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## INTRODUCTION

### Records, Recoveries, Remnants and Inter-Asian Interconnections: Decoding Cultural Heritage

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*I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things...*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ozymandias*,<sup>1</sup> 1818

So why begin an introduction on the contours, memories and cascading narratives of an inter Asian cultural history and heritage making with the sonorous words of the quintessential British Romantic poet, Percy Shelley, writing of a lost and unknown king, one who is possibly an Egyptian tyrant in an ancient time? A poem which takes at its point of entry the view of “a traveller from an antique land”, one, it is clear, who has no direct links with this land but is encountering an unknown, unreadable culture and is seeking to decipher and decode the lost civilizational history from a Eurocentric, colonially shaped imaginary.

So is it a sense of historical myopia and twisted irony, to choose as an epigraph this iconic poem, one that is symbolic in literary history of the opaqueness of cultural encounters? More so given that many essays within the pages of this volume directly disagree and debate on how history is manifested, absorbed and then concretized into a narrative that feeds a culture's — any culture's — sense of hegemony: accounts that have the common seam of being dialogic and interrogative, and, fundamentally, anti-colonial.

However, the views that emerged in the works of a Shelley, or others I will cite/site later on in this introduction, sit well with the arc of the narrative that many of the cultural theorists, Sinologists, historians, art historians, interlocutors of heritage and culture, its practitioners, religious study experts and social anthropologist engage with in this collection. At the heart of these contestations lie the vexed questions of cultural heritage, its complex and multivalent legacies, its deep fissures, its ruptures indicative of ideological schismatics and political shifts, its historical reconfigurations and altered meanings and symbolic “value” across time. In fact, as we read through this collection, we find that the drum beat of a lost time echoes in different ideational registers till today. Echoes bringing with them responses that are still locked in an emotive — and sometime resistant — account of what it means to “own” a monument, a ruin, a tree, a bark, a brick, a leaf, a space, a temple, a temple that was a not a temple at one time, or a manuscript, that, for example Andrea Acri's unknown “cultural brokers” circulated and transmitted, and unwittingly, preserved.

Shelley, as we know through the long history of the nineteenth century British-led colonial charge in India, was only speaking of concerns that despite the gap in the spatial location(s) — Europe and Asia — shaped how culture and heritage were made and remade from the vantage point of the colonial master. Some of these colonial master narratives that Sraman Mukherjee and others refer to, namely, Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, Alexander Cunningham, and Alexander M. Broadley that becomes the common referent for many as they dismantle the colonial “heritage” narrative. Critical commentary on how they constructed (and thus deconstructed) a material and textual “history” of ancient India (that was in line with their own positioning as colonial administrators) is hence a consistent theme. Thus ancient India, of course, in the view of these three Victorian gentlemen archaeologists was none other than Bihar, or, more accurately ancient Magadh: a variegated space from where opium, indigo and the Buddha all travelled to both the Eastern and the Western edges of the Empire.

And it is Bihar and its centrality in a multi-religious cosmology that we explain, explore and elucidate in this volume in a small way. So what of this Magadh-Bihar typology that confronts us when we dwell on how the regional and the transregional, the ancient, the medieval and the modern, now work within a space which is constantly being mapped and defined depending on which “traveller” is the current resident of the space? As we time-travel we ask: what of the time of the Chinese monks, Xuanzang, Faxian and Yijing, that Max Deeg and Anne Cheng principally, and to a degree, Frederick Asher, concern themselves with? What of the impact today of the aforementioned Broadley, Cunningham and Buchanan, Victorian gents all? Additionally, what of the valuable counter culture narrative and politics of the Sri Lankan monk, Anagarika Dharmapala — who almost the same time as the British imperialists as Padma Maitland tells us — was doing his own revisionist history of the spiritual and cultural ecology of the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya? And what, specially, of the subaltern narrative of the unnamed villagers of the region, with their everyday interventions and assimilative practices that reshaped Buddhist iconography and history through the lens of their lived Hindu traditions in the words of Abhishek Amar?

Going beyond the sacred geography of the Magadh-Bihar matrix lies a connection across the seas — of Srivijaya, far away from the kingly Magadh where the Buddha walked and preached. Srivijaya, a space which nurtured and protected ideas of an Indic heritage even when it lost its lustre in its own sub continental homeland. How does one find links between the Buddha world, and what Frederick Asher and Andrea Acri define as the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, worlds far distant but which, nevertheless, deftly wove the travelling accounts, for instance, of kingship derived from the epical Indic textual world to create their own transregional variants? And finally, what of the relationship of travel, time, traveller, memory, memorial, text, context, History and history, shared heritage and inter-Asian interactions, and most significantly, the evolving patterns of religious practice with the compelling memory of the ancient Nalanda *Mahavihara*?

All of this and more became the substratum for the humanist vision of a shared heritage that underpinned the revival of the new Nalanda university in Rajgir, Bihar in the twenty-first century. Nalanda university, as many know now, is a revival project that brings with it old time and new, and had its founding mentors from Europe, the United States, East Asia and Southeast Asia, and, of course, India. A university designed to encourage the study of new disciplines grafted onto the lineage of an ancient tradition

of cutting-edge knowledge. It is a narration fittingly put together in this collection by Gopa Sabharwal, the Founding Vice Chancellor.

This collection of essays has its beginning in all of these questions; interrogations that became the intellectual space from where I organized my second international conference, while discharging the role of Dean, Academic Planning, at the fledgling Nalanda university. In 2014, eight months before the first set of students and faculty came to live and learn at Nalanda university — after a gap of eight hundred years — I, along with the Vice Chancellor Gopa Sabharwal and a few intrepid Nalanda Fellows — Michiel Baas, Eleonor Marcussen, Aviram Sharma, M.B. Rajani — and with the able support of Tansen Sen, Governing Board member, and Philippe Peycam, Director of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) Leiden, conceptualized a collaborative, truly international and interdisciplinary conference in Rajgir, Bihar. It was, on my part, a leap of faith, to bring to the as-yet-to-be inaugurated university a set of scholars from places near and far, many of whom, like Anne Cheng, came as pilgrims, some as curious travellers, as would-be-faculty as it turns out, to the conference on “Cultural Heritage: Environment, Ecology and Inter-Asian Interactions” in a briskly cold but salubrious January of the year 2014.

It was only natural that I chose a subject that lay at the intersection of all that Nalanda and its networks have resonated with: movements of people and hence movement of cultures; heritage anchorage in spaces that transcended the geographical borders of Nalanda. Additionally, it engaged with ecological concerns and political dynamics that changed not just Magadh-Bihar, Rajgir-Nalanda, Bodh-Gaya and its environs (a process trenchantly described by Frederick Asher in his essay), but also shaped the cultural economies of the medieval Deccan region in India (Kashshaf Ghani) and of medieval Nusantara (Andrea Acri). And at the heart lies Nalanda: a place that resonated with not just the message of the Buddha, but also the spirit of a monastery, or a university (there are many views on what exactly) still suffused with the memory of a time when, to quote Kakuzo Okakura (1904), when “Asia is [was] one” (ibid., p. 1).

It is this sense of Nalanda shared across Asian countries — before and after colonialism — that helped to create a unique initiative, spearheaded by Singapore’s former Foreign Minister, George Yeo and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, the Founding Chancellor to begin drawing on a *tabula rasa* the broad brush strokes of the new Nalanda university. And later — post the historic revival of the Nalanda university on ground — this partnership across countries, helped to draw fresh attention to the crying need to have

the ancient ruins of Nalanda, only about 10 kilometres from the site of the new university, to be considered worthy of being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is important to point out that the debate on “why not Nalanda ruins too?” came at the same time as the founding of the university. Finally, in 2016, almost fifteen years after Bodh Gaya was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2001, and almost two years after the formal beginning of classes at Nalanda university in 2014, the excavated remains of ancient Nalanda were finally inscribed. A listing that brought with it a sense of well-being and achievement for Bihar and for Rajgir-Nalanda as evidenced from the many congratulatory messages we at the university received.

In this context, I share a snippet from the dossier which was submitted for evaluation and which — despite some reservations expressed by those who worked on this on behalf of the university — was eventually cleared for approval for listing. In the section entitled, in pared down bureaucratic terminology, as “Justification for inscription”, the Nalanda dossier (2014) states:

The textual evidence, including inscriptions, about Nalanda that appear in Tibetan, Chinese, and other East Asian records suggest that it was a leading site for intra-Asian interactions. No other place in Asia seems to have attracted such immense notice and imagination of people living in far-flung regions of the continent.

The influence of the revival of Nalanda as a full-fledged modern university with a unique heritage is also evidenced by the following evaluative statement: “... Nalanda symbolized the multiplicity of knowledge production, the innovative processes of the organized transmission of ideas through education, and a shared heritage of people living in multiple regions of Asia (ibid., p. 105).

Additionally, and this is moot, under Criteria vi — “*to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance*” (ibid., p. 109) the dossier states

Moreover, the systems of education and administration apart from architecture and planning were the basis on which later Mahaviharas at Vikramashila and Odantapuri in India, Jagaddala and Paharpur in Bangladesh were established by the Pala dynasty between 9th–12th Centuries. Nalanda Geidge in Sri Lanka stands testimony to Nalanda Mahavihara’s influence in higher education. The continuity of its systems is also evident in contemporary monasteries in Tibet and Nepal.

In fact, the term Nalanda has become synonymous with aspired standard of education as evidenced in 21st century namesake institutions such as ... Nalanda University in India, the Nalanda Buddhist Society in Malaysia, the Nalanda Monastery near Toulouse in France, the Instituut Nalanda in Belgium, and the Nalanda cultural festival, organized annually by Dongguk University, Korea's largest and most prominent Buddhist University (*ibid.*, p. 110).

Many commentators in this volume, and elsewhere, are deeply critical of the whole UNESCO driven socio-economic-historical-political-cultural intent behind heritage classifications as being reflective of a continuance of colonial hierarchies of power vis-à-vis culture and heritage. However, the experience of those who are close kin and neighbours to heritage sites can sometime belie this — a response briefly spelt out by Abhishek Amar. Thus, while I partly concur with Chiara Bortolotto's (2007, p. 22) observation that

the UNESCO approach to cultural heritage, as fostered by the Convention Concerning the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage (Paris, 17 October 1972), was limited to the traditional categories of "classical" art history and shaped by Western museological principles ...

the actual impact on those who have tended and honoured some of these "heritage" sites very often comes as a personal validation of long years of unmemorable foot soldiering.

Having said that, there is no way of eliding the colonial impulse that is the shaping influence behind the still largely Eurocentric view on *who* determines *what* constitutes heritage. This persists despite — as David Lowenthal (2015, p. 11) points out — the diminishing returns on heritage today

Additionally, calendric happenstance imposes a *fin-de-siècle* sense of change — we are no longer twentieth- but twenty-first-century people, denizens even of a new millennium. Like post-French Revolutionaries of the early 1800s and *fin-de-siècle* survivors in the early 1900s, we feel marooned in fearsome novelty. The past is not simply foreign but utterly estranged, as if on some remote planet. Our exile from it seems total, lasting, irrevocable.... In the twenty-first century being nineteenth century seems appealing but impossible. Irrelevant and irretrievable as the past may seem, it is by no means simply sloughed off. To assuage the grief of loss, the pain of rupture, the distress of

obsolescence, we cling avidly to all manner of pasts, however alien or fragmentary. We also add to them in ways evident and extraordinary. Newly augmented and embellished pasts cannot replace the traditional ... But they comprise a complex of histories and memories, relics and traces (ibid.).

But, for our purposes, and certainly large parts of the Asian world (Lowenthal is situating his remarks in the context of his American experience) the past is not a lost world. To elucidate this we loop back to the nineteenth century and its desire for collecting, displaying, labelling and classifying. It is this political drive, masked as a saving impulse of a fast-vanishing heritage, on the parts of the colonialists, that sits at the heart of Sraman Mukherjee's essay "Collecting the Region: Configuring Bihar in the Space of Museums". The account critiques the colonial "master" narrative of nineteenth century Bihar with a specific focus on Broadley and his privateer urges, urges that were a direct result of the unquestioned authority vested in him as representative of British imperial power

Framing nineteenth century Bihar as a land of wilderness, a region wrecked by lawlessness, and inhabited by natives with a disregard for their own past, enabled the colonial narratives of discovery of Bihar's ancient history. It is against these narratives of loss that colonial officials, archaeologists, and antiquarians like Broadley would stage their labours of recovering ancient pasts.

In his capacity as the Assistant Magistrate of Bihar, Broadley conducted surveys, excavations, and built up a substantial antiquarian collection which found their way into the Bihar Museum established in the town of Bihar Sharif. As the earliest museum collection of nineteenth century colonial Bihar, the Broadley Collection emerged during 1870s and 1880s as the site of rediscovered ancient Buddhist Bihar protected from the ravages of "nature" and "natives".

Mukherjee's reading is echoed by Amar, whose own surveys of the region of Rajgir-Nalanda-Gaya-Bodh Gaya are indicative of a counter culture "native" narrative that continues through the colonial era and after. What emerges in his essay, "Heritage Preservation in the Gaya Region" is the direct opposite of the colonial history of discovery of lost Indic heritage, particularly Buddhist. Instead, Amar explores the disjunct between lived heritage and textual heritage and comments on the layered contexts of the lived traditions in which this "heritage" lay, and sets it off against the ascription of "true" value by the enlightened, esoteric and culturally sophisticated imperialists.

It is small solace to know that this sense of cultural superiority was not something the British colonialists only felt in colonies they had founded, so to say. For the nineteenth century British of a certain class and education, much of the world they controlled — and did not — suffered from what David Lowenthal (1998, p. 243) evocatively names “heritage blindness”

Heritage blindness was imputed not only to savages but to civilized Europe’s archetypal heirs, the Greeks. Debased 18th-century Athenians strolling “with supine indifference among the glorious ruins of antiquity” struck Gibbon as “incapable of admiring the genius of their predecessors.” As classicism gained devotees, more and more of them found modern Greeks unfit guardians. The “rightful inheritors” of Hellenic legacy, in Woolf’s words, were in London, Paris, and Berlin. They were truer heirs not only because they cared and knew more about it, but because in their hands it became truly universal — a legacy inspiring philosophers and statesmen, poets and architects everywhere. “We are all Greeks,” Shelley declared; “our laws, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece.” (ibid.)

But, as we now well know, it was not just Greece that the English could truly value as vaunted roots of European classicism, but also others parts of the world, even the several worlds of India. It is India, more than any other part of the British Empire that witnesses the successful charge of the Light Brigade of administrators, amateur collectors, Indophiles, archaeologists, epigraphists, philologists, linguists, art historians, Sanskritists, breakers of the Brahmi code, and creators of the first museums, especially the redoubtable Calcutta Museum. And, unsurprisingly, as all of this army of colonials made camp in Indian terrains, in Indian texts, in Indian monuments, and in Indian mounds and ruins, they saw each and every one of them through the panoptic vision of an European imaginary.

Such a hegemonic and flattening perception would, naturally, make it possible for a Cunningham or a Buchanan (a quick shorthand for so many others like them) to decide, unilaterally, how precisely “heritage” was to be protected, preserved and memorialized. If you see the world, as these British did, as object and text, as something that needs to be codified, explained and *removed* beyond its contemporaneous value, then you would wrench, extract, remove all *object de arts* of an ancient time into the police version of a “safe house” — a museum, a library, a private collection. Or, as it did over and over again, ship them “back home” in the manner of the famous collection of Greek marbles brought back to London by the nineteenth century aesthete, the wealthy English aristocrat, Lord Elgin. Or, even better, house them in the greatest monument of England’s

imperial might: the British Museum with its Egyptian, its African and Asian rooms, among others.

What would such a world view know of matters of what Amar sees as a resituated and assimilative practice of those who live, literally cheek-to-jowl with hoary antiquity and lost religions? However, it is this lived tradition that has, as Amar reaffirms repeatedly, ensured the survival of shrines, temples, and sculptures by villagers, who, while they could not tell you about their “meaning” in historical or cultural terms, could certainly value them as symbolic of grace and beneficence that lived beyond its taxonomy in altered historical times

These remains were either appropriated or resituated in new socio-religious contexts at their site of discovery or in proximate distance, which indicates an ongoing dialogue between the extant communities and the past.... It was this assimilative practice, as the paper argues — based on the interaction between extant communities, local knowledge, and material-remains (sculptures and temples/shrines) — that resulted in their reuse and their subsequent preservation. Hence, it also illustrates an awareness of the historic potential and heritage value of material remains amongst the local inhabitants.

Amar also comments on how history is differently apprehended and hence valued, by those who live in close proximity with it, and those others who are trained to “read” history; essentially, practitioners of lived history versus believers of documented History

This also explains why the dialogue between the villagers and Buchanan emphasized the different understanding of history that they both had. For Buchanan, what mattered was the origin and primary identity of sculptures, whereas the local inhabitants were not interested in configuring these questions. For them, the temple constituted a part of their daily experience as well as a living reminder of their past.

Jacob N. Kinnard (1998), too, bears out this way of apprehending how we see lived traditions, peoples and their interactions with what to them is also heritage, but heritage in a deeply personalized yet, simultaneously, communitarian manner

The whole question of the identity of any single image in India is, I think, in serious need of revision. There can be no question that Indian images, be they Buddhist or Hindu or Jain, have always been made for specific purposes, made by and for specific people, and made to function in specific contexts. But we would do well to heed Davis’s words about obsessing about original intentions. For as he

has demonstrated in his *Lives of Indian Images*: “Even as the images hang on to their distinctive insignia, they may find themselves carried off to new places, where they encounter new audiences, who may not know or appreciate their earlier significance. Or, even staying in their original locations, the images may take on new roles and new meanings in response to the changing world around them (Kinnard 1998, p. 822).

To extend this argument: this “new audience” could also be widely separated by age, by disposition, by race, by country of origin, by politics, and by religion. Hence, for example, for the nineteenth century antiquarian, the historical “archive” of ancient Magadha, specifically *Buddhist* Magadha, would be, to quote from Keats’ *Ode to the Grecian Urn* (1820), possibly a thing of rare beauty indicative of a lost, desirable world. Or a place from which their minds could seek to decipher an ancient, impenetrable age. Certainly, worthy of preservation, but, at the same time removed from their European experience. Yet, as we witness again through poetry, through art, through architecture and archaeology, through historical writing and so much else that originates from the nineteenth century imperial space, it was this shock brought on by this intercivilizational and intercultural encounter that eventually became the intellectual bedrock of their newly globalized world view.

Nevertheless, in a curious twist, it is a few lines of this poem which I will just quote from, that make the views of the European colonizer and the colonized Indian villager come together in unexpectedly similar ways of seeing. It really — as I see it — does not matter that one had access to a treasure trove of material to “read” the sculpture of say a Buddhist deity, and the other had no knowledge that it was even a Buddhist sculpture! For, at the end both were as mystified as Keats when he first saw the famous Elgin Marbles in a private exhibition in London and sought to recreate a heritage and civilization that was far removed from his own one that was rooted in urban, industrial, nineteenth century London. Thus, in their own ways both the colonial master and the native subject confront the same conundrum when they encounter time past in its material reality, by, possibly thinking along such lines

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
 What little town by river or sea-shore,

Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul, to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return

So how do we truly “know” a past from which no “can e'er return”? And, if this past has to be recovered and reinscribed, is the “native” understanding a better repository of cultural heritage than that of the “outsider”? Do changed times, changed contexts, changed cultural and political prisms only reflect an unending struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses? Or, can there be meeting grounds where the imperial agenda works to secure the ownership of the sacred heritage by some others, who are also colonised, as in the case of the historic and sacred Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, Bihar?

Padma Maitland's account of the struggles of what precisely was the spiritual legacy of the Mahabodhi temple — Indian, Hindu, or, Sri Lankan, Buddhist — is a good example of the convoluted and contested history of spiritual legacy, religious practice and transregional bid for ownership of spaces that are seen as lying beyond the geographical boundaries of where they are actually spatially located. The essay details the highly successful manoeuvring of the Sri Lankan monk, Anagarika Dharmapala who fought for control of the Mahabodhi Temple, and successfully wrested it, for a time, from its Hindu trustees. What Maitland explores in his essay is the inheritance of an interregional Buddhist heritage and its linkage with Buddha, the sacred ground of his Enlightenment, and its roots (pun intended) in the Tree of Trees — the magical, mystical, ever living symbol of the presence of Buddha in a particular space: the much venerated Bodhi Tree at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. This connection between the inner core of Bodh Gaya and its Buddhist edges is, in the words of Kinnard (1998, p. 819), reflective of “the multivalent complexity of Bodhgaya itself”.

At the opening of the introduction I had spoken of how cultural heritage can be linked with the ecological space via a tree, a bark, a leaf. What I had not spoken of then was how critical origination narratives are to deciding who really owns what? Two essays in this collection — Maitland's “The Object | The Tree: Emissaries of Buddhist Ground”, and Aciri's “Tracing Trans-regional Networks and Connections Across the Indic Manuscript Cultures of Nusantara (AD 1400–1600)” — pay close attention to the ecological origins to weave a narrative of inheritance and legacy.

Maitland traces the struggles of ownership not only between the British and the Indian on heritage meaning and ownership, but between two sets of colonized peoples — the Hindu Indians in whose land the Mahabodhi Temple exists, and the Buddhist Sri Lankans whose Bodhi tree it apparently is. What Maitland's essay uncovers is how Buddhist networks can and are created not only through the materiality of shrines and temples, the corporeality of Buddhist relics, but also through the circulating ecology of the many Bodhi trees with multiple significations all of which create a Buddhist cosmology and “sacred ground” in disparate parts of Asia

Despite the common use of the term, bodhi trees are not technically “bodhi trees”. They are a variant of the fig tree known as the *ficus religiosa*, and sometimes known as a *pipal* tree, *bo* tree, or *ashtvatta*....

While it is possible to talk of one Bodhi Tree, it is more correct to talk of many bodhi trees. While the bodhi tree that the Buddha Sakya Muni is said to have sat beneath died many years ago, saplings and cuttings of the original — or of its decedents — have been planted in Sri Lanka, Japan, India, Europe, and the United States.

The present tree at Bodh Gaya — the object of deep veneration for not just Buddhist of many hues, but also those who come to pay obeisance to the life of the Buddha from different faiths — is a cutting from one in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. A cutting that returned “home” after centuries to the parent, or originating space, from where it first went as a sign of the body of the Buddha and the sap filled living icon of Buddhist heritage.

It is this re-turn that also signals how the powerful Sri Lankan monk, Dharmapala, could make a highly successful bid for Sri Lanka to become the *authentic* inheritor of the Mahabodhi Temple, and not Hindus who worshipped the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu, for instance. It was a historical reading that found favour with the Buddhist oriented Europeans who supported the claim. As a result, “by the nineteenth century”, Maitland explicates, “the bodhi trees of Bodh Gaya had become important objects in debates over ritual, rights, and space. Legal battles over Bodh Gaya continued for years until finally the Mahabodhi Temple was entrusted to a committee of both Hindu and Buddhist representatives.”

However, despite the legal tussles that Maitland shares what is beyond question is how the living, thriving presence of Bodhi trees — across countries — signalled towards the Buddhist ordinary core in Magadh. It is the space from which Buddhist values spread in Asia from ancient times

The conflation of the tree with multiple narratives — historical, botanical, religious — and with figure and ground, make it a prime object for considering the ways Buddhism spread around the world and its modern return to India. Just as Buddhism experienced periods of transformation at the hands of new ways of seeing and studying, bodhi trees have been caught up in multiple discourses and modes of figurations related to efforts to conceptualize India as a Buddhist territory. In particular, the continued presence of bodhi trees at Bodh Gaya has been vital to arguments about Buddhism's enduring connection to its original landscape.

[For] when planted as part of the creation of new Buddhist landscapes, bodhi trees legitimize each new locality as sacred space, invoking the Buddha and fostering an equivalence between that spot and the ground where the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Through the planting of bodhi trees, sites become linked to much longer histories of Buddhism. They become part of a network of Buddhist sites and cultures, each unique, yet linked by a common invocation of the Buddha as a teacher and Bodh Gaya as his seat of liberation.

Moreover,

The movement of bodhi trees has played a crucial role in the preservation of Bodh Gaya and in perpetuating conceptions of India as a Buddhist holy land. They have acted as ambassadors, helping to instill Buddhist ideals and a sense of community, *sangha*, abroad. More recently, bodhi trees have been used to revive notions of Buddhist ground and sangha in India, redefining cultural and ecological landscapes in South Asia.

These struggles to correctly reflect what is the spatial and spiritual topology of colonial India's greatest export — the Life of the Buddha — is best showcased by how British colonialists living in India sent back an “authentic” record to their British brothers living in Victorian England. An England plagued by the cankerous spread of doubt in the efficacy of religion post mid-1900s, thanks to the separate but combined assault of the naturalist Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and Karl Marx's three volume magnum opus *Das Kapital*: the first part of which was written in London and published in 1867.

Though the cultural and theological impact of Darwin's revolutionary text is well established, what is often not remembered is what led him to create his scientific document is none other than travel beyond the shores of Great Britain. Like many other British of a certain disposition in the

nineteenth century, Darwin too was bitten by the voyaging bug and his scientific temper led him to embark on a five-year survey voyage around the world on the HMS *Beagle*. His studies of specimens around the globe led him to formulate his theory of evolution and his views on the process of natural selection.

What is readily accessible from the two quick examples of Darwin and Marx is that Victorian England was undergoing ideational tectonic shifts that would be soon characterized in literary parlance as the Age of Faith and Doubt. So Doubt we have in the interventions of the aforementioned duo, but what of the faith that was steadily ebbing with the advance of science and industry? It was a terrible time where God the Father seemed an image created by hapless Man to keep him warm in the cold winter of his harsh life on this earth. The answer to this, it seems, lay with the figure of a man with god-like attributes, one who was born in an ancient time, but whose life and words and examples could possibly inspire, for a while, the late Victorian public: Gautam Buddha.

Philip Almond's work — cited by Mukherjee in his essay — on *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (1988) works well to explain why all things associated with the Buddha and Buddhist lore — text and monument — captured the Victorian imagination. And, at the centre of this “discovery” was Bodh Gaya. How strong a pull this exerted in late Victorian England — and not only on those who found themselves now ruling in the veritable Land of the Buddha — but on the home-bound others is evidenced through the numerous literary accounts of the life of the Buddha that were in circulation in British print culture. The three best-known ones, which ran through several editions are still well known today: Richard Phillips' *The Story of Gautam Buddha and His Creed: An Epic* (1871), Sir Edwin Arnold's long poem, *The Light of Asia: Being the Life and Teachings of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism* (1879), and the winner of the Newdigate Prize in Oxford, Sidney Arthur Alexander's verse narrative, *Sakya-Muni: The Story of the Buddha* (1887). It is the last, written as the inner flycover tells us, by a “scholar of Trinity College” that provides a verse-drawing of the Buddha image enshrined in the inner sanctum of the Mahabodhi, thus placing the Buddha in a new “home” of the Victorian reading public. A short section of this long poem very effectively conveys how heritage is transposed, nay, transliterated from the space from where it materially exists to one where it is part of the heritage imaginary of those who can evoke its richness within the lines of their poetic renditions.

*The Story of Buddha*

*And, passing inward, you will wonder there  
 At lofty pillars, carved and sculptured fair,  
 And fretted work of silver — shrine by shrine,  
 Reaching to where in majesty divine  
 Great Buddha, wrought of gold, looks down on all.  
 And there is silence, till the trumpet's call  
 Thrice rings out sharp on the untroubled day,  
 And thrice loud echo sells and dies away:  
 Then, wending voiceless down the long-drawn aisle,  
 The priests of Lhasa in slow-moving file  
 Part the translucent gloom, and darkly seem  
 To move like figures in a painter's dream,  
 Mystic and lovely, in that mystic place:  
 And then the hymn and prayer for Buddha's grace  
 Spring from a thousand voices, and the air  
 Grows heavy with faint clouds of incense rare,  
 While dim lamps, lifted high above the throng,  
 Shine through the dusk, and mingling with the song  
 Make strange sweet union of sound and sight. (Alexander, 1887)*

However, long before the over-arching narrative of British colonialism and its connections with heritage, particularly Buddhist heritage, there were ancient, inter-Asian interconnections that took the story of the Buddha back to their own countries, lands contiguous to India, namely China. Two articles in this volume, Anne Cheng's and Max Deeg's, tell the story of the Buddha, of Buddhism, and most significantly of the Rajgir-Nalanda core in the spread of Buddhism to China and from there onto Korea and Japan. As inheritors of the twisted legacy of colonialism, we postcolonial millennials, know little of the deep historical and spiritual links between India and its Asian neighbours, connections forged not just by the circulation of Sanskrit texts, but the more enduring ones built on the transmission of Buddhist philosophy.

It was this cultural loss of memory that is a crucial part of the revival mission and vision of Nalanda university: to re-tell the story, for instance, of the ancient travels of the Chinese monks and seekers of the Law. This foundational narrative is explored in the aforementioned essays by Max Deeg and Anne Cheng. However, while both Cheng and Deeg provide a close examination of original textual Chinese sources to explicate how they view the relationship between the Chinese monk travellers accounts of their travels to India, they hold widely divergently views on how this

heritage was received, interpreted, and codified, and then transmitted in future times.

Cheng's essay, "Central India is what is called the Middle Kingdom" provides a fresh take on how exactly we are to view the notion of an ageless Chinese cultural, political, social and spiritual heritage in contemporary geopolitics. Cheng takes as her point of departure, the contemporaneous Western capitalist inspired narrative — between the Chinese dragon and the Indian tiger — as a way of reading historical interactions from a non-Orientalized, pre-colonial perspective. In fact, Cheng makes her own location in the latter part of the essay eminently clear to show how she reads the India–China dualism by stating

In 1882, Friedrich Maximilian Müller, the renowned Sanskritist of German origin, gave a famous series of lectures at the University of Cambridge entitled *What can India teach us?*, and proceeded to show in detail in what way India was at the source of numerous aspects of European languages, cultures, religious beliefs, etc. In that respect, Max Müller's question was raised from a European point of view. Being born and bred in France, but of Chinese ancestry, I would personally raise the question both from a European and a Chinese viewpoint.

Cheng's viewpoint, thus, sees the ancient Chinese world view of themselves in a way that runs counter to the normative contemporaneous Chinese narrative. By closely examining textual sources, Cheng affirms that ancient Nalanda, is a space

redolent with the memory of the historic endeavour of members of the Chinese elites to leave behind their Chinese heritage in their quest for something other than what had so far constituted the Chinese civilizational centrality and self-proclaimed superiority.

Far from being just an emotive statement from one, who in 2014 came to Rajgir, to the Nalanda university conference with the heart of a "pilgrim", the careful analysis of textual sources related to the travels of Faxian and Xuanzang bears out her assertions on how India was, in a particular historical time, the Central kingdom to which Chinese came seeking spiritual knowledge and salvation. In Cheng's account India, particularly Central India is the heart of culture, of knowledge, of heritage, of spirituality and much more, and the Chinese travellers convey through their travelogues a sense of being from the margins of all of this.

As was noted by Abel-Rémusat, Faxian seems to consider as a matter of fact that the Chinese designation *Zhongguo* can only refer to *Madhyadeśa*, which is confirmed by the fact that he and his fellow-monks consistently refer to themselves as coming from the “borderlands” (*biandi* 邊地, literally “lands on the margins”)

Hence, according to Cheng, there can be only one possible way to read the centre-margin cultural discourse: the identity of “*Madhyadeśa*” as the only possible “Central country or kingdom” (*Zhongguo*) is a clear referent to *India*’s centrality.

And as Abel-Rémusat specified in his footnote, the Chinese monks never use *Zhongguo* to refer to their homeland, but persistently identify themselves as coming from the land of such and such a dynasty, e.g. “the land of Qin” (Qindi 秦地), “the land of Han” (Handi 漢地), or “the land of Jin” (Jindi 晉地, Jin being the Chinese reigning dynasty at the time of Faxian).

Indeed, as Cheng posits, many ancient Chinese travellers to India display an acute sense of cultural inferiority — “the borderland complex” — coming as they do from “the land of Han” (*Handi*), that wretched ‘borderland’ (*biandi*). Why? Because they were not karmically lucky enough to be born in the land of the Buddha! The only way to fill this lack is to work towards learning all they can in India, take it back to China, and thus provide “enlightenment to the Chinese who were not lucky enough to be born in the right place.”

Max Deeg’s essay, on the other hand reads with scepticism another aspect of the China–India linkage, even as it employs the same methodology of reading textual sources as Cheng does. His, provocatively titled essay, “Setting the ‘Records’ Straight: Textual Sources on Nālandā and Their Historical Value” tilts at many windmills and questions accounts related to Nalanda. Referring to the UNESCO World Heritage inscription and the attention that it has garnered for the Nalanda ruins, Deeg critically examines the textual, “archaeological and art-historical evidence” — principally Frederick Asher and Mary Stewart’s seminal work — and the uses of evidentiary material “made on the basis of the old nineteenth century translations of the most extensive texts on Nālandā, the Chinese records, and of the Middle-Indic (Pāli, Prākṛt) and Tibetan sources”. His essay sets up a sort of fact-finding mission — to “set the record straight” — from a “textual-philological point of view” in order “to give contextually informed translations and discussions of the relevant textual sources”.

His argument primarily focuses on the textual materials and their translation by those whom he — rightly — considers “the ones deemed to be most informative and reliable ... Chinese records of Xuanzang 玄奘 (600/602–664), of his biographer(s), and of Yijing 義淨 (635–713).” The choice is a natural one for Nalanda: “both monks resided and studied in Nālandā for several years.” The problematic lies not with their originary texts, but, as Deeg painstakingly unravels, because of the manner in which “the information extracted from these sources, digested mostly from the nineteenth century translations by Beal and others, [and thus] feed[s] rather uncritically into the major historical narrative of the monastery, pushing its existence even back to the time of the Buddha.”

Deeg’s essay deconstructs the hagiographic accounts around the highly privileged status of a very successful Nalanda *Mahavihara*, its immense success creating a back story that even has the Buddha himself imparting knowledge there! This telling amply proves that what the British did with the history of ancient Maghadh was something done centuries earlier by others by those who knew how to create legacies and interconnections across regions, spaces, times. In this context, he too strongly resists — as do Cheng and Asher — the “fact” of their being 10,000 students at Nalanda in its prime and links it to later histories, post the destruction of the monastery.

The tendency to make the monastery bigger than it was (“ten thousand monks”) is also found in Tārānātha’s history when it states that at the time of Nāgārjuna a certain “Suviṣṇu, a *brāhmaṇa* of Magadha, built one hundred and eight temples at Śrī Nalendra.”

Deeg’s comments on the actual size of the monastery are borne out by the essay that moves to quite a distance from reliance on textual and philological sources to ones based on the most recent technological advancement and their indubitable service to imaging the very ground from where the heritage site is spatially located. M.B. Rajani and Sonia Das’s essay, “Archaeological Remains at Nalanda: A Spatial Comparison of Nineteenth Century Observations and the Protected World Heritage Site” signals towards the new pathways that are now being taken by those who work with heritage, with ecology and environment and their hitherto concealed histories that are now, for the very first time in human history, revealed with a degree of fullness not before encountered either by those who work in the textual or the material archive.

The duo, trained in first-rate scientific institutions, reveal how the new depths (literally) that the use of LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging)

and other scientific tools gives to us new ways of seeing the old. Ways that are, moreover, seemingly not subject to the degree of individual and cultural biases that other disciplinary trainings seem to be often ransomed to. Indeed, through their highly specialized examination of the physical site of the Nalanda ruins — using geospatial imagery — the authors provide a picture, or pictures, that add a whole new dimension on how we “read” a historical, heritage site that is overlaid with centuries of textual interpretative narratives.

However, and this is moot, they too begin by looking at “the graphical and textual records of archaeological ruins in Nalanda’s vicinity made in the nineteenth century”. In addition, they use as their base data

all features recorded therein, and precisely locate these archaeological remains in Nalanda’s environs by correlating historical information with recognizable patterns in a variety of satellite images and report the current condition of every location through on-ground observations.

Furthermore, they place “this information in geospatial context with the core and buffer zones of the inscribed property as specified on the UNESCO website”.

However, more than the questions of core and buffer — what technology does in the context of the Nalanda ruins — is to determine exactly how large was the expanse of the old Nalanda; though the initial ground for the aerial research, as suggested above, is squarely based on the study of the nineteenth century maps drawn by Buchanan and Broadley. As the authors state, this new technological arm of heritage preservation uses

remote sensing images obtained from satellite/aerial platforms in this study (to) augment traditional techniques, especially when synoptic, multispectral views can discern tell-tale signs of archaeologically interesting features that are invisible to observers at ground level.

Also, this scientific way of seeing is done without the burden of history, or so it seems. Thus, they provide credence to Deeg’s closing argument, that an authentic account of Nalanda must not only require the union of architectural and textual sources, but also the added frame of technological advances.

What emerges then if we put together the multiple approaches to heritage and culture making is that they are most likely to be “authentic” if we go beyond the disciplinary hermeticism and ideas that segue not just between defined disciplines — viz. history and art history and archaeology,

epigraphy and philology, linguistics and literature — but also embrace the immense contribution of science and technology. It is possibly exactly this kind of unified vision, one that the pedagogical practice of new and old Nalanda seem to be aligned to that may allow us to get beyond Deeg's concerns when he has to reconstruct the history of the ancient Nalanda *mahavihara*. An account that can accommodate, for instance, this kind of anomaly:

In contrast to Xuanzang's brief description, Huili's aggrandizing and Daoxuan's idealizing depictions of Nālandā, the other famous Chinese traveller Yijing gives a very elaborate, in fact the longest, description of the monastery, its monastic organization and its history in his "Biographies of Eminent Monks" where he indirectly compares the architectural structure and the organization of the Indian monastery with the different layout and monastic functions of Tang monasteries," or the Tibetan hagiographic accounts post the destruction of Nalanda where "Tārānātha states that Śāriputra was born and attained *parinirvāṇa* in Nālandā (Nālendra) and ascribes the foundation of the first monastery there to Aśoka."

With Deeg's mention of King Ashoka we come to another extremely significant aspect of heritage-making: the dynasts whose immortal deeds signified through their large territories leave a human trace that is soon transformed, through bards and their books, into a tangible cultural heritage that is then enshrined and unquestioned. It is this aspect that Deeg, Acri, Asher, and in altered context Kashshaf Ghani expiates upon. In the context of Nalanda, Deeg avers "Nālandā became prominent as a transregional centre of Buddhist monasticism and learning at a time when India was prospering under the rulership of a dynasty which presented itself officially as prominently non-Buddhist and dedicated to major Hindu deities: the imperial Guptas."

It is this trajectory of the imperial Guptas, and other empire builders such as them, which is the opening argument of distinguished art historian Frederick Asher's essay: "India, Magadha, Nalanda: Ecology and a Premodern World System". Asher argues that it is the sea routes that these empire builders had access to that were the crucial components in the transmission of ideas on kingship, on culture and even on the material reality of art and architecture in Southeast Asia (ideas shared by Andrea Acri).

Both Asher and Acri clearly establish how the circulating Sanskrit texts established the concepts of a venerable and divine idea of kingship in Southeast Asian culture, and thus ensured the continuing traditions —

albeit altered over a period of time — of Indic cultures. However, going beyond those tropes, Asher’s reading of why Buddhism expanded at such an extraordinary speed at a particular moment in inter-Asian history touches on questions of real politics and building of structures of power and prestige. His comments lead to a very shrewd conclusion:

But there were things a landlocked power such as the Guptas and their contemporaries, the Vakatakas, or somewhat later Harshavardhana, could do to foster an international profile, and high among those things was support for Buddhists and Buddhist institutions such as Nalanda or Ajanta, in the case of the Vakatakas. In other words, it was not just great benevolence that led these dynastic powers to promote places for Buddhist learning. It was, rather, considerable pragmatism. Buddhism had a pan-Indian footprint and regular traffic in both directions between India and East Asia.

This reading is, as mentioned above, is both espoused and developed in scholarly detail by Aciri in “Tracing Transregional Networks and Connections Across the Indic Manuscript Cultures of Nusantara (AD 1400–1600)”. The great attractions of the divine right of kingship as extolled in Sanskrit manuscripts is something that even endures in cultures that move — in this instance — beyond the Hindu textual and spiritual traditions of a Java and Bali in Indonesia and continue to live on in a newly emergent Islamic culture in the same space. Why? Because they endorse and protect the new Islamic sovereigns in the same way as they did their Hindu predecessors. While the paper focuses on the “manuscripts and textual practices in the Java, Bali and Sumatra in the period going from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century”, it goes beyond them to highlight

not only the shared, Indic-derived tradition of text building, but also the common religious imaginaries. My aim has been to reconnect what are often perceived as “local” and disconnected historical developments in the Javano-Balinese world and the Sumatran highlands on the one hand, and the cosmopolitan centres and the peripheries within those regions on the other. In doing so, I have stressed the continuities and changes between the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic epistemes in the production and consumption of knowledge during the crucial centuries that led to a religious and socio-cultural paradigm shift in Nusantara.

What Aciri and Asher also reflect upon (to different degrees in their essays) is how the inter related thematics of human power, of religious variants, of temples and monasteries, of scriptural and manuscript survival and

circulation, of transregionalism and transnationalism are all subtly but critically linked with the questions of environmental, ecological and climatic factors. Hence, ideas cannot be located in some transcendent space but are literally rooted in specific locales which either can ensure their survival or literally cause them to decay and die away.

Take the case of another compelling Asian heritage site: Angkor Wat. Marika Vicziany (2013), in her seminal essay “‘Indianization’ and the Religious Sites of South East Asia”, discusses the decline of the temple complex in terms of environmental changes; shifts that impacted the very survival of the site. Thus, going beyond the historical factors and depredations due to war which form the core account of the decline of Angkor, Vicziany, turns to the “environmental, spatial, palaeological and new archaeological data”, that melds “multidisciplinary approaches and multiple technologies to generate a complete and holistic perspective on what Angkor Wat was and meant”. Simply put, it became environmentally unsustainable for such a huge community to continue living in the environs of the sacred site.

This account of the reasons why Angkor Wat was first established in the place it was — well-irrigated agricultural lands — is apposite when we look at the story of the founding of Nalanda in ancient Magadha too. Asher — stepping away from the accounts of spirituality and kingship that characterize conversations around Nalanda — comments thus:

Nalanda was established in Magadha, not only because Magadha was the homeland of Buddhism — after all, Nalanda was not a site associated with the life of the Buddha, although nearby Rajgir was. But there was also the economic infrastructure to support an enormous monastic establishment, and that required a sort of climatic benevolence, that is a climate that could support cultivation sufficiently well that there would always be an agricultural excess sufficient to generate profit and give to the maintenance of the monastery.

What then about ancient Nalanda? The monastery must have had a dynamic relationship with the surrounding region, not just with towns such as Rajgir and Bihar Sharif but also with the agricultural lands outside of the towns. While the region may have prospered from the endowment wealth of Nalanda, the great monastery in turn was heavily dependent on goods and services from the region. Food alone would have been a major enterprise.

In fact, one explanation for the concentration of Buddhist monasteries in Magadha might be the ability to supply food for large concentrated populations of monks who provided neither goods nor services to the community but rather were exclusively consumers.

This linkage between ecology and heritage and its survival is also dwelt upon by Acri in his account of how certain manuscripts survived the depredations of time and changing religious practices and others died away. Consequently, is its not only heritage that is built of materials such as brick and stone that is subject to environmental challenges, changes that are usually placed within the cyclical histories of dynasties and religions — as in the case of Nalanda — but also the more fragile history of a tree or a bark that is subjected to a historio-environmental processes that have not often been read in their completeness. Acri's examples work well here:

The ecological considerations by van Lennep (1969, pp. 16–17) and van der Molen (1983, p. 88) contrasting the thatch-palm, generally growing only in a humid climate along muddy coasts, beaches and lagoons (West Java), to the *lontar* palm, thriving in drier climates (Central and East Java, Bali, Lombok), appears to be still valid with respect to the *talipot* and *lontar* palms. These ecological considerations may explain why the number of *gebang* or *śrīṭala* manuscripts that have survived until today is very small compared to the number of *lontars*, and none of them has been recovered from East Javanese or Balinese collections. Similar considerations could be applied to Sumatra, where the *daluang* or tree-bark is the commonest writing material while the *lontar* palm is unknown except in the dry part of Aceh.

While the introduction has so far largely dealt with questions of the circulation and transmission of tangible heritage there is also the question of intangible heritage and its link with orality and performance traditions that are subject to individual whimsicality and the nebulousness of changing tastes. How does cultural interchange and transregional dynamics get reified in for instance, in verse, song, dance and spiritual ecstasy? Moreover, how does the dissemination of cultures attempting to occupy a new space — both literally and figuratively — in a socio-religious and politico-geographical context work out to temper and complicate our understanding of cultural heritage? These and other such concerns lie at the core of Kashshaf Ghani's "Seeking a Sufi Heritage in the Deccan".

Ghani's essay goes beyond both the British colonial rule and its interface with Indian art, architecture, its texts and the overarching rubric of Sankritized cultures and the spread of Buddhism, and engages with an intrinsic element of Asian culture — the syncretism that allowed for Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Islamic cultures to co-exist in a simultaneity rarely found in other parts of the blue planet. Traversing the spatial geography of the Deccan area in Central India, Ghani deliberates on the steady growth

and development of Islamic culture in what was hitherto a Sanskritized space. His essay looks

into certain aspects connected to the rise of Sufi activities in the Deccan in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at a time when Deccan's Sanskritized cultural world experienced the coming of a North Indian Persian tradition. In spite of some obvious similarities with the Iranian situation, the focus will be less on such sweeping categories as "renaissance" [but] will seek to engage with a different set of questions that have a more direct relevance to the creation of a Sufi heritage in the Deccan.

A heritage, most interestingly, that certainly has the material reality of a shrine but is more often to be found in the "intangible idea of mystical rituals and practices, like *sama*?" One that, additionally, reflects the trans regional dynamics of Persian culture and its assimilation in a Sanskritized culture. The carriers of this are Sufi saints, who go beyond the brief given them by their Sultans and chart a whole new path that assures that the Sufi tradition becomes secularized and indigenized, creating, what Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 55) denotes as the "Third Space", a space that is beyond regulation and control of those who first sanctioned it.

This narrative of heritage construction and cultural exegesis centres around the Sultans who became the newest arrivals in the Indian subcontinent, and like others before and after them, were first overwhelmed by the cultural richness of the lands they now controlled and then began to seek to overlay their own cultural signatures upon it. Thus, it comes about that in 1327

after becoming the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq set up an administrative centre in the Deccan that would, in all senses, operate as the second capital ... renamed Daulatabad in 1328. A successful completion of this project was done through the physical transfer of the Muslim elite from Delhi to the Deccan. This involved the movement of intellectuals, scholars, clergy, administrators, warriors, revenue officers, poets and artisans to the Deccan capital, who, it was expected, would inaugurate a new era in the socio-cultural and political life of the region. Sufis formed a considerable section of this migrant population who were expected to spread the worldview of Islam in Daulatabad, and subsequently the larger Deccan region, thereby advancing the agenda of the Sultan to fuse "Islamic religious symbolism with the rhetoric of empire".

While successful in manifold ways, this enterprise to host “Persianized political culture” met the countervailing views and understanding of the very Sufi saints, the redoubtable Chistis who were only appointed to take forward the imperial agenda. Their contributions ensured that the enduring Sufi tradition seeped not only in the Deccan area but also beyond — travelling through the riverine network to coastal Malabar, the Konkan region and Bengal — and became part of the heritage of a whole intra-Asian region long after the demise of the Sultanate.

Discovery and demise, space and signification, textured heritage and civilizational interchanges that live on long after the fading away those who contributed to the physical, tactile reality of ordering the buildings of monuments — small and large — becomes even more evocative when we turn to the transregional imperatives that finally led to the revival of Nalanda university. In the light of the severe treatment meted out to British colonialists by many of us post colonials, it now behoves me to say in their defence that if it had not been for Alexander Cunningham’s ability to see mounds as not just earth hillocks but as more, we would never actually had a Nalanda *Mahavihara* model to emulate. It is his determined and dogged efforts that gave to us the excavated revelations of the Nalanda *Mahavihara* in all its red brick, geometric, stupa filled glory. An actuality that had, moreover, before him only lived in esoteric accounts of Chinese and Tibetan scholars. A tactile reality furthermore that had, stunningly, no presence in the lives of the many who lived, loved, married and died there for centuries with scant knowledge of the sacred ground beneath their feet and its immense, impeccable inter-Asian heritage.

And it is this place — Rajgir-Nalanda — that is examined in great detail through the lens of sociology, history, archaeological and textual accounts — by Gopa Sabharwal in her exhaustive commentary on the carefully thought out choice of reviving the new Nalanda in the aforementioned site only some ten kilometres or so from the majestic ruin of the ancient one. In “Negotiating Place and Heritage: Creating Nalanda University” she elaborates on her role as the Founding Vice Chancellor, Nalanda University. In essence, the role — as she brought it to life — ensured that the vision behind the reconstruction of Nalanda — as idea and practice — drew its *raison d’etre* from the very land in which it is founded anew, even as it sought to connect with networks — old and new — that are designated as “the Nalanda Trail”.<sup>2</sup>

The essay begins with a set of questions: “Does place matter? Does it matter in all instances? When locating new institutions does place matter beyond conventional issues of logistics, or will institutions achieve the

same outcome irrespective of locale?'. It then goes on to state, with absolute certainty, that the close linkage between old and new Nalanda and the unique character of Rajgir as a multi religious site with a rich and varied history of cultural exchanges and ideational flows is the *only* space in which this university can be brought to life again.

This assertion is backed up by data that relies on multiple sources — material and textual — that state, that despite the visible drawbacks of being non-metropolitan and mofussil, Rajgir still has strengths that shore up its pan-Asian profile. Additionally, it also has the benefit of historical, ecological and environmental factors that shape the university curricula.

By situating itself in a living historical and ecological laboratory, Nalanda university is uniquely placed to draw upon the richness of the locale and to bring to it scholarship and engagement which will further the research on the area and simultaneously expose students to the research process, encouraging them to move outside of the classroom. The Nalanda academic community is engaging with Rajgir and fulfilling its mission to link research to the community and its needs through a range of activities.

What is readily manifest is that this mode of direct intervention takes cultural heritage and situates it within the heart of a university, and in and through this process, travels beyond the existant paradigms of preservation and conservation, of display and ownership, and possibly, most critically, beyond the borders of governmental and State controls. Instead, by initiating a programme of learning — immersion — dissemination into the community and *for* the community, Nalanda's research ambit breaks new grounds. The university then becomes not an entity that is first built and then endorsed by the legacy of a sacred site and its historical tapestry, but a continuum that nurtures and fosters in ways that connects the community of scholars and students *and* the community of those who either reside in its environs or come as visitors to this place. It is this manner of integrative, holistic curricula development that is imaged in collaborations such as the ones mentioned here by Sabharwal

At a more formal level, the university is taking its research objective further by launching the Rajgir Archaeological Survey Project (RASP) in collaboration with the Bihar Heritage Development Society, (an autonomous society under the Art, Culture & Youth Department, Government of Bihar)... RASP will examine the multi-phased and multi-layered development of Rajgir as an urban, political and religious centre. In addition, the university... conducts the Rajgir Heritage

walks in association with the Bihar Heritage Development Society on separate routes namely, historical Rajgir, new Rajgir, Ecological Rajgir and multi-religious Rajgir. These have commentary in English and Hindi for both domestic and international visitors.

The inter-linkage between environs and university building is not confined to academic programming alone: the dossier for the master plan and design components of the university directly pay homage to the sense of place that the university is coming to life within. It's a rare case of synergy between history and legacy, between idea and practice, and most of all, between principles of sacred ground of a kind mentioned by Maitland that has anchored the care filled and exemplary values of the Nalanda Masterplan:

The site of the university runs parallel to the Rajgir hills that stand as sentinels in the background. Given the immense historicity of those hills and the Buddhist Councils and other events there, the university took two decisions — one, that all vistas in the Campus will have a view of the hills or look towards the hills and second, that no structure on the land will attempt to dwarf the hills. Thus buildings are going to be generally a maximum of four storeys height. It has also been a stated philosophy from inception that even though 450 acres seems like a small township, the university intends to be outward looking in its lived philosophy. Walls if any will be porous: the university will not be an ivory tower looking out at the world but an institution that has a harmonious relationship between what has traditionally been called the “town and the gown”.

In brief, it will endeavour to breathe the heart and soul of the ancient *Mahavihara* with its Buddhist belief in the sanctity of all life and the shared relationship between culture, heritage, ecology, environmental sustainability and human beings into one integrative and powerful whole. Truly build, in every way, a Nalanda for all times and for all peoples.

## CODA

For the illustrious Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, writing during the interregnum of the two world wars, history was a nightmare where the cycles of destruction had unleashed a nightmare spectacle of senseless destruction. In this slaughterhouse, all that is of “value” in human society could — at least for Yeats — only be secured through the profundity of poetry that strives to conserve and preserve fast vanishing myth, history,

folklore, heritage and culture. For Yeats, thus, the only way to preserve cultural heritage and contain the toxicity of political, sociological and environmental abuse was through writing illuminating verse. But, the Yeatsian project of revival, reconstruction and rescue, as we have seen in the body of many of the accounts shared by the scholars in this selection, can also be built *on the very ground in which it was first destroyed*: say, in the case of the preservation of the Mahabodhi Temple, or, in the conservation of the Nalanda site.

Rinkoo Bhowmik's crisp, anecdotal and passionate account of a few — too few — socially and culturally invested individuals with few monetary resources but huge emotive and intellectual ones, is a fitting Coda to this collection to my mind. The Singapore-based CHA (Cities, Heritage, Architecture) Project, which is led by a combine of heritage practitioners, university-bred academicians, and those who literally live within this heritage, provides a heartening account of how a small band of like-minded folks — from different parts of the globe — can soldier on to resurrect, for instance, what Bhowmik describes as “a heritage gem that sits in the heart of a city”. It is none other than Kolkata's Chinatown, a Chinatown that Bhowmik swiftly but effectively shows us as very different from the image in the public consciousness of generic Chinatowns across the world, and is, furthermore, “one of the oldest and the only surviving one of its kind in South Asia”.

A forgotten place, even if not buried under a mound, Kolkata's Chinatown is a lingering presence of a treacherous arc of Southeast Asian history, in particular the migrations that occurred in the wake of the decades of bloody struggles for power in Mainland China. Kolkata, or erstwhile Calcutta, a port city, functioned for these Chinese exactly as it had done for the British when they came into India first — a safe haven, a place that accommodated multiple ways of living, of eating, of building, of praying, and of performing. It is a city that encouraged the spirit of commerce and enterprise regardless of points of origin of its new denizens.

It is this new history of one of the most recent *émigrés* that the CHA Project is concerned with: to recover, preserve and conserve a relatively new but vital aspect of an inter-Asian connection. It occurs in the first half of the twentieth century when Chinese semicolonialists are provided refuge in an India that has not only won its freedom from colonialism, but is also now sees itself, under the broad and encompassing vision of a Nehruvian India, as a place from where the Asian recovery of old friendships, interrupted dialogues can be begun anew. And so, initially it

welcomes the Chinese diaspora into its own national boundaries and gives them a home and an identity, but with the outbreak of the 1962 Indo-China war the same Indian State withdraws its patronage and rejects the values of Asian syncretic cultures and spirit of multi-ethnic and multi-religious accommodation and corrals and pens and up the self-same Chinese. The effect of this historical accident — as Bhowmik spells out — is then lived out in the slow but steady decline of the Chinese heritage in Kolkata. A Kolkata, which now retains only a wispy memory of the genial spirit of shared cultures and connected histories between India and China: the Middle Kingdoms twain of Cheng's account, but torn asunder.

Bhowmik's pithy account traces the history of this cultural encounter and unveils how the forces of geopolitics decide what heritage lives and what has to be erased. And it does by choosing as the nomenclature of its endeavour the acronym "CHA"

Chiya.Chaha.Chaya.Theneer, Ti. Many different words for tea in different parts of India. Interestingly, in Bengali (spoken in Kolkata) it is Cha. As it is in Chinese. Although CHA primarily stands for Cities, Heritage and Architecture, it takes on an acronym that is really the essence of the project — a revival through teashops and cafes. Tea has had a rich legacy of being a catalyst for communication, culture, and creativity, bringing people, even nations, together, and it is through cafes and tea rooms that the project plans to revitalize the neighbourhood turning neglected by-lanes into vibrant food streets and night markets.

What even then, in conclusion, is the relationship between this spirited endeavor and the critical analysis of "Heritage" experts such as David Lowenthal? How do we reconcile the Lowenthal vision of the burdens of and indecipherable past with its sheer foreignness and the pointlessness of bodies such as the much-maligned UNESCO, a Moby Dick-like creature fated to die despite its size?

There are no easy answers here, but, given the myriad examples that the many essays place before us in this volume, it would not be over optimistic to state that the human race will not easily bury and forget much of its past (even as it chooses to do exactly that with some parts of it). To conclude then, the business of understanding our own selves must necessarily be done with the added and necessary recognition of where we come from, or where we were *told* we came from. To my mind, only in looking back can we move forward. For, in the words of T.S. Elliot (1943): "In the end is my beginning."

## Notes

1. *Ozymandias* is one of Percy Bysshe Shelley's best-known poems. It was written sometime between December 1817 and January 1818, and was probably the result of a sonnet competition between Shelley and his friend Horace Smith, who stayed with the Shelleys at their home Marlow between 26 and 28 December. In such competitions two or more poets would each write a sonnet on an agreed subject against the clock. *Ozymandias* was first printed in *The Examiner* on 11 January 1818; Smith's sonnet, also entitled *Ozymandias* was published in the same newspaper on 1 February. Shelley's poem was the last of the "other poems" he included in *Rosalind and Helen*, published in 1819.

In 1812 Shelley ordered a copy of Diodorus's forty-book *Bibliotheca historica* (*Historical Library*), and in 1814 an English translation, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian*, by George Booth, was published in London. See more at <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ozymandias#sthash.VRtUIKKj.dpuf>>.

2. "The Nalanda Trail" was a specially curated exhibition hosted at the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore that was inaugurated in late November 2007 to underscore the Government of Singapore's immense and early contribution to the revival of Nalanda university. It traced the Nalanda footprint across Southeast Asia, India and China and displayed the spread of Buddhism across these regions and their connection with ancient Nalanda through the travel accounts of Chinese travellers such as Faxian, XuanZang and Yijing. Artefacts from Indian museums — such as the Nalanda copperplate from the ninth century Pala times — were loaned for this exhibition.

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