

Book Review: Buddhist Culture and Heritage: Province 5 (बौद्ध संस्कृति र सम्पदा : प्रदेश नं.५)

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Introduction

The book entitled "Buddhist Culture and Heritage: Province 5" Published by Lumbini Research Center (LRC), Lumbini Buddhist University, is a comprehensive exploration of the rich Buddhist heritage in what is now known as Lumbini Province in Nepal. This book, an anthology of research contributions from various experts, offers an in-depth examination of the cultural, historical, and religious significance of Buddhism in this region. The book has been published with the financial support of the Ministry of Social Development, the Province Government, Province 5. Its study area is about Buddhist history of this province, the introduction of Buddhist sites, exposure of tangible and intangible culture and heritage, management of heritage, the importance of Buddhist education, and its role in peace and prosperity. Priority has been given to on-site study and observation. Data from various places and areas have been collected and studies, research and writing have been done with the involvement of experts in the respective fields. Among the fourteen chapters, Prof. Anandman Shakya, Buddhist Education, Prof. Dr. Sankiccha Buddhist expert, Prof. Chhatraraja Shakya Buddhist practice and Associate professor Dr. Kavindra Bajracharya has given his contributions to Buddhist rites and Vajrayana Buddhist practice. Similarly, Dr. Deepak Prasad Acharya has prepared chapters on the management of Buddhist heritage as well as the contribution of Buddhist philosophy to peace and prosperity, Meena Shahi on painting and sculpture, and Geeta Sharma on festivals and architecture. Other chapters

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have been prepared with the participation of the Research Center itself. The text is divided into fourteen chapters, each focusing on different aspects of Buddhist culture, practices, traditions, and heritage sites.

Content Overview

The book begins with an introduction (Chapter One) that sets the stage for the ensuing discussions by providing an overview of the province's Buddhist heritage. It highlights the historical and cultural backdrop against which Buddhism flourished in Province 5. In the introduction section of the book, topics such as background, objectives of the study, importance of the study, review of previous literature, study method and outline of the study are covered (LRC, 1-12). Chapter Two explores the history of Buddhism in this region, tracing its origins and evolution over the centuries. This chapter is crucial for understanding the foundations of Buddhist culture in the area. The book highlights the fact that Gautama Buddha was born in Lumbini, Rupandehi located in the western Terai region of Nepal. His native kingdom of Kapilavastu and the maternal kingdom of Koliya were then republics. The birthplaces of human Buddhas before Siddhartha, Krakuchanda and Kanakamuni, are also located in Gotihwā and Niglihawā respectively in this region. Emperor Ashoka came here and erected a stone pillar with the inscription, while pilgrims from all over the country came for pilgrimage to places including the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, the pioneer of peace. Even after him, various kings and dignitaries continued to come here. In this way, there are evidence of Buddhism, philosophy, art, practice and history in the political structure of Nepal. It has remained as five special sacred holy lands. Even now, various communities have been practicing Buddhism here (LRC, 13-42).

The subsequent chapters (Three to Five) focus on Buddhist practices, traditions, and the lives of Buddhist experts in the region (LRC, 43-90). These sections provide readers with insights into the everyday practices, rituals, and significant figures who have contributed to the preservation and propagation of Buddhism in Lumbini Province. The book provides the detail information regarding Theravāda, Māhāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist groups started to settle in this province, and they started to practice traditional religion, rituals and life there. In the Buddhist community here, (a) Daskarma from conception to Pānigrahanakarma, (b) Bhimarathārohana, Devarathārohana and Maharathārohana and (c) Death and post-death karma are being practised. Apart from the above rites, lighting lamps in the name of the deceased, giving donations, singing Gyanmāla bhajans, giving donations in Gaijātrā, giving donations in pilgrimages etc. are also been highlighted (Ibid).

Chapter Six is dedicated to Buddhist festivals, showcasing the vibrant celebrations that mark the Buddhist calendar in this region (LRC, 91-111). It offers a vivid portrayal of how these festivals contribute to the cultural fabric of the province. There are Theravada Buddhist vihārs in Nine districts of Province 5. Buddhist monks and nuns (anāgārikās) live in some of those vihārs. Most of the vihārsas in the hills and other areas do not have the presence of monks. But in all the vihārsas, on the days of Poornimā, Aunsi, Ashtami and in some, regular Buddha Pujā, Sheel Prayer and Triratna Bandana are held daily. Such exercises are being done here. Among the Buddhists of this region are Sākyā, Vajrāchāryā, Buddhāchāryā Newārs, Magar, Thāru, Gurung, Tamang, Sherpā, Maharjan, Udaya, Pradhān, Nāpit, Khadgi etc. These Buddhists go to the vihārsas and join in praying and worshiping the Buddha, while in places where there are no vihārsas, they sit in front of the Buddha statue or in a quiet room in their own homes and perform modesty, bandana and Buddha worship. Three of these (vihārsas) are in Butwal. There are five monasteries, two in Bhairahawa and Twenty four outside Lumbini. Thus, there are sixteen Theravāda Buddhist vihārs and forty Buddhist vihārs and Monasteries of all denominations, excluding Himalayan Buddhism, including twenty-four Māhāyāna Buddhist vihārs and Monasteries in Rupandehi District.

Rupandehi is the district that has the highest number of vihārs outside Kathmandu Valley and in province 5. Theravāda vihārs in this region perform Buddha Pujā, Sheela Prayer and Bandana. The heart of the book lies in Chapter Seven, which details the major Buddhist heritage sites (LRC, 112-135). This chapter is particularly valuable for scholars and practitioners interested in Buddhist pilgrimage and architectural heritage. The descriptions of sites are accompanied by photographs and maps, enhancing the reader's understanding of their significance.

Chapters Eight to Ten shift focus to the artistic expressions of Buddhism in the region, covering Buddhist paintings, Murtikalā (sculpture), and Vāstukalā (architecture). These chapters are richly illustrated, providing a visual feast that complements the scholarly analysis (LRC, 136-198).

The management of Buddhist heritage sites is discussed in Chapter Eleven, addressing the challenges and strategies for preserving these important cultural assets. This chapter is especially relevant in the context of modern development pressures and the need for sustainable tourism practices (LRC, 199-220).

Chapter Twelve explores Buddhist education in Province Number 5, highlighting the role of monastic and secular institutions in imparting Buddhist teachings (LRC, 221-229). It underscores the importance of education in maintaining the continuity of Buddhist traditions.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter Thirteen, discusses the role of Buddhism in promoting peace and prosperity in the region (LRC, 230-234). It presents Buddhism as not just a religion but also as a social and ethical guide for the community.

The book concludes with Chapter Fourteen, offering conclusions and suggestions for future research and preservation efforts (LRC, 235-289). This final chapter is followed by a comprehensive set of references, indexes, photos, maps, and a glossary, making the book a valuable resource for researchers and students alike (Ibid).

Critical Analysis

"Buddhist Culture and Heritage: Province Number 5" is an essential contribution to the field of Buddhist studies, particularly for those interested in the cultural heritage of Nepal. The book is meticulously researched and well-organized, with each chapter building on the previous ones to create a holistic understanding of Buddhist heritage in Lumbini Province.

One of the book's strengths is its interdisciplinary approach, combining history, art, architecture, and religious studies to provide a multifaceted view of Buddhist culture. The inclusion of photographs, maps, and illustrations further enriches the reader's experience, making complex topics more accessible.

However, the book could have benefited from a more detailed exploration of the contemporary challenges facing Buddhist heritage sites, particularly in the context of globalization and modernity. While Chapter Eleven addresses some aspects of heritage management, a deeper analysis of these issues would have been valuable.

Moreover, while the book covers a broad range of topics, some readers may find the transition between chapters somewhat abrupt. A more cohesive narrative thread tying together the diverse themes could have enhanced the overall readability of the text.

Conclusion

Overall, "Buddhist Culture and Heritage: Province Number 5" is a significant scholarly

work that offers valuable insights into the Buddhist heritage of Lumbini Province. It serves as both an academic resource and a guide for those interested in exploring the cultural and religious landscape of this historically rich region. Prof. Dr. Gitu Giri and the contributing authors have succeeded in producing a text that is both informative and engaging, making it a worthy addition to the field of Buddhist studies.

This book is recommended for scholars, students, and practitioners of Buddhism, as well as anyone interested in the cultural heritage of Nepal.

Works Cited

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