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Visits to Sacred Places from Buddhist Perspective

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Abstract

This writing introduces the rationale of undertaking a pilgrimage from the Western perspective particularly focusing on Mircea Eliade's "Centre of the World" view point. The main objective of the research was to explore why foreign tourists visit Buddhist sacred place like monastery and perception of monks and nuns to foreign visitors. It has included nine monasteries of Pokhara valley. First, this paper pays glimpse on general understanding of 'pilgrimage' from the Buddhist perspective. This is qualitative research. The secondary data were collected from books, journals etc and the primary data were through field visits, asking participants' responses to prepared questionnaires as well as contextual questions. It has used inductive reasoning on interviews, responses to questionnaires and informal discourses of the respondents. The analysis and conclusion are mostly based on primary data. The findings indicate that foreign visitors' entertainment purpose, will to meditation as well as faith and devotion to the Buddha and Buddhism motivate them to visit monasteries. The sightseeing purpose is kindled by respect to Buddhism and curiosity to know environment of Buddhist religious practices in Nepal in general and Pokhara in particular. The attitude and perception of monastery monks and nuns in receiving visitors and tourism was found to be positive and, in practice, the monks and nuns were mostly welcoming and supportive to foreign visitors.

Keywords: Compassion, detachment, monastery, pilgrimage, profane, sacred

Introduction

Visits to sacred places of every religion is a common practice of people who follow religious directives. Pilgrimage is one of the oldest forms of travelling, particularly to sacred sites (Olsen & Timothy 2006). Religious sacred sites are only sacred to those who hold and share the same faith and belief in the religion. Atheists or believers in another religion would have little reason to visit a particular religious site because it is not sacred to them. This kind of belief and practice was dominant in the history of religious travel, particularly in the medieval ages (Towner & Wall 1991). Before the invention and progress

in transportation systems, there were many constraints on travelling. Limited free time, not enough income, unsecured feelings and controlled freedom to potential travelers from nears and dears to travel, particularly to women, and unavailability of information about the route and other obstacles were some of them to mention (Wong 2011). Ordinary people's visits to a sacred place were generally restricted to their local religious centers, such as churches, temples or mosques (Rinschede 1992). However, today, there are many visitors who travel to religious sites and do not necessarily hold the same religious belief to take journey for religious reasons. In this reference, Olsen and Timothy comment, "As a result of marketing and of a growing general interest in cultural tourism, religious sites are being frequented more by curious tourists than by spiritual pilgrims and are thus commoditized and packaged for a tourism audience" (Olsen & Timothy 2006). However, in many religions, the believers are still empathetically persuaded to visit the holy places of their religion. The doctrines and traditions of people's faith are guiding principles of undertaking pilgrimage in one's lifetime (Wong 2011). Such a journey to one's religious sacred land, when undertaken with religious devotion, is called a pilgrimage (Rotherham 2007). Boris Vukonic comments that "All the religions of the world, from the ancient mythologies onward, have promised believers that a visit to a holy place will solve some or all of their spiritual or material troubles. Such visits to holy places also deserved the aims of purification, salvation, healing and so on" (80). from this perspective, pilgrimag is a traveling for spiritual experience.

In his lifetime, Buddha guided his disciples and students to form a Buddhist monastic community, which is called the Sangha. The Sangha was entrusted with the mission to continue to preach the Buddha's teaching after his Parinirvana (Armstrong 2000; Bhikkhu 2007). In order to ensure that lay people would continue to be attracted to holy sites through respect to the Buddha and faith to his Dharma, and to listen to the Sangha's preaching, Buddha told one of his ten disciples, Ananda, that the remains of his body after death be separated into eight parts and arrange them to be cremated in different parts (Wong 2011). The cremation places later became enshrines and stupas. Wong further says that stupas were then used as an instrument to aid the Sangha's preaching mission by the fact that disciples and seniors from the Sangha would station nearby the different stupas and whenever someone would come by the stupas to pay reverence to the Buddha, the Sangha would have the chance to carry out its preaching mission. Stupas have since then been seen as holy places where genuine relics of the Buddha are kept. Since the death of the Buddha, such places have become the symbol of holy sites of Buddhism, where visitors pay reverence to the Buddha (Keyes 348). Therefore pilgrimage in Buddhist view is homage to The Buddha and his preachings too.

Another kind of Buddhist pilgrimage destination has an association with apparitions or other manifestations of Buddhist Great Beings. In Buddhism, it is believed that there are many Bodhisattvas, Great Beings, who are already enlightened, have power for reincarnation in need of the time for preaching people for moving them to the path for enlightenment (Wong 2011). They have thus left the reincarnation system and such

Bodhisattvas do take rebirth to express their compassion and desire to save all sentient beings that are still trapped in the reincarnation system. Any Bodhisattvas' reincarnation manifests need to preach Buddhism in the world for the lay people. Like Buddhism, other religions in the world have their own background of pilgrim practice and they have made so because people realize they need to expand their collective knowledge about pilgrimages by studying them in a wide variety of cultural and geographical settings for different religious behavior and practices in influence and motivate people (Stoddard 99).

Lumbini, the birth place of Buddha in Nepal is visited every year by millions of devotees from all over the world. So many believers on Buddhism visit Bodhgaya, the place in India where Siddhartha got enlightened and became the Buddha. Potala in Tibet and Pu-Tuo in China are the two special lands where Bodhisattvas are believed to have appeared to humans (Naquin & Vu 1992). And most Buddhist wish to visit such places and take pilgrimage. The elation and difficulties that one may encounter during the journey to such places are considered physical endurance which a Buddhist should put into practice of what he/she has learned from Buddhism, so that what he/she gets experienced through the journey will be transformed into seeds of enlightenment (Wong 2011). Buddhist holy places in this context are thus interpreted as only markers on earth that help Buddhists progress forward along the path of enlightenment (Karmapa 2008). In other words, a true pilgrim, in Buddhism, should understand and experience that his/her purpose is to orient him/herself towards the Buddha and to take the path of enlightenment. The pilgrims perceive and manifest actions of such faith for all the activities taken during the pilgrimage journey (Wong 2011). All the worshipping rites such as kneeling and bowing and ritual recitations such as chanting holy mantra with mala are meant to physically and mentally prepare the pilgrim to be focused on unearthing the inner Buddha-hood in his/her soul.

Venerable Master Hsingyun comments that it is meaningless to simply chant the mala/ beads or recite Holy Scriptures if one does not understand their meanings. Such acts in themselves are not different from simply talking or singing a song (Hsingyun 1959). His holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa says:

. . . even if someone makes circumambulations, reads holy books, practices meditation, it does not necessarily mean that he has reached the real Dharma. If these things are not real dharma, then what is? If you would cast aside your regard away from this lifetime and instead focus on your future lifetimes and strive to attain liberation and omniscience, then that would be the true practice of the dharma. (Karmapa 21)

Such an understanding appears to be different from one of those who engage in pilgrimage with the motivation of simply accumulating merits, gaining access to magical powers or asking for a favor from the Buddha and the Bodhisattva.

It should be noted that undertaking a pilgrimage journey to Buddhist holy places is, in a Buddhist context, interpreted as being only a journey to find the Buddha in the external world. In fact, what the Buddha had told his disciples and students to do, and

which is much more important, is to conduct one's own internal pilgrimage. A Buddhist should undertake a journey of meditation to discover the inner Buddhahood within him or herself. Due to the emptiness theory in Buddhist theology, engaging in internal pilgrimage brings an individual much closer to the Buddha and to enlightenment than undertaking an external pilgrimage (Wong 2011). To engage in the latter will only be useful in achieving enlightenment if one has reached the correct understanding of the idea of pilgrimage. The quest for Dharma or the Buddhist enlightenment along the journey should be the real and the only motivation for a Buddhist to engage in a pilgrimage.

Statement of the Problem

Tourism always comes in a myriad of guises and that can have both good and bad social, environmental, economic, political cultural and religious consequences depending upon its size and form, the extent to which its growth is controlled or boosted up. Tourism is a service-oriented industry and it can be a major source of foreign currency income in the country like Nepal. Its sustainability depends on a good host guest relationship. Urban settlement of the migrated people from the hills and mountains started some forty years ago in Pokhara. Major Buddhist sites got constructed after the Tibetan refugees settlement and the monasteries now attract large numbers of pilgrims and tourists. However, study about who (Buddhists or non-Buddhists) visit the monasteries and why they visit such places in Pokhara, how the nuns, monks as well as monasteries management members deal with the visitors is needed because hardly any research about contemporary Buddhist pilgrimage in Pokhara has been published. It has been an ample area for research. So, it was deemed appropriate to select major monasteries (nine in this study) in Pokhara for the study. Policy for the management of pilgrimage tourism is need of the time and a good research study in this field will be a much guiding document for the purpose.

This study has tried to solve the following research questions:

- Why do tourists visit monasteries in Pokhara ?
- Are they 'Pilgrims' from Buddhist religion or not ?
- How do the Buddhist monks and nuns receive and perceive the visitors ?
- What do the visitors do when they are inside a monastery ?

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to explore the tourism in monasteries in Pokhara. However, the specific objectives were :

- To identify the reasons of visits at monasteries by foreign tourists and how monks and nuns respond to the visitors
- To reveal the perceptions of the Buddhist monks and nuns at monasteries towards receiving visitors and managing their activities.

Methodology

This study is based on field study as well as secondary data collection from various

published and unpublished sources. Primary data were collected by using pre structured questionnaire and interview techniques. The secondary data were collected from different article, books, published and unpublished sources which were used to review the literatures, to find the supportive variables for constructing questionnaires and for linking with the results from this study. Quantitative data were collected through semi structured open ended questions. First, the questionnaires about respondents' faith on Buddhism, and purpose of visiting monasteries were asked, then responses from the monks and nuns about the visitors' activities were collected through formal and informal face to face conversation. Therefore, the research has applied descriptive as well as analytical methods in interpreting the collected data.

Method of Data Analysis

First, the researcher generated the typology of the visitors by asking their nationalities, and purposes of visiting Nepal as well as Pokhara. Particular focus is on the purpose of visiting monasteries in Pokhara. The second objective was to understand the perceptions of the Buddhist monks and nuns towards visitors' ways of doing and behaving in the monastery sites and monks and nuns' ways of receiving them. After the collection of the data based on purposes, the information collected from two hundred three respondents were stored, sorted, coded, edited, and entered in SPSS for data analysis. The descriptive statistics was used during the study. Frequency analysis, and descriptive analysis were used to meet the objectives. Qualitative data were analyzed manually.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study on pilgrimage to sacred places and analysis of the causes of visits to such places and responses from the devotees like monks and nuns to the approaches and activities of visitors were carried out purely from theological perspective. However other approaches to interpretation of religious visits were studied and taken into consideration for analysis theoretically. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1912), has made a sociological viewpoint to the description and analysis of pilgrimage. In his view worship to god has some close affinity to establishing close social relation to people on the basis of faith they are aligned to. According to Cora Wong, Emile Durkheim provides a scientific sociological and practical way of studying religion.

Mircea Eliade's (1968) study has similarities with Emile Durkheim's but different from a religious, historical and functional perspective. Eliade is more direct in linking religion and pilgrimage and in his work, the connection is immediate. Eliade outsets the world into "sacred and profane" regions which creates distance, both physically and spiritually and thereby calls for religious believers to travel between the regions (Wong 8). Eliade's work appears to be distinct in identifying the sacred world and the profane world of the believers on faith and to be highly relevant in explaining why humans undertake pilgrimage and how undertaking pilgrimage affects the communal life of a religious person as well as his/her secular life.

Mircea Eliade's concept of the "Centre of the World" emerges from his study

of religion based on the distinction between the sacred and the profane world (9). The pilgrimage centre is typically the “Centre of the World” for the believers who live their everyday life in the ordinary world, which is at the periphery of the sacred “Centre of the World” and “religious man can live only in a sacred world, because it is only in such a world that he participates in being, that he has a real existence” (64). He further says” every religious man places himself at the Centre of the World and by the same token at the very source of absolute reality” (65). Eliade thinks that religious people cannot be content in life simply remaining in the profane world, nor they can be fully elated in the centre of the world. Yet centre of the world is a powerful place for proving peace, and pleasure of what they have got and how they have been living with. Eliade asserts that it is of significance for an individual to pursue a pilgrimage journey and place him/herself into his/her “Centre of the World”, where he/she can find his/her true existence and the meaning of life. Eliade’s theory provides an explanation of why pilgrimages are undertaken even though, traditionally speaking, they can be arduous, dangerous and may require physical efforts and material sacrifices for the purpose of fulfilling religious obligations and responding to the calls of the gods (Wong 9).

Eliade thinks that frequency of visiting sacred place from theological perspective can be an energy of living in the profane world. A man needs to visit “Centre of the World” for therapeutic healings and the quest for his /her lives regeneration. Eliade thus says:

. . . through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated, that is, it began again as sacred time ... The cosmogony is the supreme divine manifestation, the paradigmatic act of strength, superabundance and creativity . . . It is easy to understand why the memory of that marvelous time haunted religious man, why he periodically sought to return to it. (80)

This is a kind of a therapy of psychology. A man cannot live monotonously for long in a place. Change in physical surrounding play avital role in boosting up energy and courage. Faith to unknown energy source and respect to such power through physical presence at the place the power is believed to have dwelled is a will of human being whatever is the source of faith of religion. Eliade is so strong in his interpretation of pilgrim visit and his view has been a guiding perspective in this article.

Results and Discussion

The two main objectives of this article were to identify a typology of visitors at monasteries in Pokhara , and to present how tourism is perceived and responded by the monks and nuns living in Buddhist sacred sites . The following pages are about the findings and discussions on the basis of the objectives. First, the researcher has generated the typology of the visitors by asking their nationalities, and purposes of visiting Nepal and Pokhara as well. Particular focus is on the purpose of visiting monasteries in Pokhara. The second objective was to understand the perceptions of the Buddhist monks and nuns towards visitors’ ways of doing and behaving in the monastery sites and monks and nuns’ ways of receiving them and it is presented on the basis of the information given by the participants (Monks and Nuns) in the selected sacred sites.

How important it is to visit Buddhist holy sites in Pokhara, was one of the major questions to the respondents. This question was asked because one of the major objectives of this research is to find out the types of the visitors in the monasteries so as to explore the potentiality of the tourism prospective at monastery regions in Pokhara. Most of the visitors said that visiting monasteries is important. Their faith on Buddhism was only reason for their visiting at monasteries. The researcher has drawn this conclusion because of his informal discussion with those visitors who indicated their faith on Buddhism in the questionnaire form.

Table No. 1

Access on Respondent’s faith on Buddhism for Visiting Monastery

Respondent’s reasons for visiting monastery	Frequency	Percent
Faith was the reason for my visit	34	16.7
Buddhists by tradition	59	29.1
Buddhist practioner	49	24.1
Deep respect to Buddhism	46	22.7
Interest in Buddhism	9	4.4
no interest at all	6	3.0
Total	203	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The table shows that most of the visitors give importance on visiting Buddhist heritage place. In data collection period it was found that most of them who gave much importance on the need of visiting sacred sites of Buddhism were followers of Buddhist creeds. Those who gave little importance in this visit were less in number and they represent only 7 percent. It can be concluded that most of the visitors in the monasteries in Pokhara have deep faith on Buddhism and they enjoy visiting such places because they perceive such places as holy site of their faith and their visits would make them feel peace as well as satisfied with sense of cultural duty they have performed even when they are out of their own lands and holy sites of their faith. This kind of faith and practice of visitors can, of course, prompt tourism in Pokhara.

The Purposes to Visit Monasteries

The following table shows general purposes of the tourists in arriving monasteries. And most of the tourists have informed and asserted that scenery around the monasteries and other heritage sites in Pokhara are very attractive The geographical locations and the view the visitors can look from the sites are very attractive. They would feel much relaxed and refreshed from panoramic view around the sites. More than 40 percent visitors respond that they arrived there to enjoy beauty around the monasteries. Meditation is the second purpose of visiting and it covers almost 16 percent and around 10% of people go to these holy places because they are really holy sites for them. This table indicates that visitors’ attending in monasteries are inspired by multiple purposes and whoever goes there

has more or less has some kind of faith to Buddhism. It is indicated through the activity they perform there; such people are around 50%: some for meditation, some for learnings from monks and nuns, some for respecting the Buddha and his followers in the monasteries and so on. Though 41 percent of the visitors accept that they are there to see the scenery around the sites, they also informally accepted that they have deep respect to that religions and the ways its practitioners behave to people in their daily life.

Table No. 2

Respondents' purposes for visiting Buddhist sacred sites

Purpose	Frequency	Percent
to enjoy sight seeing	84	41.4
to spend time with Buddhists	12	5.9
to meditate	32	15.8
its a sacred place for me	22	10.8
its historical place.....	14	6.9
to learn Buddhism	13	6.4
to seek spiritual experience	9	4.4
to attend puja	4	2.0
to learn more about Buddhism	6	3.0
to see ritual ceremony	7	3.4
Total	203	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022

More than forty percent of the respondents' purpose for visiting monasteries is to enjoy sightseeing. Almost one fourth of the respondents performed meditation which is memorable activity while visiting Pokhara. Almost half of the respondents stay at monasteries for few hours. Most of the tourists have accepted the fact that their level of understanding Buddhism has increased from their visit to monasteries here. It has prompted tourism trade in the valley because visits to such places, meditation, learning and praying activities do certainly increase visitors' stay and expenses which help in boosting up economic prosperity. Though higher number responded at first sight seeing as the main purpose of visiting monasteries, yet they accepted that it is their deep faith on Buddhist religion that inspired and motivated them to visit the sacred places. This indicates that visitors' destination to Buddhist holy sites seems to be one of the most remarkable tourism promotion strategies in Pokhara, the second tourism destination of Nepal.

Thematic Discussion of the Results

Since this research has two parts of overview on pilgrimage world, few pages onwards have included findings and discussion on the perspectives of Buddhist monks and nun on observing, analyzing and responding to the activities and words of the pilgrim visitors on the sacred place like monasteries and meditation centres.

Monks' and Nuns' Perceptions of Visitors and their activities in Sacred Sites

This part of analysis is based on thematic interviews and conversations with the

monks and nuns of monasteries. It first addresses the issue of the identity and characteristics of the visitors to monasteries. Second, it indicates how the monks and nuns personally feel and react towards the different groups of visitors that they identify. Third, it presents how monks and nuns perceive visitors' presence at their sacred site. Finally, it enquires about the way the monks and nuns deal with any visitor's unacceptable behavior in the monastery sites.

The Secular and Buddhist Perspectives

In the thematic analysis of the individual quotes extracted from the interviews with monks and nuns, a key pattern emerged from the data that a majority of the informants responded by taking first a 'secular perspective' and, subsequently, a 'Buddhist' perspective. Only a few monks and nuns initially started with replies from their 'Buddhist perspective and even fewer still confined their responses to a single perspective (Wong 2011). The 'secular perspective appears to be a way of seeing social phenomena simply through the lens of an ordinary human being, whose knowledge and understanding towards a phenomenon is derived from his or her cognitive construction of the secular reality in an ordinary social situation. On the other hand, the 'Buddhist perspective is the worldview from which phenomena are understood from the perspective of Buddhism. When answering from that Buddhist perspective, the respondents put themselves in the particular role of a member of the Buddhist monastic community. Buddhist theology provides guidance on how Buddhist monks and nuns should determine their conduct and ways of understanding (Karmapa, 2008). A simple example, illustrating the difference between the secular and the Buddhist when considering another person's identity can be seen from the different attitude they show towards man or woman. If a tall man with white skin, fair hair and blue eye comes in the monastery the monk or the nun with the secular perspective would be sure that he or she is from Europe or America and probably not Buddhist. If the person's skin is yellow and hair rather black, he or she is from Asia, particularly from India and she or he is perhaps Hindu, and if the person is wheat-white in skin with black hair and flat nose he is from East Asian countries particularly from Japan, Korean if not from China and so on.

The informants responded to the research questions either from a secular or a Buddhist perspective. Most monks and nuns were found to switch from one to the other perspective during the course of the interview. From their secular perspective, the informants see and categorize visitors into four groups: the non-religious tourists who come to the monasteries exclusively for sightseeing; the non-Buddhist tourists who are reluctant in religious activities; the believers who are highly motivated Buddhist prayers and puja and the learners who are 'true' Buddhist practitioners.

Monks and nuns thus express that the differentiating factor among the visitors is not based on what they do but on what perception from this experience is in their mind. The informants reveal that 'the level of devotion and understanding of Buddhism' is the differentiating factor from the secular perspective. On the other hand, when taking the Buddhist worldview, the informants look away from the distinctions between visitors and take the view that "everyone is the same", "there is no difference among visitors" because all humans equally possess Buddhist seed.

Tourists and pilgrims are thus not put at the two opposite extremities of a spectrum.

Looking at them from the secular perspective, the interviews of the monks and nuns give the impression that the believers are more of a problem than the sightseeing tourists, as the kind of activities that they participate in are more likely to cause problems to the physical fabric of the Buddhist venues, for example, burning many incense sticks, candles and paper offerings inside the monasteries. Nevertheless, majority of the informants perceived tourism positively and they viewed tourist arrivals in the monasteries as a channel that allows more people to learn about the religion.

There is a general consensus among monks and nuns that the way they enforce the rules of visitation should be benign and forgiving, but that they have to intervene when a visitor's conduct is rather disrespectful to the sanctity of the place, or if the physical fabric of the monastery or nunnery is put at risk. They practice Buddhist virtues to overcome those challenges: they apply Buddhist detachment and compassion virtues. They apply monastery rules and regulation only when necessary.

Visitors' Behavior and Monks and Nuns' General Perception

The monks' perception of a visitor's behavior is critical in determining what attitude they adopt. The interviews showed that the majority of monks and nuns expressed indiscrimination on visitors, saying that, "everyone is the same, everyone is welcome". They did not have preference for a particular kind of visitor, for all sentient beings are the same to a Buddhist. Many also claimed that they did not really care who the visitors were, on the basis of the principles of equality: -the notion that all human beings are the same; there is no difference for all humans. Another significant recurring theme that emerged from the data was that "everyone is welcome as long as he/she does not do any action that would harm or disrespect the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha". This shows the way monks and nuns think from the Buddhist world view perspective.

Since monks are much directed from their consciousness to Buddhist regulations and monastery rules, they think that majority of visitors are Grihasthies and are less familiar with monastic rules and regulations. However, they bring no intention to harm the monastic life and surrounding. The informants presume that the visitors don't misbehave intentionally and make mistakes simply because they do not know the rules. In case of mistake or misbehavior they simply advise with the belief that the visitors will change their behavior once they are reminded of the rules.

The majority of informants expressed that as long as visitors are not at risk of destroying something or do not behave disrespectfully inside the monasteries, they will not interfere them. The monks and nuns do not enforce their own rules and only apply those rules that are meant to safeguard the safety and sanctity of the monasteries.

The Different Buddhist Methods of Coping with Visitors

This section presents the Buddhist methods used by the monks and nuns of monasteries to handle the challenges that they may encounter when dealing with visitors. Two main Buddhist virtues - detachment and compassion - were found in the interview notes to be the main components of the strategies used to cope with visitors.

Detachment

From the analysis of the interview notes, the challenges inside monasteries created

by visitors include noise, incense smoke, and disrespectful conduct like neglecting nun and monk presence as well as negative attitudes towards monks and nuns. To solve these problems which are considered not harmful, some monks who are highly conscious of Buddhist philosophy use detachment approach, one of the key Buddhist frames of mind in handling any such challenges.

Detachment in a Buddhist context is defined as the ultimate understanding of the true nature of all forms of existence of objects and phenomena on earth: the fact that they are simply illusions and that they are not real in an absolute sense. The existence of any external object is impermanent by its fundamental nature. External objects exist only at the moment our mind creates them and we cling to them. When one can achieve a stable focused mind and acquire the ability to establish and maintain the proper balance within one's mind, then one is detached from illusions and it is the beginning of achieving enlightenment" (Karmapa 52-53). So, some monks and nuns do not care about the situation of having tourism at monasteries or about how many visitors come. They remain detached for the sake of concentration on achieving enlightenment and thus they do not care greatly about the external world. This Buddhist mentality influences the way some of these informants look at the situation of having tourism and handle challenges created by visitors. They use detachment as an instrument to help them remain focused on their Buddhist practice and preserve their inner serenity, even at the times they are facing antagonistic attitudes of some visitors.

Compassion

Some monks and nuns considered that to be willing to help lay people with their inquiries, regardless of whether their questions are related to Buddhism or not, is a merciful practice for a Buddhist. Even if the visitors asked question without addressing and respecting the monks properly, the monks adopt compassion and forgiveness attitudes which are other important Buddhist virtues. These monks and nuns do not deny that tourists intrude. Yet they do not choose to ignore these challenges by simply adopting a detached attitude, but also by taking a compassionate world view which considers tourism to be a channel to preach Buddhism even in the cost of being subjected to some amount of distraction and inconvenience. When facing challenges, they do not choose to ignore them or simply bear with them, but they practice forgiveness towards peoples' ignorance and adopt a compassionate manner to handle them.

Conclusion

The general purpose of this study was to explore the tourism in monasteries in Pokhara. However, the specific objectives were to identify and generate the typology of the foreign visitors and the purpose of visiting monasteries as well as explore how monks and nuns perceive of the visitors and their activities at sacred sites.

It was found that majority of the foreign visitors at monasteries in Pokhara were with the purpose of sightseeing. Most of the visitors were found from non- Buddhist countries and their missions on such sacred places were just to enjoy what different things they could see there- whatever its culturally, artistically, structurally and naturally different from their

previous experience. Remarkable number of them were for meditation and paying their deep faith and respect to the Buddha and Buddhist followers. Wish to learn Buddhism and experience peace and relaxation were also the purposes of some visitors and such visitors expressed their satisfaction to the experience they got in such places.

Most monks and nuns acknowledged the fact that there were mild intrusions brought by visitors at monasteries. Still, the majority of monks and nuns perceived visitors and tourism positively. Either they see tourism as a channel to preach Buddhism, to let them more lay people and have an opportunity to know more about Buddhism and get closer to the Bodhisattva. Likewise, they consider that tourism contributes to the local economy and supports the monasteries. A few monks and nuns intend to apply certain rules and regulations in coping with challenges created by visitors mainly two strategies compassion and detachment are the main ways of managing visitors' intrusion.

Monks and nuns thus express that the differentiating factor among the visitors is not based on what they do but on what is in their mind. The informants reveal that 'the level of devotion and understanding of Buddhism' is the differentiating factor from the secular perspective. On the other hand, when taking the Buddhist worldview, the informants look away from the distinctions between visitors and take the view that "everyone is the same", "there is no difference among visitors" for they are equal when they visit holy places with holy purpose.

Tourists and pilgrims are thus not put at the two opposite extremities of a spectrum. Looking at them from the secular perspective, the interviews of the monks and nuns give the impression that the believers are more of a problem than the sightseeing tourists, because some kind of activities they participate in are more likely to cause problems to the physical fabric of the Buddhist venues, for example, burning many incense sticks, candles and paper offerings inside the monasteries generates fume and heat to cope with and physically manage them.

The majority of informants perceived arrivals of foreign tourists positively. They accept that they can receive more people who are interested to learn about the Buddhism. That would be a good opportunity for them to teach visitors Buddhist philosophy. And there is a general consensus among monks and nuns that the way they enforce the rules of visitation should be benign and forgiving and they agree that they have to intervene when a visitor's conduct is not acceptable from the Buddhist precepts, or their behavior spoils the sanctity of the place, or if the physical fabric of the monastery or nunnery is put at risk. They practice Buddhist virtues to address those challenges: the application of Buddhist detachment and compassion virtues. They impose monastery rules and regulation only when they realize they are necessary.

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