Acceptance and rejection in Buddhist monasticism: spatial organization in Nalanda monasteries in Bihar

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When we reconstruct the history of relationships and hierarchies among people and groups the study of spatial organization provides much information. The 'space' is a production that narrates the nature of relationships, hierarchies, organizational structures, rejection and acceptance of certain people and groups who live or interact with that particular space. Perhaps the story narrated by the spatial studies differs considerably from the story narrated by the literature.

Such relationships, hierarchies and organizational structures that maintained in monasteries are reconstructed mainly considering on literary sources which have their own limitations and biases. Therefore, there is a vacuum for studies of the spatial organization of Buddhist monasteries. In this paper the spatial organization of Nalanda monasteries of Bihar (4th century to 13th century) is analyzed.

Objectives of this paper are to explore and reconstruct the above mentioned different relationships, hierarchies and organizational structures that have been maintained among inmates and between lay and clergy of Nalanda, a Buddhist monastery that represents a mature level of the development of the idea of 'monastery'. In exploring this archaeological and architectural remains of ritual and residential spaces will be analyzed in details horizontally and vertically. The way of the ritual and residential spaces are organized, their orientations, centrality and different levels of restrictive methods adopted through spatial organization will be analyzed here.

Several levels of hierarchies among monks and between lay and clergy are seen. While attempting to keep lay people away from the spaces of the monks the effort is seen to welcome them with certain restrictions and limitations.

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