

Patterns of Ritual Engagements between Buddhist Religious Centres and Their Non-monastic Devotees in the Religious Space of Some Excavated Buddhist Sites of Early medieval Bihar and Bengal: A Study with Particular Reference to the Cult of Votive *Stūpas*, Votive Terracotta Plaques and Votive Tablets.

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Abstract

Through an analysis of the spatial distribution pattern of the published corpus of votive stūpas, votive terracotta plaques and tablets in the religious space of excavated Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, this paper attempts to analyse the patterns of ritual engagements between Buddhist religious centres of this area and their non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees. We have argued that Buddhist religious centres of Magadha made determined efforts of attracting and retaining pilgrimage by non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees by offering the most sacred spots within their religious space to non-monastic devotees for ritual activities. The pattern was fundamentally different in Bengal, where most of the excavated monastic centres largely functioned as political institutions, established and patronized by their political patrons, who established them for political motives. These monastic centres of Bengal did not feel the need of entering into ritual engagements with non-aristocratic devotees. With different kinds of support systems, the process of the decline of Buddhism in early medieval Bihar and Bengal could not have been the same.

Introduction

In Indian historiography, the issue of patterns of ritual engagement between Buddhist religious centres and their non-monastic devotees during the early medieval period (c. 600 -1200 CE) has invited some interesting studies. In some text-based studies, it is generally believed that this phase witnessed some fundamental problems within the ritual sphere of Buddhism: ‘Vajrayāna esoteric excesses’, which turned the common population against it (Bhattacharyya 1993,15; Sarao 2012,128); the ‘complete’ ‘unwillingness’ and ‘inability’ of Buddhism to guard its ritual and institutional distinction in the face of an expanding and assimilative Brahmanism (Sarao 2012, 258-59)¹; and the ‘unwillingness’ of Buddhist monks and monasteries to enter into ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees almost everywhere in India where Buddhism was still present as an institutional religion (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15; Sarao 2012, 205-210). It is often argued that these factors precipitated the ‘disappearance’ of Buddhism almost suddenly with the Turkic destruction of some of its monastic centres in the early 13th century (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15). These theorizations are mostly based on the analysis of Vajrayāna textual material. A study of this issue from the ‘archaeology of religion’ perspective may offer an altogether different kind of picture.

In the present paper, an attempt will be made to understand the patterns of ritual engagement between Buddhist religious centres of Bihar and Bengal and their non-monastic devotees during the early medieval period through an analysis of a particular kind of published archaeological data: votive stūpas, votive terracotta plaques and votive tablets. These objects have been rightly treated as important archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres (Willis 2008, 139-40; Mishra 2009, 142).² Through an analysis of the spatial distribution pattern of these objects in the religious space of some excavated Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar

¹ The view of Buddhism as a passive recipient of Brahmanical appropriation has been contested in some recent writings ((Bautze-Picron 1996: 109–135; Linrothe 1997: 193–98; Amar 2012: 155–185; Prasad 2013b; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2014b; Prasad 2018a; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b).

² We are studying Bihar and Bengal together in this paper, mainly because for a significant part of the early medieval period--- from the middle of the 8th century CE to the end of the 12th century CE--- much of Bihar and Bengal were ruled by the same dynasty: Pāla or Sena. The Sena dynasty supplanted the Pāla dynasty by the middle of the 12th century in a significant portion of the area under study.

and Bengal, we will try to analyse the extent, if any, to which these religious centres were willing to ‘open up’ to their non-monastic devotees. Did every Buddhist religious centre of early medieval Bihar and Bengal interact with the non-monastic devotee in the same way? If the pattern was not homogenous, do we see any difference when we move to Bengal from Bihar? What bearings did these patterns have on the issue of the decline of monastic Buddhism in these areas? Was the process of the decline of monastic Buddhism different in Bihar from in Bengal?

Some limitations of this paper may be put on record at the outset. This paper is not based on any kind of primary documentation. It is based totally on analysis of the published archaeological data.³ This kind of study may, at best, be regarded as exploratory in nature and its findings tentative. It is hoped that this study may induce some more in-depth studies based on primary documentation of the archaeological data.

³ Through an analysis of some textual sources, Peter Skilling has attempted to show that the term ‘votive’ may not be used for these objects (small/miniature stūpas, clay tablets and clay sealings) as they were not ‘dedicated, consecrated, ordered, erected, etc., in consequence of, or in fulfilment of a vow’ (Skilling 2006, 677). He has further argued that these objects were not ‘ex-voto’ as they were not ‘offering made in pursuance of a vow’ (Skilling 2001, 677). This attitude is problematic as it overlooks some epigraphic evidence related to the practice of dedication of these stūpas, sealings and tablets. Many stūpas, sealings and tablets discovered from the Mahābodhi area do contain epigraphic evidence that these objects were donated in fulfilment of vows. So some of them were both ‘votive’ and ‘ex-voto’. A similar possibility for the large number of uninscribed miniature stūpas, sealings and tablets cannot be ruled out. But, despite having this evidence, we cannot claim that every single miniature stupa, clay tablet or sealing dealt with in the present paper was ‘dedicated, consecrated, ordered, erected, etc., in consequence of, or in fulfilment of a vow’. Yet, we are forced to use the term ‘votive’ for the small/miniature stūpas, clay tablets and terracotta plaques because we have based our study totally on the published data. In the published archaeological records and secondary literature based on the analysis of such records of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, barring the solitary exception of Prof. Skilling, only this term (‘votive’) has been used ever since the days of Alexander Cunningham. As our study is based totally on the analysis of the published archaeological data, we are forced to inherit this term.

Early Medieval Buddhist monasteries as nuclei of ‘institutional esoterism’ and the question of the access of non-monastic devotees to the monastic religious space in early medieval Bihar and Bengal

In many available studies on the Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, one generally encounters an *a priori* assumption that esoteric Vajrayāna was the only form of Buddhism practised in those centres. In fact, this point has been highlighted to such an extent that one scholar has argued that all monasteries of Bihar and Bengal served as nuclei of ‘institutional esoterism’ (Davidson 2002, 114-115).⁴ It is also argued that all monastic centres, depending totally on royal patronage, were institutional centres for the practice of esoteric Vajrayāna, so that they hardly felt any need to enter into ritual engagement with their non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15). It is also claimed that this was the general pattern across those areas of India where monastic Buddhism survived in the early medieval period (Bhattacharyya 1993,15; Sarao 2012,205-07).⁵

In this context, the core question that needs to be explored is: is this ‘institutional esoterism’ also reflected in the archaeological records? Vajrayāna was not a homogenous religious system and it needed to keep a distinction between the extreme esoteric practices that were to be practised by its advanced initiates (monks) and those aspects of its ritual practices that were to be offered to the masses in order to attract their patronage. After all, in the long run it was only patronage from, and association with, the masses that would ensure the survival of Buddhist religious centres. An open display of extreme practices might turn away devotees, resulting in the shrinkage of the patronage base of the Buddhist religious centres. In the context of monasteries of early medieval Orissa, it has been found that the introduction of esoteric practices in monastic Buddhism entailed a neat segregation of the sacred space of Buddhist monasteries into ‘restricted space’ where secret esoteric rituals were/could be performed, and ‘unrestricted space’ where lay devotees had unrestricted access to undertake their own ritual activities (Mishra 2009,151-52). Do we see a similar arrangement of monastic space in early medieval Bihar and Bengal? Esoteric Vajrayāna did involve some extreme esoteric rites, some explicit sexual imagery (*Yab-yum* deities) and sometimes open display of confrontation in some

⁴ For a review of Davidson, see Prasad 2008

⁵ Lars Fogelin, through an analysis of archaeological data, has arrived at similar conclusions (Fogelin 2015, 202).

sculptures (Trailokyavijaya, Aparājītā, Heruka/Cakrasaṃvara etc.). Did the non-monastic devotees have unrestricted access to such spots within the monasteries where such rites took place and such imagery was worshipped/ displayed? In other words, what did the monks practise in private and what did they intend to display to the public at large? How many excavated monastic centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal show archaeological evidence for the practice of esoteric forms of Vajrayāna? How do the excavated data from monastic sites of Bihar and Bengal reflect on this issue? Which part of the monastic religious space was made available to the non-monastic devotees to undertake rituals? Which part of the monastic religious space was not accessible by them? In the space available to non-monastic devotees for their ritual activities, did the monastic authorities devise any special mechanism to monitor their activities? Did the monastic authorities undertake any especial measure for the protection of relics and/or some specific cult objects in their sacred spots?⁶

Let's begin with an analysis of an issue that is quite fundamental to the issues raised above: accessibility of the religious space within the religious centres by non-monastic devotees. Which part of the religious space of a particular religious centre was accessible by the non-monastic devotees, and what was the importance of that part in the overall religious personality of that particular religious centre? Did that part have a significant role in forming the 'core personality' of that particular religious centre? An analysis of this issue will provide some important clues to the extent to which a particular Buddhist religious centre was willing to 'open up' to its non-monastic devotees.

It may be added that no monastic centre would provide unrestricted access to the monastic cell area for the non-monastic devotees. Our prime avenue of enquiry in this section would thus be access to the sacred spots within the monastic establishments in general and temples within the monastic establishments in particular. We will begin with an analysis of some excavated sites (Mahābodhi and Nālandā) of Magadha, and then move to Aṅga (i.e. the site of Antichak), sites in Rāḍha, Varendra, Vaṅga and Samatāṭa-Harikela.⁷ We will begin our

⁶ For an interesting analysis of this issue in the case of early medieval Buddhist monasteries in the Sanchi area, see Shaw 2009, 131-132. She has argued that 'the need to protect the relics by regulating access to the *stūpa* and maintaining close surveillance on them is also a factor in the positioning of the monuments' (p.132).

⁷ In an important study of the political geography of early medieval Bengal on the basis of analysis of copper plate inscriptions, B.M. Morrison (Morrison 1980: 38) has observed that early medieval Bengal had four sub-regions: Rāḍha (covering the areas to the west of the Bhagirathi - Hughli

analysis with an analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the religious space of the main Buddhist religious centres of our study area. We will also look into votive terracotta plaques and tablets, and seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, in understanding this issue.

Votive *stūpas*, votive terracotta plaques and votive tablets as archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres

There has been a heated debate on the basic nature and function of these miniature *stūpas*. In many cases, as Schopen has shown, many of them were meant to be ‘burial *ad sanctos*’, intended to contain the bodily relics of important monks/nuns or important non-monastic devotees (Schopen 2010a, 119-120). By allowing the common devotees to bury the relics of their loved one within the monastery or inside the compound of a Buddhist temple site, the monastic authorities granted them a chance to be near to the Buddha even after their death, as the Buddha was believed to be physically present inside the *stūpa* or monastery in many parts of India’ (Schopen 2010b, 258-289).

But in many other cases these *stūpas* may have been purely dedicatory in nature, made and donated to acquire religious merit. This has been noted particularly in the context of the Buddhist sites of the Middle and Lower Ganga valley, 5th -- 6th century CE onwards, when the installation of such *stūpas* and votive tablets inscribed/not inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula began to be regarded as significant acts of religious merit (Skilling 2008: 514-518).

That the donation of these *stūpas* brought religious merit to their donors has been argued by some earlier scholars as well. Cunningham, on the basis of observations on this practice in living Buddhist traditions of South-East Asia in the 19th century, as well as on the basis of analysis of votive *stūpas*, votive tablets and plaques that were found at the Buddhist sites excavated/explored by him within India, provides some interesting observations in this regard. He has noted that whenever Buddhist pilgrims visited any famous Buddhist religious centre, it was their inevitable custom to make some offerings, no matter how small or poor, to the shrine and, at

ivers); Varendra (covering the area of North Bengal, more appropriately the tract of land bounded by the Mahananda river in the west, Karatoya/ Brahmaputra in the east, and Padma in the south); Vaṅga (the tract of land lying to the south of the Padma river, bounded by the rivers Hughali in the west and Meghna in the east) and Samatāṭa- Harikela (area lying to the east of the Surma- Meghna rivers: roughly corresponding to Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong areas). We have largely followed the scheme of Morrison in delineating the boundaries of Rāḍha, Varendra, Vaṅga and Samatāṭa-Harikela.

the same time, to set up some memorials of their visit (Cunningham 1972,46). For the rich, offerings included money, precious stones, vessels and costly fabrics, and they installed big *stūpas* or temples as memorials. For the poor devotees, offerings generally took the form of flowers and fruit, and their memorials included small *stūpas* and small inscribed seals and sealings (Cunningham 1972,46). Generally, both categories of devotees took some mementos with them to be installed in their village/city shrines or to be kept in their homes as objects to ward off evil and ensure good luck. Such mementos included miniature replicas of some famous Buddhist temples, or seals carrying the official emblem of the monastery to which they made pilgrimage inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula. They also included seals and sealings and terracotta tablets stamped with the figure of some particular Buddhist deity, with or without the Buddhist Creed Formula.⁸ Seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula were also offered to important Buddhist religious centres as votive offerings (Das1967, 64; Cunningham 1972, 52). Before being dedicated to important religious centres by the pilgrims, or being carried back as mementos, they were sacralised by the monks/ priests through some particular ritual process (Mishra 2009,142). This process, then, involved a close ritual interface between the monks and non-monastic devotees.

It may be noted that Cunningham's observations are largely corroborated by the writings of the 7th century Chinese pilgrims to India, who observed the cult of votive *stūpas* minutely. Itsing, in the context of eastern India (Bihar and Bengal) recorded that

The priests and laymen in India make *Chaityas* or images with earth, or impress the Buddha's image on silk and paper, and worship it with offerings wherever they go. Sometime they build *stūpas* of the Buddha by making a pile and surrounding it with bricks. They sometime form these *stūpas* in lonely fields, and leave them to fall in ruins. Anyone may thus employ himself in making the objects for worship. Again, when the people make images and *Chaityas* which consist of gold, silver, copper, iron, earth, lacquer, bricks, and stone, or when they heap up the snowy sand (lit. sand-snow), they put in images or *Chaityas* two kinds of Śarīras. 1. The relic of Great Teacher. 2. The *Gāthā* of the Chain of Causation (Takakusu 1982, 151)

⁸The significance of these objects in the archaeology of Buddhist pilgrimage has been reaffirmed by John Guy (1991, 356).

And

If we put these two [Śarīras] in the images or *Chaityas*, the blessings derived from them are abundant. This is the reason why the *sūtras* praise in parables the merit of making images or *Chaityas* as unspeakable. Even if a man makes an image as small as a grain of barley, or a *Chaitya* the size of a small jujube, placing on it a round figure, or a staff like a small pin, a special cause for good birth is obtained thereby, and will be as limitless as seven seas, and good rewards will last as long as the coming four births (Takakusu 1982, 151).

Making images and donating them to some Buddhist monastic/ *stūpa* centre could have been a costly affair, but the miniature *stūpas* could have provided an easier and cheaper alternative. Many lay devotees could have acquired religious merit by making and donating them. According to Xuan Zang:

It is a custom in India to make little *stūpas* of powdered scent made into paste; their height is about six or seven inches, and they place inside them some writing from a *sūtra*; this they call a *dharmasārīra*. When the number of these becomes large, they then build a great *stūpa* and collect all others within it, and continually offer to it religious offerings (Beal 1981, 146-47).

This practice ensured a close interface between such devotees and the Saṅgha. Xuan Zang, with reference to Jayasena, a Kṣatriya Upāsaka, originally from Western India, but settled near Yaṣṭivana (modern Jethian on the borders of Gayā and Nālandā districts in Bihar) has also noted that

During thirty years, he had made seven *koṭis* of these *dharmasārīra-stūpas*, and for every *koṭi* that he made he built a great *stūpa* and placed them in it. When full, he presented his religious offerings and invited the priests; whilst they, on their part, offered him their congratulations. On these occasions, a divine light shone around and spiritual wonders exhibited themselves; and from that time forth the miraculous light has continued to be seen. (Beal 1981, 147).

Leaving aside the exaggeration (appearance of miracles, divine light etc. at the time of installation of such miniature *stūpas*) in Xuan Zang's narratives, we may infer that many such devotees did offer some gifts to monks when they installed such *stūpas*. This could have been, then, another important source through which the Saṅgha mobilized resources and ensured closer interaction with its common devotees.

These objects -- votive *stūpas*, seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, terracotta votive tablets inscribed with or without the Buddhist Creed Formula – are important archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres (Willis 2008, 139-40; Mishra 2009, 142). Their study may unravel some important aspects of the pilgrimage network of Buddhist religious centres. Such study has been attempted in the cases of Buddhist monasteries of early medieval Orissa and coastal Andhra Pradesh.⁹ Despite some early observations by Cunningham on the importance of votive *stūpas* of Bodh Gaya in the reconstruction of its pilgrimage history, this line of enquiry has not been pursued in tracing the patronage aspect of Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. One notes this gap particularly in the study of votive *stūpas*, which have been rightly termed an 'archaeological barometer of pilgrim flow' (Mishra 2009, 82). The issues to be probed in this connection are: which spot within the Buddhist religious centres were made available to the devotees to install dedicatory *stūpas*? Did they have access to the most sacred spots within the religious centres for this purpose? How did the pattern evolve across Bihar and Bengal? Do we see any difference in the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis sacred spots within the religious centres as we move to Bengal from Bihar? To what extent was the cult of votive *stūpas* monastically controlled or regulated? Which section of society took the lead in donating votive *stūpas*? My enquiry into this issue will involve an analysis of published dedicatory inscriptions on votive *stūpas*.

We shall begin with an analysis of votive *stūpas* of the Mahābodhi complex, the biggest pilgrimage centre of Buddhism.

⁹For Orissa, see Debala Mitra (1981, 31). She has noted the number of votive *stūpas* in Ratnagiri to highlight its role as a significant pilgrimage centre (p.31). This work was carried forward by Mishra (2009, 141-46), who concentrated more on the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the *Mahāstūpa* area of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, Khandagiri and Langudi, to arrive at some generalizations regarding the differential access lay devotees had to the most sacred spots within these religious centres. H.P. Ray (Ray 2008, 119-138) has undertaken a similar study of votive *stūpas* associated with early medieval monasteries of Orissa and coastal Andhra Pradesh. 'Eastern India' in her paper does not include Bihar or Bengal.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* within the Mahābodhi complex and its implications for the organization of religious space

In terms of the findings of votive *stūpas*, the Mahābodhi complex, the holiest centre for Buddhist pilgrimage, emerges as the most important centre. The findings of votive *stūpas* from this site largely corroborate Xuan Zang's statement on the findings of such objects within the Mahābodhi complex: "within the surrounding wall the sacred traces touch one another in all directions. Here there are *stūpas*, in other places, Vihāras. The kings, princes, and great personages have erected these memorials" (Beal 1981, 215). These *stūpas*, as well as terracotta votive plaques containing the figure of some Buddhist deity and generally inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, were dedicated to the Mahābodhi temple complex by pilgrims to earn merit. They also served as pilgrims' mementos (Lawson 1988, 64).

In the excavations of the Mahābodhi complex by Cunningham, three types of votive *stūpas* were unearthed:

(A) Structural *stūpas* built up of separate stones and bricks: in this category, he includes around 200 *stūpas* in the courtyard of the Mahābodhi temple, which shows only the lower stratum of earlier *stūpas*. Above these, he found four tiers of similar monuments in a still more ruinous condition from their exposure to the ravages of the villagers (Cunningham 1972, 46). The finding of 'four tiers of similar monuments in a still more ruinous condition' indicates that the actual number of even these structural *stūpas* built up of separate stones and bricks must have been much bigger than the 200 pieces that survived till the time of Cunningham. Votive *stūpas* in this category were generally donated by more well-to-do devotees (Lawson 1988, 63-64).

(B) "Thousands of monolithic *stūpas* of all sizes, their diameter ranging from 2 feet to 2 inches" (Cunningham 1972: 46).

(C) The most numerous were little clay *stūpas*, baked and unbaked. Cunningham found 'hundreds and thousands' of such *stūpas*, their size ranging from '2 to 3 inches in height to the size of a walnut' (Cunningham 1972, 46). In excavations at the site, 'hundreds of such clay *stūpas* were found inside the larger *stūpas*, enclosing small clay seals inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula' (Cunningham 1972, 46). It has rightly been noted that these miniature clay votive *stūpas* were the common form of memorial for the poor pilgrims (Cunningham 1972, 46; Lawson 1988, 63-64).

Cunningham's excavations indicate that the courtyard near the Mahābodhi

temple was made available to the devotees to install votive *stūpas*. In other words, the authorities of the Mahābodhi allowed the non-monastic devotees to undertake some of their ritual activities in the precincts of the Mahābodhi and devotees took full advantage of this. Cunningham has observed that “carved stones of an early date were frequently found in the bases of later monuments, and as the soil got silted up, the general level of the courtyard was gradually raised, and the later *stūpas* were built over the tops of the earlier ones in successive tiers of different ages’ (Cunningham 1972,49). And ‘so great was the number of these successive monuments, and so rapid was the accumulation of stones and earth that the general level of the courtyard was raised above 20 feet above the floor of the Great Temple’ (Cunningham 1972, 49). All this indicates that the Mahābodhi attracted pilgrimage on a substantial scale and pilgrims installed *stūpas* within the precincts of the Mahābodhi in a sustained manner.¹⁰

Most of the surviving pieces in the Mahābodhi complex have been dated to the Pāla period (Lawson 1988, 64-65). But the accounts of Xuan Zang indicate that such objects were dedicated at Mahābodhi in the earlier period on a significant scale as well. We infer that this trend continued in a significant manner in the Pāla period.

What was the social background of persons who installed dedicatory *stūpas* in the precincts of the Mahābodhi? Some clues to this question are provided by dedicatory inscriptions on some votive *stūpas* from this site. We shall begin with an analysis of those inscribed dedicatory *stūpas* that contain the name of the donor. We shall base our analysis mainly on the catalogue provided by Claudine Bautze-Picron.

¹⁰The same pattern is reflected in another archaeological marker of pilgrimage: dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures donated by non-monastic devotees, which have been analysed in Prasad 2019.

The social background and expectations of donors who donated votive stūpas at the Mahābodhi as reflected in dedicatory inscriptions

12 votive *stūpas* inscribed with the names of donors have been reported from Bodh Gaya by Claudine Bautze-Picron and others. The data from them are summarized in the following table:

Donated by	Social background of the donor	Expressed motive behind donation	Period	Reference ¹¹
Jaya	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	None expressed	10 th century.	p. 56.
Sabhokā	non-monastic and non-aristocratic woman	Do	10 th or 11 th century.	p. 55
Geghāḍhar-aka	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Do	10 th or 11 th century.	p. 58.
Rāṇaka Śrī Golika	non-monastic, aristocratic man	Do	11 th century.	p.53
Vaṇika Ajhuka	Mercantile	Do	11 th century.	p.54.
Dhammajīva	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Do	11 th century.	p.56
Semideva	Do	Do	11 th century.	p.57.
Dānapati Maṇo	Do	Donated to fulfil a religious vow.	11 th century.	p. 58.
Mahādevī	non-monastic and non-aristocratic woman	None expressed	11 th -12 th century.	p. 57.
Dākokā	Do	Do	12 th century.	p.66.
Dānapati Māvuka	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Donated to fulfil a religious vow.	12 th century.	p.66.
Saḍhaladevī	Queen of a local state in the Bodh Gaya area	None expressed	12 th century	Bhattacharya (1995-96,178-79)

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references in this table are to Bautze-Picron1998.

In terms of sheer number, evidence of votive *stūpas* inscribed with the name of the donor is much less than what we see in the case of inscribed sculptures. Most of the pieces published by Claudine Bautze-Picron are inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula only. Probably that had much to do with the devotee's perception of the nature of these *stūpas*. As Itsing has narrated, inscribing the Buddhist Creed Formula was believed to be sufficient to gain great religious merit. It was probably for this reason that only a few donors inscribed their name on such *stūpas*. Fewer have left details of their social background. As noted earlier in the analysis of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal (Prasad 2010; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2016; Prasad 2017, 182-285; Prasad 2018c; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b), all those persons who have not left any detail of their social background and have not claimed to be a monk/nun were most probably from the 'non-monastic non-aristocratic' section of society. Accordingly, in the 10th century, we see three men and one woman donor, all belonging to the non-monastic non-aristocratic category. None of the donors expressed any Buddhist identity (*Pravara-Mahāyāna-Anuyāyin*, *Paramopāsaka* etc.) in the epigraphic record left by them.¹² None of the donors in any century has any expressed motive behind their donation. So far, we have also not come across the donation of an inscribed *stūpa* by any monk or nun at Bodh Gaya in this century or any other century.

In the 11th century, we see a diversification in the social background of donors: this century witnessed donation not only by a *Rāṇaka*, but also by a merchant (*Vaṇika*). This century also witnessed the dedication of a votive *stūpa* by a *Dānapati* donor. In the context of dedicatory inscriptions on Buddhist sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, it has been observed that the word '*Dānapati*' occurs in the context of a person who has installed an image for worship for the fulfilment of a vow (Sircar 1953-54, 85). A person would aspire for some worldly wish; he would pray to a chosen deity that if his wish were fulfilled by the deity, he would install the image of the deity in some religious centre. Once his wish was fulfilled, it was his

¹²In the context of dedicatory inscriptions on the Buddhist sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, the presence of some characteristic terms has been used in attributing an expressed Buddhist identity to the donors of such sculptures. Similarly, an absence of such characteristic terms in the dedicatory inscriptions on such sculptures has been used to attribute 'persons without expressed Buddhist identity' status to their donors (Prasad 2013a; Prasad 2013b; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2016; Prasad 2017, 182-285; Prasad 2018a; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b).

obligation to install the image of the deity, and in such cases he would use the technical term *Dānapati* for himself (Sircar 1965-66, 41; Bhattacharya 2000, 226-27). In some cases, when a man was not able to fulfil this obligation for some reason (death etc.), it would be fulfilled by his wife or son (Sircar 1965-66, 41; Bhattacharya 2000, 226-27). The occurrence of the term '*Dānapati*' in the votive inscription on a votive stūpa at Bodh Gaya indicates that even the dedication of votive *stūpas* had a significant element of fulfilling worldly wishes of devotees.

In this century, we don't see any donation by a woman. Three male donors belonged to the non-monastic non-aristocratic category. In the 12th century, we see women from two different sections of society donating such *stūpas*: Saḍhaladevī, who donated a bronze stupa, was the queen of the local *Pīṭhipati* dynasty, but Mahādevī, the donor of an inscribed stone votive *stūpa*, has not claimed any such pedigree for herself.

The Buddha in different *mudrās* was the deity most chosen to be depicted on the votive *stūpas*. We see no depiction of the *Pañcatathāgatas* on them. We see no depiction of ferocious Vajrayāna deities (Aparājitā, Trailokyavijaya, Saṃvara, Heruka etc.) in the niches or on the pedestal of votive *stūpas*, either in this century or in any other century. Even Tārā is rare. So far, we have not come across any example of depiction of a Brahmanical deity in the niches or on the pedestal of votive *stūpas*. Bodh Gaya, the site of the Enlightenment of the Buddha, continued to be identified predominantly with the Buddha by devotees who donated votive *stūpas*. None of the donors have mentioned their extra-local origin, if any, though this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Let's sum up the situation now. The Mahābodhi complex was able to attract patronage from a cross section of society till the end of the 12th century. Women donors, except in the 11th century, had a significant presence. Barring one queen and one *Rāṇaka*, all other donors belonged to the common section of society. Monks are not met with in the reported corpus of inscribed votive *stūpas*. We see a similar pattern in the donation of inscribed votive tablets in the Mahābodhi area, a theme we shall turn to now.

Inscriptions on terracotta votive tablets from Bodh Gaya and the social background of some pilgrims to the Mahābodhi.

12 Inscribed terracotta votive tablets have been reported from Bodh Gaya by Claudine Bautze-Picron.¹³ No donor has recorded any motive behind their donation.

The data from them are summarized in the following table:

Depicted deities and motifs	Donated by	Social background of the donor	Period	Reference ¹⁴
Devotee kneeling in front of offerings: two cones on small cups, flowers on a high and circular stand, a garland, a lamp stand.	Śauma-naratha	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	10 th century	p. 73, item no. 184.
Devotees kneeling in front of offerings: flowers and cakes. No depiction of any monk or deity.	-----	A Mahāyāna lay follower (<i>Pravara-Mahāyāna-Anuyāyina</i>)	11 th century	p. 73, item no. 183.
A priest and offerings	Dānapati Bhalaka	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, with expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 74, item no. 187.
A priest and offerings	Vovānatārakā	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 74, item no. 188.
Offerings and devotee	Paramopāsa-ka Thaku	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, with expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 75, item no. 193.

¹³ We have not considered those inscribed terracotta votive tablets that contain the Buddhist Creed Formula only, as no information about the donor is available in them.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all references in this table are to Claudine Bautze-Picron 1998.

PATTERNS OF RITUAL ENGAGEMENTS

Depicted deities and motifs	Donated by	Social background of the donor	Period	Reference ¹⁴
Offerings ¹⁵ in the lower part, row of eleven seated Buddhas in the upper part.	<i>Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo, wife of Sādhu Śrī Simharatna.</i>	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 75, item no. 196.
In the upper part: row of seated Buddhas, all in <i>Samādhimudrā</i> . In the lower part: <i>Saptaratna</i> .	Ratanadevikā, wife of Raṇa-Śrī- Jakhvāla.	Wife of an officer, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 76, item no. 198-99.
Devotees kneeling in front of offerings: flowers and cakes. No depiction of any monk or deity.	Sachadeva, wife of Bhadū	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th or 12 th century.	p. 73, item no. 182.
Offerings and devotee	Nīsohacikā	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity	12 th century.	p. 75, item no. 194.
Devotees, offerings including <i>Saptaratna</i> displayed on either side of a manuscript.	-----	Mahāyāna lay follower or monk	12 th century.	p. 75, item no. 195.
In the upper portion: row of 15 seated Buddhas, all in <i>Samādhimudrā</i> . In the lower part: a Burmese inscription.	-----	A donor from non-monastic and non-aristocratic background, from Burma	12 th century.	p. 76, item no. 197.
A priest and offerings	Dānapati Gopadeva-sāmī	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity	11 th –12 th century.	p. 74, item no. 189.

¹⁵Incense brazier in front of a lamp, a bowl with offerings, a stand on which a manuscript and

In the inscriptions on votive tablets, we get some interesting glimpses of the social background of devotees that were attracted to the Mahābodhi, and also of the kind of offerings they made to the same. The first thing to be noted is that many donors have used the term ‘*Deyadharmā*’, thus indicating that the tablets were actually donated. These tablets were not just a pilgrim’s memento to be carried back home after their pilgrimage to the Mahābodhi.

In terms of the depiction of offerings on such tablets, we see the evolution of an interesting pattern. No such inscribed piece which is datable before the 10th century has been reported so far. In the tenth century, and also in most of the inscribed tablets of the 11th and 12th centuries, we generally see a devotee or more than one devotee kneeling in front of the offerings made by them. Occasionally we also see donors in *anjālimudrā* in front of offerings made by them. Depicted offerings are basically the objects associated with their *pūjā* or ritual offerings: flowers, garlands, lamp stands, cakes, incense braziers, conic cups placed on a large jar etc. Generally, the figure of the Buddha in *Dhyānamudrā* or *Samādhimudrā*, or one or more monk is depicted in the upper or lower part of the tablet. To date, we have not come across any other Buddhist or Brahmanical deity depicted on such tablets from Bodh Gaya. Bodh Gaya primarily remained the seat of the Enlightenment of the Buddha till the 12th century, at least for such common devotees. In the 11th and the 12th century, we also see devotees paying their respect to a manuscript, which is generally prominently displayed in the tablet. Preserving, copying and studying manuscripts were important functions undertaken by monks in Buddhist monasteries, so the depiction of common devotees making offerings to the manuscripts was a symbolic depiction of their respect for the textual tradition of the Buddhist Saṅgha.

As a whole, we see a great diversity in the social background of donors. During the 10th century, we see the donation by a man without any expressed Mahāyāna identity, belonging to the non-monastic, non-aristocratic section of society. In the 11th century, we see a significant diversification in the social background of donors, which now include three men with expressed Mahāyāna identity in the epigraphic records, indicated by the use of the Buddhist Creed Formula or some characteristic definitional term: *Pravara- Mahāyāna –Anuyāyina* etc. Women donors occupy a significant place in this century (four out of the seven recorded instances) and their background ranges from the wife of an officer (Ratanadevikā, wife of *Raṇa Śrī Jakhvāla*; we may assume that ‘*Raṇa*’ was

some flowers are depicted.

an incorrect rendering of *Rāṇaka*) to two women donors from non-aristocratic background (Vovānatārakā, who has not mentioned the name of her husband or father; and Svahādevī, wife of Bhadū). The case of *Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo*, wife of *Sādhu Śrī Simharatna*, as pointed out by Bautze-Picron, indicates a donation by the wife of a merchant (Bautze-Picron 1998,75). As we have seen in the case of the donation of an image of Khasarapaṇa Avalokiteśvara by *Vanika Sādhu Saharaṇa*, son of *Sādhu Bhadulva*, in the 11th century, *Sādhu* was one of the titles used by merchants in this century in Magadha (Prasad 2017,226). *Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo*'s husband was a *Dānapati*, who probably undertook the vow of making offerings to the Mahābodhi complex and its monastic community for the fulfilment of a worldly wish. Similar was the case with another *Dānapati* donor: *Dānapati Gopadeva-sāmī*.

In the 12th century, female patronage continued, but on a much lesser scale (only one example). As indicated by Burmese inscriptions on two votive tablets, two donors came from Burma. One of them has recorded that at the place of the liberation (i.e. Enlightenment) of the Buddha, he/she donated an umbrella (Bautze-Picron 1998, 76). The name of the donor has not been recorded, so we are not sure if that was a man or a woman. That they were not from an aristocratic background is indicated by the fact that they could donate only an umbrella, for which many resources were not required. Priests of the Mahābodhi were open to accepting even such small donations. Contrary to the opinion of Bautze-Picron (Bautze-Picron 1998,76), we have nothing to suggest that the donor was a monk. The case with the donor of another terracotta votive tablet appears to be similar. Due to the highly fragmented nature of the inscription, the name and title of the donor is not clear, though the surviving portion indicates that the donor was a follower of the Mahāyāna. Bautze-Picron has claimed that the donor was a monk (Bautze-Picron 1998,75). But in the absence of any categorical evidence this claim is questionable.

Barring the wife of a *Rāṇaka*, all other donors appear to be from non-aristocratic backgrounds. The Mahābodhi complex attracted patronage from such donors and accepted their donations. By depicting priests or manuscripts on these tablets, male and female donors paid their respects to the textual tradition of Buddhist monasteries.

Monks could never become the dominant donors of votive tablets at Bodhi Gaya and nuns are totally absent. This practice remained dominated by non-monastic donors. None of the donors mentioned his/her *Varṇa* or *Jāti* status, indicating that the Mahābodhi complex provided an avenue for the

marginalization of these social categories. Similarly, an increase in the number of donors in the late Pāla period (11th and 12th centuries) indicates a spurt in pilgrimage to this site in these centuries.

It may be noted that the exact find-spots of the published inscribed votive tablets have not been provided by Claudine-Bautze Picron. But the accounts of Dharmasvāmin, a Tibetan monk who visited the Mahābodhi in 1234 CE informs us that “to the east of Vajrāsana there was a hole the size of a human head in the wall of a small building where clay votive offerings (*tsha-tsha*) were kept” (Roerich 1959: 66). It is apparent that the monastic authorities of the Mahābodhi offered a place for the performance of this practice by the non-monastic devotees near the most sacred spot: the Vajrāsana.

Pilgrims’ mementos: the case of the miniature models of the Mahābodhi temple.

Many terracotta votive tablets inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula could have been taken back to their homes by pilgrims as memento or magical talisman (Guy 1991, 356). Many miniature votive *stūpas* would have served the same purpose. But the Mahābodhi complex specialized in the production of a kind of memento that was sold to pilgrims: the miniature models (average height: 20 cm) of the Mahābodhi temple that have been found in different parts of India, South-east Asia, Tibet and China. In an interesting study, 20 such models kept in different museums have been noted (Guy 1991, 356-367).¹⁶ The actual number (i.e. those that got destroyed due to the vagaries of time or other factors) could have been much greater. These models, made of dark grey schist or graphitic phyllite, were made in the Gaya-Bodh Gaya area, with the motive of selling them to pilgrims (Guy 1991,362). They ‘served not only as souvenirs but as proof of the journey successfully completed’ (Guy 1991,362). We are not sure if the authorities of the Mahābodhi had any control over the production and sale of these mementoes. But it cannot be ruled out that many of them may have been sacralised through some ritual by a monk or priest of the Mahābodhi area.

The chronology of the surviving pieces is significant: ‘all belong to the late Pāla-Sena period (tenth- twelfth century)’ (Guy 1991,364). We have also noted

¹⁶For an earlier discussion of this theme, see Sinha (1977, 159- 64). Sinha has also reported discovery of such items in Burma and Thailand, as well as at many sites in Bihar.

the spurt in the donation of inscribed votive *stūpas* and terracotta tablets in this period. They are all indicators of increasing pilgrimage to the Mahābodhi. In other words, at least in the case of the Mahābodhi complex, we need to question those theories that postulate a ‘systemic crisis’ in Buddhism in the late Pāla-Sena period.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the articulation of monastic religious space within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra.

Compared to the Mahābodhi, the evidence for the cult of votive *stūpas* at Nālandā is less, but it is much more than at any other monastic site of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. Before analyzing the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the religious space of this monastic site, let us first briefly analyze the spatial alignment of the main monuments of the site. That will provide the context to understand the alignment of votive *stūpas*.

It may be assumed that the excavated ruins of Nālandā do not represent the full extent of the site in the past. Excavated ruins reveal the presence of eleven monasteries (numbered 1B, 1A, 1, 4, 5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 11) and six Temples (numbered 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, Sarai mound)(Asher 2015,42).The numbering of sites (i.e. monastery site 4.5,6 etc. or Temple Site 2, 3, 12 etc.) is not by their chronology but according to the sequence of excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India. Nālandā was not a single, unified monastery centering on a single shrine like later monasteries of Paharpur, Antichak or Salban Vihara. Unlike Paharpur, Antichak or Salban Vihara, no trace of any enclosure wall enclosing all the monasteries and temples of Nālandā has been found so far. At the available stage of our data base, none of the monasteries antedate the 5th century and none of them seems to have continued beyond the early decades of the 13th century.

Barring Temple/Stūpa Site 3 and the Sarai mound temple, temples generally face east and are in alignment with the monastery sites that generally face west. This may be taken as an indication of the intention of the monastic authorities to keep a watch on devotees visiting the temple sites. Similarly, if it is proved that temple sites were frequently visited by non-monastic devotees, then we may infer that the monks may have been forced to ensure that their practice of esoteric forms of Vajrayāna, if any, remained either invisible to non-monastic pilgrims or remained visible to as few as possible: too explicit a display of such practices might have turned away the non-monastic devotees, resulting in the

loss of their patronage. It has been argued elsewhere that unlike most of the monasteries of Bengal, Nālandā did try to attract non-monastic non-aristocratic patronage on a sustained basis.¹⁷

The question that needs to be explored, then, is: did the monastic authorities of Nālandā allow non-monastic devotees to undertake ritual activities in or near important temple sites within the Mahāvihāra? We shall analyse this question with special reference to Temple/*Stūpa* site 3 and 12.

It may be inferred that the Temple/*Stūpa* Site 3 was the most ancient, most important and most sacred site among the excavated ruins of Nālandā.¹⁸ This site is the tallest surviving monument among the excavated edifices of Nālandā. It formed the node in the neighbourhood of which different monasteries and temples/*stūpas* of Nālandā emerged and developed in the later phase. Excavations indicate that the Site 3 represents the result of seven accumulations, the earliest three of modest dimensions being buried deep under the later ones. The temple of the fifth stage, with four corner towers, had its facade ornamented with stucco figures of Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* in Gupta tradition, which were encased within the extension of the sixth stage. The level of the shrine at the top rose with each reconstruction with a resultant higher flight of each stage. The ruins of the shrine of the last stage with a pedestal for the installed Buddha image are seen at the top. *Each stage had its own votive stūpas all around, often engulfed in the latter's extensions.* One of such *stūpas*, of the fifth stage, contained in its core a clay tablet inscribed with the sacred text *Pratītya Samutpādasūtra* and dated A.D. 516-17. Another manifestation of devotion is the enshrinement within votive *stūpas* of clay lumps or miniature clay *stūpas*, each having in its core two “clay tablets impressed with the Buddhist creed formula (*ARASI 1925-26*, reprint Delhi 2002, 101).

¹⁷ This inference has been arrived at on the basis of analysis of inscriptions on seals and sealings, dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures, inscriptions on stones, pillars etc., and spatial alignments of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the main temples of the Mahāvihāra (Prasad 2017, 2018-219; 299-314). In fact, such was the willingness of the Mahāvihāra to attract non-monastic non-aristocratic patronage that a non-monastic non-aristocratic Mahāyāna Upāsaka from a Brahmin background was given the honour to donate and install the tutelary deity--- Nāgarāja---of Temple Site 3 in the 8th century (Prasad 2017, 213-14).

¹⁸ As the superstructure of the site has collapsed, it is difficult to determine whether it was a *stūpa*, a *stūpa*-shrine or a *stūpa* site that evolved into a temple site at a later date. Shrine-like structures have been found at the top of the 5th, 6th and 7th phase of the site (Mani 2008, 15). So we cannot rule out that in some phase of its life this monument could have served as a temple.

The earliest phase of the occupation of this site, as recently argued by B.R.Mani, could go back to the Mauryan period, marked with the presence of a square brick-*stūpa* (Mani 2008, 18-19). It may be noted that the early phases of Site 3 antedate the earliest monasteries of Nālandā by many centuries. The earliest phase (Mauryan period) of structural activities at Site 3 could very well have been the *stūpa* built in the memory of Śāriputra as referred to by Faxian (Legge 1991, 81). Site 3 of Nālandā, presumably associated with the memory of Śāriputra, continued for almost one millennium after the Maurya period.¹⁹ In effect, if Nālandā could not claim direct association with the Buddha, it could claim association with some of his *aggasāvakas*. This could have been one of the factors in attracting pilgrimage to the site.

If the Mahāvihāra was founded at the place where it was in the 5th century, it was, presumably, to take advantage of the established sanctity of Site 3. The earliest monastic site that emerged at Nālandā---1B-- faced Temple Site 3 (Asher 2015, 69). The emergence of this monastery in the close proximity of Site 3 suggests that it wanted to take advantage of the pre-existing sacrality of Site 3.

As indicated by alignment of votive *stūpas*, Site 3 was the most popular pilgrimage destination within the Mahāvihāra, even before the emergence of any monastery at the site. The central shrine area of Salban Vihara in Mainamati also attracted the installation of votive *stūpas* in the phase before the emergence of the monastery, but this practice came to an end with the foundation of the monastery that eventually enclosed the central shrine area.²⁰ This kind of situation did not develop at Temple Site 3 of Nālandā, indicating that it remained accessible to non-monastic devotees.

We may explore the question of accessibility through one more perspective. If Site 3 was regarded as the holiest centre within the Mahāvihāra and was the most popular pilgrimage destination within the same, then its overall location within the Mahāvihāra must have had a special significance. As regards its overall location within the Mahāvihāra, we may point out its location at the southern end of the excavated ruins of the Mahāvihāra. Even when monastic sites emerged at the Mahāvihāra, no attempt was made to enclose Site 3 by monastic cells.

¹⁹ Recently, another *stūpa* site associated with another *aggasāvaka* of the Buddha (Maudgalyāyana) has been excavated at the neighbouring village of Juafardih, located at a distance of three km from the excavated ruins of Nālandā. The mud *stūpa* at Juafardih, founded in the Mauryan period, was in visible decline in the Śunga period. It does not seem to have continued beyond that period. For details of this site, see Saran et al 2008, 59-73.

²⁰ For an analysis of the pattern at Salban Vihara, see Prasad 2017, 410-411.

The pattern is, thus, fundamentally different from the pattern observed at later monasteries of Antichak, Paharpur, Salban Vihara, Ananda Vihara and Bhoj Vihara, where central shrines are located in the centre of a courtyard enclosed by a number of monastic cells. So far, we have not come across any evidence of enclosing this site by a boundary wall either. All this indicates that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra did not want to put much restriction on access to the site by monastic and non-monastic devotees. Site 3 of Nālandā was certainly more accessible by non-monastic devotees than were the central cruciform shrines of Antichak, Paharpur, Salban Vihara, Ananda Vihara and Bhoj Vihara.

Available data indicate that this site received votive *stūpas* in considerable number on a sustained basis. This is indicated by the fact that as the main monument increased in size with each addition, the level of the court gradually rose, and many small votive *stūpas* are found in several places completely or partially buried under the different floors and walls that have been exposed (Ghosh1939, 4). Not only the area around the main monument, but also the area around a subsidiary shrine (the shrine of Avalokiteśvara, at the north-east corner of the main monument) shows evidence of donation of votive *stūpas* (Ghosh1939, 4).

None of the votive *stūpas* reported in the neighbourhood of the site is inscribed with the name of the donor, so it is difficult to ascertain if they were donated only by non-monastic devotees or some monks were also involved in the process. It may be noted that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra allowed the installation not only of the votive *stūpas*, but also of sculptures by non-monastic devotees in or in the immediate neighborhood of Temple Site 3. One such sculpture (Nāgarāja) donated by a Mahāyāna Upāsaka was, as we have analysed earlier, the tutelary deity of the site (Prasad 2017,213-214). In other words, non-monastic devotees not only had access to this most sacred spot within the Mahāvihāra, sometimes they had privileged access: they could even install the tutelary deity of the site to earn merit. In the analysis of inscribed terracotta seals and sealings from Site 3, we have seen an overwhelming dominance of persons of ‘non-monastic non-aristocratic’ category (Prasad 2017,306-307). The case with votive *stūpas* at this site is unlikely to have been fundamentally different.

A similar process, though on a much smaller scale, appears to have been in operation at Temple Site 12, where ruins of a very big temple (plinth: 52x50 meters), built in two phases, have been found. The original temple, most probably similar to the Mahābodhi temple in design, was built in the late 6th or early 7th century, and was contemporary with the fifth phase of Site 3 (Ghosh 1939, 17;

Asher 2015, 53-54). The main shrine and subsidiary shrines were enclosed by a boundary wall (Ghosh1939, 17). That indicates that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra wanted to regulate access to the temple. That does not seem to have had much impact: a large number of votive *stūpas* were dedicated in the compound of the temple (Ghosh1939, 17). That indicates pilgrimage and patronage by non-monastic devotees. The second phase temple, built over the ruins of the temple of the first phase after its destruction by fire, was built through the patronage of a non-aristocratic Mahāyāna Upāsaka Bālāditya, a person from Kauśāmbī, who had settled at Telāḍhaka (modern Telhara) (Prasad 2017,313). The very fact that the second phase of this temple was constructed through the patronage of a Mahāyāna Upāsaka indicates that it was accessible by non-monastic devotees. We may infer the same pattern for temple site 13. A large forecourt to the east of this Temple contained many votive *stūpas* (Ghosh1939, 18).

Before we conclude our analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the monastic religious space, we need to highlight two broad features: (1) their absence in the area adjacent to the ‘outer’ structures such as Nālandā Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound temple, and (2) their concentration near the sacred centres in the ‘inner’ parts: near Temple/Stūpa Sites 3, 12 and 13. The most remarkable concentration is seen near Temple/Stūpa Site 3 and Temple Site 12. If we consider the fact that Site 3 was the holiest spot within the Mahāvihāra and Site 12 was probably its loftiest temple, we may easily infer that even the most sacred spots within the Mahāvihāra were accessible to the monastic and non-monastic devotees for the installation of votive *stūpas*. The pattern is thus similar to the Mahābodhi and different from Antichak, Paharpur and monasteries on the Mainamati ridge. That may also partially explain why we see their absence from Nālandā Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound area. When the most sacred spots were made available to devotees to install votive *stūpas*, they probably did not have much motivation left to undertake this act in the neighbourhood of Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound area. Additionally, the non-monastic devotees might have wanted to keep a distance from the contentious attempt at subordinate integration of Brahmanical deities to Buddhism.²¹

Let us sum up the pattern at Nālandā. Every temple of Nālandā seems to be accessible to non-monastic devotees. At the available stage of our data base, none of the temples indicates the performance of any secret, esoteric rite within

²¹ Within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra complex, Temple Site 2 was one of the sites where Buddhism attempted a subordinate integration of Śaivism. For details, see Prasad 2017, 437-438.

their religious space. If all temples were accessible to non-monastic devotees, then it was unlikely that esoteric Vajrayāna rituals, if practised within the confines of the monastic sites that generally face the temple sites, were intended to be publicly visible to non-monastic devotees.

Pilgrims' mementos or dedications: the case of votive terracotta plaques from Nālandā

Votive terracotta plaques either dedicated by pilgrims or to be carried by them back to their homes as mementos have not been reported as profusely as in the case of the Mahābodhi. Such plaques reported from Nālandā basically represent *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala*: a maṇḍala on a plaque in which the central figure of the Buddha is surrounded by eight different Bodhisattvas (Mitra 2005,32). Mitra has rightly highlighted that 'evidently, such inexpensive plaques were in great demand among the devotees and pilgrims of meagre and moderate means, desirous of earning merit by their gifts at Buddhist centres and also by carrying these portable objects to their countries' (Mitra 2005,32).

It is not clear if the central figure in the plaque is that of the Buddha Śākyamuni or Vairocana, but Debala Mitra is more inclined to identify them with Buddha Śākyamuni (Mitra 2005, 32). Her inference is supported by some circumstantial evidence. In early medieval Bihar and Bengal, some Buddhist religious centres were famous for particular deities that were supposed to be especially attached to that particular religious centre. That found manifestation in the terracotta plaques distributed to/purchased by the pilgrims as mementos. Thus the terracotta plaques from Bodh Gaya generally highlighted the *Māravijaya* episode or the miniature image of the Mahābodhi temple; both symbolizing the Enlightenment of the Buddha. Terracotta plaques from the Tārā temple at Satyapir Bhita (Paharpur) depicted some form of Tārā for which this temple seems to have been especially famous.²² In the available data from Nālandā, Vairocana does not appear to be the main cult figure of the Mahāvihāra: only three sculptures (one in bronze, two in stone) of this deity has been reported so far and sculptures of other *Pañcatathāgatas* are equally rare (Paul 1995, 104).²³

²²For details, Prasad 2017, 405-409.

²³Paul has noted the paucity of sculptures of the Crowned Buddha at the site as well (p. 91). 10th century onwards, the Crowned Buddha was regarded as a form of Mahāvairocana (Woodward 1990, 20). That also indicates that the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* could never have been very important at Nālandā.

In contrast, big, or rather colossal, images of the Buddha in *Bhūmiśparśamudrā* (Dhelva Baba, Teliya Baba, Jagadishpur Buddha etc.) were the most important sculptures for public display and worship. All this makes us conclude that the figures depicted in the centre of the *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala* plaques from Nālandā were most probably intended as the Buddha Śākyamuni.

It may also be added that Nālandā was most probably the centre where Tārā emerged as an independent object of worship in the 6th century A.D. (Ghosh1980, 31; Paul 1995, 102). Yet Tārā did not find depiction in the available assemblage of terracotta votive plaques of Nālandā. Buddha Śākyamuni in *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala* remained the popular theme in the plaques.²⁴

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Antichak

As we move to the east of Magadha, archaeological markers of access to the inner parts of the monasteries by non-monastic devotees decrease considerably at most of the excavated sites. In general, we may infer reluctance of the monastic authorities to allow the installation of votive *stūpas* in the ‘inner space’ of monasteries. This was most probably related to the basic difference in the nature of excavated Buddhist sites of Magadha (Mahābodhi, Nālandā) and the sites located to the east of it in Aṅga (Antichak, identifiable with the Vikramaśilā Mahāvihāra), Varendra (Jagajjibanpur, Paharpur, Sitakot, Jagaddala etc.) and Samataṭa (monasteries on the Mainamati ridge). Mahābodhi was the holiest Buddhist pilgrimage centre. The monastic site of Nālandā, though established through royal patronage, took steps to attract ‘non-monastic non-aristocratic’ pilgrimage on a substantial scale. Sites like Antichak, Paharpur or monasteries on the Mainamati ridge, on the other hand, radiated some particular political and religious symbolism: they were believed to function as *Maṇḍala* monuments offering magico-ritual protection to the patron state.²⁵ They did not feel much need to enter into ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees. This

²⁴ Till the late 12th century, big stone sculptures of the Buddha Śākyamuni remained the cultic foci of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra. The Mahāvihāra retained its basic Mahayanist orientation till its very end. This remained the situation not only within the Mahāvihāra, but also in its archaeological landscape. A recent documentation of early medieval Buddhist sculptures in the modern Nālandā district indicates that stone sculptures of the Buddha, most of which were obviously objects of public worship in Buddhist shrines and temples, far outnumbered the sculptures of other Buddhist deities (Chowdhary 2015; Prasad 2017, 74-77).

²⁵ For details, see Prasad 2017, 416-422; Prasad 2018b.

pattern is reflected in site morphology as well, an issue we will turn to now. That will form the backdrop to our analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the arrangement of monastic religious space. We will begin with Antichak, commonly identified with the site of the Vikramaśilā Mahāvihāra founded by the Pāla king Dharmapāla.

In basic plan, this monastery consists of a central cruciform shrine set in the middle of the monastic courtyard, surrounded by a series of monastic cells numbering approximately 208 (Verma 2015, 77-78). With this basic plan, this site had a marked emphasis on security: in fact it gives an impression of being a ‘fort-monastery’. The outer walls of the monastery are marked with circular projections alternating with rectangular projections at regular intervals. The corner projections are larger in size (Verma 2015, 78). Apart from the circular corner projection, each side has yielded four circular and four corner projections. They have been constructed alternately at a distance of about 22 to 23 meters from each other (Verma 2015, 78). These bastion-like features imparted a distinct fort-like look to the monastery; a feature observed on a lesser scale in the later monastery of Jagajjibanpur. This ‘fort-like’ look was further accentuated by the imposing gateway complex on the northern side of the monastery guarding the main entrance to the same, and also by the double layers of enclosure walls.²⁶ Traces of an enclosure wall were found beyond the northern gateway complex of the monastery, thus confirming the Tibetan sources which record that the whole monastery was surrounded by a massive enclosure wall (Verma 2015a, 83). This enclosure wall was also provided with a small gateway complex, which was paved with stone slabs with provision for sockets on either side (Verma 2015a, 83). This small gate was in alignment with the central shrine and the north gate of the Mahāvihāra. On either side of this small gate complex, remnants of a defence wall 1.5 meters thick and about eight courses of bricks were found running in the eastward direction (Verma 2015a, 83).

The available data indicate that this monastery put a great emphasis on regulating the access of non-monastic devotees to the inner parts of the monastery. Crossing two gateway complexes to reach to the inner parts of the monastery would never have been an easy task for an outsider. Within the monastery too, there seems to have been a great emphasis on the privacy of monks. Excavations in the inner part of the monastery led to the discovery of 12 monastic cells with underground chambers. The maximum depth of these

²⁶ For an analysis of the architecture of the gateway complex, see Verma 2011, 9.

underground chambers was about 1 meter (Verma 2011, 7). The single point of access to these underground chambers was through a narrow manhole in one of the corners of the cells through which one would have to drop a person into them (Verma 2011, 7). Though the excavator has not attributed any particular function to them, considering the reputation of Vikramaśilā as one of the most renowned centres of esoteric Vajrayāna, we may infer that these underground cells were used for some secret rites. In literary sources, Vikramaśilā is depicted as the one of the most renowned centres for esoteric Vajrayāna.²⁷ This inference is also supported by the features of monastic religious space noted above. If this was the case then it was but natural for the monastic authorities of Vikramaśilā to discourage the access of non-monastic devotees to the area enclosed by monastic cells.

That the common devotees did not have any access to the area enclosed by the inner enclosure wall is indicated by the absence of archaeological markers of pilgrimage to that area: votive *stūpas*, votive tablets, inscribed seals and sealings etc., a theme we will analyze now.

The pattern of alignment of votive *stūpas* at Antichak displays a transitional trait between Magadha and Varendra/Samataṭa. Here votive *stūpas* were not allowed inside the monastery: either near the central shrine or in the monastic courtyard. The votive *stūpa* complex of this site is just in front of the main gate of the monastery: 150 votive *stūpas* (40 in stone, 110 in brick) were found located on either side of the passage leading to the main gate (Verma 2011, 65-66). As indicated by two floorings on which they were built; they show at least two phases of construction (Verma 2011, 65). It has been rightly claimed that these *stūpas* were raised by devotees who intended to earn merit by installing them near the main gate of the monastery, suggesting that the site was held in high veneration (Verma 2011, 65).

Even in the first phase the monastic authorities of Vikramaśilā seem to have imposed some regulations on the installation of votive *stūpas*. This is indicated by the finding of an enclosure wall, which was provided with a small entrance (measuring 3.30 1.90 m) with a door-sill, about 2 m wide (Verma 2011, 66). The gate of this enclosure wall corresponded to the main gateway of the monastery.

²⁷ In Tibetan accounts, Vikramaśilā stands out as the most important institutional centre from where the Tibetans received a significant part of their Tantric leanings. It became one of the most renowned centres of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and made determined efforts to purge every kind of Śaiva influence from this text, another reflection of its esoteric Vajrayāna orthodoxy (Loseries, 2015, 142-155).

The provision for enclosure did not dent the spirits of non-monastic devotees, which is reflected in the increase in the number of votive *stūpas* in the next phase. In the first phase, votive *stūpas* were constructed following a plan in rows, but when the paucity of space was felt, they were constructed at a convenient point, i.e., wherever space was available, overlooking the arrangement of rows (Verma 2011, 65). The pattern is somewhat similar to Ratnagiri, where too the paucity of space resulted in the similar placing of votive *stūpas* wherever space was available (Mishra 2009, 146).

Only four inscribed votive *stūpas*, all datable to the 12th century A.D. on palaeographic grounds, have been reported from this site. Three of them just contain the names of donors: Śrīdhamma (Verma 2011, 171), Hadrava (Verma 2011, 171), and Śrīdha (Verma 2011, 171).²⁸ Their social backgrounds are not recorded, but we may infer that they were from the non-monastic, non-aristocratic segment. Their *Varṇa* and *Jāti* status, professional occupation, gender, and places they came from are not recorded. None of them had any expressed Buddhist identity. Women donors are not met with in the available corpus of inscribed votive *stūpas*. Nor do we see any donation by a person from a mercantile background at Antichak. One *stūpa* has a legend in *Bhikuni* characters (Verma 2011, 171).²⁹ This script was used by Buddhist monks only, so we may infer that this *stūpa* was donated by a monk.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees in Varendra monasteries (other than Paharpur)

As we move from Antichak to the Varendra sites, the distance between the spot where votive *stūpas* were allowed to be installed and the monastery increased. That may indicate a lesser ritual engagement between the monasteries and their non-monastic devotees. At the ‘fort-like’ monastery of Jagajjibanpur, which has a moat all around the monastery with circular bastions at the corners and a wide enclosure wall (Roy 2002, 576), and was established through the initiative of a Pāla *Senāpati* (Vajradeva), we have nothing to suggest that non-monastic devotees had any kind of access to any part of the monastery. Throughout its life, it seems to have remained a ‘fort-monastery’, with very little recorded attempt

²⁸ As the *stūpa* is partially broken, we cannot determine if the original legend referred to Śrīdhamma, though it cannot be ruled out.

²⁹ The reading of this inscription has not been provided by the excavator.

to attract additional sources of patronage. Instances of the donation of inscribed sculptures and inscribed terracotta plaques by non-monastic devotees have not been reported from the site so far. So far, only one terracotta votive *stūpa* has been reported from the site (Roy 2012,94). We have nothing to suggest that it was donated by a non-monastic devotee.

Sitakot, another ‘fort-like’ monastery (Ahmed 1979b, 27) having its earliest phase of occupation in the 7th -8th century A.D., had a massive gateway complex with an 82 feet wide frontage, which was guarded by two big guard rooms, each measuring 27 feet 24 feet 6 inches (Ahmed 1979b, 25). The monastic courtyard area, the cellas in the middle of the eastern, western and southern wings of the monastery, and the area just adjacent to the outer walls of the monastery do not show any evidence of ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees. Excavations at the site have produced no report of votive *stūpas*, inscribed sculpture donated by any non-monastic devotee, or seals/sealings inscribed with the name of non-monastic devotees.

In the case of the excavated sites of Bihar Dhap, which most probably represented the ruins of the *Po-shi-Po* monastery seen by Xuan Zang on the outskirts of the urban centre of Mahasthan, a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the eastern wing of a monastery, flanked by guard rooms, has been reported (Alam et al 2000a, 11). In its heavily guarded nature, this monastery anticipated the later monasteries of Antichak, Paharpur, Jagajibanpur, Jagaddala and many monasteries on the Mainamati ridge. The inner parts of this monastery were not easily accessible to outsiders, resulting in the absence of archaeological markers of pilgrimage to this site. This is intriguing, because the monastery was located on the outskirts of the city of Mahasthan and one would have expected a flow of patronage from the residents of the city to the monastery.

The case with the site of Vasu Vihar, located 4 miles north-west of Mahasthangarh, is not very different. Excavations at this site have resulted in the unearthing of two monasteries and a cruciform shrine that served as the common shrine of both monasteries (Ahmed 1979c, 40- 45). Unfortunately, excavations at the site were confined to the upper level of the site (datable to c. 10th -11th century A.D.) (Chakrabarti 1992, 101). For this reason we are not sure of the earlier levels of occupation, if any, of the monastery. The first monastery at the site had 26 cells of largely uniform size (12 feet by 11 feet, separated from one another by partition walls) enclosing a courtyard (Ahmed 1979c, 40-41). This monastery had an impressive gateway complex (75 feet 6 inches) set in

the middle of the eastern wing, projecting outwards (Ahmed 1979c, 40). On the outer side, the entrance complex was guarded by two guard rooms, each 10 feet square (Ahmed 1979c, 40). This monastery does not seem to have any shrine. It did not have any other entrance, and the presence of a massive gateway complex and guard rooms indicate that the non-monastic devotees could only have regulated access to the inner parts of the monastery. In the case of the second excavated monastery at the site, bigger than the first one, the single entrance to the monastery was provided through an impressive gateway complex (72 feet by 21 feet) projecting outward in the middle of the southern wing (Ahmed 1979c, 42). Some terracotta seals and sealings, inscribed with the names of non-monastic individuals, serve as the only archaeological marker of ritual interface with non-monastic devotees. No votive *stūpa* has been reported either from the inner parts of the monastery or in the area adjacent to it.

The sites analysed above give the impression that Varendra monasteries did not have much ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees. This feature is also apparent in the recently excavated monastic site at the village Jagaddala (located 20 km to the northwest of Paharpur) in Dharmoirhat Upazilla of Bangladesh. It is claimed to be the ruins of the site of Jagaddala Mahāvihāra established by the Pāla ruler Rāmapāla in the 11th century after the *Kaivartta* rebellion (Miah 2003,147-166). Excavations at the site have exposed the remains of a monastery with 32 cells, a shrine with *maṇḍapa* in the western wing of the monastery, a gateway complex in the middle of the eastern wing; and bastions at the four corners of the monastery (Miah 2003,147-166). Excavations at this site are incomplete and they are limited to the latest occupation phase of the site (Miah 2003,149). Excavations have also revealed the presence of four bastions at the four corners of the monastery. The entrance to these bastions was from inside the monastery through the narrow passages that spring from the corner cells (Miah 2003,156). The excavator has rightly argued that these bastions probably served the purpose of watch towers intended to keep watch on the enemies or outsiders who might approach the site and cause harm to it (Miah 2003,156). This was probably natural for a monastery established by a dynasty that had just recovered from a serious rebellion, especially in a phase when we get at least one epigraphically recorded example of the plundering of a ‘royal monastery’ (Somapura Mahāvihāra, identifiable with the excavated ruins of Paharpur) in Varendra by a political rival.³⁰ These bastions, along with the massive gateway

³⁰ In the 11th century, the Somapura Mahāvihāra was vandalised by an invading army of

complex in the eastern wing of the monastery, gave a ‘fort-like’ look to the monastery. It would not have been an easy task for the common devotees to access the inner shrine of the monastery. This monastery, like Jagajibbanpur, seems to have retained its core character of being a ‘fort-monastery’ built through state patronage and surviving largely on state patronage, with minimum interaction with the non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees. In terms of its cultic focus too, this monastery had a feature unique in the whole of early medieval Bihar and Bengal: the provision of large image pedestals in every single cell of the monastery, converting the cells, in effect, to shrines. We have treated this as an indication of some sort of deification of monks, with which non-aristocratic non-monastic devotees had little concern.³¹

Due to the incomplete nature of excavations at the sites of Rajabadidanga, it is difficult to ascertain the question of accessibility of non-monastic devotees to the inner parts of the monastery by analyzing the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis monastic religious space.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Paharpur.

Among Varendra sites, votive *stūpas* in any significant number have been reported from the neighbourhood of Paharpur only. In terms of architecture, this site is very similar to the site of Antichak: a central cruciform shrine surrounded by a number of monastic cells, with a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the northern wing of the monastery, guarding access to the inner parts of the monastery. We have nothing to suggest that the non-monastic non-aristocratic segment of society had access to the area enclosed by monastic cells. Like at Antichak, votive *stūpas* are absent in the area enclosed by monastic walls at Paharpur. They have not been reported from the area near the central cruciform shrine, in the monastic courtyard, or even near the later period cells containing ornamented pedestals. Only two circular structures, which were most probably votive *stūpas*, have been reported from the area outside the northern gateway of the monastery (Dikshit 1999, 18).

Vaṅgāla. Karuṇāśrīmitra, who was most probably the abbot of this Mahāvihāra, was killed in this attack. Later a monk (Vipulaśrīmitra) repaired the Mahāvihāra (Majumdar 1930-31, 97; Prasad 2017, 405-406).

³¹ For details, see Prasad 2017, 425-426.

At Paharpur, a concentration of votive *stūpas* is seen at the site of a temple dedicated to some form of Tārā at Satyapir Bhita, which is located at a distance of about 300 yards from the eastern exterior wall of the Mahāvihāra. At the available stage of our data base, we don't know the exact relationship this site had, if any, with the Mahāvihāra, though a monk of Somapura Mahāvihāra (Vipulaśrīmitra) did repair it in the later phase. Dikshit's excavations at this site led to the unearthing of an oblong temple (48 feet in width and at least 80 feet in length) facing south, with at least two phases of structural activity (Dikshit 1999, 80-81). The original plan of this temple consisted of a sanctum and a pillared hall surrounded by an ambulatory path, and an entrance hall that provided passage to the whole complex (Dikshit 1999, 81). This temple stood in the midst of a courtyard. This structure, as indicated by the discovery of a large quantity of charcoal lying on the floor at the north-eastern end of the floor of the first period, was destroyed by fire (Dikshit 1999, 81). This temple was rebuilt, most probably in the middle of the 11th century (Sengupta 1993, 75; Gill 2007, 177). In this phase, a buttress wall enveloping the walls of the original temple on the sides and carrying the projection in front of the temple still farther, thereby covering the earlier flight of steps, was added. In course of this reconstruction a fresh concrete floor was laid almost throughout the courtyard and over the main temple (Dikshit 1999, 81).

As indicated by the discovery of around 50 circular terracotta plaques depicting either Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā or Sitātapatrā which are inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula in 11th century A.D. characters in different places in the courtyard in the south and southwest of the main temple, the temple was dedicated to some form of Tārā, most probably to her *Aṣṭamahābhaya* form (Dikshit 1999, 82). This temple attracted considerable pilgrimage in both phases of its history, which is indicated by the discovery of structural votive *stūpas*. 132 structural votive *stūpas* of various shapes and sizes (ranging from 25 feet in diameter to 2 feet 9 inches) have been discovered in the courtyard of the temple (Dikshit 1999, 82). Votive *stūpas* of the earlier period are simpler in plan, but the later ones are ornate in design (Dikshit 1999, 82-83). The only inscribed votive *stūpa* of this site, which contains the name of the donor in 11th century A.D. characters, records the donation of the *stūpa* by *Sthavira* Praśāntamati (Dikshit 1999, 83). That indicates that some votive *stūpas* were donated by monks as well, though, as in the Mahābodhi and Nālandā, we may assume that non-monastic devotees perhaps formed a significant portion of donors.

It is interesting to note that in the relic chamber of a square votive *stūpa* which was positioned close to the main temple in the south-eastern section, a thick deposit of miniature votive clay *stūpas* ‘numbering several thousands’ was found (Dikshit 1999, 83). Two tiny circular clay tablets, inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, were also found inside the chamber (Dikshit 1999, 84). Dikshit has rightly treated these materials as archaeological markers of the significant scale of pilgrimage to the Tārā temple (Dikshit 1999, 84).

We agree with his contention that the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita commanded considerable pilgrimage. But how did that affect the Somapura Mahāvihāra? His observations force us to explore the ‘exact relation of the Tārā temple in the general layout of the site’ of Paharpur.³² Technically speaking, it was outside the monastic enclosure, and thus was not a part of the Somapura Mahāvihāra. Yet, being in close proximity to the Mahāvihāra, it could not have been totally immune to the developments in the Mahāvihāra. In fact, when the Mahāvihāra was burnt down by the army of Vaṅgāla in the middle of the 11th century, the Tārā temple also bore the brunt. Later it was rebuilt by the monk Vipulaśrīmitra of Somapura Mahāvihāra. That, however, does not fully explain the nature of the institutional relationship between the Mahāvihāra and the Tārā temple. Available epigraphic data from the Mahāvihāra does not throw any light on this issue. We have no evidence to suggest that this temple was founded by the same patron who founded the Mahāvihāra.

Some aspects of this complex question may be explored by looking into two issues: (a) Do we see any kind of cultic parallelism between the Mahāvihāra and the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita? That is to say, if the ritual focus of the Satyapira Bhita temple was on the worship of Tārā the saviouress, did the monastery too show the same feature? (b) If the monastery did not show the same feature, then did it make any attempt to appropriate the pilgrimage potential of the temple of Tārā for increasing its own patronage base?

Available data indicate that a disjuncture did exist between the ritual focus of the temple of Tārā and that of the Mahāvihāra. The Mahāvihāra focused more on things with which non-monastic devotees had little concern: the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* in its central cruciform shrine; an attempt to integrate Brahmanism in a manner, such as a subordinate union, in its

³² The need to analyze the ‘exact relation of the Tārā temple in the general layout of the site of Paharpur’ has been recently pointed out by Gill (2007, 181). She has, unfortunately, not looked into this issue in her paper.

central cruciform shrine; and, later, through the attempted deification of some monks, approximating to an architectural *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala*.³³ It basically functioned as a state-sponsored monument, intended to offer magical protection to the state.³⁴ It was probably for this reason that this Mahāvihāra did not make much effort to attract lay patronage and pilgrimage. The Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita does not seem to have formed part of its functional or ritual matrix.

That the Mahāvihāra was reluctant to be associated with, or appropriate the popularity of, the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita becomes quite apparent when we contrast the situation with Ratnagiri in Orissa, where a conscious attempt was made to associate the Ratnagiri Mahāvihāra with the cult of Tārā. Ratnagiri was a great centre for the cult of Tārā and it attracted considerable pilgrimage due to this factor. Many monastic seals of Ratnagiri, containing the legend *Tārāśraya* (literally meaning ‘taking refuge in Tārā’), were considered to be some sort of amulet or talisman. However, when the sealings with the *Tārāśraya* legend were struck with the monastic sealing of Ratnagiri, it indicated that there was a conscious attempt on the part of the monastic establishment to associate this monastery as an important cult centre of Tārā (Mishra 2009, 150). This sort of evidence has not come to light from Paharpur as yet, forcing us to conclude that the monastic authorities maintained a deliberate policy of not appropriating the popularity of the Satyapira Bhita Tārā temple for their own advantage. An individual monk (Vipulaśrīmitra) repaired this temple after its destruction, but the monastery did not lend its institutional name either to the Satyapira Bhita temple or to the cult of Tārā: no seal or sealing recording that the Tārā temple was officially part of the Somapura Mahāvihāra (or this temple was under the official control of the monastic authorities of Somapura) has been found so far. Similarly, no Tārā plaque of the type discovered within the Satyapira Bhita complex has been reported from the Mahāvihāra. Nor do we see any non-monastic devotee donating any inscribed sculpture of Tārā within the Mahāvihāra. That also indicates that those pilgrims who thronged to the Tārā temple most probably did not visit the inner parts of the monastery. Even if they made a visit, the Mahāvihāra authorities did not allow them to undertake those rituals that would survive in archaeological records: donation

³³ For details, see Prasad 2017, 422-426.

³⁴ Ibid.

of structural and clay votive *stūpas* or donation of inscribed sculptures.³⁵ The Nālandā Temple Site 3 kind of pattern did not develop here.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Moghalmari

At Moghalmari, five small votive *stūpas* were discovered at MGM2 mound (Datta 2010, 281; Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 4). This mound is a little away from the main mound where the monastery was excavated. A votive *stūpa* has been discovered in the *Pradakṣiṇāpatha*, which is located in the southern part of the monastery (Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 8). As none of the discovered pieces are inscribed with the names of donors, it is difficult to ascertain whether they were donated by monks or non-monastic devotees. That some of them could have been donated by non-monastic devotees cannot be ruled out, especially in view of the fact that in its basic characteristic, Moghalmari is different from the ‘fort-like’ monasteries of Bangladesh.

17 terracotta votive tablets have also been discovered from the site. They basically represent the Buddha Śākyamuni in different *mudrās*, and a *stūpa* surrounded by many other miniature *stūpas* (Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 9-10). They indicate the basic Mahayanist character of this site. They most probably served as pilgrim’s mementos.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees in the case of Buddhist monasteries on the Mainamati-Lalmai ridge

In the case of Buddhist monasteries on the Mainamati-Lalmai ridge, we see a tendency to enforce a deliberate isolation from the non-monastic devotees. This tendency is quite marked at the site of Salban Vihara. Among the Mainamati monastic sites, the highest number of copper plate inscriptions and silver and gold coins have been reported from the site of Salban Vihara. All this indicates

³⁵ The three reported inscriptions from the central cruciform shrine area of Somapura Mahāvihāra record the donation of pillars by three monks: *Bhikṣu* Ajayagarbha (in the latter half of the 9th century), *Sthavira* Śrīgarbha (in the 10th century) and Daśabalagarbha (in the 12th century). They all belonged to a single lineage of monks—monks whose name ended with *Garbha*---- present at this site. It is apparent that only the monks of this lineage had privileged access to the central cruciform shrine area of this site (Prasad 2017, 340-341).

that, at the available stage of our database, it was the most important Buddhist establishment on the Mainamati ridge, despite being smaller than Ananda Vihara. As indicated by the discovery of terracotta sealings inscribed with the legend ‘Śrī-Bhavadeva-Mahāvihāra-Ārya--Bhikṣusaṅghasya’ (Rashid 2008, 104), this monastery seems to have been founded in the 8th century A.D. by the Deva ruler Bhavadeva. This monastery developed around a shrine that antedated the monastery. Later the shrine was rebuilt at the time of the foundation of the monastery, as a part of the monastery. In plan and features, this monastery antedated the plans of Paharpur and Antichak monasteries.

The structural remains at the central shrine area of this site indicate a series of structures built over the remains of previous structures. Five such structures have been unearthed in excavations (Rashid 2008, 64). Each phase of occupation at the central shrine is represented by a separate structure. At the beginning of the new phase of occupation, a new structure covered the significant portions of the older structure. In Period II (later part of 7th century A.D.) of the central shrine of Salban Vihara, ‘no less than 15 basketfuls of clay votive *stūpas*, sealings and a number of Buddhist images were recovered’ from the shrine area (Rashid 2008, 66). No trace of any monastery associated with the shrine has been found in this period (Rashid 2008, 66). In this aspect, the shrine area of Salban Vihara offers a striking parallel to the Nālandā Temple/*Stūpa* site 3, which commanded sanctity even before the emergence of any monastery in the neighbourhood. As the monastery had yet to emerge in this phase at Salban Vihara, we may infer that these votive objects were donated by non-monastic devotees. In the next period (8th century A.D.), the shape of the shrine was converted into cruciform: it was built with the monastery as a single complex, and on the same stupendous scale (Rashid 2008, 66). Two clear phases of occupation, associated with two distinct floors, have been found in this period: below the original brick floor, a layer of earth filling, masses of clay votive *stūpas*, seals and sealings and Buddhist images were found, which were apparently deposited before the laying of the foundation of the shrine (Rashid 2008, 67). The floor of the second phase in this period, constructed with reddish brick concrete with *Surkhi* plaster, was built over the floor of the first floor (Rashid 2008, 67). We have no categorical information as to who were the donors of the clay votive *stūpas* and the seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula. It may not be ruled out that some of them could have been from a non-monastic background. In Period III (latter part of the 8th century A.D.), a decrease in the number of unbaked clay votive *stūpas*, seals and images has been noted (Rashid 2008, 68). A total

absence of such materials in the next period (Period IV, roughly 9th century) in the shine area was quite pronounced (Rashid 2008, 68). All this indicates that as the monastic cells emerged around the central shrine and enclosed it from all sides, that heralded a lesser ritual interface with the non-monastic devotees. Even this decreased interface ceased to survive in the next period (i.e., the Candra period). Votive *stūpas* were not allowed to be installed inside the area enclosed by monastic cells (either near the central shrine or in the verandah that separated the central shrine from monastic cells) or just outside the monumental northern gateway complex, or at a little distance from the monastic site. No pattern like Antichak or Satyapira Bhita could emerge here.

This was most probably related to the way the monastery evolved at this site. From the very beginning of the monastery (8th century), we see a great emphasis on its security. The only point of entry to the monastery was through a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the northern wing. Guarded by four guardrooms, this monumental gateway complex imparted a distinct ‘citadel-like look’ to the monastery (Rashid 2008, 43). In other words, the access to the inner parts of the monastery was regulated by the monastic authorities. It would not have been an easy task for non-monastic devotees to enter into the monastery.

A related feature was a great emphasis on ensuring the privacy of monks. In every cell of the monastery, there was no arrangement of window or any other kind of ventilation. The door served the purpose of light, ventilation and entrance and exit. Moreover, most of the cells had provisions for cooking, indicated by the findings of fire places associated with large quantities of household pottery, grinding stones, pestles and ashes (Rashid 2008, 46). This feature emerged in the very first phase of the monastery. Occasionally, a separate portion within the cell was earmarked for hearth and kitchen material by erecting a low partition wall (Rashid 2008, 46). Though traces of a community kitchen have been found in the archaeological excavations of the site, most of the monks preferred to cook their meal individually (Rashid 2008, 46). It seems that monks of this monastery had very little interaction with one another. If they maintained a deliberate distance from non-monastic devotees, that should not come as any surprise.

In the case of other excavated monastic sites on the Mainamati-Lalmal ridge --- Ananda Vihara, Rupaban Mura Vihara, Itakhola Mura Vihara, and Bhoja Vihara— evidence of ritual engagements between the monasteries and their non-monastic devotees is less than that found at the Salban Vihara. All of them

had monumental gateway complexes guarding access to the inner parts of the monastery.³⁶ None of these monasteries developed around a shrine that antedated the foundation of the monastery. Votive *stūpas* were not allowed to be installed inside the area enclosed by monastic cells (either near the central shrine or in the verandah that separated the central shrine from monastic cells) or just outside the monumental northern gateway complex, or at a little distance from the monastic site. Nor do we get any evidence of dedication of inscribed sculptures by non-monastic devotees. Similarly, terracotta seals/sealings inscribed with the names of non-monastic devotees and votive plaques inscribed with the names of non-monastic devotees or with the Buddhist Creed Formula have not been reported from these sites.

This evidence, though, should not make us infer that the entire Mainamati-Lalmai ridge was out of bounds for non-monastic devotees. A separate site--Kutila Mura-- away from monastic centres was earmarked for this purpose. The site of Kutila Mura, located about three miles north of Salban Vihara and nearly a mile to the north of Ananda Vihara, offers evidence of considerable ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees. Before analyzing the pattern of this engagement, we will mention the general features of this site to understand the context.

Kutila Mura basically contains three *stūpas* in a row, on a common plinth. In each *stūpa*, the drum in cylindrical shape supports the hemispherical dome (Haque 2008, 34). The ground plan of the central *stūpa* is in the shape of a *Dharmacakra* or Wheel of Law. The hub of the *Dharmacakra* is represented by a deep central shaft and spokes by brick walls which have formed eight cells or box-chambers (Alam 1982, 47). The two other *stūpas* are believed to symbolically represent the Buddha and the Saṅgha, and, as such, the three *stūpas* are together referred to as *Triratnastūpas* (Alam 1982, 47; Haque 2008, 33-34). These *stūpas* are surrounded by other *stūpas* and structures spread over an area measuring about 280 feet from north to south and 225 feet from east to west. The entire area is enclosed by a massive boundary wall decorated with recessed panels (Alam 1982, 47). That indicates that access to this area was sought to be regulated by some authority.

Despite the enclosure, the three *stūpas* seem to have provided avenues for ritual activities by non-monastic devotees. This aspect is clearest in the central

³⁶For a general review of architecture of excavated sites on the Mainamati ridge, see Haque 2008. For Ananda Vihara, Ahmed 1979a ; Alam & Miah 1999. For Rupaban Mura, see Alam 1992 ; Alam et al 2000.

stūpa, which, instead of being solid, is hollow inside, the radiating eight partition walls meeting the circular wall (Haque 2008, 33). The cells thus created are filled with stone and clay sculptures and numerous miniature *stūpas* of unbaked clay, produced from moulds (Haque 2008, 33-34). The chambers also contained minute round sealings impressed with the Buddhist creed (Haque 2008, 33-34).

The other two *stūpas*, representing the Buddha and the Saṅgha, are made of solid brick masonry. Each *stūpa* has a deep central shaft which also contained a large number of clay miniature *stūpas* and terracotta sealings (Alam 1982, 47). Moreover, the nine brick *stūpas* that were found to the west of the *Triratnastūpas* also contained many miniature clay *stūpas* in their central shafts (Alam 1982, 48). These are all indicators of the flow of pilgrims to these *stūpas*.

In sun-baked clay votive *stūpas* found in the *Triratnastūpas* as well as in the nine other *stūpas* referred to above, figures of the eight-handed Tārā (i.e., *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā) and Jambhala occur frequently (Alam 1982, 59). That is an indication of the cult preference of lay devotees, as well as of the emergence of this site as a great centre for the worship of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā.

One more inference is quite likely. A disjuncture seems to have developed between the cultic practices observed by the devotees who donated votive *stūpas* to the sites of Kutila Mura and Satyapira Bhita and the kind of Buddhism practised within the monasteries of Paharpur and monasteries in the neighbourhood of Kutila Mura. At both Kutila Mura and Satyapira Bhita, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā was the most preferred deity for depiction on votive *stūpas* and plaques. In many Mainamati monasteries with central cruciform shrines, the cultic focus was on the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* (Prasad 2017, 419-422; Prasad 2018b). Similar was the case with Paharpur (Prasad 2017, 419-422; Prasad 2018b). It could have been one of the reasons why the non-monastic devotees generally kept a distance from such monasteries.

Summing up: differential patterns of alignment of votive *stūpas* in Bihar and Bengal and their implications.

Let me sum up the patterns of alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the main religious monuments from Magadha to Bengal. We notice some fundamental differences in the pattern as we move from Magadha to Bengal. Within Magadha, lay donors could install stone, terracotta or sun-baked clay votive *stūpas* in the

courtyard of the Mahābodhi temple, the holiest Buddhist site. They could also do the same in or near the most sacred site within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra: the Temple/*Stūpa* Site 3. They could do the same in the courtyard of the loftiest temple of Nālandā (Site 12). That is to say that the most sacred avenues located in the inner parts of the Mahāvihāra were available to non-monastic devotees for the dedication of votive *stūpas*. These votive *stūpas* were, in other words, parts of the monastic fabric: a pattern fundamentally different from Paharpur and Mainamati monasteries, where the Saṅgha did not allow the dedication of votive *stūpas* either near the central cruciform shrine or near the outer walls of the monastic enclosure. They testify to the willingness and enthusiasm of monastic authorities of Nālandā to enter into ritual engagement with their non-monastic devotees.

The pattern changes when we move to Antichak. At Antichak, no votive *stūpa* has been reported from within the area enclosed by monastic cells. They are, rather, found just outside the northern gate of the monastery. There too, a separate area was earmarked by an enclosure wall with a gate for the dedication of votive *stūpas* by non-monastic devotees.

The distance between the main monastery and votive *stūpas* increases as we move to Bengal. The monastic authorities of Paharpur seem to have taken a decision not to allow the erection of votive *stūpas* anywhere within the monastic enclosure or just outside its northern gate. This was allowed at Satyapira Bhita (located 270 m to the east of the monastery) but we don't know what kind of relationship the monastery had with the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita. The monastery did not attempt to appropriate the cult of Tārā at Satyapira Bhita to diversify its own patronage base.

In other Varendra monasteries, votive *stūpas* have generally not been reported either from inside the monastery or just near it. Nor could a Satyapira Bhita kind of phenomenon ever evolve in the neighbourhood of any excavated monastic site of Varendra. They seem to be reluctant to enter into ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees.

Barring the Period II shrine of Salbana Vihara, more or less similar was the case with the Mainamati monasteries. Here Kutila Mura seems to have offered the only avenue for the installation of dedicatory *stūpas*. The nearest known monastic centre is at least one mile away from Kutila Mura. In other words, a distinction was maintained between the main monasteries (which generally did not favour installation of votive *stūpas* by non-monastic devotees within the space enclosed by the monastic walls

or the area adjacent to the outer walls of monasteries) and Kutila Mura, which was made available to non-monastic devotees for the dedication of votive *stūpas*. Like the Satyapira Bhita Tārā temple, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā was the main cult figure at Kutila Mura. No monastery on the Mainamati ridge seems to have attempted to appropriate the popularity of the cult of *Aṣṭamahābhayā* Tārā at Kutila Mura to augment and diversify its own patronage and pilgrimage base.

All this indicates that monasteries of Bengal had less ritual interface with non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees than what we find in Bihar monasteries. Patronage provided by pilgrims does not seem to have formed the main component of their resource base. This inference tallies well with the epigraphic data associated with the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal. Published epigraphic data associated with the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal indicate patronage of monasteries mainly by two categories of donors: Sāmantas (subordinate rulers), who, in the garb of establishing Buddhist monasteries as an act of religious piety, tried to enhance their own authority and encroach upon the same of the state in the donated tract of land (Furui 2011: 151); and kings, who expected to use some particular political and religious symbolism radiated by some monasteries for their own benefit (Prasad 2017, 316-342). Non-aristocratic devotees either did not have much interest in patronising such monasteries or were not allowed to do so. That the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal were reluctant to invite patronage from the non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees is indicated by one more fact: a general paucity of inscribed sculptures installed within the religious space of such monasteries by such devotees. In contrast, a big landed magnate like the Nalanda Mahāvihāra allowed the installation of the tutelary deity of the site---a stone sculpture of Nāgarāja, installed in Temple Site 3--- by a non-aristocratic Mahāyāna *Upāsaka* (Prasad 2017: 341). To sum up, some fundamental differences are discernible in the support systems of Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. Thus the process of the decline of monastic Buddhism in Bihar and Bengal could not have been the same.

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