

ISSN 0972 - 6004

Taj Mahal

Review

CYBERWIT'S INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
DEVOTED TO ARTS, LITERATURE, POETRY AND CULTURE

▶▶ VOLUME 15

▶▶ NUMBER 2

▶▶ DEC. 2016

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DISAPPEARING BUDDHAS

The front wall has a large painting,
Buddha meditating in lotus position,
painted thousands of years ago.

He is surrounded by ten thousand other Buddhas,
all sitting cross-legged, meditating with him.
Their vibrations reverberate the entire complex.

In front of the painting,
tiny earthen lamps dispel the darkness,
just like they did in ancient times.

The smoke from the incense sticks rises straight up
as if it knows where it wants to go.
But like human beings,
it fizzles out soon after,
not knowing which direction to take.

The monks chant swaying to a rhythm.
Tourists come in, take pictures and leave.
A young monk, wearing a frayed bucket hat,
an old mobile phone peering out of his robe belt,
refills the lamps running out of oil
from an old two-litre plastic bottle.

The painting is fading, losing its colours.
One of the Buddha's ears is missing,
the mortar underneath gazing in its place.
All meditating Buddhas seem to be disappearing slowly.

As if their time on earth is now over.
As if their teachings of living a relaxed mindful life
with minimal possessions are now out-dated.
As if it is time for another god to take over.