accuracy of any interpretation based on evidence from other regions, may be questionable on the ground of possible regional variations.

As regards the accounts of Chinese travellers, their evidence is entirely limited to the affairs and organisation of the Buddhist institutions. Even that information is based largely on the larger monasteries, where the travellers spent most of their time. Besides, the travellers were not interested in recording any possible difference in the conditions and organisation of

the establishments belonging to various Buddhist schools. Above all, their main concern was to record the condition of Buddhism in India and to study how the Buddhist *Vinaya* (Text) was practised by the Indian monks, and therefore, any information on the social and economic functions of the Buddhist monasteries are found only in incidental references. Owing to these limitations, it is inevitable that many questions would remain unanswered.

Secondary Sources

A survey of the works of Devangana Desai, Herman Kulke, R.N.Misra, R.N.Nandi, Burton Stein, among others, bears this out. Very little attention has been paid to the economic activities of the East Indian Buddhist *vihāras*, whose importance is often emphasised in other contexts. These monastic establishments, after all, were major institutions and quite possibly centers of alternative ideology. In terms of dimension, activities, patronage, capacity for legitimation and their social, economic and religious networks, they were of no little consequence. Eastern India was a major area of Buddhist activities. The religion, its organisation and institutions were recipients of community and royal patronage in the region during the early medieval period. The Pālas ruling over parts of Bengal and Bihar and the Bhaumakaras of Orissa were among the principal patrons around the eighth- tenth centuries. However, the treatment of the subject, as it is sparse, is far from satisfactory. It has not been given the necessary and independent attention it deserves.

A brief survey of some of the works bearing on the problem would highlight the gaps in the treatment of the subject. Debala Mitra on the basis of archaeological as well as literary evidences has provided narrative details of Buddhist monuments in India¹. She believes that monasteries came into being during the life-time of the Buddha and they were meant to provide shelter to the Buddha and his homeless disciples during the rainy season. According to Mitra, on his death-bed, Buddha himself had suggested the erection of *stūpas* over his mortal remains. In the first part of this work, she presents a sketch of Buddha's life which had great bearing on the Buddhist monuments and sculptures. In the first portion of part II, a historical background of the Buddhist monuments from the beginning to the last days has been furnished, while in the remaining portion, evolution of *stūpas*, monasteries *chaityagrihas* and temples- the main components of Buddhist architecture- have been traced with the help of copious illustrations a line or two as treatment of eastern India.. In the third part of this work, the monuments and sites are grouped either according to the state or region wise. Before introducing the sites in particular group, a preliminary survey of the state or region has been relevantly presented in each case. D.Mitra has discussed all the major Buddhist sites like Ratnagiri, Somapura, Nālandā, Vikramaśīla , Jagaddala, Mainamati, etc. This work is basically a written record of primary materials on the basis of the archaeological sources available at various sites and also on the basis of literary evidence of these sites as recorded by foreign travellers like Hsuan tsang, I-tsing, Fa-hsien, etc. Thus, it may serve as a raw material for our work. Mitra's other works like *Bronzes from Achutrajpur and Ratnagiri*, are similar in nature of their contents. In the first book (i.e. *Bronzes from Bangladesh*²), the author has brought Chittagong to limelight as an important center of Buddhist art. The cumulative evidence of her study proves the existence of a distinctive local school with an identity of its own in the sphere of metal sculpture; at the same time, here is a tradition, which by no means is cut off from the mainstream of the artistic tradition of the sub-continent. She considers Jhewary as the most important site in the Chittagong region where eighty icons, one miniature temple, one metal stupa (all belonging to the ninth- tenth century A.D.) have

¹ Debala Mitra, *Buddhist monuments*, 1971.

² Debala Mitra, *Bronzes from Bangladesh*, 1982.

been unearthed. Achutrajpur³ and Ratnagiri⁴(two volumes) by Debala Mitra, are similar in nature of the content. Both these works are basically a compilation of excavation reports, where under Debala Mitra aegis, several phases of excavations were undertaken in the two Orissan sites in the early sixties. In all these works mentioned above, the author has given details of architecture and layout of the structure at various sites meticulous care. But, all these works lack insightful interpretation or analysis of the subject. However, they are useful as a source material for further studies. They also appear to stimulate an urge among scholars to undertake exploration and excavation in order to unearth further ancient remains of Buddhist structures in eastern India. *History of Buddhism in India*, by Lama Taranath⁵ is the most authentic book on the topic of Buddhism. It was originally written in 1608. Unfortunately, the original manuscript of this work is not available. In 1946, Taranath's work was compiled and translated from Tibetan to English. It encompasses a vast time span of about 1500 years [from Ajatshatru to *Turuska* (Turkish) invasion]- in the background of which Taranath wants us to understand the history of Buddhism in India. It appears to us to be an amazing intellectual performance. The importance of his work lies more particularly in its chapters covering the period intervening between the visit of Hsuan Tsang and the virtual extinction of Buddhism in India, marked by the end of two important monasteries in eastern India, Vikramsila and Odantipura. Taranath was the only historian to have compiled for us in his own way through a vast amount of relevant data concerning Indian Buddhism its latest phase, which are not easy to trace elsewhere. Secondly, he gives us a correct idea of chronology of the development of *vihāras* as well as Buddhism in India. We know for the first time from Taranath's account, the sequence in which most notables accepted Buddhism, the names of their patrons and enemies and trends of their theological activities. Actually Taranath's history is not a history as such, but a document, which calls for further research into history and provides for some remarkable and rare facts.

In the context of Orissa, N.K.Sahu's *Buddhism in Orissa*⁶, provides the traditional stereotyped description of Buddhism, basing itself on literary, inscriptional and sculptural evidences. The institutional and ideological dimensions are the major casualties of the work. However in favour of the work it may be said that it tried to encompass the material available till the 1950's and at the time of the publication of the work, not much was known about Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, and Lalitagiri. In *Buddhism and other religious cult of South East Asia*, S.S.Tripathi⁷ admits that it will serve as a source material for research work, as it has primarily narrative details of major Buddhist sites in Orissa. The origin and development of Buddhism in Orissa is also the subject matter of this book. Tripathi like N.K.Sahu relying on Taranath's work believes that Kalinga was the birth-place of Mahayanism and similarly for this doesn't find any epigraphical corroboration. He has talked about Buddhism during Bhaumakaras and Somavansis period. The former period, according to him, was characterized by tremendous development of Buddhism in the region, while the latter period witnessed the reversal of the earlier process. The author has tried to analyse the evolution of *Tāntricism* in Buddhism in its sociological perspective by making use of the concept of Sanskritisation, where autochthonous non- Brahmanical rituals were encompassed into the Buddhist pantheon (as in the case of Hinduism) to satisfy the masses' religious urge. *The Bhaumakara-Buddhist Kings of Orissa and Their Times*, by Biswarup Das⁸ is based on

³ Debala Mitra, *Achutrajpur*, (1970).

⁴ Debala Mitra, *Ratnagiri*, (1981).

⁵ Lama Taranath, *History Of Buddhism In India*, Potala edition (1946).

⁶ N.K.Sahu, *Buddhism in Orissa*, 1958.

⁷ S.S.Tripathi, *Buddhism and other religious cults of South East Asia*.

⁸ Biswarup Das, *The Bhaumakara-Buddhist Kings of Orissa and Their Times*.

archaeological and literary sources available in the region. He has talked about various *mathas*, monasteries and sanctuaries. He believes that *vihāras* were not merely religious institutions, but were also great educational and cultural centres. However, he fails to show the economic role of these *vihāras* vis-à-vis the Orissan set-up.

For Bengal, R.C.Mazumdar's *History of Bengal* is a very comprehensive work, giving narrative details of Buddhist sites comprising of *vihāras*, *stūpas*, etc.⁹. The author's reliance is on archaeological and literary sources to reconstruct the history of the region. Accounts of Chinese travelers like Hsuan Tsang, I-tsing, Fa-hsien, Tao-lin and Shengchi have been judiciously used by the author. Mazumdar has not accepted all those records on their face-value. He does not agree with Hsuan Tsang's view of persecution of Buddhist followers by Sasanka on the ground that the flourishing state of Buddhism in the capital of Sasanka, i.e. Karnasuvarna was not possible if Hsuan Tsang was correct. The first part of this book discusses a large number of *vihāras* at Traikutaka (W. Bengal), Devikata (Northern Bengal), Samragara (East Bengal), Phulahari (Western Magadha), Pattikera (Northern Bengal), Vikrampur (Dacca) Jagaddala (Varendri), etc., along with their layout and architectural details. A comparison has been made between Buddhism as described by Hsuan Tsang (seventh century A.D.) and its history during the Pāla period. He has also discussed the evolution of *Tantric* Buddhism. However, the functional aspect of *vihāras* has been totally ignored by the author. Social and religious aspects of Bengal inscription, by Dr. R. K. Tripathi¹⁰ is basically a compilation of a number of epigraphic records of land grants made by various rulers in Bengal to various religious institutions or individuals. It contains both the detailed description of the content of these inscriptions and critical analysis of various terms and titles inscribed on them. Some other aspects of Buddhism like the rise and decline of Buddhism, rise of Maha yāna sect, rise of *Tantric* Buddhism have been vividly discussed.

R.K.Chaudhary¹¹ in *Bihar, the homeland of Buddhism*, has discussed Buddhism in its evolutionary perspective. He traces the various stages of development of Buddhism, characterised by schisms leading to the creation of new sects. The rise of *Tāntricism* as a new sect *Vajra yāna* sect of Buddhism with all its three forms *Sahaja yāna*, *Kālachakra yāna* and *yogacāra*, have been discussed in detail. In *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, (vol.1), B.P.Sinha¹² has given the architectural details of all the major sites in Bihar. He believes that royal patronage to those institutions constituted the basis of their existence. Various aspects of monastic life like rules and regulations for the monks, administrative arrangements and procedure of admission in those institutions have been touched. But the author's main concern has been to highlight the role of *vihāras* in the dissemination of education and culture to the world. In both the above-mentioned books, *vihāras* as an economic institution has been ignored completely. In *A history of Buddhist iconography in Bihar A.D. (600-1200) century*, Jayadev Mishra¹³ has critically studied Buddhist deities and its complex art form in Bihar. This work illustrates themes of Buddhist learning and their centre characteristics of culture and regional style, which developed in the context of the socio-economic milieu of the period under review. The essential purpose of the book is to relate the presentation of remarkable and little known works of art to the study and interpretation of Buddhist culture of Bihar. It also shows that Buddhist *vihāras* served not only as theological centres but also as the scriptoria for illustrating and copying of Buddhist manuscripts and as a workshop for casting bronze images of Buddha. He points out that Buddhist *vihāras* were built up with easy approach of the confluence of rivers such as Ganga, Gandaka, Punpun, Son, Phalgu,

⁹ R.C.Mazumdar, *History of Bengal*.

¹⁰ R.K.Tripathi, *Social and Religious Aspects of Bengal Inscriptions*.

¹¹ R.K.Chaudhary, *Bihar, the Homeland of Buddhism*.

¹² B.P.Sinha, *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, (2 vols.)

¹³ Jayadeva Mishra, *A History Of Buddhist Iconography In Bihar*.

Damodar, Suvarnarekha and trade routes. Since traders and merchants as Buddhist devotees were in majority, commercially strategic locations of the *vihāras* became imperative. It were these trading class who made liberal donations to the Buddhist *vihāras* and centres of learning in Bihar on account of which monasteries became self-supporting. The author has treated the work in two parts:

A. Descriptive study which concerns mainly with the formal and physical features of images studied with the prescription and corroboration available from texts.

B. Historical study which takes into account the various factors giving rise to and contributing to the gradual evolution of the iconographic concepts.

Art is, it is said, a mirror in which its contemporary society gets reflected. On the basis of this concept, the author has discussed how Buddhist iconography reflected early medieval Bihar as passing through characteristic trails and travails of feudal obscurantism and as such the islands of artistic school flourished with their typical autonomous openness under the shadow of feudal social milieu. *The Early Bronzes of Bihar* (1983), by Kamini Sinha¹⁴, is related to the problem in so far as it deals with the development of metal art and iconography, including the archaeology of Vikramaśīla and Champa. Such works provide details of pottery, inscription, coins and seals of the region. They focus on architecture and art including sculptures, bronzes slatter statues and terracotta plaques.

The History and Culture of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar (750-1200) century A.D., by Jhunu Bagchi¹⁵, is a comprehensive monograph on literature, religion (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism), art and architecture; epigraphy during the Pāla period. The author has consulted both archaeological as well as literary sources for the purpose. She has also consulted a new literary source – Arabic treatises *Silsilah-Tawarikh* (951c.A.D.) by Sulaiman, which throws some light on the travelling account of Indian Buddhist mendicant to China and Chinese travellers to India in the Pāla period. However, the author has given primacy to the epigraphic records, narrating land grants made to various religious background. She has portrayed *vihāras* as centres of learning, where people from various place with different background came to study secular discipline like *Ayurveda*, *Tantrika*, etc. She observes that the Pālas were the saviour of Buddhism and that their period was characterised by religious eclecticism.

In the context of Assam, *History of Buddhism in Assam* by S.Sasanand¹⁶ is a general survey of Buddhism in this part of India. The author has relied on both archaeological sources (three clay seals and two copper plates of Bhaskarvarman and various sites in Assam) and literary sources (contemporary foreign accounts by Hsuan Tsang, Fa-hsien, Hwui-li, Lama Taranath, etc.). He has shown the gradual development of Buddhism in Assam from third century B.C. to the twelfth C.A.D. There are many references to *vihāras* in the contemporary literature. But archaeological sources found in Assam are either in a very dilapidated condition or transformed conditions, creating problems for the scholars to authentically reconstruct Buddhist history of the region.

One of the earliest book written specifically on Buddhist *vihāras* is Sukumar Dutt's¹⁷ *Buddhist monks and monasteries of India*. It presents a picture in outline of the Buddhist monastic order in its growth and development during the first three or four centuries of Buddhism. He has portrayed the evolution of *vihāras* in various stages, with a longer dynamic view and more extended historical perspective through various stages. He has consulted all types of sources for this work. His main area of concern is the glorification of *vihāras* as great educational and cultural centres of the contemporary world. In *Vihārasin*

¹⁴Kamini Sinha, *The Early Bronzes From Bihar*, (1983).

¹⁵ Jhunu Bagchi, *The History of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar*.

¹⁶ S.Sasanand, *History of Buddhism in Assam*.

¹⁷ Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*.

Ancient India, D. K. Barua¹⁸ has made a general survey of Buddhist monasteries of ancient India regionally first and chronologically next. He has talked about monasteries as religious settlements playing important role in the sphere of architecture, education, painting and sculpture. He has also portrayed them as great repositories of innumerable valuable books, therefore satisfying the Carlyle-dictum that ‘a true university is a collection of books’. He sees the decline of Buddhism in the destruction of Buddhist *vihāras* primarily by three factors ---a. degeneration and demoralisation. b. religious persecution and c. foreign invasion of Huns and Turks. Barua does not analyse *vihāras* as a socio-economic unit in ancient India. Gokul Das De¹⁹ in his book *Democracy in Early Buddhist Sangha*, talks of the development of *vihāras* into *mahāvihāras* and their further conversion into residential university. Earlier *vihāras* were solely dependent on royal patronage. Later, the patronage to the *vihāras* multiplied due to the involvement of wealthy people. This led to the conversion of *vihāras* into *mahāvihāra* indicating a qualitative and quantitative change in its dimension. The author’s main concern is to discuss the organisation and administration of the *vihāras*. He shows adoption of democratic principles in the rules and regulations of the *vihāras*. He also tries to expose the wide gap between the prescribed norms by the authorities and their actual practical implementation at various levels in the monastery. He completely ignores the *mahāvihāra* as a socio-economic unit in the contemporary society. It is something like talking of the Athenian democracy in the ‘Classical World’ without mentioning the institution of ‘slavery’ on which it was fundamentally based.

In this respect, D. D. Kosambi, was the first scholar to study the involvement of Buddhist monks in the economic development with special reference to the trade routes in the western region of India.²⁰ The chapter on monastic establishments in R.S.Sharma’s *Urban Decay in India*) provides some fresh insights²¹. The *vihāras* have been located in the context of the changed economic setting and the attended problem and especially issues relating to the domain of economic history have been taken care of. On the basis of the availability and non-availability of various material artifacts (like, coins, seals terracotta, beads, sculptures), he visualises the de-urbanisation of monastic settlements from sixth century to tenth century A.D. However, the economic role of monasteries has not been adequately highlighted. In the author’s own words “whether the religious population was involved in economic activity typical of urban centres needs investigation”.

There are some good studies focusing on the socio-economic role of the *vihāras* in western India. H.P.Ray’s *Guilds and Monastery*:²² Commerce under the Satavahanas and *The Winds of Change* drive home the generative role of the *vihāras* in the early historical period. The *vihāras* as a repository of technical knowledge contributed towards agrarian growth and craft activities. As centers of a new ideology, we are told that they helped in the organization of society. In her first book i.e. *Guilds and Monasteries*, Ray has consulted variety of sources like archaeological, epigraphical and literary sources. Actually this work relates to early historical India. Ray believes that *vihāras* acquired wealth through land grants made by kings and wealthy people, which were untaxed and had no danger of confiscation. Later, with the help of this capital (in the form of agricultural surplus) *vihāras* widened their economic base by participating in a number of entrepreneurial activities like money lending etc., *Vihāras* became the purchasers of clothes and other commodities during famine. She believes that D.D.Kosambi was the first scholar to recognize that the influence of monasteries extended far beyond religious matters. But she thinks that Kosambi underestimated the role of *vihāras* in

¹⁸ D.K.Barua, *Vihāras in Ancient India*.

¹⁹ Gokul Das De, *Democracy in early Buddhist Sangha*.

²⁰ Dhenukataka, Kosambi, p.1-60, 1955. In A.J.Syed (ed.) *D.D.Kosambi on history and society, Bombay, 1985*

²¹ R.S.Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 1987.

²² H.P.Ray, *Guilds and Monastery: Satavahana Settlement*.

the peasantisation of the tribals. Ray contends that earlier, *vihāras* were in the nature of pioneer in undeveloped areas as centres providing information on cropping pattern, distant market, organisation of village settlements, trade etc., Later they accumulated wealth and actively participated in economic activity. *The Winds Of Change :Buddhism and the Maritime Links of early South Asia*²³, is also a very important work relevant for our work. As the title of the book itself suggests the functional aspect of Buddhist *vihāras* was among the core issue of this work. Apart from the economic functions that *vihāras* performed, their most crucial contribution to society was in their role as repositories of knowledge: that of writing and the development of an indigenous system of medicine. On the basis of some literary and archaeological evidences, she contends that *vihāras* maintained hospitals for the welfare of its lay devotees, which is quite convincing. Kosambi's theory of the direct intervention of *vihāras* in economic activities (i.e. monasteries may have supplied essential provision to trade and caravans at a profit and also provided much needed capital at an interest), has been contested by Ray in a very articulate manner. She is one of the protagonist of the theory of indirect involvement of *vihāras* in the commercial sector. Xinru Liu in many ways reinforces these ideas of H.P.Ray. *Trade During Buddhist China*, by Xinru-liu²⁴, throws some light on the economic contribution of the *vihāras* in the contemporary period. Xinru-liu, examining a vast mass of material in Sanskrit and Chinese languages, confirmed that the analysis of the structure of the trade reveals that Buddhist ideology and institutions played a major role in economic activities. Examination of both commercial and religious transactions offers new perspective on the study of the relationship between ancient urban society and religious ideas and rituals. Kwansu-li, in *Korea's Cultural Contact with Early India: a Study in Ideas Rituals*²⁵, has tried to trace a relation between ideology and institution and socio-economic mechanism in ancient India and Korea. An attempt is made to study, not in a passionate but in an inter-connected and systematic manner, the tradition of Buddhist ideas and progress of the rituals in the context of its social basis. Among the important articles on the subject one may refer to the works of Andre Bareaud and Pushpa Niyogi. In an article, Andre Bareaud²⁶ has outlined the development of the practice of making endowments to the Buddhist *vihāras* in India. Yet, Bareaud, hardly used any inscription, except those of the Kshaharta-Ksatrapa-Satavahana period, which provide valuable information on the subject. In a short article, Pushpa Niyogi²⁷ has briefly dealt with the nature of endowments made to the Buddhist monasteries in Bihar and Bengal from the fifth to twelfth century A.D. However, Niyogi has based her discussion mainly on the accounts of three Chinese monks Fa-hsien, Hsuan Tsang and I-tsing, and much of the inscriptional evidence has not been used. Even the records of the Chinese travellers have not been fully utilised. However the issues raised by these historians *vis-à-vis* the role of the *vihāras* in early historical India largely remain valid even for subsequent times and that drives home the importance of these works.

²³ H.P.Ray, *The Winds Of Change: Buddhism and The Maritime Links Of South Asia*.

²⁴ Xinru Liu, *Trade During Buddhist China*.

²⁵ Kwansu Li, *Cultural Contacts with Early India: A Study in Ideas and Rituals*.

²⁶ Andre bareaud, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1960-61.

²⁷ Pushpa Niyogi, 'Endowments in Favour of Early Buddhist Monasteries in Bihar and Bengal' *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, 1972-73.

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