

Bodhgaya: A case study in the development of Buddhist heritage site

Aparajita Morde

Research Scholar, Visual Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU

Bodhgaya is a place of Buddha's enlightenment that assumes an important place in Buddhist cosmology. It is a leading tourist place for Buddhist devotees who throng the center daily to pay respect to the holy tree. The site had fallen into oblivion after the 13th CE and was subsequently rediscovered in the 19th CE as a result of the growing antiquarian interest. The formation of the Archaeological Survey of India and the establishment of Indological studies as a discipline gave a further impetus to the study of Bodhgaya. In the post-independence period, the rediscovery of India's past was synonymous with the activity of nation-building. It was in this and the subsequent periods that the policymakers took a keen interest in the development of religious sites to boost tourism. Bodhgaya is a site that received immense attraction from not only the center but also from the international community. Buddhism has actively been an important part of India's soft power. India has taken considerable efforts within the realm of Buddhist diplomacy. Since, then the place has received subsequent patronage from governments which have contributed immensely towards the development, reconstruction of the site to put it back on the religious map of the world. The site is a testimony of the changing course of history as it has been an object of interest for each subsequent wave of visitors across medieval and modern India. The paper conducts a brief study of the site of Bodhgaya and the drastic transformation in the landscape of the site. The key players bringing about this transformation are the state, the international agencies and the tourism sector have considerably altered the religious landscape of this place. Giving rise to a rich vocabulary of architectural and visual data which in turn has reshaped the religious understanding of the place. Thus, the place has been a center of much national and international attention. The paper through the study of the singular site of Bodhgaya tries to touch upon the role that the state, the international communities have in the development of a site.

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