

### **Samgha-Laity Relationship, Decline of Urbanization, and Evolving Material Milieu**

Buddhism in India appears to have never made an attempt to create a community of lay supporters who could exclusively be called followers of the Buddha and none other. They were no more than mere unattached well-wishers (or even fickle-minded).

As Buddhism originated and prospered in an urban milieu, with the onset of crisis in urbanization during the post-Kuṣāṇa period, the situation developed completely to the disadvantage of Buddhism. Loss of support due to the dispersal of merchants, traders, bankers, financiers, and artisans led to the dwindling in the numbers of Buddhist monasteries as well as those who aspired to adopt renunciation in the Buddhist samgha. In such a newly emerged situation, the samgha became concentrated in fewer and fewer monasteries. As time went by and as more and more urban settlements decayed, the number of Buddhist monasteries became reduced significantly.

Though some support may still have accrued here and there from the few surviving or newly emerged urban settlements to a small number of Buddhist monasteries, the number of traditional supporters of Buddhism became grievously small.

In order to survive in a situation of dwindling traditional support and the rising tide of rejuvenated Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism, the few surviving Buddhist monasteries began to tune themselves to the emerging feudal situation by adopting new roles for themselves through the practice of self-supporting economies based on land grants. Further, the samgha liberalized learning and opened the doors of its monasteries to secular education so as to make it more effective in debates and disputations. Thus, from the fifth century onwards a number of monasteries began to grow out of their conventional character into fully-grown universities (*mahāvihāras*) of laicized academic learning and scholarship.

A major share of the land grants to these *mahāvihāras* came from their Brāhmaṇical-Hindu patrons who appear to have approached Buddhist deities as if they were Brāhmaṇical-Hindu. One consequence of such a development was that it greatly contributed towards making breaches in the wall that existed between Brāhmaṇical-Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the Brāhmaṇical-Hindu temples had a clear advantage over *mahāvihāras* in the management of landed estates due to their better knowledge of agriculture (especially rice cultivation) and seasons, and their ingenuity in constructing origin myths and enormous capacity for legitimation, and thus wider socio-political functions. This advantage was manifested in the shift of royal patronage from Buddhism to Brāhmaṇical-Hindu sects.