

# The Expansion of Buddhism in India

<sup>1</sup>Archana Rashmi and <sup>2</sup>Dr.Jayveer Singh

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar Opjs University Churu Rajasthan

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor Opjs University Churu Rajasthan

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 20 January 2019

### Keywords

expansion, Buddhist tradition,  
religious, different traditions

## ABSTRACT

This paper, study with those unfamiliar with the Buddhist tradition in mind. Hence, it is not an in-depth critical study of the relationship between Buddhism and expansion, but rather an overview of existing studies. Readers should also be reminded to reflect upon the gulf that often exists between 'lived religion' and the ideal version of the tradition that can be extracted from the texts. This is, on the one hand, a result of the fact that people often do not exactly follow or match up to the ideals of the traditions that they profess to follow. On the other hand, local cultural variations in religious belief and practice are also relevant and have an impact upon diversity within different traditions.

## 1. Introduction

The fact that Buddhism does not hold with a belief in a transcendental deity or supernatural beings does differentiate it from most other religious systems. While the figure of the Buddha and various 'bodhisattvas' do, at the popular level, more or less, fulfil the role of transcendent deities, and often Buddhists will combine local animistic beliefs in the supernatural within their Buddhist practice, the 'orthodox' view is that a reliance upon the divine is an obstacle to the individual taking responsibility for their own journey towards enlightenment. The Buddha taught not only that craving for things in the world is a source of kamma/karma, which means that we continue to be reborn each time we die (karma 'binds' us to future rebirth), but that the belief in a discrete individual 'self', to which we are attached, is itself a fundamental mistake or delusion that must be recognised in order to escape samsara (the cycle of rebirths). The teaching of anatta/anatman ('no self') is at the very core of the Buddha's second sermon, which he gave following his own realisation of the causes of human suffering. While this teaching may seem highly esoteric, the Buddha taught the practical means to overcome craving and attachment through following the 'eightfold path' of right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration.

From the very beginning in Northeast India (dates of the Buddha's life are taken as circa 485-405 BCE, following Gombrich, 1992) the Buddha envisaged the need for a 'fourfold sangha' (community) consisting of fully ordained men and women (bhikkhus/bhikkhus and bhikkhunis/bhikkhunis) as well as lay men and women (upasaka and upasika). Hence, a system emerged whereby some Buddhists renounced the world in order to join the monastic sangha/samgha, where they could more fully live within an environment that was conducive to meditation practice and living by the eightfold path, in order that they might achieve enlightenment (the state where one is freed from samsara). Others would remain in the world and support the monastic community through the giving of alms - for lay Buddhists this is a positive source of merit - punna/punya - that can improve their chances of a better rebirth in the future.

As Buddhism developed and spread to different regions of the world, different schools of thought emerged. Today there

are three main extant traditions: Theravada, found in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos; Mahayana, found in Korea, China, Japan and Vietnam; and Vajrayana, found in Tibet, Nepal and parts of Northern India. There are important differences between the Buddhist teachings in the different schools, but these differences represent attempts to improve explanations of reality in order to improve upon the means to achieve enlightenment. For instance, the later Mahayana and Vajrayana schools emphasise the concept of sunyata (emptiness) rather than no-self (anatta/anatman) in order to express the notion of impermanence and non-duality. Much more recently, since the late eighteenth century, Buddhism has begun to spread to the West. Buddhism was 'discovered' by colonial 'orientalists' such as Sir William Jones, who established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784; Sir Edwin Arnold, who published his famous book - Light of Asia - popularising Buddhism to a western audience in 1879 and who co-founded the Mahabodhi Society in 1891; T. W. Rhys-Davids who in 1881 founded the Pali Text Society; and Allan Bennett McGregor who entered a Burmese monastery in 1901 and, taking on the new name of Ananda Metteya, founded the 'International Buddhist Society' in 1903 and the 'Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland' in 1907 (see Almond, 1988). However, rather than just transporting an existing tradition to a new context and to a new audience, 'Buddhism' underwent a transformation during its transmission to the West. There was a tendency to: emphasise the texts over the tradition as it was lived and practised in Asia; to focus upon the psychological and philosophical aspects, rather than the ritual and the supernatural; and to impose a "rational order on what had hitherto been perceived as unrelated, thus creating the 'prototype of the European concept of Buddhism'". Some scholars have referred to the western import of Buddhism, which has been informed by informed by modernity, individualism and Protestantism, as 'Protestant Buddhism'.

## 2. Buddhism And Research On Expansion

For the Religions and Expansion Research Programme, which focuses on India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania, Buddhism is relevant because of its association with India. While Buddhism had died out in India by the tenth century CE,

there are two patterns of more recent revival of the tradition. The first of these followed the Chinese invasion of Tibet, when the Dalai Lama, with his followers, was permitted in 1959 to establish a 'government-in-exile' in Dharamsala in Kangra District, in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh. Since then a community of several thousand Tibetan exiles have also settled there, in Upper Dharamsala, or McLeod Ganj, where they have established monasteries, temples and schools. The second revival of Buddhism in India can be traced to the work of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in the state of Maharashtra to outlaw untouchability, in the early part of the twentieth century. While Ambedkar (1891-1956) was born as an outcaste or untouchable, he managed to pursue higher education in the US and the UK and to become a lawyer and Bahujan political leader, as well as the main author of the Indian constitution after independence. However, his pursuit of dalit rights was not confined to politics: instead, he converted to Buddhism in 1956 and then converted an estimated 380,000 of his followers to the tradition. This conversion was, on the one hand, a symbolic rejection of Hinduism, which was considered through its sanction of the caste system to justify the oppression of outcastes. On the other hand, the conversion to Buddhism has proved to be an important means of enabling dalits to enhance their self worth and, to a degree, their social standing in a society that continues to exercise discrimination against what are now called, for classification purposes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) (Jaffrelot, 2005; Omvedt, 2004). Studies on dalit communities indicate consistently low levels of education, health and income compared to higher castes (Robb 1996). Increasing numbers are converting to other religions, including Buddhism, in order to improve their status (Patel, 2003; Fitzgerald, 1997). For instance, the BBC recently reported that "thousands of people have been attending mass ceremonies in India at which hundreds of Hindu Dalits converted to Buddhism and Christianity... The ceremonies mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of Buddhism by the scholar Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar." Some states in India that are governed by the Hindu Nationalist BJP, have introduced legislation to restrict such conversions (i.e. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu), whereas Gujarat has reclassified Buddhism, as well as Jainism, as part of Hinduism in "an attempt to prevent conversions away from Hinduism eroding the BJP's bedrock support."

### 3. Buddhist Values

#### Karma

To those unfamiliar with Buddhist teaching, the doctrine of karma may appear to be similar to fatalism, which within the context of thinking about expansion could seem to be non-conducive to social ethics that encourage people to consider ways that they can improve their situation. We do sometimes find an articulation of attitudes that can seem problematically fatalistic or deterministic. For instance, Tibetan Buddhism often takes a deterministic view of karma, suggesting that people are to blame in some sense for their current situation in life because of their actions in a past life. This has caused controversy in recent times with regard to discussions about whether Buddhism would hold Jewish Holocaust victims responsible for their fate. To liberal western thinking the idea that one's gender or social situation is in any way a result of previous actions in a past life is unappealing. However, the

Buddha intended to gesture towards explanations for social difference rather than to establish fixed roles and social situations. Harvey presents the position of mainstream Buddhist thinking on karma as follows; the emphasis here is upon what the individual can do to improve his/her situation, even if certain aspects of it have been conditioned by actions in a previous life:

"karma and fatalism differ on two scores. Firstly, humans have freedom of choice; their present actions are not the karmic results of previous actions, through karmic results may influence the type of action that a person tends to think of doing, because of the character he or she has developed. Secondly, not everything that happens to a person is seen as due to karma. Any unpleasant feelings of illnesses that one has can arise from a variety of causes: 'originating from bile phlegm, or wind, from union (of bodily humours), born from seasonal changes, born from disruptive circumstances, arriving suddenly [due to the action of another person], or born of the fruition of karma'".

By contrast, there are certain aspects of life that are considered to be the results of past karma. These include: one's current rebirth, one's social class at the time of birth, the general character of an individual, 'crucial' good and bad things which happen to a person, and the way in which an individual tends to see the world. Harvey stresses that since an individual can never actually be sure which elements of a particular situation is determined by their past karma a person should always strive to make the best of a their lot. Nevertheless, while the doctrine of karma should not mean that people are fatalistic, there is an important sense in which Buddhism teaches an individual to "live patiently with a situation"

#### The 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eightfold Path'

The second shared aspect of different Buddhist traditions that Harvey notes as being relevant to a consideration of ethics is the Four Noble Truths, the teaching delivered at the Buddha's first sermon:

- 1) **The truth that suffering (dukkha) exists:** "Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering: in short the five categories affected by clinging are suffering"
- 2) **The truth that the arising of suffering has an origin, which is craving (tanha):** "It is craving which renews being and is accompanied by relish and lust, relishing this and that: in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being. But whereon does this craving arise and flourish? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it arises and flourishes"
- 3) **The truth that dukkha has a cessation (nirodha):** "What is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the remainderless fading and cessation of that same craving; the rejecting, relinquishing, leaving and renouncing of it. But whereon is this craving abandoned and made to cease? Wherever there is what seems lovable and gratifying, thereon it is abandoned and made to cease"
- 4) **The truth that there is a path leading to the cessation of dukkha (the Noble Eightfold Path):** "What is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the

Cessation of Suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration". The Noble Eightfold Path is fundamentally concerned with cultivating the correct mindset conducive to overcoming craving and hence suffering in order to reach 'nirvana' ('blowing out' or 'quashing'), the state of Buddhist enlightenment and freedom from samsara (future rebirths): actions from this state of wisdom (panna) no longer create karma since they are undertaken without attachment.

Hence, ethics with respect to how one acts, thinks or talks, for instance, are crucial to the ultimate goal of Buddhism: morality is "part of a spiritual path which largely consists of cultivating a more wholesome character by undermining moral/spiritual defilements and cultural counteractive virtues. This process of ...transformation is seen to culminate in a state of liberation from all traces of greed/ attachment, hatred and delusion, and their consequent suffering, through the experience of Nirvana". Buddhists are guided in this quest by what are called the three refuges: Buddha, dhamma and sangha.

#### **Buddhist precepts and rules**

Lay Buddhists and monastics pledge to keep certain precepts or rules. There are five precepts that are kept by lay Buddhists (although some may opt to keep eight<sup>17</sup>): non-injury to all living beings (ahimsa); avoiding theft and cheating; avoiding sexual misconduct; refraining from lying and other forms of wrong speech; and retaining sobriety. The ethical conduct of monastics, by contrast, is governed by the vinaya (monastic code), which includes the maintenance of complete celibacy. In the Theravada tradition, for instance, there are 227 rules for monks, which include, elaborate upon and add to the lay precepts. On the whole, the Buddha considered that living in the world created obstacles that made it difficult to eradicate 'greed, hate and delusion'. Hence, the rules governing the monastic way of life were intended to create the optimum conditions for Buddhist practice.

#### **4. Buddhism and expansion**

The above discussion has provided a brief overview of some key Buddhist values, including social and political values. In the following section will move on to look at some areas of Buddhist thought and practice that have a direct bearing upon expansion.

#### **Engaged Buddhism**

Engaged Buddhism is a good place to begin a more focused discussion of the relationships between Buddhism and expansion. The term 'Engaged Buddhism' is modern, first used by the Vietnamese monk TichNhat Hanh in 1963. Some scholars consider that the roots of 'Engaged Buddhism' go back to transformations during the colonial period, particularly

in Sri Lanka where there was a Buddhist resurgence in the face of the Protestant critique of what was considered to be the socially passive and transmudane nature of traditional Buddhist thought and practice. This style of western-influenced Buddhism has been called 'Protestant Buddhism': it is reformist (e.g. stressing contemporary ethical concerns), assigns a greater role to the laity, and (as discussed above) is more focussed upon Buddhism as a rational and non-theistic tradition. Others claim, however, that Engaged Buddhism, as a style of socially active and reformist Buddhism, predates the colonial era, and that the sangha in Asia, for instance, is actually reviving modes of practice that were suppressed by the colonialists. Yarnall (2000) divides Engaged Buddhists into two types: traditionalists (who consider that social engagement is inherent to the Buddhist tradition: it is nothing new) and modernists (who see Engaged Buddhism as a contemporary response to social problems: it is a distinctly new style of Buddhism, or a fourth Yana). The traditionalists (who are both Asian and western, whereas the modernists are predominantly western) argue that the image of Buddhism as otherworldly and uninterested in social issues is a western orientalist construction (arguably beginning with Max Weber's depiction of Buddhism).

#### **Buddhism and ecology**

Discussions about Buddhism and the environment are typically found within Engaged Buddhist literature. The literature stresses the positive ways in which Buddhist thought and practice can influence care for the natural world and has a normative agenda in calling for a greater recognition of this potential within environmental initiatives across the globe. This is to be distinguished from another, smaller, genre of literature that is concerned to look at the ways in which Buddhist thought and practice influence people's relationship to the natural world. This influence may not always be positive, in terms of how it translates into 'environmentally friendly' behaviour. Critiques of the ecological interpretation of Buddhism point out that the tradition can also be seen to go against ecological thinking. For instance, central to Buddhist soteriology (theory of salvation) is the idea that the material world is a source of suffering and attachment that makes it difficult to realise the impermanence of notions of individual selfhood. This, it is argued, would hardly seem to support an attitude conducive to environmental conservation.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In this paper has been to provide an introduction to key Buddhist teachings and values and to relate these to issues that are relevant to expansion. It is not a comprehensive study, but more an indicative overview that individual researchers can use as a starting point either for more focused literature reviews (e.g. on particular expansion concerns or on the relationship between religion and expansion in different locations) or as a basis for guiding research in the field.

#### **References**

01. Ariyaratne, A. T. (1990) Does Development Education in the More Developed World Make a Difference in the Less Developed World? (A Third World perspective), Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary, International Centre, and Division of International Development.
02. Ariyaratne, A. T. (1996) Buddhism and Sarvodaya, Delhi: Indian Books Centre.

03. Ariyaratne, A. T. and J. Macy (1992) The island of temple and tank: Sarvodaya: self-help in Sri Lanka. In M. Batchelor and K. Brown (Eds) *Buddhism and Ecology*, London: Cassell, pp. 78–86.
04. Batchelor, M. and Brown, K. (Eds) (1992) *Buddhism and Ecology*, London: Cassell.
05. Baumann, M. (1995) Creating a European path to nirvana: historical and contemporary developments of Buddhism in Europe. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1(1), pp 55-70.
06. Baumann, M. (2001) Buddhism in Europe: past, present, prospects. In: C. S. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.) *Westward Dharma. The Blossoming of Buddhism outside Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp 85-105.
07. Bond, G.D. (2004) *Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment, and the Sarvodaya Movement*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.
08. Bond, G. D. (1996) A. T. Ariyaratne and the SarvodayaShramadana Movement Sri Lanka. In C. S. Queen and S. B. King (Eds) *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, pp 121–46.
09. Bechte, G.A. and Apakupakul, N. (1999) AIDS in Southern Thailand: stories of Krengjai and social connections, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 29(2), pp 471 – 475.
10. Chambers, R. (1992) *Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies Working Paper 311.
11. Chodron, P. and Boucher (Eds) (2006) *Practicing Peace in Times of War: A Buddhist Perspective*, Boston, Mass: Shambhala Publications.