

Walking in a Weather rather than a Climate: Critique on the Meta-Narrative of Buddhism in Early India

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Abstract : Since the agreement on the historicity of historical Buddha in eastern India, the beginning, heyday and decline of Buddhism in Early India have been discussed in urbanization, commercialism and state formation context, in short, Weberian socio-politico frame. Recent Scholarship, notably in archaeology and anthropology, has proposed 're-materialization of Buddhism in Early India' based on what Buddhist had actually done rather than what they should do according to canonical teachings or philosophies. But its historical narrations still remain with a domain of socio-politico meta-narrative which tends to unjustifiably dismiss the naturally existing heterogeneity and often chaotic dynamic of diverse agencies, landscape perceptions, localized traditions, etc. An author will argue the multiplicity of theoretical standpoints for the reconstruction on the Buddhism in Early India. For this, at first, the diverse agencies, localized traditions, landscape patterns of Buddhist communities and monasteries in Trans-Himalayan regions; focusing Zaskar Valley and Spiti Valley in India will be illustrated based on an author's field work. And then an author will discuss this anthropological landscape analysis is better appropriated with textual and archaeological evidences on the tension between urban monastic and forest Buddhism, the phenomena of sacred landscape, cemetery, garden, natural cave along with socio-economic landscape, the demographic heterogeneity in Early India. Finally, it will be attempted to compare between anthropological landscape of present Trans-Himalayan and archaeological one of ancient Western India. The study of Buddhism in Early India has hardly been discussed through multivalent theoretical archaeology and anthropology of religion, thus traditional and recent scholarship have produced historical meta-narrative though heterogeneous among them. The multidisciplinary approaches of textual critics, archaeology and anthropology will surely help to deconstruct the grand and all-encompassing historical description on Buddhism in Early India and then to reconstruct the localized, behavioral and multivalent narratives. This paper expects to highlight the importance of lesser-studied Buddhist archaeological sites and the dynamic views on religious landscape in Early India with a help of critical anthropology of religion.

Keywords : analogy by living traditions, Buddhism in Early India, landscape analysis, meta-narrative

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