

Lost on the pilgrim routes

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Abstract

Pilgrimages developed with devotees traveling to visit sacred spaces and sacred objects and symbols. Among the followers of Buddha and Dhamma, there was no reason, and no necessity to go on pilgrimages or worship any objects or symbols. One of the main reasons for the decline of Buddha and Dhamma has been because of the adaptation of pilgrimages. Such pilgrimages developed very fast with the development of transport facilities and travel routes, and were very detrimental to the people following Buddha and Dhamma, as they were tempted to deviate from the true path shown by the Buddha and to seek the easier, more comfortable path leading to religious spaces, which in turn made them seek pleasure and prosperity in this life and the next, with no reason to strive to escape from *samsara*. Most sacred spaces have become just tourist spaces where the state, religious institutions and tourist organizations vie for financial benefits. Providing transport for pilgrimages has become a worldwide business. It is almost impossible to draw a line between pilgrims and tourists. Ashoka's *Dharma Yatra* was not a pilgrimage to visit sacred spaces, Buddhist or otherwise. For a true follower of Buddha and Dhamma, the only way he could benefit from a visit to a Buddhist sacred space is by contemplating on the Buddha's teaching and trying to find his own escape into Nirvana. Travel to Lumbini is very easy now, by flying direct to Kathmandu. Only 30% of the visitors to Lumbini are Buddhist, while 51% are Hindu. In January 2013, 72.16% of them spent less than 30 minutes and only 5.5% spent over one hour. This was the theme of Balangoda Ananda Maitreya thero's 'A Strange Story' written in 1930.

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